

Jerome H. Barkow

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Definition

Jerome (Jerry) Barkow is a biosocial anthropologist whose work has emphasized how our evolved psychology provides the infrastructure of culture and whose work has been a prescient call (Barkow, 1973; Barkow, 1994) for an evolutionary psychological anthropology. His often pioneering work embraces how our pan-primate tendency to form hierarchies helps to generate--and always underlies--human social structures (Barkow, 1975a, 1975b, 1980a, 2014). He co-edited the foundational text and rallying cry for evolutionary psychology, *The Adapted Mind* (Barkow et al., 1992a), drawing together his earlier recognition for evolutionary approaches to ground our study of human behaviour. Barkow’s work runs a broad gamut, including work that was a forerunner in the evolutionary study of gossip (Barkow, 1992b), happiness (Barkow, 1997), and, more recently, the likely psychology of extraterrestrials (Barkow, 2000, 2014, Forthcoming) He has also been vocal that explanations at different levels of organization (such as those at the individual versus sociological levels) must always be compatible with one another but can never be in competition (Barkow, 1989a, 2006a).

Introduction

Jerry Barkow is an interdisciplinary, biosocial anthropologist who has spent his academic career at Dalhousie University, Canada. He has been a visiting professor at the Institute for Cognition and Culture at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and, following his retirement and appointment as a Professor Emeritus at Dalhousie, served as an honorary professor at QUB for seven years.

Private Life

Jerry Barkow was born on January 18, 1944 in Brooklyn, New York to Philip Barkow and Rebecca Gendler Barkow, the younger of two sons. He spent the first 20 years of his life in Brooklyn and worked selling ice cream, as a photographic technician, a postal worker, and finally a Social Investigator for the New York City Department of Welfare. He has lived most of his adult life in Canada and identifies as Canadian. Jerry was the first in his family to earn a university degree. He is married to Irma Juuti and has one son, Philip, one daughter, Sarah, and two grandchildren.

Academic Education

Jerry received his B.A. from Brooklyn College. While majoring in psychology, a course taken just prior to graduation with the late Gerald Henderson in Culture and Personality led him to seek interdisciplinary graduate training. He was accepted by the University of Chicago's Committee on Human Development, where he worked with psychological anthropologist Robert A. LeVine and ethologically-oriented psychologist Daniel G. Freedman. During his first summer, he was

hired by a project on ethnocentrism that LeVine was conducting with then-Northwestern University psychologist Donald Campbell. Campbell gave Jerry a stack of his publications and he read them all carefully and with delight; Campbell's thought has been a lifelong influence on Jerry's own work and prepared him for his introduction to the work of Darwin and to ethology that Freedman provided. LeVine was beginning a project (involving infants) among the Hausa of northern Nigeria, and Jerry went off to Ahmadu Bello University and then to a small town nearby where he built a compound and lived for 15 months conducting his first fieldwork. His thesis topic addressed prestige and relative standing, comparing the ethos of Muslim Hausa and the more rural Maguzawa, a non-Muslim Hausa people. He substantiated his findings using four distinct methods. One of the findings was that the Maguzawa had lower self-esteem than did the Muslim Hausa, reflecting the Maguzawa's lower political power. This lesson, that personal self-esteem, membership, group standing, and political power are intricately interlinked and apparently are the human heritage of the general primate tendency to form, maintain and see the world through hierarchies ("hierarchizing"), informed much of Jerry's subsequent evolutionary thinking about the relationship between our evolved psychology and our social structures.

Contributions to Evolutionary Psychology

Fieldwork contributions

In keeping with his social-cultural anthropological training, Jerry's work has a substantial degree that is field-based. Several of his publications provide empirical data on the relationship between

culture and our evolved psychology. For example, Barkow (1982) found that when the age grading social hierarchical system of the Migili (Koro) of Nigeria's Middle Belt collapsed, reciprocal and kin-directed altruism replaced them. An age grading system is a social organization based on a series of ranks and one is promoted as one gets older and shows appropriate qualities. For the Migili, the age grade of younger men was responsible for doing most of the heavy labor, including making the hills for the all-important yam crop. This is arduous labor and that age grade performed it for everyone, including women and older people. When the social organization collapsed, individuals were on their own. Data on who made hills for whom and whether or not there was reciprocity combined with coefficients of relatedness, showed that the higher the relatedness the less likely that aid would be reciprocated; in contrast, among non-relatives, it was always reciprocated. Thus, a fundamental aspect of evolved psychology, reciprocal and kin-directed altruism, came to the fore when the social structure that had over-ridden it (for this task, at least) ceased to operate.

Working with a medical team in Indonesia, during the late Nineties, Jerry came across an evolutionary paradox (Barkow et al., 2001), which he framed as "why the Bugis know more about cooking than about nutrition". Why, apparently, did Bugis women have a stronger interest in their cooking ability rather than nutritional knowledge? Jerry wondered would not evolutionary theory predict a maternal ability to monitor her offspring's nutritional status and thus strive to provide the healthiest diet possible, given the local environment? As Barkow details, a physician member of the team explained why indigenous knowledge of infant and child nutrition was poor: how would a mother know whether the child's ill health was caused by a parasite, a disease, or diet? Barkow notes that evolution needs something to work with and in this case there is no way that even the most observant and caring mothers can provide natural

selection with genetic variance to select on. Skill in cooking, however, is an important cultural realm of competition, locally, and not just among the women themselves, so we get the historical development of an excellent cuisine (cookies, in particular). Ever the anthropologist, Jerry notes that a lesson for evolutionary psychology is that both evolution and their field have their limits.

Working in the city of Maradi in Niger during the first half of the Seventies, Jerry studied a small panel of men intensively (Barkow, 1975b). A status conflict existed between the ruling, French-speaking bureaucratic elite and ordinary people. Jerry observed that the response of the latter was to seek to invalidate the prestige claims of the elite by arguing that only Islamic learning and practice merit respect—something the elite did not have, and so many people spent countless hours in religious study; those who had not had sufficient early Islamic education to have this option open to them suffered low self-esteem. Decades later, it is apparent that Jerry may have described one of the processes that has led to the spread of a fervent Islam in the region. The evolved psychological trait of hierarchizing is at the base of a vertically integrated explanation for a major socio-political phenomenon.

Links with Social-Cultural Anthropology

Jerry has repeatedly sought to engage his discipline with evolutionary thinking. At times he has done this with data, at other times by explaining how their view of human behavior is fundamentally flawed (Barkow, 1978a, 1978b, 1980b, 1984, 1989a, 1989b, 1994, 2001; Barkow et al., 1978; Barkow, O'Gorman, & Rendell, 2013). “Sometimes the Bus Does Wait” (Barkow, 2006b), the amusingly titled introduction to his edited book (Barkow, 2006c), *Missing the*

Revolution: Darwinism for Social Scientists, is at once a powerful deconstruction of the myths many social scientists hold of evolutionary psychology and a heartfelt plea for them to join the major human science intellectual revolution of our time. The tragedy here is that without evolutionary psychology's theories of human nature the social sciences are condemned to explaining endlessly recurring fires whose ultimate causes they can never understand, a point made in the title of Jerry's article (Barkow, 2003), "Biology is destiny only if we ignore it."

An important theme in Jerry's work is that if cultural features were simply replicated, culture would be non-adaptive because environments change; old practices may no longer work or no longer be sustainable, while new opportunities appear: culture must not only be transmitted but added to and *edited* (Barkow, 1975b, 1989a, 2014; Barkow, O'Gorman, & Rendell, 2012; Barkow et al., 2013). Much of our evolved psychology, he has long argued, was selected for in order to edit culture. Whom we attend to determines from whom we learn. Status shapes this strongly, biasing us to learn from those high in status as we attend to them (Barkow, 1976a, 1976b, 2014; Barkow et al., 2012).

Jerry has also incorporated other concepts into his work that are more commonly found in the animal behavior literature. Jerry has presciently looked at the notion of local adaptation, where the environment of adaptation is the culture (Barkow, 1980a). In a quantitative study of conformity to the local ethos and reproductive success among Hausa townsmen (Barkow, 1977), he provides evidence for selective pressure from culture in that men who conformed better to the ethos of their community (by not mentioning emotion-laden topics in a standardized setting) had more children than did those who did not conform as well. Population mobility and sociocultural change preclude the process from having any real genetic impact, in this example, but the results

are compatible with the possibility that genetic impact from cultural traits may have played a role in our evolutionary history.

Links with Extraterrestrial Intelligences

Jerry is on the Board of Directors of Messaging Extraterrestrial Intelligence International (METI) and has ties to the SETI (Searching for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute as well. In his articles (cited earlier), he reviews the processes believed to have led to our own species' evolved psychology and then asks what if, on an exoplanet, those processes varied. For example, suppose an ETI (extraterrestrial intelligence) evolved in competition not with bands of conspecifics but with members of other species, would they therefore be selected to be obligate xenophobes? Suppose an ETI species did not have sexes and moved genes laterally but nevertheless evolved a high technology through a history entirely different from our own: what would their psychology be like? Competition is a human universal and is deeply implicated in our science, technology, and art and was likely produced at least in part by sexual selection: would the evolved psychology of a sexless species that could not have been subject to sexual selection lack competitiveness? These are the fascinating questions Jerry has been asking in his most recent work, perhaps the ultimate exercise for an evolutionarily-minded scholar! As we move to being a space-faring species the need for advice from evolutionary psychologists about what we may meet out there will only grow.

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