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A Model for Children's Relationships and Relationship Dysfunctions

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter a model for conceptualizing children's relationships and their dysfunctions is presented. The model emphasizes four main relationship characteristics: warmth, conflict, relative status/power, and comparisons of one relationship with other relationships. These features are applied to both normal and dysfunctional relationships. An emphasis is placed on relationship dysfunctions of dyads rather than on individual children's problems that might lead to social difficulties.

The social world of the child encompasses a wide range of different personal relationships. For most children, interpersonal relationships are a source of support and contribute to personal development. Relationships may also be a source of stress, however, leading to difficulties in development. In other instances still, wide variation may be found. For example, some children may have close relationships with family members but feel ostracized by peers. Alternatively, some children, especially during adolescence, may feel estranged from their parents but have close friendships. Children may also relate differently to members of their families. Some children may have warm relationships with their parents whereas they may experience conflict with their siblings. In other families, siblings may provide the warmth and support that is lacking in parent-child relationships. Social scientists and clinicians alike have been concerned with identifying the sources of children's relationship problems and with developing effective intervention programs to correct them.

Although much research has focused on describing children's relationships and their dysfunctions, it has lacked a common focus. Researchers investigating peer, sibling, or parent-child relationships have focused on different relation-

ship qualities. Moreover, researchers studying normal and dysfunctional relationships have employed different theoretical approaches and different methodological paradigms in their work. This lack of integration has made it difficult to compare different types of childhood relationships or to compare normal relationships and problematic ones.

In the present chapter, we offer a framework that attempts to integrate what is known about children's relationships with parents, peers, and siblings. In developing this framework, we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of employing such an approach. The framework will also serve to highlight the similarities and differences among children's normal social relationships. The framework will then be applied to children's dysfunctional relationships and will provide a basis for a discussion of the assessment of problems that occur in these relationships.

NORMAL RELATIONSHIPS

Extensive bodies of literature have developed concerning normal relationships with parents (Maccoby and Martin, 1983), siblings (Bryant, 1982; Dunn, 1983) and peers (Hartup, 1983). The different literatures have developed separately from one another, and they have focused on different facets of relationships. For example, investigators studying parent-child relationships have focused on disciplinary techniques, whereas those studying sibling relationships have focused on rivalry. Even when seemingly similar relationship qualities are studied, different terms are used. Social scientists talk about love when discussing parent-child relationships, but they refer to interpersonal attraction in peer relationships. A conceptualization of relationships that allows for generalizations across different types of relationships may allow us to better understand the key dimensions in children's relationships.

One means of developing an integrated framework is to use a common theoretical perspective. For example, Weiss (1974) proposed that individuals seek a series of 'social provisions' or types of social support in their relationships. Weiss proposed a list of six basic provisions: (a) attachment—including affection, security, and intimate disclosure, (b) reliable alliance—a lasting, dependable bond that need not include emotional closeness, (c) enhancement of worth—recognition and affirmation of one's competence or value, (d) social integration—companionship, (e) guidance—tangible aid and advice, and (f) the opportunity for nurturance—taking care of someone else. These provisions can usually be obtained from many people in one's social network, although one may turn to specific people for specific provisions. For example, one may turn to friends for social integration or companionship, whereas one would turn to family members for reliable alliance. With this approach, the same set of constructs—social provisions—can be used to describe different relationships.

Furman and Buhrmester (1985) used Weiss' ideas to understand the similarities and differences among children's personal relationships. To this end, they developed a Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI) to assess social provisions and other characteristics of relationships. The list of ten relationship

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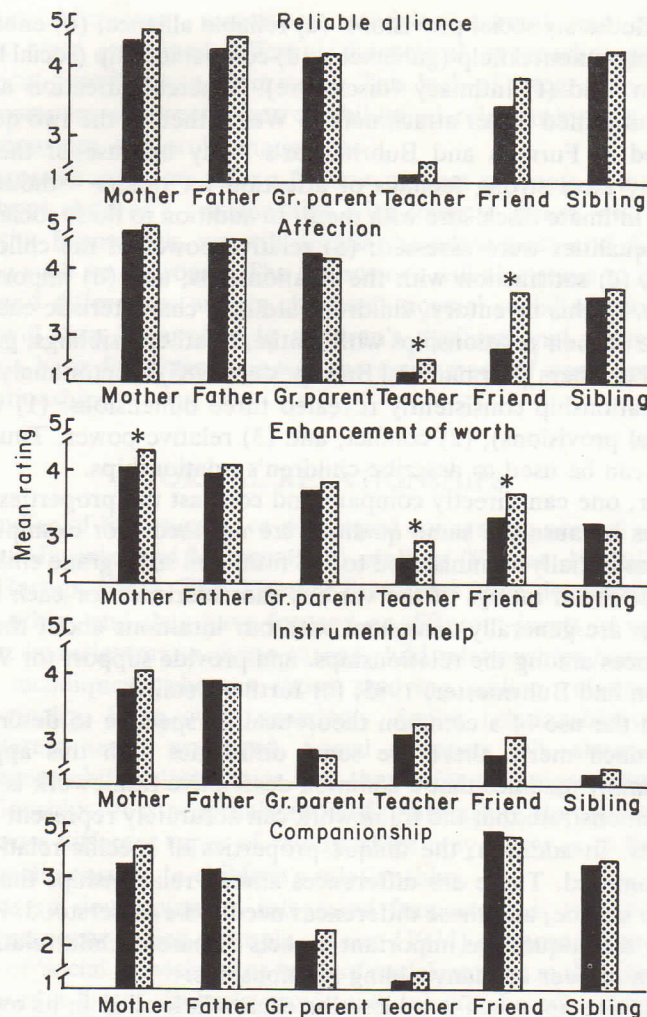
qualities includes six social provisions: (a) reliable alliance, (b) enhancement of worth, (c) instrumental help (guidance), (d) companionship (social integration), (e) affection, and (f) intimacy (disclosure). Whereas affection and intimacy were both subsumed under attachment in Weiss' theory, the two qualities were distinguished in Furman and Buhrmester's study because of the belief that children may have strong feelings of affection for others without necessarily engaging in intimate disclosure with them. In addition to these social provisions, four other qualities were assessed: (a) relative power of the child and other, (b) conflict, (c) satisfaction with the relationships, and (d) importance of the relationship. In this inventory, children rate how characteristic each of the ten qualities are of their relationships with mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, friends, and teachers (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985). Factor analyses of scores for each relationship consistently revealed three dimensions: (1) warmth (i.e. the six social provisions), (2) conflict, and (3) relative power. Thus a common framework can be used to describe children's relationships.

Moreover, one can directly compare and contrast the properties of different relationships because the same qualities are assessed. For example, the questionnaire was initially administered to 198 fifth- and sixth-grade children. Figure 1 depicts the mean ratings of the various characteristics for each relationship. The findings are generally consistent with our intuitions about the similarities and differences among the relationships, and provide support for Weiss' theory (see Furman and Buhrmester, 1985, for further details).

Although the use of a common theoretical perspective to describe relationships has much merit, there are some difficulties with this approach. The approach simply assumes that a common descriptive framework is possible and does not demonstrate that the framework can accurately represent the different relationships. In addition, the unique properties of specific relationships may be simply omitted. There are differences among relationships that make each relationship unique, and these differences need to be understood. For example, disciplinary techniques are important aspects of parent-child relationships that are not seen in peer or many sibling relationships.

An alternative approach is to describe each relationship in its own terms and compare the descriptions that result. In our own research we have derived separate questionnaires for measuring relationships with siblings, friends, and parents. These questionnaires include both qualities thought to be common to all relationships and qualities that may be specific to a particular relationship. For example, conflict is measured in both parent-child and sibling relationships, but disciplinary techniques are measured exclusively in the parent-child relationship and rivalry is measured only in the sibling relationship. Using these questionnaires, we were able to consider whether descriptive frameworks for parent, sibling, and peer interactions correspond to one another. We addressed this issue at each of three levels: (a) the level of underlying dimensions, (b) the level of relationship qualities, (c) the manifestation of these relationship qualities. In methodological terms, these three levels would be equivalent to factors, scales, and items.

We now turn to a discussion of the commonality of the underlying dimensions



*Sex differences $p < 0.05$

Figure 1. Mean quality scores of each relationship

of children's relationships. We will first examine the individual dimensions of the sibling and peer relationships, and then examine the similarities and differences among these two relationships. Finally, we will discuss the underlying dimensions of the parent-child relationship and compare these dimensions to the dimensions underlying children's friendships and sibling relationships.

The degree of commonality among the dimensions underlying peer, sibling, and parent-child relationships was examined by conducting principal components analyses with oblique rotations. Four main dimensions describe the sibling relationship: warmth/closeness, conflict, rivalry and relative status/power (see Table 1). Representative characteristics of the warmth/closeness dimension

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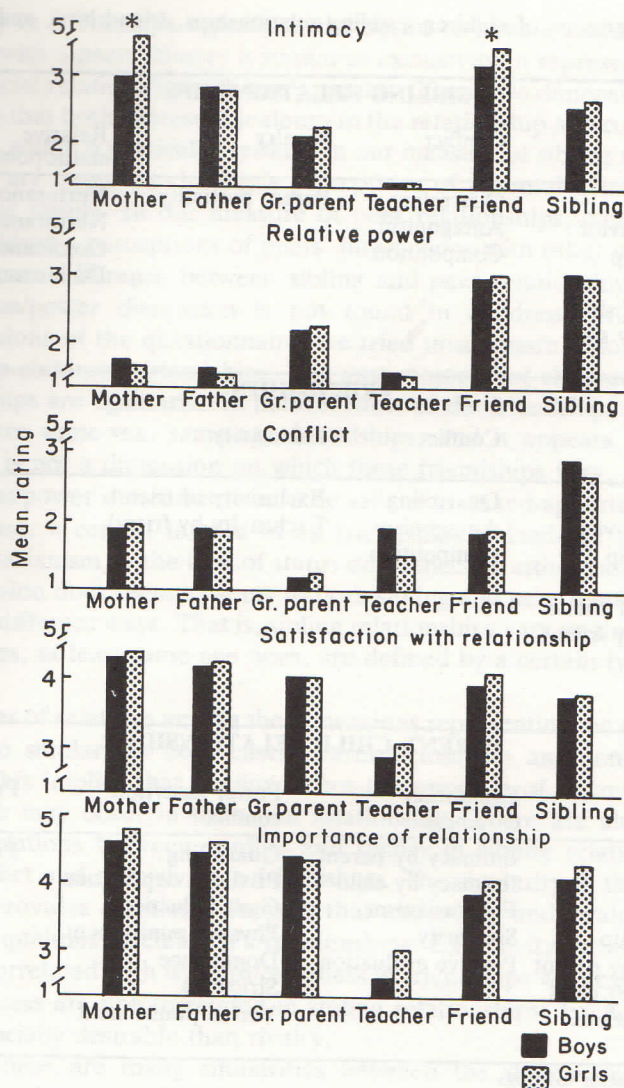


Figure 1 (continued)

are intimacy, prosocial behavior, companionship, affection, and admiration. Quarreling, antagonism, and dominance are examples of characteristics of sibling conflict. Rivalry is represented by parent partiality or parental favoritism towards one of the siblings. Relative status/power refers to asymmetry in terms of who dominates or nurtures the other.

Our assessment of peer interactions focuses on children's friendships, rather than peer relationships in general. The principal components analyses revealed that friendships are characterized by three dimensions: warmth/closeness, conflict, and exclusivity (see Table 1). Moreover, the qualities that define these constructs are similar in the two relationships. For example, intimacy, prosocial

Table 1 Dimensions of children's sibling relationships, friendships, and parent-child relationships

SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS			
Warmth/ closeness	Conflict	Rivalry	Relative status/power
Intimacy	Quarreling	Parent partiality	Nurturance of sib.
Prosocial behavior	Antagonism		Nurturance by sib. (-)
Companionship	Competition		Dominance of sib.
Similarity			Dominance by sib. (-)
Admiration of sib.			
Admiration by sib.			
Affection			
FRIENDSHIPS			
Warmth/ closeness	Conflict	Exclusivity	
Intimacy	Quarreling	Exclusivity of friend	
Prosocial behavior	Antagonism	Exclusivity by friend	
Companionship	Competition		
Similarity			
Admiration of friend			
Admiration by friend			
Affection			
Acceptance			
Loyalty			
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS			
Warmth/ closeness	Egalitarian closeness	Power assertion/ conflict	Protectiveness
Nurturance	Intimacy by parent	Quarreling	Protectiveness
Importance	Intimacy by child	Privilege deprivation	
Affection	Egalitarianism	Guilt induction	
Companionship	Similarity	Physical punishment	
Admiration by parent	Positive evaluation	Dominance	
Admiration by child		Strictness	
High expectations		Verbal punishment	
Satisfaction			

(-) negative factor loadings

behavior, companionship, affection, similarity, and admiration define warmth/closeness in both cases. In no case does a common quality define this dimension for one relationship and not the other. Some warmth/closeness qualities are specific to only one relationship, but they are conceptually similar to the common qualities. For example, loyalty and acceptance are examined only in peer relationships, but these qualities seem similar to other warmth/closeness qualities such as prosocial behavior and admiration.

Conflict in sibling and in peer relationships also seem to be very similar. In both cases, quarreling, antagonism, and competition define this relationship characteristic. Dominance is related to conflict in the sibling relationship, but it was not examined in peer relationships.

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Exclusivity in friendships represents the desire to have a singular, exclusive relationship with a peer. Rivalry is similar to exclusivity; it represents the desire to have a special relationship with one's parents. These two dimensions resemble each other in that both represent jealousy in the relationship and comparisons of relationships within a particular system. In our measure of sibling relationships, comparisons are based on children's perceptions of parental behavior towards siblings in the family. In our measure of peer relationships, comparisons are based on children's perceptions of peers' interactions with other children.

An important difference between sibling and peer relationships is that the relative status/power dimension is not found in children's friendships. In previous versions of the questionnaire, we tried unsuccessfully to assess status differences in children's friendships. The vast majority of children report that their friendships are egalitarian in nature. Most of the friendships that children described were same-sex, same-age friendships, and it appears that relative status/power is not a dimension on which these friendships vary. It is possible that the status/power dimension would be salient in mixed-age friendships. On the other hand, a central feature of all friendships (mixed-age or same-age) may be egalitarianism or the lack of status difference. In either case, the status/power dimension does seem to apply to both sibling and peer relationships, but in somewhat different ways. That is, sibling relationships vary on this dimension, but friendships, at least same-age ones, are defined by a certain type of power arrangement.

The patterns of relations among the dimensions representing the two relationships are also similar. In both cases, warmth/closeness and conflict are not correlated. This implies that conflict is not the opposite of warmth/closeness, and that both may occur in the same relationship. There are also moderate positive correlations between conflict and rivalry in sibling relationships and between conflict and exclusivity in friendships. The similarity in the pattern of correlations provides additional support that exclusivity and rivalry are measuring similar qualities of children's relationships. Exclusivity, however, is also moderately correlated with warmth/closeness in friendships whereas rivalry and warmth/closeness are not correlated in sibling relationships. Exclusivity seems to be more socially desirable than rivalry.

Although there are many similarities between the dimensions of sibling relationships and those of friendships, the two relationships differ from those of parent-child relationships. We found that relationships with parents (mother or father) are represented by four dimensions: warmth/closeness, egalitarian closeness, power assertion/conflict, and protectiveness (see Table 1). The first and second dimensions, warmth/closeness and egalitarian closeness, both reflect closeness in the parent-child relationship. The first dimension includes qualities such as admiration, nurturance, and affection and represents aspects of the parent-child relationship that reflect parental love and affection. The second dimension, egalitarian closeness, includes qualities such as egalitarianism and similarity, and represents aspects of the parent-child relationship that reflect friendship and respect of the child. Although researchers have commonly examined warmth in parent-child relationships, we believe we are the first researchers

to identify an egalitarian dimension of this warmth. Power assertion/conflict, the second dimension, represents the degree of conflict and use of discipline. Protectiveness represents the degree of parental control and possessiveness.

An examination of the pattern of relations among the dimensions reveals that warmth/closeness and egalitarian closeness are highly correlated. The patterns of correlations for these two dimensions are also similar. Both are negatively correlated with power assertion/conflict and positively correlated with protectiveness.

Despite the fact that sibling relationships and friendships are represented by relatively similar dimensions, the dimensions representing parent-child relationships are different from the others in many respects.* We find that there is not a single dimension of warmth for parent-child relationships, but two. Warmth/closeness appears to represent the parent *qua* parent aspect of the relationship, whereas egalitarian closeness appears to represent the parent *qua* friend aspect of the relationship. Although there is a single dimension of conflict for all three relationships, the parent-child dimension includes types of parental discipline as well as quarreling. Thus, its meaning in parent-child relationships is different from its meanings in friendships or sibling relationships.

Unlike sibling relationships, parent-child relationships do not have a pure relative status/power dimension. The presence of a power differential seems implicit, however, in both the warmth and power assertion/conflict dimensions. Thus, the issue of power and status seems applicable to all three relationships, but the nature of its impact on the descriptions of the three relationships varies.

Finally, protectiveness appears to have some similarities with rivalry or exclusivity, in that it involves comparisons of relationships within a particular social system. The dimension of protectiveness involves comparisons between family and nonfamily relationships. This dimension reflects how much parents prefer that their children interact with family members rather than with outsiders. Protectiveness also includes the quality of possessiveness, and reflects jealousy or the desire for a relationship between parent and child that excludes others.

In addition to comparing the general dimensions of these relationships, we can also consider the similarities and differences among specific qualities. In some respects, we have been examining the issue of similarity at this level by comparing the specific scales that load on various dimensions or factors. One can also compare the three different lists of relationship qualities and see that there are many similarities among the three. For example, affection, companionship, and quarreling would be appropriate descriptors for parent-child, sibling, and peer relationships. At the same time, each relationship has some properties that really apply only to that relationship. Examples of such properties would include loyalty and acceptance for friendships, dominance and parental partiality for sibling relationships, and disciplinary techniques for parent-child relationships. These special properties may help define these

* Subsequent analyses of parents' (versus children's) perceptions of parent-child relationships suggest that there may be a fifth factor representing disciplinary aspects of warmth in the parent-child relationship.

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relationships and thus help us understand how they can be differentiated from one another.

The differences among the relationships are particularly salient when we consider how relationship qualities are manifested in terms of specific behaviors. This level of analysis would be comparable to the item level in methodological terms. Of course, different qualities (scales) will have different behavioral manifestations, but even the same relationship quality can be manifested differently in various relationships. For example, affection in parent-child relationships may be expressed physically, but few school-aged boys in the United States would be caught dead hugging or kissing their friends. Similarly, self-disclosure is likely to be unilateral in parent-child relationships, but reciprocal in friendships and closely spaced sibling relationships.

Is a common framework a viable means of describing children's relationships? We believe it is. At the very least, we have identified four major elements that must be addressed in describing any of these relationships. These are: (a) the degree of warmth, (b) the degree of conflict, (c) the power/status arrangements, and (d) how the relationship compares with other relationships in the network. These four elements or combinations of them are often reflected in the dimensions of particular relationships. For example, the warmth/closeness dimension in sibling relationships is related to the elements of warmth, whereas egalitarian closeness in parent-child relationships reflects the elements of warmth as well as a particular type of relationship. In the remaining instances, an element may not be reflected in a dimension because it has a fixed or defining value in a relationship. For example, same-age friendships appear to be egalitarian in nature. There is not a dimension of power in the relationship, but obviously a particular power arrangement is an important element of the friendship.

Not only are these four elements important to describe in all relationships but in some cases there may be dimensions common to more than one relationship, particularly for friendships and sibling relationships. Of course, deciding whether we have a common dimension is not straightforward. If we assess the same qualities for all relationships, we are more likely to obtain the same dimensions than if we use different qualities. In fact, the dimensions obtained from the NRI are more similar across relationships than those which were obtained using three different questionnaires. Clearly, one can manipulate the qualities being assessed and thus portray these relationships as more or less similar. Our intent was not to find either similarities or differences. To develop the measures, we asked children or significant others to describe these relationships and used their responses (and existing literature) to develop the lists. Thus, we believe that these results provide a reasonable estimate of the similarities and differences in the relationships.

Although there may be some common dimensions, the differences among relationships become more apparent when one begins to examine qualities and their manifestations. The issues involved in comparing across relationships seem analogous to those raised by comparisons across ages. Kagan's (1969) concepts of phenotypic discontinuity and genotypic continuity are helpful in understanding this comparison. The specific behaviors in which children of different

ages engage are likely to differ markedly (phenotypic discontinuity). The different behaviors, however, may represent the same underlying construct (genotypic continuity). When we examine various relationships, we may find that the same general dimension (genotypic similarity) is manifested differently in different relationships (phenotypic dissimilarity). Of course, we need to be cautious about equating relationship dimensions and qualities in different relationships, especially in light of the unique properties of each relationship. There may be geno-typic dissimilarity as well! At the same time, the incorrect assertion of a similarity does not seem to be a worse mistake than the failure to identify an actual similarity. Even when the dimensions are not identical, the emphasis on common properties encourages us to make cross-relationship comparisons and to understand the interrelations among different relationships. For example, we can begin to assess how conflict in parent-child relationships relates to conflict in sibling relationships. Moreover, it can provide a basis for comparing functional and dysfunctional relationships, the topic we turn to next.

DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our discussion will focus on dysfunctional relationships rather than individual dysfunctions that can lead to relationship problems. We will first review commonly described relationship problems and the different ways they have been conceptualized. We will then discuss specific relationship dysfunctions according to our proposed model.

In the mental health field, there has been a traditional focus on individual psychopathology and relatively little work exists on dysfunctional relationships. This imbalance is reflected in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) of the American Psychiatric Association (1980). In fact, only four DSM-III codes specifically refer to relationship dysfunction: Marital Problem, Parent-Child Problem, Other Specified Family Circumstances, and Other Interpersonal Problem. These codes are very broad and do not provide subcategories for specific types of relationship difficulties. Certainly the DSM-III also has a number of diagnostic codes whose criteria include relationship difficulties. These difficulties are conceptualized, however, as disorders of the *individual* and not as relationship problems. Although etiology and treatment do not have to parallel one another, the two conceptualizations seem to imply different treatments. In the former case, therapeutic intervention would focus on the individual and his or her behaviors. In the latter case, one would focus on the relationship and patterns of interaction. Although many clinicians would choose the latter approach to treatment, the focus on individual psychopathology remains as true as it is inaccurate.

Family theorists have played a particularly important role in shifting the focus from individual psychopathology to relationship dysfunctions. Rather than focusing on delinquent children's individual difficulties, Minuchin *et al.* (1967) explored family patterns of relationships. They found that families of delinquent children were characterized by specific types of family interactions. Similarly, G. R. Patterson (1982) has characterized children's behavioral difficulties in

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Despite the fact that researchers and clinicians have traditionally focused on individual psychopathology, there has been a recent trend towards conceptualizing dysfunction in terms of relationships. For example, researchers have begun to recognize the role that the peer group plays in contributing to difficulties in peer relationships (Hymel, Wagner and Butler, in press). Wright, Giammarino and Parad (1986) have found that the specific bases for peer rejection vary from group to group. Similarly, Bierman and Furman (1984) demonstrated that effective treatment of peer relationship problems may depend on changing both the target child's social skills and the peer group's attitude and behavior towards that child.

To date, the descriptions of relationships have been rather scattered and lack a common framework. Our framework for describing children's relationships may be helpful in categorizing children's dysfunctional relationships. Our dimensions of relationships may characterize dysfunctions as well as normal variations in relationships. Many, although not all, dysfunctions in relationships can be viewed as instances in which the quality of the relationship exceeds normal variation along one or more of these four dimensions. In the subsequent paragraphs, we discuss how our relationship dimensions can be applied to dysfunctions in relationships.

Conflict

One can readily imagine dysfunctions on the conflict dimension. In fact, excessive conflicts with parents, siblings, and peers are all common reasons for seeking psychological services. Of course, the specific issues of conflict differ from relationship to relationship. Excessive quarreling and antagonism often represent difficulties in peer or sibling relationships, whereas discipline and punishment issues are often major problems in parent-child relationships. These differences probably reflect the differences in power distribution. In friendships, the relationships are egalitarian and the issues involve negotiating with each other, whereas in parent-child relationships, the issues are those of parental control. Despite these differences, excessive conflict in all these relationships appears to be a common type of dysfunction.

The research on conflict in one relationship may prove valuable in understanding conflict in the other relationships. For example, we may find that there are patterns to conflictual relationships and that children who have conflictual sibling relationships also have conflictual parent-child relationships. G. R. Patterson's (1982) work on coercive patterns of parent-child interactions supports the importance of examining conflict as a relationship dysfunction rather than simply as the result of individual psychopathology. He has demonstrated that specific patterns of parent-child interactions reinforce conflictual behavior. A coercive cycle develops wherein ineffectual parental disciplinary techniques tend to reinforce negative child behaviors, which in turn produce negative parent behaviors. Resolving such conflict thus requires that parents

and children learn more effective patterns of interaction. Patterson's work also highlights the importance of examining the bidirectionality of interactions among parents and children.

Excessive sibling conflict has commonly been conceptualized in individual terms (A. Adler, 1929/1959). For example, conflict may occur if an older child has feelings of anger and displacement because of the birth of another child. In this conceptualization, treatment would be likely to focus on the older child. Although some instances of sibling conflict may very well originate from feelings of displacement, a relationship perspective can shed insights into the nature of the problem and its treatment. G. R. Patterson (1984b) has recently reconceptualized conflictual sibling interactions in terms of coercive family processes. In a study of 60 families, he demonstrated that certain sibling behaviors serve to reinforce conflictual interaction patterns, just as he had found in his earlier research on parent-child interactions. As yet, an intervention program based on the coercive model has not been used to correct excessive sibling conflict, but the idea seems promising. Patterson's work is also important because he has applied his model of coercive interactions to both sibling and parent-child relationships. He is one of the few researchers who has attempted to generalize his understanding of one type of relationship to other relationships. This work is important in developing a framework for children's relationships.

Interestingly, researchers have not focused on children's difficulties with specific friends, but rather have concentrated on children's difficulties with peers in general. Our impression is that parents are also more likely to be concerned about problems in peer relations in general than about problems in specific friendships. In any event, it is clear that excessive peer conflict is dysfunctional. Excessive conflict, aggressiveness, or negative behavior has been repeatedly found to be correlated with peer rejection (see Hartup, 1983) and, in fact, has been shown to lead to being rejected (Coie and Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983). Such behaviors have been commonly conceptualized as dysfunctions of the individual, which seems logical because one is describing a person's interactions with many others rather than with a specific individual. At the same time, recent investigators have observed that the peer group can contribute to aggressive or rejected children's difficulties by being more likely to interpret their behavior as aggressive (Dodge, 1980) or by rebuffing their overtures to join in (Putallaz and Gottman, 1981). Thus, even when aggressive children attempt to decrease the degree of conflict in their relationships, their peers may react in ways that maintain conflict.

The past discussion has focused on high levels of conflict in children's relationships. It is unclear if excessively low conflict can be dysfunctional. Children who are very submissive towards peers may be the frequent victims of aggression (Patterson, Littman and Bricker, 1967) and may not have very effective relationships with peers. Similarly, one would be concerned about a family in which the children were never permitted to disagree with their parents. In some parent-child relationships, low conflict may be associated with low warmth. That is, the parents may be uninvolved with their children and in-

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different towards them. Our preference is to conceptualize these difficulties as dysfunctions on the other dimensions rather than on the conflict dimension *per se*.

Warmth

Low warmth in the parent-child relationship may be reflected in a number of parenting styles. Baumrind (1971) notes that authoritarian parents discourage verbal give-and-take between parent and child. These parents might thus rank low on our measures of warmth/closeness and egalitarian closeness. Although they are highly involved with their children, and place a number of demands upon them, they are low in their responsivity to them. Interestingly, Baumrind's work also suggests that permissive parents are relatively uninvolved with their children and make few demands upon them. Thus, both authoritarian and permissive parent-child relationships may rate low on the warmth/closeness and egalitarian closeness dimensions. The groups are, however, on opposite ends of the power assertion/conflict dimension.

Low warmth is also characteristic of indifferent or neglecting parents. Maccoby and Martin (1983) characterize uninvolved parents as those who are likely to be motivated to do whatever is necessary to keep their children at a distance and minimize the amount of interaction. Egeland and Sroufe (1981a, b) detailed some of the more extreme implications of low parental involvement. These include physical abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, and psychological unavailability. Parents who were unavailable psychologically tended to be those who were detached, depressed, and uninterested in their children.

We know relatively little about dysfunctions in warmth in sibling relationships, and it is not clear what impact a distant sibling relationship might have. Bank and Kahn (1982) discuss deidentification, a process by which siblings deny any similarities between them and disown the relationship. The sibling relationship is thus characterized as distant and rejecting. These authors state that the rejection between such siblings often results from family identification of one sibling as strong or good and the other sibling as weak or bad. Deidentification thus results in an attempt to avoid any of the weaker sibling's traits. Although deidentification is a normal process, some deidentified relationships may lead to problems in adjustment. The relevant data to assess this hypothesis, however, do not currently exist.

Low warmth in children's friendships is likely to be manifested as a lack of peer relationships. After all, if the interactions between two children were not friendly and warm, it is unlikely that a friendship would develop. It is unclear if social isolation is dysfunctional. Some investigators have argued that it is a serious problem in adjustment (Hops and Greenwood, 1981; Strain, Kerr and Ragland, 1981), whereas others have argued that it is not at all problematic. Intuitively, one might expect social isolation to be problematic, because peer interactions have been found to provide numerous contributions to development (Hartup, 1976). On the other hand, most forms of nonsocial behavior are adaptive (Moore, Evertson and Brophy, 1974), although some are not (Furman

and Garcia, 1986; Rubin, 1982). Similarly, social isolation is not usually related to current or subsequent adjustment (Asher, Markell and Hymel, 1981).

The controversy, however, may result from the typical definition of social isolation—low rates of interaction. Some investigators have accurately observed that some forms of interactions are not necessarily more healthy than not interacting at all. Would we want an isolated child to be interacting, but doing so aggressively? Probably not. On the other hand, if we think of 'isolation' in terms of low rates of positive or warm interactions, then most investigators would probably think that isolation, at least in extreme forms, is dysfunctional. In fact, Asher, Markell and Hymel (1981), major critics of the use of low rates of interaction, have reviewed research demonstrating that qualitative indices of interaction, such as frequency of positive interactions, are associated with adjustment.

We do not see a high degree of warmth as being dysfunctional in and of itself. Too much warmth may be detrimental if it occurs along with dysfunctions in other relationship qualities, however. For example, a power dysfunction in a parent-child relationship (with a child taking on a parentified role) might indicate a danger of the parent becoming seductive with the child (Sroufe and Ward, 1980). Seductive parenting is described as behavior which is insensitive and unresponsive to the needs of the child and which tends to draw the child into patterns of interaction that are overly stimulating and inappropriate (Sroufe and Ward, 1980). More generally, high degrees of warmth might also indicate enmeshment of parent and child. In an enmeshed relationship, individuals are overconcerned and overinvolved in each other's lives. We would expect that such enmeshment would be associated with an accompanying lack of closeness in other relationships. The parent and child would be close to the exclusion of other members of the child's social network. Thus, high levels of warmth may be detrimental when associated with other dysfunctions in the relationship. If a relationship is characterized by a normal distribution of power, if warmth is fairly evenly distributed across family members, and if family warmth does not exclude the possibility of interactions with extrafamilial members, high warmth should not be a problem.

Relative Status/Power

The distribution of power between parent and child can be imbalanced in either direction. In the previous section, authoritarian parents and the dysfunctional extreme of rejecting, abusive parents were described. Here, the parent-child relationship is characterized as low in warmth and high in power assertion/conflict. Authoritarian parents may be exerting too much control and are thus not allowing children to develop their own sense of independence. On the other hand, permissive and uninvolved parents may not exert a sufficient amount of control over their children.

Clinicians commonly describe a third kind of distortion in the distribution of power—parentification (Bank and Kahn, 1982; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973; Minuchin, 1974). In this instance, a child has assumed some of the

behavioral role characteristics of parents. Of course, some 'parental' responsibilities are normal for older children and adolescents, but in instances of parentification, the child has developmentally inappropriate responsibilities. As a consequence of having responsibilities for the welfare of another family member, the child may miss the support derived from a consistent parenting relationship and his or her developmental needs may not be attended to sufficiently (Friedrich and Reams, 1985).

Parentification may also affect the quality of sibling relationships. A younger child may resent being primarily cared for by an older sibling rather than by parents. Conversely, although a moderate amount of responsibility for nurturing can be a positive aspect of a sibling relationship, too much responsibility can be resented by the older child and can interfere with his or her own development (Bank and Kahn, 1982; Bossard and Boll, 1956).

Excessive dominance can also be problematic in sibling relationships. Such marked power differences can often result in conflict, and in extreme cases sibling abuse (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1981). Bank and Kahn (1982) observed that parents often fail to intervene in abusive sibling relationships. This may be because of their own need to avoid conflict or because sibling conflict may satisfy their own aggressive impulses. Bank and Kahn (1982) believe that sibling abuse, engendered by parents who amplify conflicts, is widely underreported. Such parents often rationalize their children's aggression as normal power tactics rather than as abusive.

Since egalitarianism is a defining feature of friendship, differences in power in same-age friendships appear to be unusual. It is unclear if such differences would be considered problematic; certainly, it is not a common clinical problem. What is more likely to be considered problematic are children who are very dominant or submissive. Dominant children may find it difficult to establish or maintain friendships. Very submissive children may primarily seek out younger peers as friends, something that is of concern to many parents.

These problems in friendships notwithstanding, the issues of power seem to be of greater concern in family relationships. Problems in the balance of power are commonly addressed in clinical interventions. Treatment of this dysfunctional aspect of the relationships may often include helping family members redefine their roles and responsibilities. Teaching family members effective negotiation skills (Robin, Koepke and Nayar, 1986) or attempting to make structural changes in the family (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981) are also means by which changes in the family power structure may be achieved.

Comparisons of Relationships

Some of the dysfunctions described in previous sections can reflect problems in the comparisons of relationships. For example, marked conflict may occur when parental partiality is judged to be high by siblings. Children who do not have close relationships with their parents will tend to be jealous of their siblings who have such relationships, and conflict between siblings may result. As noted

previously, we found that perceptions of parental partiality were correlated with conflict in sibling relationships (T. Adler, 1985; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985).

The influence of one relationship on another has been a primary emphasis of family therapists (Bowen, 1966; Lidz, 1963; Minuchin, 1974). For example, Minuchin (1974) proposed that each family has a structure—an invisible set of demands that organizes the ways in which members interact with each other. The family system carries out its functions through subsystems, which are differentiated by boundaries. In a healthy family, the boundaries between individuals are clear but flexible. Boundaries that are either too rigid or too diffuse are usually inappropriate. Rigid boundaries may result in disengaged relationships, resembling the low involvement described previously. Diffuse boundaries can result in enmeshed relationships. Although the closeness of extremely enmeshed relationships may seem desirable, these relationships can be dysfunctional either by restricting the autonomy of individual family members or by excluding other relationships. Excessive togetherness and sharing may lead to a lack of privacy and excessive possessiveness and protectiveness by the parent. Both parents and children may have difficulty accepting the idea of another person interfering with the close nature of their relationships. Bowen (1966) also describes a similar phenomenon of the undifferentiated family mass, in which there is a conglomerate emotional oneness and symbiotic relationships.

In healthy families, some boundaries are naturally stronger than others. For example, the family may be divided into spousal, parental, and sibling subsystems. Boundaries between subsystems may, however, be distorted by inappropriate relationships. In some instances of parentification, for example, the parentified child becomes allied with one parent and becomes a pseudoparent, while the other parent is relegated to a subservient, demeaning role (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981). Parentification is one example of triangulation, the act of involving an outsider when two people are in tense situations (Bowen, 1978). Triangulation commonly occurs when family alliances are skewed. For example, Minuchin and Fishman (1981) discuss how disobedient young children often disobey rules and 'tyrannize' their families because they have become inappropriately allied with one of their parents. These authors state that in such families the parents disqualify each other, leaving the triangulated child in a position of power that is frightening to him or her as well as to the family.

Family theorists have also emphasized that problems with any individual or specific relationship reflect system problems. The classic instance of this is scapegoating, in which one person is labeled as having problems when in fact the problems actually exist in other individuals or relationships. For example, when a child is brought to a guidance clinic for emotional problems, in actuality it may be that the marital relationship is seriously strained. In effect, the sick child has been designated as the one who will display the family's pathology, thus permitting the others to believe that they are healthy.

Understanding patterns of family interaction can also help us understand the etiology of individual pathology. Work by Minuchin, Rosman and Baker (1978) indicates that families of children who manifest these psychosomatic problems are characterized by certain patterns of interaction. Specifically, enmeshment

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is common and family members tend to be overprotective of one another. Such families tend to have a low tolerance for conflict, and conflictual situations are avoided or defused. Often, the sick child in the family is given the role of defusing conflict. The family turns its concern to the sick child and thus avoids difficulties such as marital discord. Parents who cannot deal with their conflicts with one another can avoid conflict by directing their energies towards protecting their sick child.

Although we have emphasized the impact of structural dysfunctions on parent-child relationships, these dysfunctions can also affect sibling relationships. Not only can siblings have marked rivalry, but in some instances the sibling relationships can be enmeshed. Bank and Kahn (1982) have proposed that such extreme bonding can occur when the links with parents are distant. Twins may be particularly prone to problems of diffuse ego boundaries (Bank and Kahn, 1982).

Children compare different friendships, but we have difficulty thinking of dysfunctions in this regard. Some parents may be concerned if their children play exclusively with one child. Similarly, jealousy and competing for friends are annoying and undesirable, but it is unlikely that these phenomena are clinically dysfunctional.

CONCLUSION

The primary intent of this chapter was to propose a model for describing both normal and dysfunctional relationships. Although we believe that the four dimensions we have outlined have promise, several limitations warrant mentioning. Our model is based on school-aged children's perceptions of their relationships; thus, an important topic for future research is to see how these perceptions are manifested in behavior. The model also places an emphasis on the description of relationship properties, not the etiology or treatment of relationship dysfunctions. A relationship may be characterized as high in conflict or low in warmth for any number of reasons. The characteristics of the relationship could reflect problems of the individual or, as we have emphasized here, dyadic problems. Etiological descriptions of the problems will require a different set of frameworks. Social learning theorists would emphasize the role that cognitive beliefs, communication skills, social skills, or contingencies of reinforcement play in the development and maintenance of dysfunctions. Psychoanalytically oriented theorists would emphasize the role of early object relations (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983), whereas family theorists would stress the role of family structure (Minuchin, 1974). We have alluded to different conceptualizations and treatments throughout this chapter. It is clear, however, that much work remains to be done before we can fully appreciate the contributions different perspectives may provide to the understanding of dysfunctional relationships.

Regardless of the approach, however, it is valuable to develop etiological or intervention frameworks that could be applied to different relationships. Although this has not been done frequently, such frameworks have proven

useful. For example, G. R. Patterson's (1984b) coercive model appears to be applicable to both sibling and parent-child interactions. Similarly, we are sure that researchers studying social skills in family relations and researchers studying similar phenomena in peer relations could learn from one another.

Even as a descriptive framework, the present one has a limited scope—dyadic relationship quality. Although we have talked about the importance of considering how one relationship compares to another, our emphasis has been on how such comparisons affect the quality of specific relationships. One would want to supplement descriptions of dyadic relationships with additional descriptions of the structure of the family or peer group as a whole. For example, concepts such as triangulation and enmeshment seem essential.

Additionally, not all dysfunctions are manifested in relationship qualities. The absence of certain relationships, such as friendships, can be dysfunctional as well (Furman and Robbins, 1985; Putallaz and Gottman, 1981). Thus, as either clinicians or researchers, we would want to map out the network and the characteristics of its different components.

Our descriptive framework also tends to emphasize similarities among relationships, and subtle differences are minimized. Our model is useful for a general description of normal and dysfunctional relationships. The model would benefit, however, from more detailed descriptions of these relationships and potential dysfunctions. For example, recent investigators have argued that parenting styles vary from domain to domain, and parental concerns about specific issues can lead to particular dysfunctions (Costanzo and Woody, 1985). When assessing relationships, one would thus want to capture such variation. As we develop more detailed descriptions of relationships, we can begin to identify common problematic patterns. Particularly important would be research on developmental changes in normal and dysfunctional relationships (a striking omission in this chapter). Ultimately we could have a taxonomy of relationship disorders similar to the taxonomy of individual psychopathology found in DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980).

In addition to providing information about the patterns of specific relationships, our model could stimulate work examining the patterns among different relationships. One would expect children with several dysfunctional relationships to be at greater risk than those with an isolated problem. As yet, however, we know little about the different configurations of relationships. The emphasis on common dimensions should make it possible to make comparisons of relationships and provide information about links among relationships. Other researchers have also begun to investigate links among relationships, especially early parent-child relationships (see Dunn, this volume, for example), but the surface of this topic has just been scratched.

Despite its limitations, we believe that our proposed common framework can be valuable. Research on normal and dysfunctional relationships and on different types of relationships have remained separate from one another. We hope that we have illustrated that they have much in common and much to learn from each other. Moreover, our framework may provide a basis for a

comprehensive means to understand the etiology and treatment of relationship dysfunctions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Portions of the research described in this chapter were supported by a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1R01 HD 16142), and preparation of the manuscript was facilitated by a W. T. Grant Faculty Scholar Award to W. Furman.