Relationships Outside the Family: Unrelated Adults

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The role of adults outside the family in the lives of adolescents is a complex and understudied area of adolescent social development. This chapter is organized around two key questions: Who are the unrelated adults in adolescents' lives? and Why should they matter? Research relevant to the first question may be distinguished as contextual, role-focused, or person-focused. Contextual approaches examine the settings and conditions under which adolescents engage in sustained contact with unrelated adults, comparing the contemporary United States with other countries and other eras. Role-focused approaches compare adolescents' relations with parents and other adult relatives with their relations with adults in other roles. Here the distinction between social role and functional role is important. Social role refers to the place of the adult in the social system; e.g., teacher, parents' friend. Functional role is what the adult does for the adolescent; e.g., teach, advise, encourage. Person-focused approaches share a method of asking adolescents to identify the people who are important to them (or adults to identify those who were important when they were adolescents). These three approaches clearly overlap and are sometimes mixed in practice.

In the second major section of the chapter we adopt the perspective of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) to analyze the potential effect on adolescent development of relations with adults outside the family, drawing on the limited empirical literature to substantiate these effects when possible. The functional role (or set of functional roles) most commonly ascribed to unrelated adults who are adolescents' significant others is mentor. Two themes that emerge are the interaction between parents and mentors – Do mentors substitute for or complement parents? – and the relative importance of instrumental versus emotional content in the relationship between mentors and adolescents.

Unrelated adults: The neglected other.

Adolescence is a transitional period between embeddedness within the family and the relative independence of adulthood. Among its defining qualities are an expanding range of social relations, greater ability to actively shape the social environment, and the development of a self-concept that includes awareness of both the current self and potential adult selves (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997; Eccles, Flanagan, Lord, Midgley, & et al., 1996). Adolescents' relations with parents undergo a transformation during adolescence (Collins et al., 1997) and relations with peers take on new qualities of reciprocity and intimacy during the same period (Laursen, 1998). Most research and theorizing about adolescents' social relations have been directed toward parents and same-sex peers, with little research focusing on relations with either cross-gender peers (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999) or unrelated adults (Scales & Gibbons, 1996).

Why has the study of unrelated adults in adolescents' lives been so neglected? Four trends in the field of developmental psychology may have contributed. First, developmental research has tended to proceed from infancy to adulthood and from mother-infant interactions to increasingly distal relationships (Brown et al., 1999). Thus the area may have been neglected because of both the relative distance of unrelated adults from the social core of the family as well as the age of the developing person. There appears to be much more research on the role of nonfamilial adults in the lives of younger children (e.g., daycare providers, elementary school teachers) than in the lives of adolescents (see, for example, Pianta, 1992). A second tendency in developmental research may have contributed as well. Just as physical development tends to proceed from head to foot and from the center of the body outward, developmental research on social relationships in the United States has generally

proceeded from studying what people think and feel (their head and heart) to what they do (their feet and hands). Because relationships with adults outside of the family tend to be less emotionally salient to adolescents than relationships with parents, peers, or siblings (Darling & Hamilton, in press, Darling, 1994 #30; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Galbo, 1986, 1989; Hamilton & Darling, 1996), their potential significance has been overlooked by investigators. Third, research on unrelated adults may have suffered from our stereotypes of adolescents themselves (Buchanan & Holmbeck, 1998). If adolescence is a period when individuals revel in peer relationships and rebellion from adult norms, why study relationships with unrelated adults? Adolescents have to interact with their parents. Isn't it likely that their major interactions with unrelated adults will be in their attempts to avoid their constraints? Finally, research on unrelated adults may have suffered from a lack of theories that would provide clear hypotheses about the processes through which unrelated adults may influence adolescents (for a related discussion, see Brown et al., 1999). Because the focus of research on social development is on the emotional interaction of dyadic participants, and relations with unrelated adults tend to be relatively low in emotional content, theory has provided little guidance in this area. During early and middle childhood, much of the research on continuity between relationships with parents and with unrelated adults has been carried out based upon the attachment (e,g,, Pianta, 1992) or social learning (Baumrind, 1971) perspectives. Although some research on continuity in the characteristics of relationships with parent and adult during adolescence have worked from these same perspectives (see, for examples, Cotterell, 1992; Fletcher, Darling, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, ; Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999), the ties between theory and empirical analyses have been much looser. This lack of theoretical sharpness has also led to somewhat disappointing results in empirical studies of the phenomenon.

Who are the unrelated adults in adolescents lives?

Adolescents come in contact with unrelated adults through institutional involvement with schools, churches, and organized activities, through the social networks of their parents and peers, and through the settings they frequent, such as neighborhoods, malls, or the homes of their friends. Researchers examining the social network characteristics of adolescents have taken one of three approaches to understanding the makeup of social networks: contextual, role focused, or person focused.

Contextual approaches. Adolescents today are probably more isolated from contact with unrelated adults than at any time in the past. Discontinuity in the transition to adulthood, and especially the extension of schooling, have resulted in adolescents spending much of their time in social contexts with a high concentration of peers and few opportunities to form close, trusting contacts with adults outside the family (Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996). Although the majority of high school-aged students in the United States now spend some time at work, a context where youth have traditionally encountered unrelated adults, most jobs held by youth instead involve them with other teenaged employees and supervisors not much older than themselves (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). In addition, heavy involvement in part-time work may limit adolescents' opportunities to become involved in other activities that might put them in more meaningful contact with adults, such as violin teachers, gymnastics coaches, or older members of a chess club (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Hamilton, 1990). The increasing number of families in which all adults work have left more adolescents unsupervised after school (Belle, 1999). In addition to making them less likely to spend time with their own parents, this is also likely to decrease their contact with the parents of their friends and to make it

less likely that they will meet unrelated adults through the social networks of their parents. Extracurricular activities are another context in which adolescents have traditionally become involved with non-familial adults. Although the majority of adolescents are involved, the concentration of such activities within school settings and the increasingly stringent age segregation of community-based organizations have limited the number of adults engaged with adolescents in these settings (Kleiber, 1999)

This segregation of youth from adults stands in marked contrast to the more continuous transitions to adulthood that adolescents experienced prior to this century (Kett, 1977). Schooling was often abbreviated, sporadically attended, and much less age segregated than is typical of classrooms today (Modell & Goodman, 1990). When most people earned their livelihood from farming and small shops, children and adolescents worked alongside parents and adult employees. Many young adolescents left home to work in shops, crafts, the new factories (e.g., textile mills) or as domestic help (Kett, 1977; Modell & Goodman, 1990). Coresidence with parents into early adulthood and the prevalence of sharing residence with non-family adults are also likely to have contributed to the integration of adults into the lives of youths. This kind of age integration is still observed in traditional societies, including Amish and Mennonite youth in the US and Canada (Hostetler & Huntington, 1992). Girls in traditional societies are especially likely to spend considerable time in the company of their mother and other adult women. Although boys also spend time with their fathers and other adult men learning the skills they will need to succeed as adults, they tend to socialize with peers more than with men (Schlegel, 1995).

Cross-national comparisons call attention to differences in social arrangements that are taken for granted in any one country. Customary practices and the structure of social institutions, especially educational systems and social services, create varying opportunities for young people to interact with adults (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Wood, 1991; Matsuda, 1989). A powerful illustration is the institution of apprenticeship found in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Denmark and in some Eastern European countries. Apprentices, who may include half or more of the older adolescent population, spend a large amount of their time at work in the company of adults (Hamilton, 1987; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1999; Silverberg, Vazsonyi, Schlegel, & Schmidt, 1998). This places them in direct and sustained contact with adults far more regularly than their age-mates who attend school full time. In Germany, other social arrangements also reduce the segregation of adolescents that is characteristic of U.S. communities. For example, most of the activities that are sponsored by schools in the U.S. as extra-curricular activities, including sports teams and music groups, are sponsored by community clubs in Germany, in which members are drawn from the entire age spectrum. Instead of the high school band, a parade features the community band, in which one trumpeter may be 16 and another 61. Similarly, in Japan, almost half of adolescents attend one or more "juku" schools – after-school lessons focusing on academic tutoring or the acquisition of cultural knowledge, such as martial arts, calligraphy, or music (Matsuda, 1989). Because these classes are very small, they afford more individualized contact between students and adults.

Adolescents' exposure to unrelated adults in a variety of settings may have important implications for development both because it increases the likelihood that adolescents will form strong bonds with individual adults and because it gives them access to information and other resources through "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1983). In addition, unrelated adults, especially those who are part of

youths' social networks, contribute to the informal social control parents have over their adolescents (Sampson, 1992). Although historical and cultural comparisons of the contexts in which adolescents spend their time are suggestive of potential differences in adolescents' contacts and relations with unrelated adults, no study of which we are aware systematically documents typical patterns of adolescents' contact with unrelated adults in contemporary society. Given the potential for such variation to contribute to differences in the structural and relational qualities of adolescents' social networks (Cochran & Brassard, 1979), this represents a major gap in our knowledge of adolescent development.

Role-focused approaches. Although it is likely that there is great variability in the social roles of adults different adolescents have contact with, most adolescents in industrial societies have frequent contact with adults in particular institutional roles, especially teachers. Researchers taking a role-focused approach to understanding adolescents' social networks examine differences in the functional roles (Hamilton & Darling, 1989) enacted by individuals who differ in social roles. For example, to what extent are relationships with teachers characterized by emotional support or conflict compared with relationships with peers or parents? Such research differs from person-focused approaches (discussed in the next section), in which individuals are asked to name significant others in their lives, because the social roles to be rated are chosen by the researcher and the adolescent may or may not have a meaningful relationship with a person filling that role. Such research is informative in that it describes typical relationships, rather than optimally functioning ones. This is especially important because it increases comparability across social roles. For example, because virtually all adolescents in the United States name their parents among the most important influences on their lives, but many fewer name unrelated adults (Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; Darling & Hamilton, in press), comparisons of the functional roles of parents and unrelated adults compares the functioning of an *average* parent with the functioning of a *particularly important* unrelated adult. (Note that some researchers muddy this distinction by asking adolescents to select the single most important teacher they have had, rather than a particular or current teacher (see, for example, Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992), while other researchers have asked adolescents to describe 'teachers' in general, rather than a specific teacher (e.g., Wentzel, 1997).) Analysis of the functionality of social networks based on social roles alleviates this problem.

Virtually all research taking a role-focused approach to understanding unrelated adults has compared the functional roles of teachers with those of parents, peers, and people occupying other social roles. Consistent evidence suggests that relations with teachers are less affectively charged than relationships with other adults (Galbo, 1989; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). For example, Lempers & Clark-Lempers (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992) compared early, middle, and late adolescents' perceptions of their relations with individuals in five social roles (mothers, fathers, peers, teachers, and siblings) across eight functional roles and asked about relationship satisfaction. Functional roles included admiration, affection, reliable alliance, companionship, conflict, intimacy, instrumental aid, and nurturance. In 48 of 54 comparisons (functional role by gender by age), teachers were ranked lower in the fulfillment of each functional role than parents, peers, or siblings. The only exception to this pattern was the provision of instrumental aid. Younger adolescents rated teachers as second in instrumental aid only to parents, middle adolescent boys rated them as providing more aid than siblings, and middle adolescent girls and older adolescents rated them as providing equally low

instrumental aid as opposite sex parents and siblings. These authors concur with Galbo (1984) that "adolescents do not perceive teachers as important to them" (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). Thus although virtually all adolescents in developed nations spend significant amounts of time in the company of teachers, there is little evidence that their relationships with the average teacher is as emotionally significant as their relationships with the average parent or sibling, and certainly not as salient as their relationship with a close friend. In addition, Lempers & Clark-Lempers found that the higher adolescents rated their parents on each function, the lower they rated teachers. Reflecting on the fact that middle school and high school teachers typically meet multiple classes of 20-30 students daily, one should not be surprised by the scarcity of close personal relationships between teachers and students.

Person-focused approaches. Most researchers comparing the functionality of adolescents' social networks across social roles have used a person-centered approach, where adolescents list the most significant people in their lives and report on those relationships. The procedure used to elicit names of associates varies somewhat across researchers. Some researchers simply ask adolescents to name a limited number of individuals who they believe have been most significant in their lives (e.g. Darling & Hamilton, in press; Lanz, Iafrate, Marta, & Rosnati, 1999; Tatar, 1998a). Other researchers go through a more complex process of first eliciting a range of associates in different social roles (for example, parents, unrelated adults, relatives, peers), and then either asking adolescents to choose the most significant individual or individuals in each category (e.g. Munsch & Blyth, 1993) or selecting the single associate named in the category who is 'most functional' (i.e. described using the most descriptors) (e.g. Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; Darling & Hamilton, in press). Still other researchers ask adolescents to choose the most important associate in each social role category and then name them, without the prior elicitation procedure (e.g. Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998; Tatar, 1998a). Blyth (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982) provides an excellent discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of different elicitation procedures.

In open-ended listings of significant or influential others, peers are named more frequently than any other single category of associates (see, for examples, Blyth et al., 1982; Darling & Hamilton, in press; Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning, & Coleman, 1992; Lanz et al., 1999; Tatar, 1998a). Not surprisingly, parents are named most frequently as significant adults, although there does appear to be some cultural variability in adolescents' perceptions that their parents are significant. For example, in one cross-cultural study (Darling & Hamilton, in press), virtually every college student from the United States named at least one mother and one father figure (several adolescents named stepparents as well as biological parents and included biological parents with whom they had very little contact because they felt their absence had been significant). Using an identical procedure, fewer than 70% of male college students in Japan named their mothers as one of the ten most significant people in their life prior to college, and only 72% named their fathers. This is especially surprising given the very low rate of divorce in Japan. Because the number of others who can be named as significant is typically fixed, such variability in the naming of parents has important implications for the other associates who can be named. In the Darling et al. study, Japanese adolescents named more than twice as many peers, on average, as adolescents in the United States.

Although unrelated adults comprise only a small proportion of the social network members of adolescents elicited using person-centered approaches (one widely cited statistic is approximately 10% from a study by Blyth et al., 1982), most adolescents name at least one unrelated adult among their

significant others. For example, in one retrospective study, 82% of college juniors named an unrelated adult as one of the ten most important people in their lives prior to entering college (Hamilton & Darling, 1996). When allowed to name unrelated adult associates separately from peer associates, 69% of 7th to 8th graders named an unrelated adult as currently important to them (Darling, 1990) and Blyth, et. al (1982) reported that adolescent boys named an average of 1.89 and girls an average of 2.31 significant non-kin adults. When confronted with a stressful life event, 56% of 7th and 8th graders said that they asked an unrelated adult for help with their problem (Munsch & Blyth, 1993). Thus although unrelated adults are less commonly nominated as significant network members than parents or unrelated peers, they are perceived as among the most important members of their social networks by large numbers of adolescents.

Consistent with the implications of contextual approaches to understanding social networks, there appear to be both contextual and individual differences in the makeup of social networks elicited through these techniques. Garbarino and his colleagues found that urban children included more unrelated adults in their networks than their suburban or rural peers. However, when asked to name the individuals to whom they could turn for help with a problem, the urban sample named fewer adults than their non-urban peers (Garbarino, Burston, Raber, Russell, & Crouter, 1978). Variability has been found both across neighborhoods within the same city (Furstenberg, 1990) and across schools in the same community (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) and appears to be one way in which communities contribute to variation in the development of adolescent problem behavior (Sampson, 1992). Children from families in which parents are divorced are also more likely to name unrelated adults as part of their social network than are their peers from intact families (Stinson, 1991). There are mixed findings about gender differences in the number of significant adults named, with some studies reporting more adults named by boys than by girls (Hamilton & Darling, 1989), and other reporting more adults named by girls (Blyth et al., 1982; Greenberger et al., 1998). Some of this variability may result from differences in procedures in eliciting names of significant others or, as suggested by Greenberger et al., differences in the age of participants. It may be more likely, however, that such differences reflect contextual differences peculiar to the samples. For example, in a cross-cultural comparison of network characteristics (Darling & Hamilton, in press), college students in both the United States and Japan were more likely to name same-sex than opposite sex unrelated adults (results comparable to virtually all other studies in this area). However, this tendency was stronger for boys than for girls and in Japan than in the United States. These differences are likely to reflect both the lack of female teachers in Japan and stronger gender norms (the same pattern held for peers as well). Another interesting cultural difference between the United State and Japan was in the extent to which variability in the functioning of social relationships could be attributed to between-person differences or within-person differences in the functioning of different associates. In Japan, relatively more of the variability in mentoring was attributable to differences between people, while in the United States, relatively more of the variability was attributable to differences between the associates an individual person named. This suggests that mentoring may be more role-constrained in the United States than in Japan. Such differences in the prescriptiveness of social roles may be another source of contextual variability in the relational characteristics of social networks. For example, in Japan, the onus of learning in placed primarily on the student, while in the United States, a much greater emphasis is placed on the teachers as the driving force in student learning while (Haase, 1998). One might hypothesize that individual differences in

students' abilities to take advantage of learning situations might be more important determinants of role relationships in Japan than in the United States.

One line of research that has combined the contextual and person-centered approaches to understanding significant others is exemplified by comparisons of the individuals whom adolescents and adults thought had had a significant impact on their lives prior to adulthood (Lanz et al., 1999; Tatar, 1998a). Both studies found that peers were more likely to be nominated as significant non-family members by adolescents than by adults. Although one way of interpreting such differences is that adults had had more opportunities to form significant relationships with adults during their own adolescence than adolescents do today, an alternative explanation is that such differences reflect variations in how adolescents and adults define 'significant' and understand how others have influenced them. Describing this variation, Tatar writes: " . . . retrospective recall *(by adults)* enables an emphasis on the "instrumental" aspects of relationships for future purposes, rather than on the "affective" aspects which may be more salient among individuals who are currently adolescents." (Tatar, 1998a, p.699). In other words, developmental differences in the life tasks of individuals cause them to understand the importance of others in their lives in different ways. Tatar reported that adults examining their lives retrospectively focused on individuals who changed their trajectory (for example, by changing a career focus or sparking a new interest), while adolescents tend to focus on individuals who are currently offering emotional support and companionship. Research on adolescents suggests that unrelated adults are named as significant or important because they are challenging, but supportive - especially of the adolescents' interests and abilities (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991; Hendry et al., 1992; Tatar, 1998a, 1998b; Werner, 1993). In the research reviewed by Galbo (Galbo, 1986, 1994), adults were valued for their honesty, understanding, openness, encouragement, and support. Interestingly, although non-parental adults were described by adolescents as equally uninvolved with problem behavior as parents, they were also somewhat less condemning of the adolescents' own problem behavior (Greenberger et al., 1998). This is consistent with the idea that unrelated adults may serve as something of a 'middle ground' between parents and peers. Unrelated adults represent adult norms, but are less explicitly charged with socialization, are less likely to be in a position to sanction misbehavior, and may thus allow adolescents more latitude to discuss their own beliefs and non-compliance.

Like research from the role-centered perspective, adolescents' descriptions of their relationships with significant adults place relatively more emphasis on the instrumental, rather than emotional, components of the relationships. For example, Tatar (Tatar, 1998a) reports that both adults and adolescents describe the most important characteristics of teachers as challenger, teacher, believer, enabler. Others report similar results (Darling & Hamilton, in press; Hendry et al., 1992). In an analysis of the correlates of mentoring with other aspects of relationships, Darling et al. (Darling & Hamilton, in press) found that in both Japan and the United States, mentoring was less strongly associated with affective qualities of relationships (i.e. support, being 'fun') for unrelated adults than for either parents or peers. This suggests that adolescents may be able to value and take advantage of the instrumental components of relationships with unrelated adults separately from the affective components.

Summary. It appears clear that adolescents may come in contact with a greater variety of unrelated adults in some historical and cultural contexts than in others and that the qualities of their relationships with unrelated adults may also vary as a function of cultural norms as well as individual

differences. Although the unrelated adults with whom adolescents have the most prolonged contact (teachers) appear not to be emotionally salient, it is equally clear that the majority of adolescents form significant relationships with at least one unrelated adult and that many of the unrelated adults they name as significant are teachers. Thus, in a given classroom, the particular teacher may be important to only a very small number of adolescents. This does not imply that over the course of their schooling most of the adolescents in that classroom have not encountered one teacher whom they thought was significant and with whom they formed a strong bond. Concluding that teachers are unimportant to adolescents on the basis of ratings of comparisons of current teachers to current friends or to parents may be unwarranted, just as we would not judge the significance of peers to adolescents by asking adolescents to rate their relationship with the person who happened to be assigned to the seat next to them. The literature is clear, however, that unrelated adults are important to adolescents for different reasons than are either parents or peers. The focus of these relationships is instrumental rather than emotionally based (for review and discussion of the implications of this difference, see Darling, Hamilton, & Niego, 1994). These findings suggest that our understanding of these relationships must be based in a firmer conception of how they function rather than a comparison with other relationships, which are demonstrably different.

Why should adults matter?

Prior discussions of the role of unrelated adults in the lives of adolescence research has typically framed such relationships in terms of adolescents' relationships with the most significant adults in their lives: their parents (Darling et al., 1994). This is most obvious in discussions of unrelated adults as mentors. The word 'mentor' derives from Homer's Odyssey. When Ulysses left Ithaca to fight in the Trojan wars, he asked his friend, Mentor, to serve as tutor and substitute father for his newborn son, Telemachus. From this perspective, unrelated adults should influence adolescent development to the extent that they provide similar functions to parents or compensate for inept or absent parenting (Freedman, 1993; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Rhodes, 1994; Rhodes, Contreras, & Mangelsdorf, 1994; Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992).

The presumed ability of an unrelated adult to perform a quasi-parental role accounts for much of the current popularity of programs matching single-parent children and adolescents with mentors. As Freedman points out (Freedman, 1993), another source of political support for mentoring is the inaccurate belief that it is cheap. Big Brothers/Big Sisters is the oldest, largest, and best developed mentoring program. Public/Private Ventures took advantage of the waiting list of young people maintained by most Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs, which results from the relative shortage of adult volunteers, to conduct an experiment designed to document the impact of having a mentor. Program operators in participating cities agreed to divide their applicants randomly into treatment and control groups. They then proceeded to match those in the treatment group while retaining the control group applicants in the waiting list for 18 months, the length of time applicants ordinarily spend waiting (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1996).

This design yielded unusually robust findings for a program evaluation. Compared to mostly 10-14-year-old boys and girls, predominantly from single-parent families, whose assignment to a mentor was delayed for 18 months as a result of the random selection process, those with a big brother or big sister: were less likely to begin using drugs and alcohol; were less likely to hit others; showed more positive attitudes toward school; had better grades and attendance; and reported better relations with

peers and family members.

In the following sections, we take the perspective of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) to examine the potential contributions of unrelated adults to adolescent development. Ecological systems theory is a model of human development characterized by (a) an emphasis on an active person who influences and interprets, as well as is influenced by, the environment, (b) a focus on understanding the processes underlying development, and (c) the investigation of inter-relationships among multiple contexts in which the developing person interacts. One of the basic premises of ecological systems theory is that adaptive development requires "participation in progressively more complex reciprocal activity, on a regular basis over extended periods of time with one or more other persons with whom the child develops a strong, mutual, irrational attachment, and who are committed to that child's development, preferably for life." (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 5). This concept of the nature of developmentally instigative processes is reflected in Bronfenbrenner's definition of a mentor:

> A mentor is an older, more experienced person who seeks to further the development of character and competence in a younger person by guiding the latter in acquiring mastery of progressively more complex skills and tasks in which the mentor is already proficient. The guidance is accomplished through demonstration, instruction, challenge, and encouragement on a more or less regular basis over an extended period of time. In the course of this process, the mentor and the young person develop a special bond of mutual commitment. In addition, the young person's relationship to the mentor takes on an emotional character of respect, loyalty, and identification. (Bronfenbrenner, 1990)

Bronfenbrenner's definition has four critical components: intentionality on the part of the mentor, a focus on activities and skills acquisition, interaction over a long period of time, and mutual commitment and emotional bonding. We discuss each in turn.

Intentionality on the part of the mentor. In his description of life course development, Erikson states that generativity is the central issue of human development that has "made man the teaching and instituting as well as the learning animal" (Erikson, 1950, p. 266), emphasizing the psychological need of healthy adults to nurture and teach the younger generation. Defining generativity as a key developmental task for adults implies that mentoring, like parenting, is a natural and fulfilling function. However, little research has focused on adults' motivations for becoming involved in ongoing relationships with unrelated youth or on the effect of these motivations on the relationships themselves (although see McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998, for a review of the literature on the course and correlates of generativity). Intentionality on the part of adults involved with adolescents may be an important factor in understanding adult:adolescent relationships because it influences (a) the likelihood that the relationship will form and be maintained, (b) the content of the relationships, and (c) the interpretation of the relationship by the developing person.

Within institutional settings, most individuals are drawn to professions where they work with youth because of their desire to teach, help, and form relationships with their students or clients (Ames & Ames, 1984; Sylvia & Hutchison, 1985). Similar motivations appear to underlie volunteering. Concern for others differentiates between those who volunteer and those who do not as well as tenure within volunteer organizations (Clary et al., 1998). Thus, within institutional settings, it appears that most adults with whom adolescents come in contact are motivated to form relationships with them.

Individual differences within institutional settings, however, suggests that the prevalence of mentoring (and presumably functional aspects of relationships as well) varies systematically depending upon both the personality of individuals involved and the institutional support and reward structure (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996; Bigelow, 1999). Analyses also suggest that some historical periods are more characterized by a focus on intentionally fostering development among the younger generation than others (Moran, 1998).

Intentionality on the part of the mentor may also influence the content of the relationship. Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on intentionality is consistent with both Vygotskian (Wertsch, 1979, 1981) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1989) in suggesting that development occurs when the developing person internalizes aspects of an ongoing interaction with a more skilled other. Vygotsky explicitly assumes that adults involved in interactions with younger persons will adopt behaviors facilitating growth by the child because of both cultural demands and biological imperatives. The simplification of language used by adults when communicating to children is an example of such an adjustment. In addition, individual differences in the skill of adults at scaffolding tasks to facilitate development suggest both that most adults understand the importance of adjusting their behavior to enable youth to learn in their interactions with them and that individual adults differ in their skill at adjusting their behavior to appropriate levels (Wertsch, 1979, 1981). Research suggests that differences in teachers' goals and motivations are embedded in a value system that is shared by both students and teachers (Ames & Ames, 1984). For example, Ames discusses three types of motivational systems: ability-evaluative, task mastery, and moral responsibility (Ames & Ames, 1984). Teacher goal orientation helps to determine strategy choice and behavior in the classroom, which, in turn, helps to shape students' motivations, goals, values, and behaviors. It would be expected that differences in motivations would also change both the frequency and patterning of the classroom reward structure.

The role of the protege or student has often been overlooked in the discussion of intentionality. At least one experimental study suggests that college students' *perceptions* of the motivations of adults for their involvement changes their perception of the mentor, their experiences with them, and their approach to the shared activity when the mentor was uninvolved (Wild, Enzle, & Hawkins, 1992). Students who believed their instructors were volunteers, rather than paid, enjoyed the activity more, perceived the instructors to be more creative and enthusiastic, enjoyed their lessons more and were more interested in continuing, and were more experimental and playful in their approach to the activity when on their own. In addition, studies of graduate students suggest that most mentor-protege relationships develop as a result of student initiation or recruiting of mentors. Mentors are most likely to develop relationships with proteges whom they perceive to have similar interests to themselves and to be motivated (Pawlak, 1999). These results are consistent with Werner's (1990; 1995) interpretation of the prevalence of significant, non-parental adults in the lives of resilient children as resulting from these children's ability to seek out and develop such relationships for themselves. Thus, a mentor's intentional fostering of development may occur partly in response to characteristics of the protege, including initiation of the relationship.

A focus on activities and skill acquisition. While adolescents' relations with family members are characterized by strong affect, their relations with adults who are not family members appear to be less affectively charged and to place relatively more emphasis on shared activities and instrumental functions (Blyth et al., 1982; Darling et al., 1994; Galbo, 1984; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992).

This focus on joint activity participation may be important both because it provides a context for the development of the adolescent-adult relationship and because it changes the meaning of the interactions that occur within the relationship. Two important developmental tasks of adolescence may make this activity focus particular salient: vocational selection and identity development. Both younger (Galbo, 1989) and older youth (Bigelow, 1999; Pawlak, 1999; Schmidt, 1998) seek out mentoring from adults whom they see as having shared interests that they hope to develop themselves. Adolescence is characterized by the development of a self-concept that includes an awareness of both the current self and potential adult selves. Contact with a broad range of unrelated adults with whom the adolescent shares some interests may facilitate exploration of several different vocational avenues. The weak and instrumental nature of the ties adolescents have to many adults in their environment may, in fact, be advantageous in the exploratory phase of career development. Resources accessed through individuals who are not part of a central social network tend to expand access to novel resources unavailable through close relationships (Granovetter, 1983). In addition, the lack of a strong emotional relationship between adolescent and adult may allow the adolescent to explore areas that are different from aspects of the self expressed in other contexts and to drop areas that they have decided not to pursue without fear of terminating an important source of emotional support or appearing inconsistent. The independence of emotional and instrumental functions characteristic of adolescents' relationships with unrelated adults (Darling & Hamilton, in press) may also facilitate adolescents maintaining access to instrumental resources in the absence of a strong emotional bond and without reliance on good interpersonal skills.

A second implication of the activity focus of adolescents' relations with unrelated adults is in how feedback from the significant other is internalized into the self. Two types of distinctions have been used to explain social role variability in the association between the person's perception of their relations with significant others and their self-concept: variability in the person's perception of the information source and variability in the aspect of the self which the person perceives the source to reflect upon. Unrelated adults may differ from parents and close friends both because of the value we place on their opinion and because of their credibility (Rosenberg, 1973). Although the level of emotional bonding typical of relationships with unrelated adults may decrease the saliance of their opinions on global self-worth, their credibility as sources of information may be particularly high, in part because of this same emotional distance. Credibility refers to the extent to which we place faith in the truth or validity of the person's evaluation, and may increase as a function of perceived objectivity. As a result, a mother's assurance that, "You tried hard," may no longer be very comforting to a sixteen-year-old athlete, while a coach's harsh criticism may not impinge on their emotional bond because the sixteen-year-old understands the coach's objectivity and commitment to improving performance.

It is important to note that adults need not be significant in order to influence activity selection. For example, a study suggested that unrelated adults are an important reason for dropping out of activities that adolescents were interested in (Hultsman, 1993). Although this study did not explore the reasons underlying the adolescents' decisions to quit, it seems likely that not liking the activity leader was prominent among reasons for dropout. This would be consistent with findings that adolescents' perceptions that their teachers cared about them significantly increased their interest and motivation in academic subjects (Wentzel, 1997).

Although Darling and Hamilton (1994) have argued that understanding the instrumental focus of

relationships with non-parental adults is critical in understanding the developmental impact of these relationships, other writers have disagreed. For example, Sullivan (Sullivan, 1996) has argued that the emotional support provided by mentors may be particularly important in helping at-risk urban girls develop a stronger sense of self. Other research has suggested that emotional support is instrumental in predicting among stress and depression among young Latina mothers (Rhodes et al., 1994) and optimism about the career process among African-American pregnant and parenting adolescents (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995). This research stands in sharp contrast to the instrumental focus found in research on mentoring of gifted and talented youth (Pleiss & Feldhusen, 1995). It is unclear whether emotional support is particularly important in facilitating positive development in more vulnerable populations of at-risk youth or whether these differences results from the different emphases of the researchers.

Interaction over a long period of time. Adolescents' relationships with assigned mentors through voluntary or paid programs are frequently subject to premature termination resulting from volunteer frustration and burnout, relationship difficulties, and logistical difficulties in maintaining contact (Freedman, 1993; Grossman & Rhodes, in press; Hamilton et al., 1991). It is thus particularly important to understand the consequences of early termination for development. Long-term mentoring relationships have been associated with positive outcomes such as lower involvement in drug and alcohol use, improved school performance, lower levels of emotional distress and better relations with parents and peers (for reviews, see Grossman & Rhodes, in press; Rhodes et al., 1999). Early termination of mentoring relationships has been associated with negative outcomes, including declines in global self-worth and scholastic competence (Grossman & Rhodes, in press). In addition, it is possible that adolescents who are sensitive to feelings of rejection as a result of previous relationship problems may be particularly vulnerable to perceived rejection in mentoring relationships (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Thus it appears that the benefits of mentoring relationships may take time to appear, and that unsuccessful matches may, in fact, be harmful (Grossman & Rhodes, in press).

Adolescents are more likely than preadolescents to terminate relationships with assigned mentors early (Grossman & Rhodes, in press). Although Grossman & Rhodes did not investigate the reasons underlying these differences, other, qualitative investigations suggest that mentor goals may be important determinants of such differences (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1993). As youth become more focused on peer relationships, they may less interested in establishing relationships with adults based on friendship, and more interested in establishing relationships based on skill development. Mentors whose primary goal is the establishment of a strong emotional relationship with youth may become frustrated as their meetings are cancelled because of conflicts with parties, extracurricular activities, and other peer-centered youth activities. Those mentors whose goals are more instrumentally focused may be less likely to see these frustrations in terms of rejection and may be more flexible in dealing with obstacles. Although, as discussed previously, many of the interactions adolescents have with unrelated adults may be short-term and instrumental, it appears that length of time is an important component in establishing the benefits of mentoring in relationships where there is a clear expectation that a strong emotional bond should be formed.

Mutual commitment and emotional bonding. No study of which we are aware has examined the importance or nature of behavioral and emotional commitment in adolescents' relationships with unrelated adults. Several different theoretical orientations suggest that commitment on the part of the mentor should be important, however. For example, to the extent that relationships with

unrelated adults compensate for problematic earlier relationships, attachment theory suggests that commitment by the mentor may help to realign the attachment system, moving it towards greater stability (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994). Such realignment would take time to develop and might be strengthened, rather than weakened, by sustained commitment in the face of threats. If relationships with unrelated adults develop on a similar timetable as adolescents' relations with other significant figures, it may be that the caregiving and attachment systems may become engaged only as the relationships develop over time (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Investigations of mentors' motivations for developing ongoing relationships with proteges suggests both that they are attracted to motivated (i.e. committed) youth (Bigelow, 1999) and see the development of the protege as enhancing their own prestige. Thus commitment by the protege may enhance their relationship with their mentor.

Although research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships has focused on emotional functioning, the specific functions described by Bronfenbrenner – respect, loyalty, and identification – are infrequently touched upon. All are relevant, however, to understanding unrelated adults as potential role models. As defined by Kemper, a role model is one 'who demonstrates for the individual how something is done in the technical sense . . . . (The role model) is concerned with the "how" question. The essential quality of the role model is that he possesses skills and displays techniques which the actor lacks (or thinks he lacks) and from whom, by observation and comparison with his own performance, the actor can learn' (Kemper, 1968, p. 33). A role model provides learners with observational opportunities that include imitation of new behaviors, inhibition of unsuccessful behaviors through observation of negative consequences, and the disinhibition of formerly constrained behaviors and increasing use of successful behaviors through observation of positive consequences (Bandura, 1989).

Pleiss and Feldhusen (1995) suggest that adolescents' interactions with adults who are important in their lives can be placed along a continuum from mentors, to role models, to heroes. Mentors are involved in ongoing interactions with their adolescent proteges, while heroes may be one-way attachments in which the adult has no knowledge of their importance to the developing person. Although the developmental importance of relationships such as this that are emotionally salient to youth but involve no interaction is unclear, research suggests that youth who have role models - even if they have no contact with them - may hold higher career aspirations than their peers.

As nothing more than a model of desired behavior, an unrelated adult role model need not have an emotional tie with a youth. Merton (1968), who is credited with coining the term, "role model," pointed out that it implies identification with only a narrow aspect of a person – one role – rather than with the whole person. However, a mentor is by definition someone with whom a young person has direct contact, and the modeling function of a mentor is usually presumed to extend beyond a single role, encompassing, for example, values and ways of treating others in addition to specific skills and an occupational identity. The term, "ego ideal," might be more appropriate in this context than role model. Positive emotional relationships with mentors appear to enhance the duration of mentor:protege relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, in press) and are likely to increase both the credibility and value placed on feedback. This may be especially important when feedback is difficult or demands a change in behavior on the part of the adolescent.

It is important to note that although much of Bronfenbrenner's description of an ideal mentor:protege relationship focuses on the active role of the mentor, mutual commitment and emotional bonding cannot occur without the protégé's participation; it must be reciprocal. Although an adult may

have many of the qualities that would make him or her an excellent ego ideal, only the adolescent can make the decision that the adult is worthy of emulation and loyalty (Hendry et al., 1992).

Bronfenbrenner's definition of a mentor is idealized. It incorporates all the elements one might hope to embody as a mentor or to see in a mentor for one's own child. However, the term is widely applied to people and to relationships that do not have all four elements. The term has become prominent in corporate settings as women have entered the executive ranks in growing numbers and found that the absence of female mentors has been another barrier to overcome (Zey, 1988). A workplace mentor for an adult or for a youth may be quite influential by teaching work-related competencies in the absence of a mutual emotional commitment. Haase (1998) described spending more than a year as an apprentice potter in Japan under a mentor who was emotionally abusive, causing him to leave eventually, but only after he had acquired substantial knowledge and skill despite the rather hostile relationship.

Future directions. By definition, mentors are the unrelated adults who are most influential on adolescent development. We would recommend, therefore, that one avenue of future research be directed toward the functional role or roles associated with mentors (i.e., what mentors do) rather than toward unrelated adults in social roles presumed to be influential (e.g., teacher). We have cited research on the extent to which adolescents identify unrelated adults as important to them, on who those adults are, and to some extent on what they do. Bronfenbrenner's definition of a mentor poses useful questions for future research about whether and under what conditions both instrumental and emotional functions are critical to mentoring. The research cited above suggests that emotional support from mentors may be critical for adolescents who lack such support from parents and other family members but that instrumental functions may be more critical for adolescents with stronger families or other sources of emotional support. This indicates the importance of looking for the impact of mentors in the context of other relationships, especially with parents. Are mentors substitute parents, performing functions that would otherwise be absent, or do they complement parents, addressing specific needs while parents fulfill others? Surely both functions may be found. It seems likely that young people with both strong parents and serious mentors benefit the most. Examining both the interactions between mentors and parents and the balance between instrumental and emotional functions performed by mentors promises both theoretical payoff and empirically-based guidance for programs that attempt to introduce mentors into adolescents' lives.

A second major thrust of future research on the roles played by unrelated adults in the lives of adolescents should be to recognize and explore what seems most unique and characteristic of these relationships: their instrumental and sometimes transient nature (Darling et al., 1994). More research should focus on the nature of adolescents' ties with adults who may not be emotionally significant, but who may help shape their activities, goals, skills, and talents. Social network approaches, particularly those emphasizing structural network characteristics, may be particularly important in understanding individual differences in access to resources through unrelated adults and the consequences such differences may have for adolescent development and the successful transition to adulthood. One of the challenges that may come from tying non-network based approaches to specific adolescent outcomes is that different adolescents may be influenced by specific adults in somewhat unique and idiosyncratic ways. For example, although many children who have shown resilience in the face of developmental challenges have had unrelated adults play important roles in their lives (Werner & Smith,

1992), the specific roles played are quite varied, and different individuals have been affected in different ways. A combination of qualitative approaches and more exploratory 'science in the discovery mode' (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) may be necessary before we come to understand adolescents' relationships with unrelated adults on their own terms, rather than trying to force them into the mold of relationships that are significant because of their powerful emotional force.

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Key Readings

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