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Comment on John Birtchnell's contribution

This was a very thought-provoking combination of paper and editorial comment (ASCAP, September and December, 1991). John Birtchnell is a great improvement on Leary because he is much more precise about what he means. One is confused by Leary as to whether he is talking about people or relationships or episodes in relationships or items of behaviour. Talking about S in relation to X or a generalised other is much clearer. I find it helpful to test a scheme like this against data from novels, where the full complexity of human behaviour is portrayed (unlike the data base of experimental psychology). Having just read some Thackeray, I will comment on the model as applied to some of his depicted relationships. I n The History of Henry Esmond the hero has a longstanding close relationship with the Marchioness of Castlewood, and this is mutual, and remains close whether he is staying in her house or away for years fighting the French in Flanders, so in this case physical distance is of little import, as with Dobbin's relationship to Amelia in Vanity Fair (he thinks about her most of the time while serving in India). The closeness need not be mutual, as in the case of Henry Esmond's relationship to the Marchioness's daughter Beatrix, whom he thinks about a lot of the time but who does not think about him when he is not there. In the latter case, when they are together, Henry exhibits closeness-eliciting behaviour, in that he is trying to win Beatrix's hand, but Beatrix expresses distance-eliciting behaviour, in repeatedly telling him that she does not love him and telling him in eighteenth century language that he is a wimp.

Alternative reactions to intrusive closeness are withdrawal and attack. The response varies with position on the vertical dimension. Beatrix can exhibit a verbally expressed wish for distance because she is upper in relation to Henry. Attack is another upper response to unwelcome closeness, as when adults brush off the approaches of children. Withdrawal is a lower response to intrusive closeness, as depicted in the relation of Thomas Esmond to his wife who becomes dominant in the later stages of their marriage. A difference of intention about closeness is an instance of a difference in definition of the relationship, which can be resolved, like any other difference, in either the hedonic mode (by discussion and negotiation) or in the agonic mode (by fighting) or the difference can be minimised by evasion or withdrawal (as in Palazzoli et al's families in schizophrenic transaction).

Is there a unitary trait of closeness/distance for an individual, for a relationship, for an episode in a relationship, or for an individual in a relationship? If we use as a criterion of closeness the amount of time a person spends thinking about the other, what about people who are rivals, or having a feud, who may be obsessed with constant thoughts of hatred about each other? Are the two old men in Maugham's Sanatorium close? Here the criterion of closeness is intensity of reaction to loss of the other. But there is closeness between the Esmond family and Mohun in Henry Esmond, on the criterion of time thinking about the other, but there was no sadness when he was killed. No doubt these matters have been studied by John Birtchnell in his questionnaires, and it would be interesting to know the factorial structure of closeness/distance, and how much of the variance is accounted for by a general factor. Of course the factorial structure of closeness is probably different in different kinds of pairs, even when equated for upperness/lowerness; is the closeness of father to son sufficiently similar to the closeness of master to servant to justify using the same terminology for the two kinds of relationship; and how about symmetrical pairs like married couples and pairs of friends?

This reminds me of some work I did long ago on the dimension of extraversion/introversion, which is not unrelated to closeness/distance. In that study which was never published we used a large (more than 1,000) sample of twin pairs, and studied the within-pair differences in the twins` responses to the EPI and their parents' ratings of within-pair differences. It was clear that extraversion as measured by the EPI applied only to peer-group sociability (rated by the parents), and had nothing to do with sociability within the family, either to closely related members of the same generation or to the older generation. The correlation between extraversion and the parents' ratings of various forms of family sociability were near to zero, and this was a robust finding as it applied to both sexes and to both MZ and DZ twin pairs. This suggests that people who like a lot of closeness with a lot of people may not be the same as those who like intense closeness with one or a few others. This problem does not arise if we are using closeness to describe a particular relationship or a person's behaviour to a specific other. Nevertheless it would be helpful if JB could clarify the relationship between his two dimensions and those of Eysenck.

Another two-dimensional scheme is that of Talcott Parsons (1, pp 58-61), who (based partly on the small group work of his colleague Bales) pointed out that human groups tend to differentiate on the dimensions of power/no power and instrumental/expressive, and that initially undifferentiated groups tend to come to resemble the human nuclear family which

is based on a coalition between the powerfully instrumental father and the powerfully expressive mother. I should imagine that Parsons' power dimension is similar to JB's upperness/lowerness, but that the instrumental\expressive dimension is not represented in JB's scheme. And the fact that closeness/distance is not represented in Parson's scheme probably reflects the fact that it is based on studies of formal small groups, in which the scope for variation in closeness/distance is limited.

Thinking about John Birtchnell's model more generally, there is a clear need for at least one more dimension in order to talk meaningfully about a relationship such as marriage. JB recognises that there may be positive and negative aspects of his quadrants, and that any given way of relating can be either respectful or disrespectful. This is related to the fact that the Leary horizontal dimension is loving/hating, which is a hotchpotch of closeness/distance and respectful/disrespectful. In my own thinking I find it easiest to use JB's two dimensions and for the third use Michael Chance's concept of agonic/hedonic. Hedonic means respectful and willing to negotiate any differences of definition; agonic means disrespectful, hating, selfish and determined to get one's own way by putting the other person down. Relationships can switch rapidly from hedonic to agonic and back again, so that the terms are more useful in describing episodes in relationships than relationships themselves. It is as if JB's two dimensional space can be seen in two different lights, say a red light for agonic and a green light for hedonic. Even within the hedonic mode there may be both positive and negative forms of relating for each quadrant. For example, JB describes insecure upperness, which may within the hedonic mode be expressed in such disrespectful ways as patronising behaviour (see my paper in Michael Chance's recent symposium on the two modes (2)). But I think in this argument I may be getting away from the JB level of description, which is the way one person relates to another at any given time, towards my own preferred scheme which is relationships and episodes in relationships.

In terms of relationships JB's dimensions are very asymmetrical. The closeness/distance dimension describes relationships (as well as relating), but the upperness/lowerness dimension describes people in relationships. To describe relationships we would have to transform the vertical dimension into symmetry/complementarity, taking as our data the difference between the two relating people on the original vertical dimension. Another asymmetry is the fact that when things go wrong in relating, the trouble is opposite on the two dimensions. Things go wrong on the vertical dimension when two people are too similar, such as both trying to be upper and thus getting into Batesonian symmetrical schismogenesis. But they go wrong on the horizontal dimension of closeness/distance when the two are different, one wanting closeness and the other distance, so that one has to press for closeness because the other is so distant, while the other has to escape into distance because the other is so intrusive (a mismatch of "punctuation" which has been so well described by the Bateson group).

Talking of things going wrong brings us to psychopathology, and we must note a difference in our models here. JB ascribes anxiety to the fear of losing any one of the four main positions and depression to the state of having lost it (whereas our model relates depression specifically to the coerced loss of upperness); he also ascribes psychopathology to the disrespectful behaviour of others, which overlaps with the first two, as it is likely to be the disrespectful behaviour of others which is responsible for the loss of position; i.e., intrusiveness on the part of the other leads to loss of distance, rejection on the part of the other leads to loss of closeness, intimidation on the part of the other leads to loss of upperness and abandonment on the part of the other leads to loss of lowerness. I think he would agree that most depression follows loss of upperness and/or closeness; the thought that depression may follow loss of lowerness and distance is interesting. Does this relate to the "overintrusiveness" component of high EE which has been shown to predispose to the relapse of depression? And can one envisage a situation in which one loses lowerness without losing closeness? Perhaps when the king (or president) dies - or when the prime minister seems to be making a hash of things. We accept that there are complex interactions between the positions, and also that we can keep more than one model in our minds at the same time - eventually it will become clear which parts of them have a bearing on those molecular/genetic processes that our editor yearns to grapple with, but for the time being we must settle for a state of relative uncertainty at a higher level.

Turning to across-species comparisons, it is clear that JB's two dimensions would probably mop up most of the social behavioural variation between primate species. Think of the adult male orang-utan and the male patas monkey - neither betrays the slightest need for the commodity of closeness - and contrast this with the macaque or the squirrel monkey who seem to have no need for distance. The adult female orang-utan has no need for closeness with other females, needs only sexual closeness with males, and her non-sexual closeness needs are limited to her offspring. The female patas monkey, on the other hand, has closeness needs for other adult females similar to those of macaques (3). Compare the macaque and baboon need for upperness with that of, say, chimpanzees and langurs. The only

constant factor is the lowerness needs of infants. In territorial monogamous species such as gibbons and marmosets the individual variation in needs on the two dimensions is much less, so that within-group variation in needs would seem to be an adaptation to group living. Let us hope that JB's forthcoming book (4) is widely read by primatologists as well as by those interested in human social psychology.

1. Parsons, T. (1964) Social Structure and Personality. London: Collier MacMillan.

2. Price, J.S. (1992) The agonic and hedonic modes: definition, usage, and the promotion of mental health. World Futures, 35, 87-115.

3. Rowell, T.E. (1991) On the significance of the concept of the harem when applied to animals. In: Primate Politics ed G.Schubert & R.D.Masters. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. Pp 57-72.

4. Birtchnell, J. (In press) Relating: The Human Core. Westport, CT: Greenwood\Praeger.

Reply to John Birtchnell

I like John's description of money as "packaged upperness" (ASCAP, April, 1993). I think it also emphasises the asymmetry of the vertical dimension, in that people would rather have packaged upperness than not have it; and few would be depressed at the loss of packaged lowerness, which by the same analogy would be debts or IOUs. I am doubtful about depression following loss of lowerness in other respects too. If the master calls his servant to him and says, "I no longer want you to be my servant, but rather to possess half of all I own, and to be in all things equal to myself", is this likely to be a cause of depression on the Life Events Index? I agree that if you lose the role of child or nurtured object, this may be depressing, but is it depressing because of the loss of lowerness, or because it implies the cessation of the supply of resources which the individual lacks and was the reason for him to need nurturing in the first place?

In spite of John's model, which I find helpful in accounting for variation in relating, I would still argue that the adaptive function of depression over the course of evolution has been to help individuals to cope with loss of upperness and to accommodate to imposed lowerness. It is possible that it has also had a function in helping people to cope with the loss of closeness, and to accommodate to imposed distance - the unsociability, apathy and inertia of depression would prevent the rejected person attempting to regain closeness inappropriately and thus to cause social disruption. We know from the newspapers that rejected suitors sometimes cause such havoc that they have to be put in prison, and it may be that in these cases the rejection has not made them depressed enough. But I think these instances are very minor compared to the situations of enforced lowerness. There is a fundamental evolutionary constraint on the vertical dimension in that there is a limited supply of upperness, in that being upper implies that someone else is lower; in other words, there is not enough power to go round. This does not apply to the horizontal dimension, because theoretically there is as much potential closeness as anyone could want. Even with pair-bonding, in which there is bound to be some mis-matching of pairing behaviour, the fact that there are equal numbers of both sexes ensures there are not too many casualties (unless some men are greedy and want more than one wife, but is this not a manifestation of upperness?). But there can only be one king. Even with political parties, there can only be one leader (except of course, for the Liberals here, and see where that got them!).

The dimensions are also asymmetrical because the middle of the vertical dimension is qualitatively different from the extremes, since a symmetrical relationship is different from one in which either person has upperness, but this does not apply to the horizontal dimension, along which middling degrees of closeness have no particular quality.

John mentions that people may become depressed by having any form of relating imposed on them. In this case, whatever it is they are being made to do reflects their essential lowerness in that relationship, because they are having to accept the other's definition of the relationship, and that is the ultimate criterion of upperness/lowerness (see 1, and the family therapy literature passim).

But on the whole I am sceptical about a mother being depressed by the child wanting too much closeness; I think more mothers are likely to get depressed by the child being disobedient and domineering. I suppose you can have a child which demands closeness in a domineering way, and is the mother then depressed because she is losing distance, or because the child is bossing her and she has lost upperness?

Clearly the interaction of agonistic and affiliative behaviour is very complex. I do

not think it is fair to say that "ranking theorists" underestimate the complexity of human behaviour or the importance of affiliation. It is precisely because human behaviour is so complex that we look at animal models to see the patterns of vertebrate, mammalian and primate behaviour displayed in a much more simple way, to give some insight into what might be the patterns underlying the impenetrable complexity of man. And if we ignore affiliation, it is because in evolutionary terms agonistic behaviour and ranking is more important for the evolution of depression, and more likely to give us clues as to the neurochemical mechanisms subserving it. Because a microbiologist studies the common cold and ignores smallpox, it does not mean that he considers smallpox unimportant. I suspect John is veering here towards the view that if you study ranking behaviour you approve of it, and offer your work as justification for politicians to exploit it. But does the microbiologist study the tubercle bacillus because he approves of it? It seems that when we move from physical to psychiatric disease, our standards and evaluative systems change.

Personally, I think that symmetrical relationships are the best (even in marriage!) but that does not prevent me from saying that they are more difficult to maintain than complementary relationships. Here is how I finished up a book chapter recently (2):

> "Many people find it difficult to maintain symmetrical relationships, especially when they feel strongly about something and cannot get their own way. The usual recourse in these circumstances is some form of fighting, or exchange of putting-down signals, which may result in one member becoming subordinate. This pattern of behaviour is deeply embedded in the human genome, and since many existing vertebrate species are unable to sustain symmetrical relationships, it is quite likely that the human capacity to do so is of relatively recent evolutionary origin. Marriage is an institution which in historical terms has been asymmetrical, but which now is often expected to be symmetrical, and culture is giving mixed messages to prospective marriage partners, often of male dominance to the groom and of symmetry to the bride. Marriage is like a business, with many executive decisions to be taken; and yet what investor would buy shares in a business with two equal managing directors? Were electors prepared to vote for a political party with two equal leaders? Even with an agreed objective of symmetry between the marriage partners, the maintenance of symmetry is not easy, but when the attempt is based on incompatible objectives, it is only the lucky or the very loving who get by.
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> "This is a problem for society. If we want equal marriage, we should try to prepare men for it as well as women, and that means counteracting influences from the East and from Latin-American culture, including films like The Godfather.
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> "More needs to be spent on Marriage Guidance. It is a scandal that one has a dozen supermarkets to choose from to buy one's food, but only one, or at the most two, organisations to go to for relationship counselling. In particular, more needs to be done about prophylactic marriage guidance. With the divorce rate running at fifty percent and probably half of those who stay married doing so unhappily, it should become axiomatic that all marriages need guidance, in the way that a car needs servicing. Let us by all means aim at symmetrical marriage, for that is the highest aim, but let us realise that symmetrical marriage is like a high performance engine, and its need for both routine and remedial attention is very great.
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> "We should aim to create social conditions in which people want to have symmetrical relationships, to boost each other up and to avoid putting each other down. Unfortunately, many people now find themselves with attitudes like Thomas Garrison Speidel, into whose mouth, in his novel The Eighth Day, Thornton Wilder put the following words:
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> "The capacity of human beings to wish their neighbours dead is unlimited. Now, mind you! I don't say that everybody wants everybody dead. We all belong to little clubs. We want the members of other clubs dead; we only want the members of our own club STUNTED. A man wants his wife stunted and vice versa; a father wants his son stunted and vice versa".
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> There is still a lot of work to be done in the field of mental health promotion."

I think this quotation from Thornton Wilder illustrates how destructive the need for upperness can be (it also shows a perceptive realisation of the difference between ritual agonistic behaviour resulting in stunting between kin and unritualised fighting resulting in death between non-kin). This is why I write about the vertical dimension and seem to neglect the horizontal. Also the horizontal dimension has had a lot of attention from others, from John Bowlby onwards (I was going to say downwards!).

1. Rogers, E.L. (1981) Symmetry and complementarity: evolution and evaluation of an idea. In: Wilder-Mott, C. & Weakland, J.H. (eds) Rigor and Imagination: Essays from the Legacy

of Gregory Bateson. New York: Praeger. (pp 231-252).

2. Price, J.S. (1992) Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative: the role of boosting and putting-down signals in mental health. In D.R.Trent (ed) Promotion of Mental Health Volume 1, 1991. Aldershot: Avebury.