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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a conceptual framework of mentoring for the academic context that will begin to unravel the confusing and conflicting definitions of mentoring that limit dialogue across disciplinary contexts. Two analytical concepts are suggested as a way to designate the common relationships of role model, advisor, and mentor in academe and to recognize and consider attendant roles. These concepts are "intent" and "involvement." A mentor may do all the things an advisor or role model does, or none of them. What distinguishes a mentor from an advisor is the focus on career advancement. The relationship, which focuses on what proteges bring to the table and what they need to move on to the next level, has a future orientation. Involvement also distinguishes a mentor from an advisor or role model. The role model relationship requires relatively low levels of involvement, the advisor role requires somewhat more, and the mentor role requires relatively high involvement. At any one time, one can be a role model to many, an advisor to some, and mentor to a few. (Contains 38 references.) (SLD)

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# Unraveling the Definitional Threads: Mentoring and Academe

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For more than 20 years, mentoring has been a high visibility concept and imperative, an idea and activity “whose time has come,” as suggested by Speizer in 1981 (692), which has lost none of its luster in the intervening period. References to mentoring abound in the popular and professional literature, and mentoring is seen as the *sine qua non* for personal development, career development and career advancement. If we are to believe the literature, “everyone who makes it has a mentor” (Collins & Scott, 1978, title), and everyone is in need of mentoring: new hires, potential Fortune 500 CEOs, newly minted assistant professors, welfare mothers, employees in need of remedial help, professional women, minorities, disadvantaged youth, student teachers, prospective administrators, to name but a few (cf. Stone, 1999; Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999; Murrell, Crosby & Ely, 1999; Crow & Matthew, 1998; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Zey, 1984; Collins, 1983; Kanter, 1977; Muse, Wasden & Thomas, 1988; Anderson & Shannon, 1988). For a concept and activity so widely talked about and touted, there is far less agreement than one would expect about what it is we are talking about; about what mentoring is and what it involves. A review of the management literature reveals “..coaching confused with counseling, coaching confused with mentoring, and mentoring confused with coaching and counseling” (1999,2). And it has been remarked that even “researchers cannot agree on what mentors are” (Hurley, 1988, 38).

Most operational definitions (of mentoring) used in the studies roll together the instrumental and emotional aspects of developmental relationships. The term *mentor* means different things to different scholars (and) it is hard to know which aspects of mentoring the respondents are attending when they participate in the quantitative studies (Crosby, 1999, 11).

As Hurley(1988) found, “‘Mentor’ has become a catchall term...” Thus it is not surprising that mentors and proteges themselves hold different, often conflicting conceptions of what it is they are involved in. In a study funded by the National Science Foundation, Pfleeger & Mertz (1995) found that where mentoring pairs were unsuccessful, one of their problems was that they “did not share a common perspective about mentoring or what should go on in the name of mentoring” (68).

Definitions of mentoring come in all sizes, shapes and levels of inclusiveness. The most popular definitions in the literature focus on the advancement of the protégé by someone in a position of authority within the professional context. “A high-ranking, influential member of your organization who has advanced experience and knowledge and who is committed to providing upward mobility and support to your career” (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990, as reported by Crosby, 1999, 12). “A person of greater experience and seniority in the world the young man (sic) is entering,” (Levinson, 1978, 97), who “gives tangible

assistance to your advancement” (Collins, 1983,7). (See, also: Kanter, 1977; Fagenson, 1989; Thomas, 1990; Gaskill, 1991; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Chao, et al, 1992.) A somewhat different definition focuses on development, within or outside a professional context, by an individual who may or may not be in a position to advance the career of the protégé. “A trusted and experienced supervisor or advisor who by mutual consent takes an active interest in the development and education of a younger, less experienced individual” (Atkinson, et al., 1995, as reported by Crosby, 1999, 13.) (See, also, Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999). And even more inclusive and less specific, “It may be someone whose advice you seek and value, or someone who offers you advice and suggestions which you believe are beneficial to your academic, career or personal life” (McCarthy & Mangione, (2001, in review); “an experienced adult who befriends and guides a less experienced adult” (Fagans & Walter, 1982, 51); and even, “people who help them do what they wanted to do or do it better” (Alexander & Scott, 1983, 2).

Similar confusion — even contradiction — reigns when one compares the roles identified with mentoring and the definitions assigned to those roles. Stone (1999) distinguishes coaching and counseling from mentoring, with the first two defined in traditional supervisory terms. Levinson (1977) identifies sponsor, host and guide, exemplar, and counselor as defining the role of the mentor. Building on Kram’s (1985) useful distinction between career functions and psychosocial functions, Crosby (1999) distinguishes among role models, sponsors and mentors, assigning career enhancement functions to the sponsor and largely psychosocial functions to the mentor. Speizer (1981) identifies role models and sponsors/mentors, arguing that the later two are the same. Ragins (1999) noted this intertwining of roles in academic settings, in particular, as compared to corporate settings. “Recent empirical research published in academic journals does not distinguish between a sponsor and a mentor” (228). In contrast, Josephowitz (1980) distinguishes between mentors and sponsors, but for her, mentors are akin to supervisors and sponsors are the ones with influence in the organization. And to add to the complexity, Phillips-Young (1982) delineates six different mentoring roles: traditional mentors, supportive bosses, organizational sponsors, professional mentors, patrons, and invisible “godparents” (22-24).

In reviewing definitions of mentoring, Anderson and Shannon (1988) found the extant definitions to be “too vague or ambiguous to be helpful” (39) to their attempt to develop a conceptualization of mentoring to guide beginning teachers, and decried “the lack of conceptual frameworks for organizing the various mentoring functions and behaviors found within the definitions of mentoring” (40). While it clearly overstates the case, the existing state of affairs constitutes a veritable Tower of Babel (Genesis, 11:4-9 in Tanakh, 1985).

The absence of a shared, stipulative definition of mentoring not only makes it difficult to talk with one another with any sense of certainty that we are talking about the same things, or to help individuals and organizations to maximize the potential inherent in mentoring, but it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to build a coherent base of research. Healy (1997) has captured the situation aptly.

The seeds of empirical study have been cast too broadly to yield a harvest of cumulative knowledge given the inconsistent, idiosyncratic definitions of mentoring...employed...The absence of a definitional consensus is stymieing efforts to synthesize empirical findings into a coherent body of knowledge and to identify important unanswered questions. (9-10).

As early as 1981, Speizer described the terms role model, mentor and sponsor as “elusive concepts” (title) in the literature, and advised that “the first step researchers must take is to establish accepted definitions of each concept.” Twenty years later, we are still without these accepted definitions, and we continue to conduct research on mentoring as if it made no difference. “A frequent response to the definitional conundrum has been a nod in its direction while proceeding with an admittedly inadequate formulation” (Hurley, 1988, 10).

The absence of an operational definition of mentoring is particularly problematic for the academy. In the academy, there is an implicit assumption that as advisors, teachers and supervisors, academics are committed, at the very least, to helping students at all levels to develop, advance and “be successful,” however that may be defined. Also, at least when it comes to junior colleagues and graduate students, that it is the role of senior faculty to help them not only develop their potential, but to be successful in the field. “Admission to and advancement through a colleague system (academia) is easier when newcomers have the support of an already established member of the system...and are ‘socialized’ into the profession” (Hall & Sandler, 1983,2). In agreeing to work with graduate students and junior faculty, what definition of mentoring helps one to determine what to do, how, when, for what purpose? Is there a difference between being a role model and an advisor? An advisor and a mentor? Clearly, the models in place owe little to the academic context and how it is for faculty deciding whether to accept the role of mentor or to serve in some other capacity. Also, it is clear that even the clear distinction between psychosocial and career advancement functions (Kram, 1985) does not serve to delineate even the work of the academic advisor. The functions are inextricably intertwined. We are as concerned about the psychosocial dimensions of development as the career development dimensions, whether we choose to be mentors or something else.

## *Purpose*

The purpose of the paper is to propose — for consideration and debate — a conceptual framework of mentoring for the academic context, which, it is hoped, will begin to unravel the threads of confusing, conflicting definitions of mentoring which limit dialogue across disciplinary contexts. It is offered with great modesty, and one hopes, humility, not as a finished product, or a statement of what is, but rather as a starting point for discussion, a possibility, and clearly a work in progress in search of critical voices to contribute to the discussion.

## *Conceptual/Analytical Framework*

Reflecting on the overlapping skeins of definitions, roles and functions elucidated in the literature that do not allow for clear or guiding distinctions, two concepts appear salient and promising for making such distinctions: *intent* and *involvement*. Intent is concerned with the aim and purpose for which an activity is undertaken, the outcomes or ends sought, the primary focus in the sense of being preeminent, first among several. Involvement is about how much is required of each party to the activity, emotionally and psychologically; the nature and level of investment, the intensity of the relationship. In concert, the concepts are proposed as a conceptual/analytical framework for unraveling the confused and confusing definitional threads surrounding mentoring and for differentiating advisor from mentor in the academic context.

In distinguishing the psychosocial functions of mentoring (“those aspects of a relationship that enhance an individual’s sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness,” (32)) from the career functions of mentoring (“those aspects of a relationship that enhance advancement in an organization,” (24)), Kram (1985) has provided a useful and practical starting point for conceptualizing and differentiating functional relationships in terms of intent and involvement. However, Kram’s model is limiting in melding all nature of career related activities into one category. Instead, it is proposed that Kram’s career functions be subdivided into career development and career advancement, while retaining her psychosocial function. Career development encompasses those activities designed to help individuals grow and develop professionally, and career advancement involves, first and foremost, helping individuals advance professionally. The proposed functional categories are depicted in Figure 1.

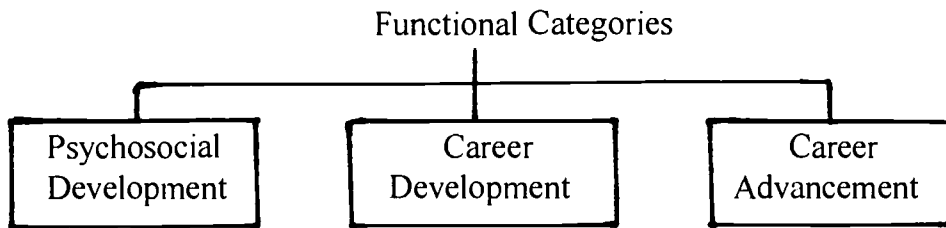


Figure 1: Functional Categories of Relationships

Intent Beginning with the concept of intent, if we ask of a particular relationship, what is the primary intent of that relationship, then the relationships can be fairly easily categorized. In academic settings, three professionally-related relationships are most evident: role model, advisor and mentor. (Role model may not be the best term for capturing the relationship described, but it will be used until a better, more descriptive term emerges.) Using the term role model in its broadest, most inclusive sense, teachers, administrators, and an infinite array of others in the academic community (and outside it) may serve as role models for students and for one another. A role model is someone to whom the individual looks or turns for social and emotional support and affirmation, or from whom they seek to learn something relative to their person-ness. The focus is on the personal, inner life of the individual, and from the standpoint of primary intent, is aligned with the psychosocial function.

The faculty advisor holds a special place in the life of the student and serves a critical organizational function at the same time. Advisors do just that, use their knowledge of the program, the institution, the field and their teaching area to help students make sound educational choices, remain on track (programmatically), and grow and develop intellectually and professionally. The advisor's primary intent is career development (career being broadly interpreted to encompass areas of study). This is not to say that advisors might not also serve as role models, or that advisors might not be concerned with the student's psychosocial development. The best advisors probably are. However, that is not their primary function/intent, and it is reasonable to assume that it is possible to be a good advisor without being particularly attentive to the students' psychosocial development or being a role model for the student.

Not unlike the supervisor in an occupational context, the advisor is concerned with addressing the present, i.e., the current situation and context in which the students are engaged, and with maximizing the students' success and potential in that context. As an advisor to colleagues, particularly new hires, an experienced faculty member may help new faculty members or other employees become acclimated to their work, learn their

new job more quickly and easily than would be afforded by trial and error, enhance their effectiveness on the job, and provide inside information and advice about where to go and what to do for what. A good advisor in this context, like a good supervisor, would quietly assess the competence and effectiveness of the new colleague and be willing to help her/him to improve his/her performance.

The role of advisor is particularly critical for the graduate student. The rigors of completing a dissertation under the direction of an advisor requires a closer working relationship than is required to provide educational guidance, and is more likely to involve a concern for the students' psychosocial well-being. However, that is not the primary focus of the relationship. The focus is on the development of a creditable dissertation that meets appropriate scholarly standards. Advisors must share their knowledge, experience and understandings about undertaking and birthing a thesis, and the process involves the student and advisor in an on-going process of give and take and give again. The focus and primary intent of the process is career development, helping the student to develop and demonstrate the capabilities requisite to their career aspirations.

Advisors may also be mentors, but they do not have to be. It is perfectly possible for an advisor to do an excellent job of guiding, e.g., doctoral students, giving intense time and energy to the activity and helping students to produce better, higher quality manuscripts than they might otherwise produce, and to become more effective professionals than they might otherwise become, without attending to the student's career advancement. The primary intent is career development.

A mentor may do all of the things an advisor does, or none of them. A mentor may also be an advisor, but does not have to be. What distinguishes a mentor from an advisor is the focus on career advancement, helping the person (e.g., student, junior colleague) "get ahead," advance professionally. The relationship is focused on what the protégé brings to the table and what s/he needs to be successful in moving to the next level. Thus mentoring has a future orientation. The mentor is not unconcerned with the student's or colleagues' current capabilities, development and enhancement, but the concern is *in service of* career advancement, the primary intent of the relationship.

The academic relationships discussed, role model, advisor and mentor, are depicted in Figure 2 in terms of primary intent (functional categories).



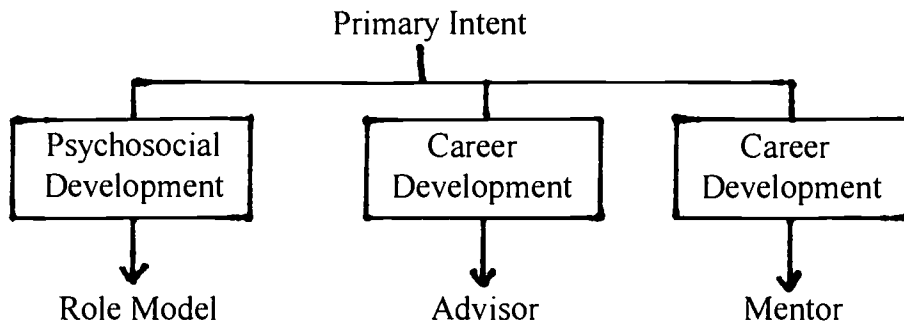


Figure 2: Academic Relationships Categorized in Terms of Primary Intent

**Involvement** Turning now to involvement, there are distinguishing differences in the nature and intensity of involvement relative to each of the academic relationships. While being a role model can require a level of involvement, if you do not know you are influencing someone (distant figure) or are only vaguely aware or conscious of being a role model (a teacher, perhaps), while one may be concerned with being “a good example,” one can conceivably have no meaningful involvement with the admirer. Even being identified as a role model does not require anything more of the role model than to be, although it may rouse an emotional response. (One does tend to like and respond to people who admire us.). As to those who seek advice, guidance or a friendly ear, while faculty members’ time and attention may be required, which faculty may give willingly, a comparatively low level of involvement is engendered. The emotional “cost” is relatively low, even though one may be called on to demonstrate concern, to reassure, to help students work through insecurities, to find the words that help to reduce the stress of students on edge, to be wise and compassionate or painfully honest and forthright in turn. As cold as it may sound, it does not require emotional involvement to do these things, and, ultimately, it is a matter of choice. Faculty may choose whether and to what extent to be involved in these activities, and how much of an emotional investment to make.

This is not true for the advisor, who has an organizational responsibility to be involved with the students he/she serves. Advisors interact with their advisees over time. That is part of their professional responsibility. And since helping students to fulfill the programmatic and/or institutional requirements is part of that responsibility, the advisor bears a level of responsibility, in concert with the student, that is not necessarily engendered in the role model relationship. If the student runs afoul because of a failure on the part of the advisor to share information or guide the student to identify what they may need to do or to monitor progress the student’s progress in a systematic way, then it is to the discredit of the advisor. The junior faculty who are successful in integrating

themselves into the group – and even in being successful in getting tenure—often attribute much of the success to the advice and guidance of a senior faculty member. And, clearly, the success of the doctoral student is attributed, at least in part, to the efforts and standards of the advisor. There is a clear connection between the advisor and advisee.

The nature and level of involvement of the advisor (with the advisee) tends to be greater, on average, than that of the role model, although it is quite possible for the role model to be fairly deeply involved. The nature of the responsibilities, the fact that advisees come for expert help and advice they are all but obligated to take (a coercive element in the relationship), speaks to a greater emotional involvement. Further, there must be a level of trust that the advisor not only knows what to do, but is willing to use that in the service of the advisee, a level of trust greater than would be required of a role model. The advisor and advisee are linked together, temporally and by purpose, and each makes something of an emotional investment in the other.

While there is clearly an emotional investment in the advisor-advisee relationship, the intensity of this involvement may vary greatly, from relatively little to a moderate amount. It is possible, as has already been suggested, to have a highly successful relationship with little direct emotional involvement or investment. While one is hard pressed to help someone one doesn't much care for—at least to do it really well, it is possible to help someone and to do it really well, without investing oneself in them very much. It is possible to focus solely and easily on the business of the relationship and the achievement of its goals, --- and to be mutually gratified. That, after all, is the primary intent of the relationship. Further, it is important to keep in mind that while in some instances advisors may be free to choose the students they will advise, particularly with doctoral students, that may not be true for all advisors at all times, and may not be strictly true even of doctoral advisors. The needs of the department and organization may circumscribe choice, necessitating working with students and junior faculty one might not have otherwise chosen. The fact that a high emotional involvement is not required allows one to do so.

By its nature, mentoring requires a comparatively high level of involvement to be successful. The mentor and protégé are visibly (to one another and to outsiders) and inextricably linked together in their common purpose, the advancement of the protégé. The mentor is invested in the success of the protégé and associated with that success (See: Mertz, Welch & Henderson, 1988). Mentoring requires more of the mentor than is required of the advisor and more that puts the mentor into more intense, even more personal involvement with the protégé. The mentor is required to do much more than give good information about the here and now, and provide ways for protégés to demonstrate and enhance their abilities. The mentor must look beyond the present to

assess, remediate, nurture and enhance the protégé's abilities to be successful in advancing professionally. The mentor is helping to create, or at the very least, polish the exemplary professional, and then using his/her networks and reputation to support and sponsor the protégé, sharing his/her power in the process. Clearly, the level of involvement may vary (perhaps from moderate to intense), but one can not have a mentoring relationship without an emotional investment, and the involvement has a highly personal dimension. One can not mentor from an emotionally distant position. And given the dimensions of the relationship, a higher level of trust is necessary. Both mentor and protégé need to share thoughts, understandings, dreams, schemes and perspectives they might not ordinarily share, and they are likely to be far more exposed before one another (warts and all) than they would be in any other professional relationship. A relatively high level of mutual trust is necessary to be able to allow for such exposure.

Given the nature of the mentoring relationship, it is clear that one can not mentor many individuals at the same time, it is just too "costly," physically and emotionally, and one must choose to be/become a mentor, it can not be imposed. Mentoring requires a total commitment. Without it, it is not a mentoring relationship. Not everyone is prepared to make this commitment; not everyone possesses the abilities to realize the commitment. And even if one is prepared and able, it only works if there is an affinity between the mentor and protégé – an affinity that is about more than liking. It is about a sure sense that the person to be mentored possesses what it takes to make it (is a winner), is worth the effort, and will make one proud. It is about shared respect as persons and professionals, and perhaps, shared values. This can not be mandated, and if it is, is more likely, best case scenario, to result in an advisor relationship.

While the differentiation between advisor and mentor may seem cold and clinical, hardly doing justice to the significant role played by the advisor, it is not meant as such nor is it in reality. Rather, it is a way to distinguish the roles and to highlight what is a more realistic description of a mentor. Mentoring is not for every faculty member, nor should it be thought to be. The framework would allow the faculty member to choose the role that is most appropriate for her/him at that time and with that student, knowing it is not possible to be all things to all students.

In attempting to draw clear distinctions, in particular between advising and mentoring, it is easy to overlook the similarities that may make it easy to blur the distinction and sometimes make it difficult for faculty to make clear distinctions about the role they may wish to play. Both are one-on-one relationships that involve a close working together, primarily (but not exclusively) for the benefit of the student/junior faculty, involve a power differential, and generally involve elements of nurturing and psychosocial development as well as career advancement and development. Further, an advisor can be

or become a mentor. However, they differ in significant ways within the conceptual framework articulated.

### Advisor

- Focus on the present
- Focus on Professional Development
- Help, guide, advise
- Professional Relationship
- Limited Responsibility for Outcome
- Limited Professional Benefits (except for the satisfaction of doing a good job)
- No necessity to share power
- Low professional risk
- Moderate emotional investment
- Can advise many
- Do not have to like the advisee
- Semi-voluntary activity (hard to refuse; Sometimes assigned)

### Mentor

- Focus on the future
- Focus on Professional Advancement
- Teach, mold, sponsor
- Personal-Professional Relationship
- Associated Responsibility for Outcome
- Direct Professional Benefits in addition to personal benefits
- Must share power
- High professional risk
- High emotional investment
- Can mentor few
- Must have an affinity for the protégé
- Free and voluntary choice
- Opens doors; Expands opportunities

In concert, then, one can see how intent and involvement conceptually differentiate role models from advisors from mentors. As depicted in Figure 3, role models focus primarily on psychosocial development and the relationship requires no to relatively low levels of involvement (emotional investment). Advisors focus predominantly on career development and the relationship requires comparatively more involvement, moderate to moderately high, and a measure of trust in the advisor. Mentors focus on career advancement and the relationship requires relatively high involvement, high to intense, and a high level of trust in one another. Given this conceptual differentiation, it is easy to see why each of these relationships may be quantitatively different. It is comparatively easier (less physically and emotionally draining, less risky, less exposing ) to serve as a role model than an advisor; an advisor than a mentor. Clearly, at any one time, one can be a role model to many, an advisor to some, and a mentor to few.

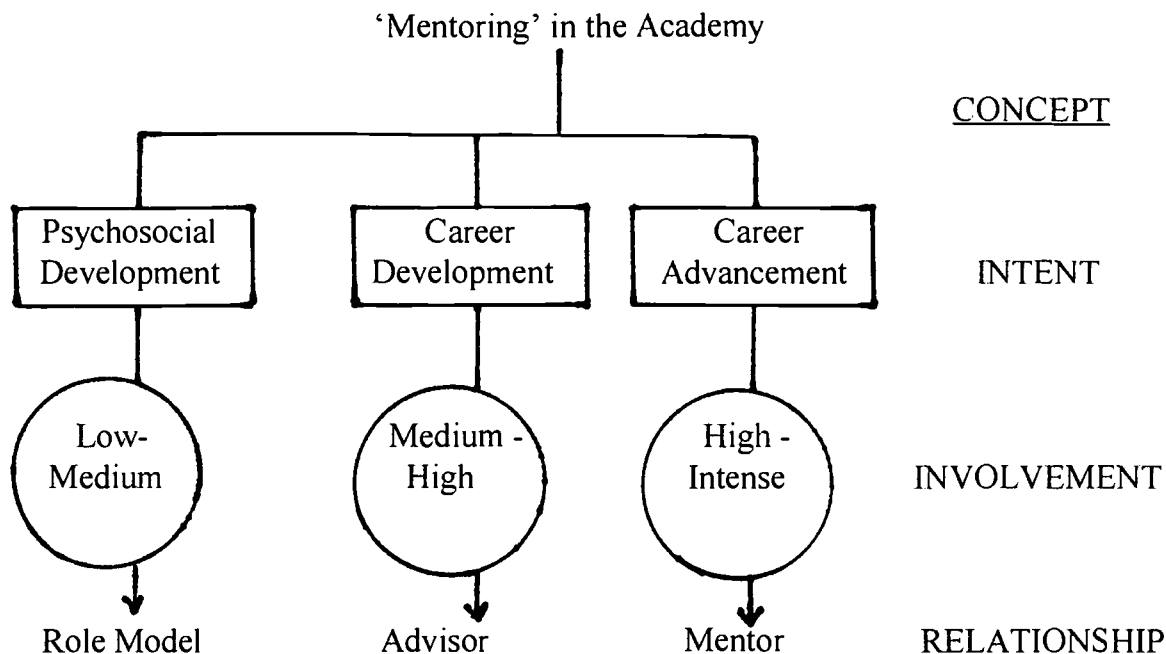


Figure 3. Conceptual Analysis of ‘Mentoring’ in the Academy

### *Role Resolution*

If the conceptual/analytical framework used in the paper is viable, it should allow for sorting and accounting for the different roles variously ascribed to mentoring in the literature. Building on the notion of a continuum of relationships suggested by Shapiro, Haseltine & Rowe (1978) and Hurley (1988), and applying the concepts of intent and involvement to the construction of that continuum, leads to the representation in Figure 4.

The pyramid allows for a representation of the continuum of mentoring roles incorporating both the hierarchical nature of that continuum based on intent and involvement, and the visual representation of relative capacity for exercising the role at each level, i.e, compared to mentor, a role which can be exercised with few, role model may be exercised with an almost limitless number. The hierarchical dimension fairly represents the increasing level of involvement and emotional investment requisite to each role, with level 1 being the least involving and level 6 the most involving. In moving up in the pyramid the role requires increasing emotional involvement, intensity and trust. Equally important, the pyramid allows for representing the notion that each level

potentially incorporates the roles of all preceding levels, and that the intents partially overlap with succeeding roles. Psychosocial development may encompass the roles at levels 1 and 2; career development with levels 2,3, and 4; career advancement with levels 3,4,5, and 6.

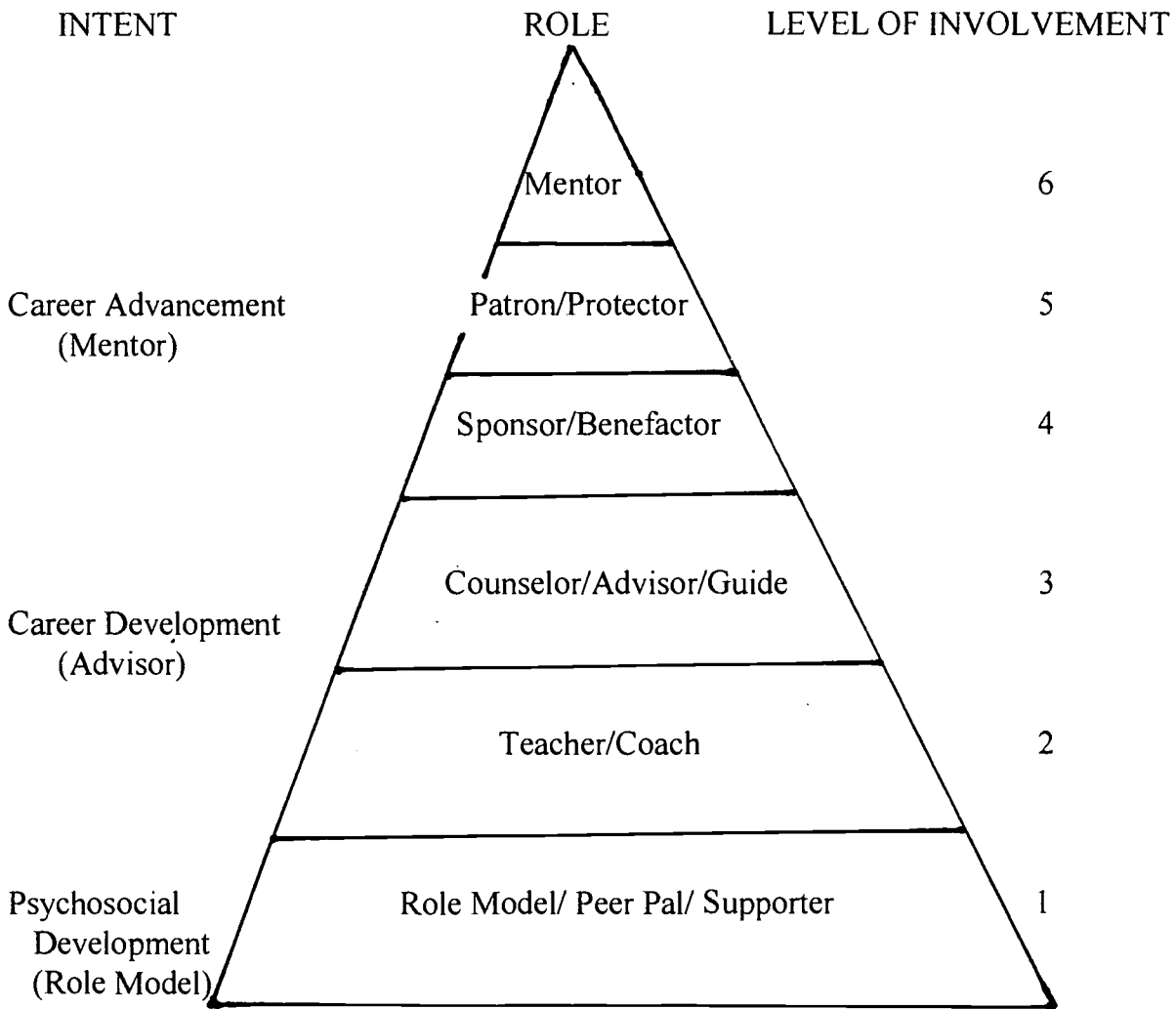


Figure 4. Academic mentoring roles arranged hierarchically in terms of intent and level of involvement.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

The purpose of the paper was to offer a conceptual analysis of mentoring to begin to unravel the confusing, conflicting definitional threads that currently limit the ability to compare, connect and build on existing research on mentoring. The analytical concepts used, intent and involvement, provide a way to distinguish common relationships in academe, and seem to provide a useful way to recognize and consider attendant roles. As indicated earlier in the text, the purpose of proffering this analysis was to stimulate discussion and feedback about the conceptual analysis and to engender the dialogue needed to derive a stipulative definition for the field. Readers are invited to engage in the dialogue and discussion, and urged to provide their feedback.

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