CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING MULTIPLE IDENTIFICATIONS THROUGH DIFFERENT SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AT WORK

12 I am particularly thankful to Astrid C. Homan, Doris Rosenauer, and Sven C. Voelpel for co-authoring this manuscript.
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ABSTRACT

The question of how employees' identifications with various foci at work (e.g., team, supervisor, profession) develop and how they can be managed actively still remains largely unanswered. This is striking given the previously demonstrated benefits of employee identifications for organizational outcomes. Building on the social validation framework, we propose that different social interactions (i.e., social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers) are apt to feed into different provisional selves and consequently differentially foster identification with the supervisor, the team, and the profession. In a longitudinal study of 212 apprentices, who are newcomers to both the organization and the profession, we test this idea using latent change scores within a structural equation modeling approach. Supporting our hypotheses, we show that changes in social support from supervisors and coworkers are related to changes in supervisor and team identification, respectively. Furthermore, increased feedback from coworkers, but not from supervisors, predicted increased professional identification. Our study thus offers an elaborated model of identification development that yields important theoretical contributions and offers practical guidance for the active management of identifications.

KEYWORDS:

Social identification
Identification development
Social information
Social validation
Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
INTRODUCTION

How does identification occur (Ashforth et al., 2008) and what can we do to actively manage identification in organizations? Surprisingly, although this is a fundamental question in research on identification at work, we are still at the beginning to understand how identification can be shaped through everyday work experiences. Yet, the question is crucial for practitioners and scholars alike as identification can lead to a myriad of positive consequences for organizations and the individual employee, such as extra-role behavior, performance, retention, or job satisfaction (e.g., Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Riketta, 2005; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Hence, identification might yield competitive advantages for contemporary organizations (Fiol, 2001). At the same time, contemporary work settings, which have become more dynamic and flexible (cf. Van Dick, 2004), often challenge existing identifications and require employees to continuously adapt their self-concepts to develop and integrate new identifications (Amiot, De la Sablonniere, Terry, & Smith, 2007; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Van Dick, 2004). Consequently, these changes also call for management to facilitate employees’ adaptations of their identifications.

Importantly, employees can identify with a variety of social entities in their work environment, such as their team, their supervisor, or their profession (Van Dick, 2001; Van Dick et al., 2004). As each focus is associated with a separate set of characteristics like values and goals, it is not only important to know if the employee identifies, but also what the individual identifies with (e.g., Albert et al., 2000). It is therefore essential to understand how the different identifications are developed and how each unique identification can be specifically promoted.

The goal of this study is therefore to provide a more comprehensive examination of identification with different foci and their unique (behavioral) antecedents in order to contribute to a more nuanced theoretical understanding of the general identification development process. For this purpose, we integrate different research lines pertaining to
the nature of multiple identifications (e.g., Van Dick et al., 2004) and identification
development of employees (e.g., Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra, 1999, 2004) within a social
validation framework (e.g., L. G. E. Smith et al., 2012, 2013).

More specifically, we draw on the assumption that employees initially try out
different provisional selves when entering new work contexts, that need to receive some
external confirmation in order to be converted into permanent stable identifications (Ibarra,
1999). Combining this approach with previous research that has demonstrated the
importance of social validation processes for identification development (e.g., L. G. E.
Smith et al., 2012, 2013), we propose that different aspects of social interactions should
nurture different identifications. In this respect, we argue that social support and feedback
from supervisors and coworkers foster identifications with the supervisor, the team, and the
profession differentially. That is, we propose that these social interactions are differentially
apt to confirm different provisional selves. Thereby, we underpin the general process of
social validation with specific workplace interactions that serve to each validate a specific
identification and thereby strive to provide practitioners with practical recommendations
how they can actively manage employee identifications. We put this process of
identification development outlined above to a longitudinal test in a sample of 212
apprentices, who are newcomers to both the organization and profession.

Identification Development

The self is composed of multiple identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which can be
either relational or collective identifications (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss &
Ashforth, 2007), and is a dynamic entity. Especially in situations of change and transitions,
the social self (i.e., relational and collective identities) is called into question and the
individual needs to adapt to the new situation (Amiot et al., 2007). This opens the floor for
the integration of new aspects of the social environment into the self. In this respect, new
beginnings and significant modifications can be understood as a sensitive phase for
identification development (Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra, 2004; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), which “occurs when an individual’s beliefs [about another person or group] become self-referential or self-defining” (Pratt, 1998, p.172). Pointing to the importance of changes in the environment for identification development, Ashforth (1998) sketched a model of how identifications are adapted over time. Building on Lewin’s (1951) idea of change in organizations, Ashforth proposed three distinct phases. First, the current identity “unfreezes” through changes in the social environment. Second, identity changes take place, until finally the identity “refreezes” in the third phase. Importantly, the actual identification change occurs during the second phase. In order to gain a better insight into the identification development process, we focus on how identifications are modified during the second phase.

Early on, scholars have argued that identification can be established only in social interaction with others (Burke, 1950/1969; Reichers, 1987). More recently, researchers have attempted to capture the process of identification development in more detail: When entering a new group or relationship, employees initially behave as if they were already identified with the group or relationship. Different scholars have used different terms to refer to this process as „anticipatory identification behavior” (Ashforth, 1998), „tentative identity claims” (Ashforth, 1998) or „provisional selves” (Ibarra, 1999). These provisional selves are then iteratively evaluated „against internal and external standards” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 773). As such, social interactions with others provide the individual with insights about the adequacy of their tentative identity claim: If the information received in social interaction signals the appropriateness of the tentative identity claim and the specific provisional self is thus confirmed, a stable identification is formed.

Consistent with identification development through the confirmation of provisional selves, social validation has been proposed as a key mechanism through which identification is shaped (L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013). According to social comparison
theory, people strive to validate their opinions and actions in comparison with others (Festinger, 1954). In other words, social validation refers to the process by which individuals assess „the accuracy and appropriateness of one’s thoughts or behavior” (Wittenbaum & Bowman, 2004, p. 170) through information received from others in social interactions. In this respect, social validation could be understood as the process of consolidating provisional selves in social interaction (Ibarra, 1999) and might thus be necessary to move provisional selves forward to become permanently integrated into the self as stable identifications.

Empirical evidence supporting the important function of social validation processes for identification development stems, for instance, from work on the emergence of new social groups. In this respect, Postmes et al. (2005) propose an interactive model of identity formation and present evidence from small interactive groups, in which communication can lead to validation of shared characteristics and thereby to the emergence of a common social identity (see also Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005). Furthermore, tow recent studies have highlighted the role of social validation in identification development in business contexts. First, L. G. E. Smith et al. (2012) found in a public-sector organization that perceived validation from the leader and the team was positively related to satisfaction with both the team and the organization, thereby aligning these identifications and attenuating identification imbalance between them. Second, L. G. E. Smith et al. (2013) demonstrated that changes in social validation were associated with changes in organizational identification over time.

We extend this previous work by integrating prior models of identification development (Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra, 1999), the premise that identification develops in social interaction (Burke, 1950/1969; Reichers, 1987), and the social validation framework. More specifically, we propose an integrative model of identification development that accommodates different foci of identification simultaneously. This focus on multiple foci at
the same time also answers the call to study identification development with different foci
(L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013). Additionally, our research complements prior social validation
research by focusing on specific workplace behaviors, which are likely to instigate this
validation process rather than measuring perceptions of validation per se. Importantly, we
will argue that several social interactions (i.e., social support and feedback from supervisors
and coworkers) have specific, differential effects on identification with different foci (i.e.,
the supervisor, the team, or the profession). Given that social validation of a provisional self
is crucial for establishing a new identification, only those interactions that serve to inform
about the specific provisional self in question are suggested to aid the development of this
specific identification. Hence, not any interaction should be capable of fostering any
identification, but only those interactions that speak to the identification focus in question
ought to be effective in validating this identification. Consequently, in order to effectively
investigate the differential effects of antecedents on identifications, as suggested by the
underlying social validation mechanism, empirically, different identification foci as well as
different social interactions have to be included simultaneously.

Social Interaction and Identification Development over Time

According to Ashforth’s (1998) identification development model, changes in the
social environment play a key role in understanding how identifications are formed over
time. When newcomers enter a new environment, their current self-concept is called into
question and rendered malleable (Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). This makes
employees sensitive to information received in social interactions in order to adjust to the
situation and to (re-)define their identifications (Amiot et al., 2007). During such phases of
identification formation, employees may be especially sensitive to whether their
identifications are validated persistently. As such, changes in validating behaviors over time
determine whether the specific identification is strengthened or weakened. To the extent
that employees perceive an increase in validating interactions, their identification will
strengthen accordingly, whereas identification will decrease when their surrounding withdraws validating behaviors. Consequently, we predict that changes in social interactions over time are related to corresponding changes in identification (cf. L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013).

Social interactions are characterized by two aspects, the interaction content and the interaction partner. The interaction content can be categorized as either social-emotional behavior or task behavior (Hare, 1960). As empirical examples of these two categories, we study emotional social support and feedback. With respect to the interaction partner, our study focuses on supervisors and coworkers as both are important agents who shape the individual’s work experience on a daily basis (e.g., Morrison, 1993; V. Rousseau & Aubé, 2010). In this respect, we propose that social support from supervisors and coworkers, which is a socio-emotional behavior in nature, informs about the particular relationship to the elicitor of the support behavior (cf. T. D. Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004) and thus will lead to identification with the supervisor and coworkers, respectively. Conversely, feedback is a task behavior focusing on employees’ professional behavior, which should therefore feed into the professional self-concept and foster professional identification.

**Social support driving supervisor and team identification.** Emotional social support is characterized as concern for the other as a person (Ducharme & Martin, 2000) and involves behaviors that signal encouragement, empathy, care, and acceptance (Ng & Sorenson, 2008). Therefore, social support can be interpreted as a signal of being a „deserving member” (D. G. Allen & Shanock, 2013, p. 353), which feeds exactly into the „strong need to relate to, and be accepted by, others” (Meyer et al., 2006). Indeed, social support has been associated with identification development in university students and online-gaming communities (Amiot, Terry, Wirawan, & Grice, 2010) as it also plays a crucial role in the construction of the social self in the development literature (Harter, 1999). Similarly, the expression of concern for an individual has been advocated as one
strategy to enhance identification (Pratt, 1998).

Yet, social support is not expected to influence identification uniformly, but we instead propose that it has differential effects on supervisor identification and team identification, depending on whether supervisors or coworkers are the source of social support. Following the idea that social interactions serve to validate provisional selves, social support from the supervisor conveys acceptance and caring by the supervisor, which feeds into the development of supervisor identification. A positive change in supervisor’s social support should therefore predict an increase in supervisor identification. Social support from coworkers conveys similar information with respect to the team-employee relationship and should thus be conducive to team identification. Thus, we predict that an increase in coworkers’ social support leads to an increase in team identification.

_Hypothesis 1: Change in social support from the supervisor is positively related to change in identification with the supervisor._

_Hypothesis 2: Change in social support from coworkers is positively related to change in team identification._

**Feedback driving professional identification.** Feedback pertains to an employee’s professional work behavior and should therefore foster professional identification. It has been described as providing “helpful or valuable information that enables the employees to learn, develop, and make improvements on the job” (Zhou, 2003, p.415) and in this sense can serve to evaluate tentative aspects of the professional self (cf. Shraugher & Schoeneman, 1979). In fact, feedback is conducive to competency building (Ilgen, Fischer, & Taylor, 1979), allows for a realistic self-assessment (Locke, Cartledge, & Koeppel, 1968), and fosters self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Fisher, 1986), all of which have been proposed to be important drivers in self-development (Erez & Earley, 1993). Likewise, Ashforth also concluded that feedback is important to help employees “gradually colonize the domain of their targeted identity” (1998, p.219). As supervisors and coworkers provide
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employees with „unique, non-overlapping information“ (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011, p.3), they should both contribute to professional identification. Hence, we propose that increased feedback from the supervisor and coworkers leads to increased professional identification.

_Hypothesis 3a: Change in feedback from the supervisor is positively related to change in professional identification._

_Hypothesis 3b: Change in feedback from coworkers is positively related to change in professional identification._

**METHOD**

**Sample and Procedure**

As we were interested in the development of identifications with various foci, we chose participants without any prior experience with either the organization or the profession. Therefore, we surveyed apprentices of a large German facility management company. Apprenticeship is a unique vocational training system in Germany, which focuses on professional training for skilled crafts and trades (as opposed to academic training). The core of the apprenticeship is thus the practical training in a specific profession through actual work in a company over the course of three to four years, which is complemented by theoretical education at vocational schools. Data was collected as part of a larger organizational survey project from apprentices during working hours via paper-and-pencil-questionnaires at two measurement points, six months apart. Previous research showed that similar time intervals (i.e., three to six months) are adequate to capture the development of identification over time (e.g., Amiot et al., 2008; Amiot et al., 2010; Schaubroeck, Peng, & Hannah, 2013; L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013).

After two researchers explained the purpose of the study at a regular apprentices’ meeting, apprentices participated in the survey on a voluntary basis. At the first
measurement point, 343 of the company’s 443 apprentices were present (71%), of whom 93% participated in the survey (n = 318). At the second measurement point, 277 of the company’s 346 apprentices attended the meetings (70%), of whom 276 apprentices (96%) participated in the study. Unfortunately, no further demographic information of non-participants was available due to strict data protection regulations. However, at both measurement points the participants were representative of the company’s overall apprentices in terms of their training profession (t1: $\chi^2[5] = 1.41, p = .92$, t2: $\chi^2[5] = 1.77, p = .88$) and year of apprenticeship (t1: $\chi^2[3] = 3.64, p = .30$, t2: $\chi^2[3] = 1.23, p = .75$).

Of all participants we retained only those who had completed questionnaires at both measurement points, resulting in 212 participants for the final sample. While most apprentices were trained in technical professions (67%), 28% were trained to become building cleaners, and 5% to become administrative staff. Overall, 87% of the apprentices in the sample were male. At the first measurement point, their average age was 19.51 years ($SD = 2.65$) and most apprentices were in their first or second year of apprenticeship (year 1: 47%, year 2: 33%, year 3: 20%, year 4: 1%). Additionally, we conducted a series of Bonferroni-Holm-corrected t-tests to check for any systematic difference between the participants included in our sample and the overall participants. Both series of t-tests revealed that participants included in the final sample (n = 212) did not differ from those who had participated either only at time 1 (n = 106) or time 2 (n = 64) on any of the variables under study (t1: all $ts [194-226] \leq 1.61$, all $ps \geq .11$; t2: all $ts [73-88] \leq 1.36$, all $ps \geq .18$).

**Measures**

All measures were included among other scales in a large survey project and were presented in German. The items were translated from English to German using the

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13 Some apprentices finish their apprenticeship after 3.5 years resulting in a smaller overall number of apprentices at the company at time 2.
translation-back translation-technique (Brislin, 1970). All items were rated on a five point scale ranging from 1 „strongly disagree“ to 5 „strongly agree“.

**Identification.** Identification with each focus was measured with five items from Mael and Ashforth (1992). We replaced the referent of the items to represent the respective foci (i.e., the supervisor, the team, or the profession; for a similar approach see Johnson et al., 2006). Sample items are „My supervisor’s [my team’s/my profession’s] successes are my successes“ and „When I talk about my supervisor [my team/my profession], I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.“ Based on preliminary analysis, on which we elaborate in more detail below (see measurement equivalence section), we unfortunately had to eliminate two items from the leader identification and the team identification scale each in order to reach at least scalar invariance for all scales (Vandenbergh & Lance, 2000). All resulting Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were good (team identification: t1: $\alpha = .76$, t2: $\alpha = .78$; supervisor identification: t1: $\alpha = .81$, t2: $\alpha = .83$; professional identification: t1: $\alpha = .88$, t2: $\alpha = .89$).

**Social support from supervisors and coworkers.** We measured supervisors’ and coworkers’ emotional social support using four items each (Snyder, 2009), inserting the respective target. A sample item is „My supervisor shows [My coworkers show] genuine concern for my problems.“ Both scales exhibited good Cronbach's alpha reliabilities (supervisor support: t1: $\alpha = .85$, t2: $\alpha = .86$; coworkers support: t1: $\alpha = .85$, t2: $\alpha = .88$).

**Feedback from supervisors and coworkers.** We employed a scale by Steelman, Levy, and Snell (2004), using ten items to measure feedback from the supervisor and the coworkers respectively. This scale assesses feedback with items like „The feedback I receive from my supervisor [my coworkers] helps me do my job.“ Overall, the scales showed excellent internal consistencies (supervisor feedback t1: $\alpha = .90$, t2: $\alpha = .92$; coworker feedback t1: $\alpha = .91$, t2: $\alpha = .92$).

**Control variables.** Apprentices reported their age, gender, profession, and year of
apprenticeship as further demographic information at the end of the questionnaire. Additionally, we obtained the distribution of apprentices per year and profession of apprenticeship from company records.

**Analytic Strategy**

The data was analyzed with MPlus using latent change scores based on structural equation modeling (SEM). Such an approach enables the researcher to simultaneously test relationships between multiple intercorrelated independent and dependent variables while also accounting for measurement error of the constructs (Geiser, 2010). We analyzed our data in three steps: First, we performed a series of preliminary analyses, which are reported in detail below. Second, we tested the proposed identification development model including the hypothesized paths from the aspects of social interaction to identifications. Following L. G. E. Smith et al.’s (2013) approach, we used latent change scores to model the relationships between social interaction and identification because latent difference scores best represent the true intra-individual change over time (Schnabel, 1996; Steyer, Partchev, & Shanahan, 2000). Third, in addition to the proposed model, we also tested alternative models to further enhance the confidence in our results. For all models that were nested within each other we used the Chi-square difference test to examine which model was superior.

**RESULTS**

Table 4.1 presents the means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, and zero-order correlations of all the variables under study.

**Preliminary Analyses**

**Item parceling for feedback scale.** In order to facilitate model estimation, Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman (2002) recommended to use item parceling for large scales to avoid under-identification and to provide parsimonious models. We thus applied
this technique on the ten items of the feedback scales. Exploratory factor analyses demonstrated that both feedback scales measured unidimensional constructs as all items loaded on a single factor. Following Little et al.'s (2002) recommendations, we created three parallel random parcels for each scale, thereby also reducing further sources of measurement or sampling error (Bandalos, 2002). Parceling was not deemed adequate for the other shorter scales.

**Confirmatory factor analyses.** We conducted separate confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) for the endogenous and exogenous variables to assert that they are distinct constructs. Table 4.2 presents the respective fit indices.\(^{14}\) For the exogenous variables, we propose a three-factor model conceptualizing team identification, supervisor identification, and professional identification as three linked, yet distinct constructs. Alternatively, we tested a one-factor model, representing an overall identification construct, and a two-factor model that distinguishes relational identification (supervisor identification) from collective identification (team identification and professional identification). The results indicate that the three-factor model fits the data best.

Similarly, in a second set of CFAs we investigated the structure of the endogenous variables. Our hypothesized four factor model, which distinguishes social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers, was superior to all of the alternative models that either collapsed interaction content regardless of their source or interaction source regardless of the interaction content.

**Measurement equivalence.** We examined scale equivalence for all scales by assessing the measurement invariance properties of each scale within a confirmatory factor analysis framework using nested model comparisons with Chi-square difference tests (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Such empirical testing of measurement equivalence has been

\(^{14}\) The reported results for the confirmatory factor analysis already pertain to the final set of items that was also used for the main analyses, after some items had to be excluded due to insufficient measurement invariance.
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<td>-.04</td>
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**Note.** N = 212; superv = supervisor, cowork = coworker; Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in the diagonal; for all correlations greater than .15, \( p < .05 \), for all correlations greater than .18, \( p < .01 \).
Table 4.2

*Model Fit Indices for Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Exogenous and Endogenous Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\chi^2$/df</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$/$\Delta df$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exogenous variables, t1 and t2</td>
<td>(1) 1 factor: identification</td>
<td>977.47</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) 2 factors: collective vs. relational identification</td>
<td>718.40</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>51.81</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) 3 factors: team, supervisor, and professional identification</td>
<td>426.92</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>32.39</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endogenous variables, t1 and t2</td>
<td>(1) 1 factor: all predictors</td>
<td>2630.19</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) 2 factors: supervisor vs. coworker</td>
<td>1028.66</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>320.31</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) 2 factors: social support vs. feedback</td>
<td>2495.04</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) 4 factors: social support and feedback from supervisor and coworkers</td>
<td>629.28</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>18.15</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; * p < .05. ¹ Comparison to Model (2). ² Comparison of Model (3).*
strongly advocated before testing substantive hypotheses, as longitudinal data analysis requires at least scalar invariance (i.e., strong factorial invariance) across measurement points in order to be interpreted meaningfully (Geiser, 2010; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). In this respect, if items fail to meet the standards of strong factorial invariance, researchers can never be certain whether an observed change in a scale is due to altered measurement properties of the respective items or due to true changes in the underlying construct, which they actually aim to assess. Hence, following recommendations by Vandenberg and Lance (2000), when single items violated the measurement invariance assumption of at least scalar invariance, they were removed from further analyses. This unfortunately was the case for two items of leader and team identification each, resulting in the use of a three-item scale for the main analyses. Thereby, at least scalar invariance was established for all constructs of the identification development model.15

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15 Due to space limitations the results of the model fit and fit comparisons to establish measurement invariance are not reported here. However, they can be obtained from the first author upon request.
Overall model fit and hypotheses testing. In order to capture the development of identification, we applied latent change scores for all variables under study (corresponding correlations in Table 4.3). As depicted in Figure 4.1, the identification development model contained all the four paths from latent changes in social interactions to latent changes in identifications in correspondence with our hypotheses outlined above. This proposed model had an excellent overall model fit ($\chi^2 (1141) = 1717.86, \chi^2/df = 1.51, \text{RMSEA} = .05, \text{SRMR} = .06, \text{CFI} = .92, \text{TLI} = .91$). As indicated by the model results, most of our hypotheses were supported. In support of Hypotheses 1 and 2, we found positive path coefficients for the path from changes in supervisor’s social support to changes in supervisor identification ($\gamma_{H1} = .44; p < .001$) as well as for the path from changes in coworkers’ social support to changes in team identification ($\gamma_{H2} = .76; p < .001$).
Furthermore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported: While we found a positive path coefficient for the relationship between change in coworkers’ feedback and change in professional identification ($\gamma_{H3b} = .30; p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis 3b, the path coefficient leading from change in supervisor’s feedback to change in professional identification was not significant ($\gamma_{H3a} = .01; p = .90$). Thus, Hypothesis 3a had to be rejected.

**Including control variables.** We investigated whether the pattern of the results remained stable when adding control variables to the model. Recently, Becker (2005) has recommended to exclude impotent control variables in order to preserve power. Hence, we first explored the relationships between each control variable (i.e., age, gender, profession and year of apprenticeship) and the outcome variables and retained only those, which were significantly related to at least one outcome (Kraimer et al., 2011). Following this approach, we added year of apprenticeship, representing the apprentices’ tenure, and gender as manifest control variables into the model. None of these added paths turned out to be significant and adding the control variables to the model did not alter the pattern of results.

**Alternative Models.** To demonstrate the adequacy of the presented model, we additionally tested three alternative models. In a first alternative model, we added direct paths from predictors at time 1 to the changes in identifications. For the second alternative model, we added two paths from changes in feedback from the supervisor and coworkers to changes in supervisor and team identification respectively, as feedback might also serve to validate the tentative identification with the source of feedback. Finally, in a third alternative model we included all other potential paths from changes in predictors to the changes in identification, thus also including paths from changes in predictors to changes in identifications that we had not predicted based on the social validation model. Table 4.4 presents an overview of the tested models and their respective fit indices. The results
Table 4.4

*Model Fit Indices for Structural Models of Identification Development using Latent Difference Scores t1-t2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\chi^2/df$</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposed model:</td>
<td>1717.86</td>
<td>1141</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ socsup superv $\rightarrow$ $\Delta$ supervisor identification,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ socsup cowo $\rightarrow$ $\Delta$ team identification,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ fb superv $\rightarrow$ $\Delta$ professional identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ fb cowo $\rightarrow$ $\Delta$ professional identification,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 1:</td>
<td>1713.69</td>
<td>1137</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute level of predictors at t1 added</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 2:</td>
<td>1715.91</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ fb superv $\rightarrow$ $\Delta$ supervisor identification and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta$ fb cowo $\rightarrow$ $\Delta$ team identification added</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 3:</td>
<td>1704.90</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all other paths from changes in predictors added</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed model + control variables</td>
<td>1893.04</td>
<td>1235</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* socsup = social support; fb = feedback; superv = supervisor; cowo = coworker;
RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; * p < .05. The proposed model 1 serves as reference model for all nested model comparisons.
demonstrate that the initially proposed model fits the data best: None of the alternative models exhibited a superior model fit in comparison to the proposed model, indicating that adding the respective paths did not explain additional variance in the data.

**DISCUSSION**

In this research, we investigate how identification with multiple foci develops over time and propose specific workplace behaviors, which can be used for the active management of identification. Supporting the idea that interactions need to validate the tentative identifications with a specific focus, our results demonstrate that different social interactions indeed foster identification development with different foci. More specifically, changes in social support from the supervisor were associated with changes in supervisor identification, whereas changes in social support from coworkers were related to changes in team identification. Furthermore, we found a positive relationship between changes in feedback from coworkers, but not from supervisors, to changes in professional identification. Thus, coworkers’ feedback seems to be the important driver for professional identification development, while feedback from the supervisor does not contribute to professional identification development in our study.

**Theoretical Implications**

Our research contributes to the identification literature in multiple ways. First of all, we answer Ashforth et al.’s (2008) long-standing call to study how identification develops and thereby add to the still limited organizational research on identification development. To do so, we integrated several theoretical outlooks on identification development (i.e., social interaction [Burke 1950/1969; Reichers, 1987], provisional selves [Ibarra, 1999], and social validation [L. G. E. Smith et al., 2012, 2013]), in order to propose a more nuanced process of identification development. Moreover, within this framework we distinguished manageable antecedents which could account for the parallel development of identification.
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with multiple foci, based on the content and the partner of the interaction. Whereas others have focused on perceptions of validation (L. G. E. Smith et al., 2012, 2013), we take the field a step further by examining specific workplace interaction that might trigger social validation processes necessary for identification development. Being one of the first to investigate parallel processes of identification development with multiple foci (i.e., the supervisor, the team, and the profession) simultaneously, we complement prior research which has predominantly focused on studying one focus of identification at a time (Amiot et al., 2010; Gibson, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013). Thereby, our research also resonates with L. G. E. Smith’s et al. (2013) call to study identification development with different work identities more comprehensively and to apply the social validation concept to other foci besides organizational identification.

Through the integration of different aspects of identification development into one comprehensive process and its application to multiple foci, our research expands our understanding of the identification development process. Specifically, our results suggest that the social validation (L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013) of provisional selves (Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra, 1999) received in social interaction (Burke 1950/1969; Reichers, 1987) might be a general mechanism, which guides the development of identification. Thus, the social validation principle offers a framework to judge an antecedent’s ability to shape identification with a specific focus. Our results support this framework as we indeed find differential effects of social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers on identifications, depending on the degree to which they inform about the particular

16 We are aware of one prior study which has included both the work team and the organization as two distinct foci in their investigation of identification development (L. G. E. Smith et al., 2012). In the paper, the authors first report that social validation from the team and the team leader, examined in separate models, are related to team and organizational satisfaction, which is conceptualized to be one subfacet of identification, and then focus on identity imbalance (i.e., the lack of congruence between identifications with the two foci) as their key outcome. However, the authors do not predict differential effects of the two sources of validation and cannot compare their influences, as leader and team validation are investigated in separate models. Our research, on the contrary, demonstrates the parallel processes of identification development with different foci over time within one model and investigates how different social interactions can stipulate these identification development processes.
identification focus.

Second, our study sheds light on proximal behavioral drivers of identification, which can be directly applied in managerial practices. In this respect, we find that social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers are indeed powerful workplace behaviors to shape identifications with different foci as they might serve to put the social validation process into operation. Our findings thereby demonstrate that common social interactions in daily working routines offer a more proximal way to actively shape identification compared to more static and distal antecedents of identification such as external images, prestige, or communication climate (Bartels et al., 2007; Wan-Huggins et al., 1998).

Third, our finding that both supervisors and coworkers contribute uniquely to identification development is in line with a more general trend to consider coworkers (besides supervisors) as important agents who shape employees’ work experiences markedly (e.g., Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). This implies that supervisors, who are formally equipped with power to exert influence on employees, on their own might not be sufficient to evoke desirable outcomes, but that others in the social environment in addition are necessary to create favorable results. As we currently have only a rudimentary understanding of, for instance, colleagues’ contributions, we encourage further research regarding the influence that coworkers might have on each other.

Finally, our research also adds to a growing body of research separating identification according to its focus (e.g., Bartels et al., 2007; Van Dick et al., 2004, 2005; Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). In this respect, our study reinforces Olkonnen and Lipponen’s (2006) conclusion that identification is a multi-foci construct as we find identification with the supervisor, the team, and the profession to be related, yet distinct constructs, which are influenced by different antecedents. While previous research on multiple identifications has predominantly focused on differential consequences (e.g., Liu et al., 2010), our study demonstrates that the correspondence of focus idea (Van Dick et al.,
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2004) also applies to antecedents of identifications and offers with the previously demonstrated social validation principle (L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013) a well-grounded explanation for these effects.

Practical Implications

Given the many changes in contemporary work such as altered career patterns and virtual team work (Cappelli, 2009; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001), the positive management of employee identifications can become a competitive advantage for organizations (Fiol, 2001). In this respect, our study provides guidance to managers how they can actively shape their employees’ identifications. Our research supports the idea that identification is formed in social interactions at work, as they serve to validate tentative identifications. Applying our specific findings directly, managers would be well-advised to provide their employees with possibilities to receive social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers, for example, by creating a positive work climate, organizing work in a way that facilitates social interactions, or having regular feedback rounds during team meetings. On a broader scale, but awaiting future research, managers could deduce further potential antecedents that speak to the various foci of identification. For example, choosing an employee to represent the team in interactions with external partners may serve to validate this employee’s team identification. Additionally, coworkers should be encouraged to take an active role in shaping their – and their coworkers – work environment, in that they are important building blocks for employee’s work experiences and thereby influence, for instance, their coworkers’ identifications.

Our findings also imply that identification is not a uniform construct that is fostered through uniform antecedents, but that different actions are required to foster identifications with different foci. Thus, managers may choose specific tools in order to boost the particular identification that is most appropriate to meet the organization’s needs. For instance, team identification might be especially important in times of organizational
change to provide employees with a sense of identity continuity (cf. Ullrich et al., 2005), whereas professional identification might prevent employees from displaying unethical practices that harm their profession’s image (cf. Dukerich et al., 2002).

Finally, we corroborate Ashforth’s (1998) early model of identification development by showing that apprentices’ identifications are malleable. Our model thereby also tentatively hints at the right timing for shaping employees’ identification: Situations of transformation, such as organizational entries or transitions, require an adaptation of the self (Amiot et al., 2007; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) and have been suggested to make employees especially receptive to social information regarding their work identifications. Although testing whether such situations are particularly opportune for managing employee identifications is beyond the scope of the current research, our findings at least show that apprentices’ identifications are susceptible to information received in social interactions with others. Future research could offer useful insights on this question by comparing employees who experience different degrees of social change.

**Limitations and Further Research**

Even though we present an integrated process of identification development instigated by specific social interactions, which hints at potential other interactions that might serve to validate specific identifications, our direct conclusions are limited to the specific workplace behaviors we have studied. In this respect, we have included different interaction contents (social support vs. feedback) from two important interaction partners (supervisors vs. coworkers), which have been recognized to play a key role in socialization (Morrison, 2002), and have examined their relationships to supervisor, team, and professional identification. As a next step, identification development researchers could investigate further sets of social interactions that might also be apt to shape identification according to the process outlined above, thus adding further evidence to the adequacy of the proposed process. In this regard, it might be especially interesting to research the influence that
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others, who are not part of the targeted identity group, have on identification development, such as trainers in training sessions, participants in meetings where the employee represents his or her team or profession, or customers, to whom the employee represents the organization or profession.

Second, we used a longitudinal design and applied latent difference scores to represent the true intra-individual change in social interactions and identifications in order to adequately capture the development over time. Future research may collect data at three measurement points for an even more conservative longitudinal design in order to replicate the findings over two different time intervals (e.g., Polyhart & Vandenberg, 2010).

However, in light of our strong theoretical deduction and the alignment of our findings with previous findings over similar time intervals (e.g., Amiot et al., 2010; L. G. E. Smith et al., 2013), we are confident that our results are trustworthy.

Furthermore, all of our data was collected through apprentices’ self-ratings as our study involves perceptions and cognitions of workplace behaviors and internal states, which are best assessed through self-reports (cf., Markoczy, 1997). Thus, we need to consider the possibility that same source/common method bias, both of which usually inflate observed correlations, might have caused our findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector, 2006). Importantly, however, two compelling reasons indicate that the obtained results are not merely artefacts: First, the common method bias should systematically affect all correlations, yet we observed several non-significant zero-order correlations. Second, we focused on differential effects of the various social interactions. Therefore, it seems very unlikely that a general inflation of correlations caused our results. Some researchers have argued that a common referent of items, such as the supervisor, might also enhance common method bias by inflating all correlations specifically related to this target. Debilitating this concern, however, our results show differential effects for behaviors exhibited by the same interaction partner. In this respect, we find that changes in
supervisor’s social support, but not changes in supervisor’s feedback, predicted changes in supervisor identification, speaking against common method bias as the primary driver of our results. Additionally, although our longitudinal change model provides a strong indication of the directionality of effects, only experiments can demonstrate causality. Thus, further experimental work is necessary to confirm the proposed process of identification development in general and the specific effects in particular.

Moreover, even though our sample was very well suited to test our research model working under relatively constant conditions within a single company, it also limited the available participants. Most importantly, apprentices are newcomers to both their profession and organization, who are usually at the beginning of their career without any former experience as employees. Thus, this rather homogenous group of participants with very limited prior experience enabled us to study identification development with several foci while minimizing the chances that previous work experiences have distorted these relationships. Although a larger sample would have been desirable for such a complex model, our sample size is in line with similar research (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 2000; Amiot et al., 2010). Moreover, smaller samples are generally associated with a lower statistical power, making our research a conservative test of our hypotheses (Kline, 2011).

While our sample of newcomers to the profession and the organization provided an excellent setting to study initial identification development, the question arises whether these processes may be generalized to more settled employees who have already established identifications with their team, their supervisor, or their profession. Although the proposed general process of identification development through the social validation of provisional selves should apply to employees in general, previous experiences might influence future identifications. This opens a rich avenue for future research. Previous experiences might serve as a frame of reference, causing them to interpret social support and feedback differently. In this regard, feedback from coworkers might be the most important social interaction to shape apprentices’ professional identification, while for more
senior employees supervisor’s feedback might emerge to be more powerful in fine-tuning professional identification (cf. Gibson, 2003).

Moreover, changes such as job transitions might render identifications malleable again (e.g., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Importantly, the context of change may differentially impact different kinds of identifications. For instance, executing a similar job in a different organization could be expected to affect team and supervisor identification more than professional identification, whereas an occupational change within the same company might challenge professional identification more than organizational identification. It would therefore be important to demonstrate that identification develops in social interactions that validate provisional selves also for other samples of employees, thereby indicating that we uncovered a general mechanism of identification development. Additionally, further research should explore whether identification is indeed easier to influence and shape during sensitive phases of transitions as proposed by previous theoretical ideas on identification development (Amiot et al., 2007; Ashforth, 1998; Ibarra, 2004; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Conclusion

We examined how identification with multiple foci develops in the workplace. We do not only introduce social support and feedback from supervisors and coworkers as proximal behavioral antecedents of identification, but also present a refined process of identification development through social validation of provisional selves over time. Thereby, we theoretically and empirically contribute to a better understanding of how identification occurs, while also offering some practical advice for managers who seek to actively foster identification in employees.