

THE THIRD MIND:  
ON THE TRIADIC ORIGIN OF REFLECTIVE FUNCTIONING

By  
DANA GOREN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York

2012



This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Arietta Slade, Ph.D.\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman of Examining Committee

Maureen O'Connor, Ph.D, J.D.\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Officer in Psychology

Steven B. Tuber, Ph.D.

Lissa Weinstein, Ph.D.

Diana Diamond, Ph.D.

Elliot Jurist, Ph.D.

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

## Abstract

## THE THIRD MIND:

## ON THE TRIADIC ORIGIN OF REFLECTIVE FUNCTIONING

By

Dana Goren

Adviser: Professor Arietta Slade

The present study adopts a ‘three-person psychology’ model in understanding the mental lives of young children. Integrating psychoanalytic, attachment and family systems formulations regarding the regulatory functions of the mother-father-child triad, it explores the triadic underpinnings of mentalization capacities at age 6. It was hypothesized that parents’ capacity to mentalize about the mother-father-child triangle would be linked to the quality of the child’s representations of self and others as intentional beings. Furthermore, the study explored the possibility that the interactive qualities of the triad mediate between parental mentalization and child mentalization. An exploratory study was conducted with a community-based sample of 6 triads of mother-father and their 6-year-old firstborn child. Parents were interviewed individually using the Parental Triadic Interview (PTI; Goren, Slade & Aber, 2010). Interactive qualities of the triads were assessed based on a pretend picnic play (Frascarolo & Favez, 2005). In addition, each child was administered 6 Story Stems (MSSB; Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum, & Emde, 1990), and Affect Task (Steele, Steele & Fonagy, 1994).

Qualitative analysis revealed continuity across representational and interactive domains: couples who manifested strong and balanced triadic RF capacities also engaged in

collaborative and inclusive three-way play. In contrast, parents with a low level of mentalization and notable difficulties around reflecting on the child-partner relationship, evidenced a competitive three-way play. In line with the study's exploratory hypothesis there were associations between parental RF and child RF: The children of the least reflective couples exhibited substantially higher aggressive themes in their story stems and labile ability for narrative coherence and intentionality.

The preliminary findings support the notion of intergenerational transmission of RF capacities as a multi-person process with complex additive relationships between maternal and paternal triadic RF competences. A three-fold typology of cooperative/strained/disrupted triads is discussed. Additionally, The study challenges gender-based parental roles in child development literature. Implications for the theory of Oedipus complex resolution are discussed, as well as gender differences in RF development in childhood.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude to the mothers, fathers and children who so generously shared with me their thoughts and their emotions and told me what being a family meant for each of them.

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Arietta Slade. I was able to conceive this project and follow it through to its completion thanks to the unwavering support and enthusiasm of Arietta, whose intellectual acumen always comes with human kindness and warmth. Arietta's active involvement in the various phases of this project has provided crucial continuity at turbulent times. I am thankful for the support of my committee member Dr. Steven Tuber, who encouraged me to be daring and playful and Dr. Lissa Weinstein, who generously gave of herself and joined the committee with no hesitations. To my readers, Drs. Elliot Jurist and Diana Diamond, whose thoughtful comments made the defense the stimulating experience it was.

A special thank you to Dr. Miriam Steele at The New School for Social Research, for her sound advice regarding the methodology of the study and for inviting me to experience firsthand the workings of a busy and thriving lab, the Center for Attachment Research. Thank you to Dr. Richard Schwartz, for letting me use the child-friendly lab space of the Speech-Language-Hearing sciences at the Graduate Center for the collection of my data and to Anjali George, for the video equipment and technical help.

To my friends and fellow doctoral students – Dafna Fuchs, Lisa Goldfine, Judith Zackson and Ellie Neuman, for being a source of comfort and laughter.

To the line of writers in my family - my father Amos Goren, my brother Ilan and my son Dario, whose incredible love for story telling and wonderful talent inspired me to

appreciate the creativity at the heart of every writing process. To my brother Itamar and my sister Noa for teaching me to tolerate uncertainty and take risks. To my little girl Alma, for the hugs and smiles and to my husband Michele, an honorary psychologist, for always believing in me and for being a true partner in all aspects of my life.

In loving memory of my mother, Dr. Dorit Goren. I miss you.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Charts.....	x
Chapter One Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two Literature Review.....	8
I.    Triads in psychoanalysis: The Oedipus Complex.....	9
II.   Triads in attachment theory.....	18
III.  Triads in family systems theory.....	30
IV.  Mentalization.....	42
V.   Putting it all together: Triads and Mentalization.....	53
Chapter Three: Method.....	62
Chapter Four: Results.....	72
Chapter Five: Case vignettes.....	96
Chapter Six: Discussion.....	134
Appendix.....	156
References.....	160

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Descriptive statistics for overall and relationship RF scores on the PTI.....	75
Table 2: Subjects' RF scores on the Parental Triadic Interview.....	75
Table 3: Pairwise comparisons: relationship type RF.....	95

List of Charts

	Page
Chart 1: 3-D representation of 6 families' RF score.....	77

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older  
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more  
    Complicated  
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment  
Isolated, with no before and after,  
But a lifetime burning in every moment

T.S. Eliot

'East Coker', *Four Quartets*

The birth of a child marks the birth of a triad. That is the starting point of this study, as it sets out to explore a new and exciting frontier in the field of child development: the 'three person psychology' model (Stern, 2010). It joins a growing number of researchers and theoreticians who challenge the exclusivity of the dyadic mother-child paradigm and expand the relational matrix to include the real 'third'. Their main premise is that triangular relations emerge very early in life, with the coming on line of the infant's capacities to perceive and react to the human environment (Stern, 2010).

A natural starting point (and by no means the end of the story) is the inclusion of the father in the model. Even in this day and age of assisted reproductive technologies any new human being is formed by the coming together of two gametes: the male sperm and the female ovum<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the notion of a third being evolving out of the union of two existing ones is a powerful one.

---

<sup>1</sup> As I was writing this introduction, the journal *Science* announced the artificial creation of a living creature, JCVI-syn1.0, that can reproduce itself. Curiously, this ancestor-less bacterium was created by two scientists – Dr. Craig Venter and Dr. Hamilton Smith.

The 'three person psychology' model considers the father to be another pole in the family force field of dynamic interactions and relationships. The model does not deny the fact that in the widely changing relational constellations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nuclear families come in many forms, not only in the traditional mother-father-baby unit. On the contrary: going beyond the dyad takes us to a general view of the structuring of multiple, and varied, close human relations.

Systematically studying the unique qualities of the 'primary triangle' (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999) and their links to development has proven difficult: Even though triangles are meaningful to psychodynamic and family oriented clinicians, research has been lacking with respect to how this crucial triangle works and develops (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999).

Psychoanalytic theorists have long recognized the centrality of the triad as it is mentally constructed in the child's mind. Beginning with Freud's notion of the Oedipus complex, psychoanalytic scholars have located the precursors of oedipal triangulation in early infancy (Klein 1945) or early childhood (Freud 1905, 1923a), and have tried to identify the earliest emergence in the child's awareness of the parents' exclusive relationship, the moment wherein the child's mind the triad transforms into a triangle, with its inherent conflict and dynamism. Central to psychoanalytic theory, even in some of its contemporary iterations, is the notion that the successful negotiation of the Oedipus complex is a prerequisite to the ability to work and love (Aron, 1995).

Over the past 30 years, however, psychoanalysis has become increasingly focused on dyads, with little, if any, attention paid to the question of triads. There has been no systematic or comparative research on the role of the triangle and triangulation in normal

or pathological development; what research there has been has focused on individual child and adult clinical material (Emanuel, 2002; Herzog, 2005). The shift to the study of dyads has much to do with the explosion of psychoanalytically oriented infant research that began in the 1970s (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Stern, 1985; Beebe & Lachmann, 2002). This work focused psychoanalysis on the mother-child relationship, and paved the way for the emergence of a more relational psychoanalysis (e.g. Greenberg, 1996; Mitchell, 1988, 1993, Benjamin 2004), but at the expense, it would seem, of ongoing attention to the meaning and organization of triads for the young child or for his earliest relationships.

The dyadic focus within psychoanalysis has been mirrored by the dyadic focus of attachment theory, which was – from the start – primarily focused on the caregiver-child relationship (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Indeed, it can be argued that the conceptual contributions of attachment theory to our understanding of the dyadic underpinnings of affect regulation and coping mechanisms (Carlson & Sroufe, 1995) are also an artifact of the classical dyadic settings for studying children’s development. This is especially true in research with infants and toddlers, which relies mostly upon observations of dyads. However, even the research on attachment at the representational level, starting in early childhood, abstracts from the content and structure of children’s narratives to describe their internalized experience of ‘being with another’ rather than ‘being with others’.

The way attachment theorists have examined the family unit has been through the study of various dyadic axes in the family, including the father-child relationship, the marital relationship and the effect of dyadic interactions on other dyadic interactions (Belsky, 2005; K. Grossmann, Grossmann & Kindler, 2005). Thus, for the most part,

attachment research is still a very dyadic paradigm, which tries, at best, to extrapolate the workings of the family from its constituent dyads.

By contrast, triads – notably the patterning of triadic interactions and their adaptive or pathogenic qualities -- have been the focus of family systems theory since its inception. Family systems theory as a distinct discipline coalesced in the 1950's around the study of 'schizophrenogenic' families. It has since evolved into the conceptualization of more adaptive family styles and into studying the ways triads handle normative developmental challenges. However, its focus on the family's shared, coordinated practices as the location of the 'memorial function' (Reiss, 1989) obscured until the mid nineties the cognitive and emotional underpinnings of the individual child's triadic representations.

The work that stands in sharp contrast to much of the psychoanalytic, attachment, and family systems theory described above is that of Elizabeth Fivaz and her colleagues in Lausanne, Switzerland, who have studied the triad in infants and their parents for a number of years. Their work, which stands at the intersection of psychoanalysis, infant study, and family systems theory and research, is unique in its attention to internal experience, on the one hand, and systems on the other. And, as such, it serves to ground this research with older children, on the links between internalized triadic experiences and the individual child's freedom to reflect on own and others' feelings and thoughts.

I argue that research on triads in the post-toddlerhood years is especially needed in the field of mentalization, an innovative and immensely influential conceptual framework for understanding emotional and cognitive development in the context of the child's relational world. An elegant developmental theory, which has evolved from attachment and draws from psychoanalysis, mentalization is defined as the psychological capacity to

make sense of one's own and others' behaviors by attributing mental states – intentions, feelings, thoughts, desires and beliefs, to action (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist & Target, 2002). The theory delineates the internalization of the maternal thinking mind as conducive to the development of child's ability to reflect on self and other's states of mind and behaviors. It highlights the crucial role of the ability to mentalize in securing subsequent mental health and adjustment.

The theory articulates the dialectical nature of the child's increasing awareness of relatedness and separateness: the growing ability to reflect on other people's mental processes enhances intersubjectivity while at the same time more realistically demarcates the boundaries of shared experiences. The theory highlights the developmental arc of reflective functioning (RF), namely the overt and measurable manifestation of an individual's mentalizing capacity, while accounting for individual differences that stem from the quality of the mother-child relationship. However, so far the theory of mentalization has only briefly alluded to the possibility that this mental flexibility to 'play with reality', acquired at around age 6 (Fonagy & Target, 1996) reflects potential triangular competence (Target & Fonagy, 2002). In other words, only briefly has it considered the possibility that RF involves the ability to see the other as a subject who has thoughts about other subjects. Moreover, RF research has not investigated individual differences in RF capacities within the context of the dynamics of the triad. A small number of longitudinal studies have shown that prenatally assessed parental triadic capacity predicts the child's representational competence 4 years later (von Klitzing & Burgin, 2005). However, direct concurrent observational data on family triangles is crucial for closing the gap in theory.

This study seeks to explore the triadic underpinnings of individual differences in RF. Specifically, the study explores the notion that the child's ability to see self and others as intentional agents of belief and desire is predicated on his or her interpersonal experiences both as a participant and as an observer. In other words, the study examines whether flexible and smooth transitions in the family dynamics between different configurations of relatedness (triad, dyads, the odd one out) are conducive to the child's growing ability for perspective taking. If the child has the opportunity to 'find himself in the parental couple' as a mentalizing individual, he can also tolerate internalizing the parents as thinking and feeling about each other.

The unique contribution of this study lies in its attempt to integrate disparate theoretical perspectives on the triadic processes that shape children's emotional and cognitive organization. I am hoping to achieve this ambitious goal by taking the leap into the triadic gestalt equipped with three conceptualizations: the 'observed family' of the family systems theory, the 'represented family' of attachment and the 'imagined family' of psychoanalysis. By straddling both the interactional world and the internal world of each participant, my study seeks to delineate the progression from the triadic intersubjective experience in the nursery room to an internalized 'triangular thinking space' (Britton, 1989) in the mind of the child. My starting point is the parents, whose representational and interactive patterns might enhance or hinder the child's acquisition of RF: I am seeking to explore the ways the parental tolerance to being the third person or the third mind is linked to the child's emerging 'theory of minds'.

This multi-layered exploratory inquiry is complex in terms of its hypotheses: in the most general way I expect parents who mentalize 'better', to play 'better' and to have children

who demonstrate higher ability and openness to explore other minds. The proposed study is not hypothesis testing in the usual sense. Rather, I will use a variety of qualitative methods to explore a series of preliminary hypotheses in a small sample of 6 children and their parents.

Starting with the parents, it is hoped that this study will shed some light on the interplay between each parent's ability to think about his or her mind and the minds of the other family members and the quality of their interaction in a triadic context. Are there discrepancies between the parent's reflective capacities when they think of the dyads to which they belong, compared to the one from which they are excluded, or the triad? And which of these capacities is more closely linked to the nature of the triadic interaction? Does gender play a role here?

Additionally, the study explores the links between the child's interactive experiences in the triad and his or her ability to creatively fathom intentionality and demonstrate self-knowledge and organization.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### An Overview

In the first three sections of the literature review I will present the evolving thinking about triads in three schools of thought: psychoanalysis, attachment and family systems. I will demonstrate how over time these quite disparate approaches have begun to converge and enrich each other.

I begin by describing the history of triadic conceptualization in psychoanalytic theory: from a formulation of an intra-psychoic instinctually-driven conflict that is phase-specific and universal, it has shifted to a notion of ever evolving triangular themes, embedded in actual family relationships. Moreover, the de-emphasis on the child's Oedipal wishes has paved the way to growing interest in the way the entire family negotiates the triangle (Diamond & Yeomans, 2007).

In the section on attachment I describe the evolution of the theory from an observation-based model of attachment behaviors, to a model of a representational system with regulatory functions. I delineate recent attempts in attachment theory and research to formulate the nature of the child-father interactive bond and its representational corollaries and even more recent efforts to formulate a triadic model of a secure base.

In section III, on triadic thinking in family systems theory, I describe the conceptual journey from triangles as pathogenic relational structures to triangles as a normative social matrix that shapes intersubjective and subjective experiences.

Section IV will summarize the current theory and research on the developmental acquisition of RF and its links to parental states of mind.

In the final section I will try to weave these threads into an integrated account of the triadic underpinnings of child development. A critical step will be to demonstrate that a triadic framework has a theoretical value in explaining the developmental acquisition of RF.

### **I. Triads in Psychoanalysis: The Oedipus complex**

*Freud: the triangle as the bedrock of desire and authority*

Of all triadic conceptualizations of child development, the one offered by Freud is by far the most compelling and influential. The Oedipus complex is a triangular drama that universally entralls the pre-school child and his or her parents and determines lifelong mental health or pathology, the ability to love and to work.

Freud considered the myth of Oedipus, in which the male protagonist unwittingly kills his father and fathers children with his mother, as the epitome of a universal unconscious infantile wish to eliminate the parent of the same sex and take sole sexual possession of the parent of opposite sex. This ‘Oedipus complex’ (Freud, 1910) is a central developmental challenge at the ages three to six, during the phallic stage of libidinal development. At this time, the child’s growing awareness of the sexual intimacy between his parents leads to bitter feelings of jealousy and rivalry. The little boy ‘abolishes’ (Freud, 1924) his desires and murderous feelings because of his castration anxiety. Consequently, the parental authority is introjected and constitutes the core of morality in the shape of the super-ego.

The formulation of the little girl's Oedipus complex states that a painful awareness of her lacking male genitalia (penis envy) pushes the girl towards the father, who could provide her with a baby as compensation (Freud, 1931). Not faced with the acute threat of castration, she gradually gives up her desires, for fear of losing her mother's love. Freud emphatically maintained that a failure to negotiate these genital impulses is detrimental to personality development, as the Oedipus complex is the "nucleus of the neuroses" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

For Freud, the Oedipus complex is a nodal point of development. In his retelling of the myth, the level of interest is intrapsychic – it is a story involving a conflict of wishes and of intentions within the individual: "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father... King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfillment of our own childhood wishes" (Freud, 1900, p. 261-64).

According to Freud, the shift into the Oedipal period is initiated by the maturation of the psychosexual drives, which are now experienced through the 'language' of the genitals (Slade & Lieberman, 1997). The child's 'phallic stage' (Freud, 1923a) determines the nature of the Oedipal libidinal impulse: incestuous sexual intercourse (Greenberg, 1991.) In addition, the phallic aim is the first that supports or permits a whole-object relationship (Freud, 1923b): the phallic child wants to possess his mother, not just some part of her (Greenberg, 1991).

It is debatable whether this 'phallic stage' indeed "knows only one kind of genital: the male one" (Freud, 1905, p.118 note added 1924) and whether the lack of penis is

experienced as a narcissistic wound for young girls. However, it is clear from observations that for both boys and girls, genital arousal is intensified and becomes an essential component of the child's self-experience. It is a multi-layered experience, underpinned by a bodily reality, in which the genitals generate pleasurable sensations through romping and masturbation (Roiphe & Galenson, 1981). This shift changes not only the bodily experience of biological urges but also the quality of children's concerns as well as their relationships: the prior concern with autonomous success turns into a new awareness of the body and its power (Greenberg, 1991). The interest previously paid to feces and the previous investment in independence are now transformed into the desire for initiative – the undertaking, planning and “attacking” a task (Slade & Lieberman, 1997).

The nature of the parental relationship is a source of immense curiosity and pain for the jealous 3-year-old. Even without accurate knowledge about anatomical differences between males and females and the physiology of conception, children have a strong notion of the sexual nature of the parental ‘coming together’ – their fantasies about the “primal scene” (Freud, 1918).

Phenomenologically, observations confirm that while preschool children normally experience and express longing for intimacy with the parent of the opposite sex, their manifestation is dissimilar to the adult version of sexual striving. Rather, the child wishes to ‘seduce’ in order to exclusively possess the parent, often voicing a fantasy of marrying the parent. The realization that this loved and desired parent is engaged in a relationship with another person, usually the parent of the same gender as the child, stirs strong

feelings of competitive rivalry – children often verbalize their hope that their rival will just ‘disappear’ or ‘go away’.

For Freud, the phenomenology of the Oedipus complex is explicable as a vicissitude of libido and aggression (Greenberg, 1991). Freud postulated that the child encounters fear of retaliation from the same gender parent for his libidinal longing, and that these anxieties involve fantasies of bodily harm and castration. Slade and Lieberman (1997) contend that even if young children do not necessarily express explicit fear of castration, they often manifest fear of imagined danger, such as monsters and fierce animals and develop persistent phobias. They are tremendously concerned with bodily injury, are very sensitive to slights to their body, their strength and their ability and are preoccupied with the integrity of their feelings and ideas. They demand to be heard and taken into account and resent and protest being silenced, excluded or literally cut off from a conversation.

Thus, Freud emphasized the sexual aspect of the Oedipus complex. Its conflicts, under castration threats, were partially resolved by identification with the same sex parent, the formation of superego and the establishment of the incest taboo towards the parent of the opposite sex (Morgan, 2007).

*Klein: guilt and concern*

Melanie Klein’s conceptualization of the underpinnings of the Oedipal constellation was substantively different: it is not only the fear but also the desire to love and to tolerate frustration that enables the child to allow the parents their relationship.

Klein suggested that the psychic world of very young infants, in the first year of life, already contains interplay between three people. The infant always relates to an object as the breast, or other parts as the mother’s mind, but there are always other objects,

atmospheres and presences representing the third (Morgan, 2007). Initially, these are experienced as indistinguishable part objects, but as the young child gradually develops a more realistic relation to his parents, he comes to consider them as separate individuals, towards whom he has ambivalent feelings. Klein described this as the depressive position – a realization of the real world outside the self, the difference between internal and external (1940). The depressive position is also the dawn of the child's recognition of the parents' exclusive relationship, albeit in a primitive or partial form. The conflicting emotions are also reflected in the infant's oral, anal and genital desires towards each of his parents, namely in the closely linked positive and inverted Oedipal feelings (Klein, 1945).

Within the Oedipal triangle the interaction between desire, identification, envy and jealousy activates in the infant various anxiety states: persecutory fears are accompanied by depressive concerns about the fate of the internal good objects and fears that in the oedipal union his genital desire would be destructive and cruel. Klein (1945) maintained that openly expressed desires and rivalry, namely the classical Oedipus complex, indicate a sense of containing good and trustworthy objects. The parental objects, separately and together, are believed to withstand envy, greed and desire without excluding or colluding, and thus help the child to recognize the productive and reparative aspects of his sexuality and to identify with the same-sex parent.

With the resolution of the Oedipal crisis, both parents are established as good objects, the child can see them as separate individuals and enjoy relations with both. "This more integrated relation to the parents... implies a greater understanding of their relationship to one another and is a precondition for the infant's hope that he can bring

them together and unite them in a happy way” (Klein, 1952, p.79). A working through of the Oedipal situation is therefore not the dissolution of desires due to tormenting fears but a developmental accomplishment in which an exclusive idealized relationship is mourned and relinquished in favour of separateness, realism and cohesion.

The acceptance of the parental sexual relationship underpins all future mental and emotional life (Britton, 1989). Whether the parental couple is experienced in fantasy as coming together in lively and pleasurable or destructive ways will determine the way a person experiences things coming together in his own mind, his own thoughts, or relationships. The capacities to think and to be part of a triangular relationship are thus closely entwined (Feldman, 1989; Morgan, 2007).

Klein and her followers are thus establishing the intimate link between triadic experiences and the child’s ability to reflect on self and others. This notion has important bearings on the development of mentalization, as will be elaborate in section IV of the literature review.

The object relations’ retelling of the myth of Oedipus pays closer attention to its interpersonal aspects, although with a caveat: as a theory, the object relations school of thought incorporates the objects and the self’s relationship with them, but still as played out ‘*within* the psyche, rather than *between* psyches” (Holmes, 2007 p. 143-144). The Kleinian oedipal triangle is thus mostly concerned with the fantasy-laden exclusive link between the parents that remains inaccessible to the child’s observation - What cannot be directly perceived is constructed and elaborated upon by the imagination, across spatial and temporal distance (Greenberg, 1991). Kleinian theory focuses on the establishment of a point of reference outside the mother-child dyad by privileging the mother’s

relationship to the third, i.e. the father, with the exclusion of the child, rather than seeing the father as a figure of identification whom “mother and child both love and share” (Benjamin, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

*The relational perspective: recognition and separation*

While the Oedipus drama still occupies a central stage in Europe, there has been a ‘waning of the Oedipus complex’ (Loewald, 1977) in the psychoanalytic discourse in North America. Jay Greenberg (1991), in his thoughtful plea to move toward ‘a new Oedipus complex’ portrays the Oedipus complex as a casualty in the politicization of drive theory. According to Greenberg, the idea that oedipal dynamics reflect “the phase-specific workings of sexual and destructive impulses has become the litmus test of theoretical orthodoxy... *a particular explanation of the Oedipus complex has become the Oedipus complex*”. (p. 15). Instead, Greenberg calls for relinquishing the metapsychological dual-instinct concept while retaining interest in internally motivated fantasy, conflicted goals and triangular relationships. Indeed, several contemporary relational theorists (e.g. Aron, 1995; Benjamin, 1988; Davies, 2003; Greenberg, 1991) have extended Klein’s broadening of the Oedipal concept beyond the heavy sexual emphasis of the Freudian theory, into the centrality of other developmental challenges, such as ambivalence in all intimate relationships. Like Klein, they perceive the

---

<sup>2</sup> Close to the contemporary Kleinians’ idea of the symbolic father in the mind of the mother, French psychoanalysis has emphasized the role of the father as the one that introduces symbolic thirdness. In his 2004 essay on “Thirdness and Psychoanalytic Concepts”, Andre Green paraphrases Winnicott’s idea to claim: there is no such thing as a mother-infant relationship, since the father is always represented in the unconscious mind of the mother. He argues: “I do not think that one has to wait until the child is capable of conceiving the third person... before acknowledging that the child can be influenced by fantasies in the mother’s mind about the father” (p.104). His ideas, following Lacan, dispute the distinction between Oedipal and pre-oedipal functioning.

development of triangular themes as less stage-specific and more as a lifespan process (Altman, Briggs, Frankel, Gensler & Pantone, 2002; Davies, 2003). However, unlike Klein, they shift the conceptual focal point from an internal drama to a “reverberating system of interpersonal events” (Greenberg, 1991, p.180).

An interpersonal reconstruction of the Oedipal narrative sees conflicts as activated between the individual and others and portrays Oedipus the child as trying to develop and adapt in the midst of maltreatment (Emde, 1994a). The original myth, according to this view, portrays Oedipus as the victim of child abuse, abandonment, neglect and seduction (Benjamin, 1988). Thus, the Oedipus complex is reconstructed out of the interplay of internally derived motives and the external circumstances in which they are expressed. Including real family dynamics in the observation field allows us to examine the contribution of subtle parental attitudes and states of minds and not solely extreme acts of maltreatment and trauma.

Davies (2003) highlights the intensity and mutuality of the Oedipal love affair between parent and child. It is, according to Davies, a love affair “...that must be entered into and lived out by both participants; and one that must be relinquished and mourned in equal measure by each participant as well” (p.9). Davies contends that in the most optimal family situations, it is the idealizing quality of the parent’s oedipal love toward the child, existing within the context of a loving and intimate marital relationship, that facilitates the child’s working through the experience of himself as both the subject and the object of romantic/erotic passion. Because the child’s experience of oedipal victory is as real as his experience of the oedipal defeat, he can move out of the oedipal situation (but never entirely ‘resolve’ it) through increasing organization: splintered relational

experiences of idealization/denigration get integrated into a “deidealized, less perfect but more truly intimate, vulnerable and emotionally interpenetrating experience of... post-oedipal relatedness” (p.6).

While Davies’ argument might be problematic in its blurring of boundaries between parental attachment and parental sexual relating (Fonagy & Target, 2004), it highlights the dialectical nature of negotiating triangulation and Oedipal feelings. Moving out of the oedipal situation entails moving into a world of multiple contradictory and incompatible self-other constructions and self-states that yet exist concurrently (Fonagy & Target, 2004).

Jessica Benjamin’s re-conceptualization of the Oedipal period from a feminist and relational point of view (1988, 1998) portrays a different kind of multiple realities, pertaining to processes of identification. Instead of the Freudian constitutionally based dualism between rational masculinity and ‘underworld’ femininity, Benjamin offers the idea of gender-multiplicity, or the multi-gendered self that preserves the “fluidity of our multifarious identifications” (Aron, 1995, p. 202).

Benjamin (1988, 2005) suggests that the Freudian Oedipal theory is intertwined with the ‘sexual politics’ of psychoanalysis. According to this view, the Freudian model is built on the assumption of the primacy of the wish for oneness. The mother is the embodiment of this regressive and seductive force, the “oceanic feeling” (Freud, 1930, P.72) and thus development necessitates paternal intervention in the mother-boy dyad in order to bring about separation by repudiation of the mother and all feminine attributes. The boy’s move toward identification with the father thus entails the loss of the intersubjective space with his mother and the turning of her, and all women, into objects.

These pillars of the theory all create the paradox that the only liberation is through paternal domination. In the so-called ‘individuation’, through the father-son rivalry and the subsequent ‘identification with the aggressor’, the child accepts his ordained position in the fixed triadic constellation. Thus, the guise of autonomy forecloses the ability to confront the independent reality of self and others as subjects. A theory of separation, contends Benjamin (1988), is actually a theory of submission and domination.

Benjamin suggests that instead of emphasizing the overcoming of pre-oedipal identifications, the Oedipal complex should be reinterpreted as another step in mental life, one that leaves room for earlier and later levels of integration through same-gendered and cross-gendered attachments and identifications. The successful negotiation of this developmental challenge, the coming to terms with difference, thus hinges on the reality of family dynamics. Benjamin writes: “The New Oedipus, the rereading of the story as a confrontation with knowledge of self and other... presumes the possibility of a post oedipal separation in which individuals are able to turn back and look at their parents and to assess critically their legacy rather than simply identifying with their authority” (1988, p.180).

## **II. Triads in attachment theory**

### *The dyadic pillars of attachment*

Attachment theory is founded on the premise that infants possess an innate instinctual tendency to seek contact with a particular attachment figure (preferentially the mother), which is motivated by a need for security. Bowlby’s postulate of a primary attachment bond between mother and child from birth (Bowlby, 1969/1982) is supported by numerous developmental studies that demonstrate the newborns’ ability to

discriminate between their mothers and other caregivers through various sensory modalities (Boston, 1991). However, ‘attachment behavior’ *per se*, namely an active pursuit of proximity to the mother, can be observed from the second half of the first year when it is organized in an expanding repertoire of behaviors such as sucking, crying, smiling, clinging and following. It remains a prominent behavior in early childhood but presents itself throughout the life cycle in times of danger and stress (Bowlby, 1988).

This behavior, Bowlby maintained, has been selected in evolution for its biological function of survival. Proximity to a strong and protective figure is conducive to survival in the face of threats from the outside world (such as predators) or the inside (in the form of disease). Consequently, the optimal distance from the mother is not an unvarying constant; rather, it reflects ‘behavioral homeostasis’ (Bowlby, 1969/1982) changing in accordance with changes in external and internal circumstances. It is notable that the need for security, which is manifested by proximity, exists in a dynamic equilibrium with the human desire for exploration.

A second central premise of attachment theory is that proximity depends additionally on the perceived accessibility of the mother and her responsiveness to her child’s needs. The mother’s physical and emotional availability, namely her ability to look after her child, soothe him and provide a ‘secure base’ (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978) from which he can venture out and explore the environment and to which he may return if he encounters danger, is a determinant factor in the quality of the infant’s attachment.

Bowlby (1969/1982) postulated that daily experiences with significant others become internalized as ‘internal working models’. These are mental representations of

the attachment figure and the self in interaction, which are shaped during the first formative years of life and gradually become established as powerful cognitive constructs (Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985). Working models are the unconscious organizing structures of experiences: they regulate the child's feelings towards her parents and towards herself, her expectations from others and her behavior towards them.

Bowlby's stress on the human innate propensity for social interaction points to the centrality of emotions early in life. For him, the interactive relationship is the source of the most intense human experience: "The formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, the threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss gives rise to sorrow..." (Bowlby, 1977, p. 130). Carlson and Sroufe (1995) noted that despite such statements, the role of emotions was not well integrated into Bowlby's original control systems model, where proximity seeking was understood to be automatically activated when the distance threshold is exceeded.

In contrast, a contemporary model of attachment views *affect* as the central feature of human psychological experience: emotions give special value to events and make particular actions likely to occur. In this expanded view of attachment, which incorporates subjective experience as a core feature, attachment behavior depends on the infant's evaluation of a range of external and internal cues, resulting in a subjective experience of security-insecurity. "Within this conceptualization the attachment system is defined in terms of *regulation of emotion*. Felt security is viewed as the set goal and affect is seen as mediating adaptive behavior" (Carlson & Sroufe, 1995 p.584, italic added). In other words, the control over the duration, frequency and intensity of affective

states is achieved within the social matrix of the mother-child relationship. The individual meaning of perceptions and actions is shaped through affective experience with a specific other. Over time, however, the regulatory system of the infant is transformed from being 'dyadic' to being 'individual' – from co-regulation to self-regulation.

Bowlby's investigative method of directly observing children was elaborated upon and operationalized by the 'strange situation' paradigm (Ainsworth et al., 1978) that spawned numerous research projects in child development and stimulated significant advances in this field. Empirical investigations into the *quality* of attachment bonds led to the elaboration of a theory concerning deficiencies and subsequent defensive patterns in *ongoing* relationships, where the mothers' physical presence is continuous and undisturbed. Modes of dyadic affect regulatory processes distinguish between the various kinds of childhood attachment bonds in the well-known fourfold typology of secure/avoidant/ resistant/ disorganized infant-caregiver attachments (Ainsworth et al, 1978; Main & Solomon, 1986).

Early experiences with a regulating and responsive caregiver (secure attachment) construct a model of the self as competent and loveable and the social environment as reliable and helpful in relieving distress. Under conditions of stress, secure attachment has been found to serve as a resiliency factor (Carlson & Sroufe, 1995). In contrast, experiences of an unresponsive parental figure instill a perception of the self as unworthy of love and support, and of others as not beneficial in the management of affective states. The interactive representation, or internal working model, that informs future interactions is of self-misattuned-with-a-disregulating-other. The dysfunction of the psychobiological regulatory systems is easily exacerbated under stressful and challenging conditions that

call for behavioral flexibility and affect regulation. Insecure attachment is therefore understood as a risk factor for developmental psychopathology (Carlson & Sroufe, 1995).

*Attachment as a representational system*

A shift within attachment research from a behavioral approach to a representational one was made possible by the work of Main (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy 1985) who used Bowlby's notion of internal working models to describe metacognition – the higher-order capacity to appraise and reorganize memories (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Main emphasized the fact that individual patterns in the organization of attachment behavior reflect differences in the mental representations of the self in relations with others. Main argued that internal working models "...direct not only feelings and behavior, but also attention, memory and cognition, insofar as they relate directly or indirectly to attachment. Individual differences in these internal working models will therefore be related not only to individual patterns in nonverbal behavior but also to patterns of language and structure of mind" (Main et al., 1985, p.67).

Main (Main et al., 1985) is describing the evolution of regulatory-styles that organize patterns of cognition, attention, memory, affect and behavior. At its highest level of functioning, self-regulation enables the individual not only to pay attention and engage with the environment but also to truly know him/herself and others, as it enables "access to, articulation of, regard for and capacity to use inner states" (Beebe & Lachman, 2002, p. 28), without resorting to defensive processes.

The 'move to the level of representations' (Main et al. 1985) opened the way to the extension of attachment research beyond infancy and the behavioral level. A crucial achievement has been the development of the Adult Attachment Interview that taps into

the unconscious representational world of adults (AAI; George, Kaplan & Main, 1985; Main 1995). The instrument is designed to elicit memories and feelings about early attachment experiences with a caregiver. The degree of security is assessed via analysis of structure, and (to a lesser extent) content of the adult's statements, but its most critical aspect is the overall coherence in the narrative (Slade, Grienenberger, Bernbach, Levy & Locker, 2005). In parallel, a plethora of instruments designed to elicit mental representations of attachment in early and middle childhood have been developed, all sharing the assumption that inferred mental representations reflect children's attachment organization (Target, Shmueli-Goetz, & Fonagy, 2002). These semi-projective measures elicit mental representations through drawings (Separation Anxiety Test, SAT; Shouldice & Stevenson-Hinde 1992), family photos (Main et al. 1985), story stems (Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum, Emde & The MacArthur Narrative Group, 1990; Hodges & Steele, 2000), and doll play (Solomon, George & Dejong, 1995).

The evolution of age-appropriate measures for assessing attachment patterns in later childhood heralded the growing interest in formulating not only the origin but also the *developmental trajectory* of representational processes and their regulatory functions, affective quality, and biological substrates. Current attachment models formulate processes and mechanisms of *continuity* in thought and behavior as a function of development: "...links between isolated, repeated experiences are formed and invariances are extracted. From dyadic care-giver-infant organization, individual cognitive and affective regulatory patterns are thought to emerge, leaving a network of behavioral, emotional, and representational associations" (Carlson, Sroufe & Egeland, 2004, p.67). Thus, interactive relationship experiences in infancy organize later development through

psychological structures that are resistant to change (H. Steele & Steele, 2005).

Moreover, the relative continuity in the environmental circumstances, i.e., parental care, contributes to the consolidation of stable representations.

Yet, changes in developmental processes may give rise to significant reorganization in the ways children represent relationships (Bretherton, 1985; Davies, Sturge-Apple, Winter, Cummings & Farrell, 2006). Sroufe and his colleagues (Carlson et al. 2004) argued that convergent with memory theory and research, inner structures of implicit and explicit representations are believed to be modified and elaborated over time: “Dynamic changes in the child’s emerging capabilities, parental scaffolding, and active participation and emotional involvement in experiences with peers and adults outside the family all help to guide and structure both social and representational development” (p. 67). Attachment theory thus offers a complex model of stability and change in the child’s representational world: its core tenet claims that early attachment experiences have a unique status in consolidating attachment representations. Yet, it implies a developmental arc of increasingly sophisticated representational capacities, and postulates the influence of not only the history of relationship but also the *concurrent quality* of relationships and developmental shifts on representational processes.

Attachment outcome research has yielded a multitude of findings regarding robust concurrent and longitudinal associations between security of infant-mother attachment as assessed in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) and the young child’s socio-emotional development (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; e.g. Sroufe, Carlson, Levy & Egeland, 1999). At the same time, various longitudinal studies using assessments of attachment representations, direct observations of parent-child interaction and age-salient outcome

measures (e.g. Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins, 2005; H. Steele & Steele, 2005) have provided support to the idea that adaptation "...arises from the progressive construction of mutually informing expectations and experiences" (Carlson et al., 2004. P. 66).

Main's groundbreaking work (Main et al., 1985; Main, 1991) in particular underlined the centrality of *ongoing* attachment-bonds in promoting personality development. Main demonstrated how attachment security affords the child more 'epistemic space' (1991 p. 146) to review her actions, situations and thinking processes. Thus, concurrently securely attached 6 year-olds were more likely to spontaneously acknowledge experiencing more than one feeling at a time and show an awareness of how feelings might change depending on the situation, compared to insecure children.

#### *The role of fathers*

The favorable impact of felt security derives from relationships other than the one with mother, as "...a young child's experience of an encouraging supportive and cooperative mother and a little later *father* gives him a sense of worth, a belief in the helpfulness of others and a favorable model on which to build future relationships" (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p. 378, italic added). Increasingly recognizing fathers as the "forgotten contributors to child development" (Lamb, 1975), attachment studies have been focusing on factors associated with fathers as attachment figures and their influences on children's psychosocial development.

Studies using the SSP with infants and their fathers found only weak links between the fathers' observable sensitivity in interactions with their infants during the first year and the nature of their children's attachment (K. Grossmann et al. 2002; van IJzendoorn & de Wolff 1997), leading researchers to suggest that by emphasizing infants'

responses to distress and need of comfort, the SSP does not capture the specific qualities of the child-father ecology (K. Grossmann et al. 2002, Volling & Belsky, 1992). Studies examining concurrent and longitudinal associations between infant-father security of attachment as assessed in the SSP and later social competencies documented only weak or non significant effects (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; H. Steele, Steele, Croft & Fonagy, 1999). Moreover, the quality of relationship in SSP was not a strong predictor of attachment organization with father at later years (K. Grossmann et al., 2002).

Grossmann and her colleagues (K. Grossmann et al. 2002) proposed that in view of these findings the critical behavioral dimensions of father-child relationship are not sensitive caring but accessibility, positive engagement, warmth, closeness and supportive involvement. Their own findings lend support to the idea that mothers and fathers support their child's attachment development in unique ways: in a longitudinal study, children who at ages 10 and 16 were able to express their distress and seek help and comfort from their parents had been securely attached to their mothers in infancy and as toddlers had experienced fathers who were sensitive and gently challenging during play. The researchers concluded that "a major aspect of the role of the father as an attachment figure might be to provide security through sensitive and challenging support as a companion when the child's exploratory system is aroused, thereby complementing the secure-base role of the mother as an attachment figure" (K. Grossmann et al. 2002, p. 311).

This notion of the father as a socializing agent to the outside world converges with the findings of H. Steele and Steele (2005) that paternal attachment organization (as indexed by the prenatal AAI) was associated with 11 year-olds' capacities for negotiation

of social interactions with siblings and peers and with the maintenance of emotionally and socially appropriate behaviors. These findings might indicate that patterns of attachment are not only parent-gender-specific but also “relationship-specific” (H. Steele & Steele, 2005). In other words, mother-child and father-child attachments can be unrelated concurrently, as often has been reported (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

In 1985 Bretherton posed the following question: “Is an integrated internal model of the self built from participation in a number of non-concordant relationships? If so, how and when?” (p.30). Almost 25 years later it remains unclear whether children construct entirely separate models for each relationship or how these models become integrated if they are mutually influential (Schermerhorn, Cummings & Davies, 2008). Applying a more triadic viewpoint to the internal working model theory, the question that then arises is whether, at the representational level, the mother and father ‘come together’ in the child’s mind.

#### *The triangle as a secure base*

Although Attachment theory and research have yet to conceptualize a *triadic internal working model*, the growing interest in mutual influences among children’s representations of family relationships has broadened its formulations of attachment security. For example, Davies and Cummings’ (1994; Schermerhorn et al. 2008) triangular model of ‘emotional security’ delineates three interconnected axes that comprise the child’s internal sense of ‘secure base’: the representation of the child’s attachment to each of his parents and the representation of the marital attachment. According to Davies and Cummings, “Children who are emotionally secure about their parents’ relationship have confidence in the stability and predictability of marital

interactions, an expectation that marital conflicts will eventually ameliorate and confidence in the continuing psychological and physical availability of parents” (1994, p.389).

In line with this family-wide notion of internal working models, studies have shown that insecure attachment and family dysfunction are interrelated (e.g. Belsky, Rovine & Fish, 1989). Thus, Bretherton, Ridgeway and Cassidy (1990) found that insecure attachment was associated with a lack of family cohesion and with low levels of family adaptability.

More specifically, research indicates that marital conflict is consistently associated with disturbances in the attachment relationship between parent and child (e.g. Isabella & Belsky, 1985; Kline, Johnston & Tschann, 1991). Positive marital engagement has been associated with more secure child-father attachment (Frosch, Mangelsdorf & McHale, 2000). Winter, Davies, Hightower and Meyers (2006) found that children’s representations of family relationships were the most secure in families with high quality communication and low levels of discord. Theoretical explanations posit that dysregulation in the marital relationship impacts other dyadic relationships directly (by interfering with sensitive parenting) and indirectly through compromising the child’s overall sense of security in relations to the parents.

Moreover, the quality of marital interactions (as well as parental attachment organization as assessed by AAI) was found to predict children’s adaptation and social functioning during the transition into school (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan & Pearson, 1992; P.A. Cowan, Bradburn & Cowan, 2005), indicating the powerful impact of the marital relationship on children’s affect regulation and level of arousal (Davies &

Cummings, 1994). The finding that a marriage-focused intervention improved parenting but that parenting-focused intervention did not improve marital interaction led Philip Cowan and Carolyn Pape Cowan, two prominent researchers in the field of family longitudinal research, to suggest that the relationship between the parents might exert more influence on parent-child relationships than vice versa (P.A. Cowan & Cowan, 2003). Further studies documented the mediating role of the parents' representations of romantic attachment (rather than their observed interaction) on the child's developing attachment (Laurent, Kin & Capaldi, 2008).

While all these findings suggest links between multiple family relationships, they represent a mixture of representational and behavioral levels of analysis (i.e. in measuring marital interaction or its representation; child's attachment behavior or internal working models). In contrast, Schermerhorn et al. (2008) attempted to unify the discourse by studying processes of influence between the child's *representations* of different family relationships. The researchers used the MacArthur Story Stem Battery (MSSB; Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum, Emde & The MacArthur Narrative Group, 1990) with a large community sample of kindergarten-age children as part of a larger longitudinal project. The findings indicated that children's representations of family relationships were interrelated to some extent: Emotional security about marital relationship predicted representations of attachment security with both mother and father. The findings support the notion of a triangular model of emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1994) and its implied premise that "... the family environment established by couples who can regulate emotions and solve problems effectively facilitates both mother-child and father-child relationships that, in turn, foster the child's ability to

explore new ideas and relationships” (Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan & Cowan, 2002, p.425). From this notion of a co-parental regulatory mechanism follows the idea that “...the quality of the relationship between the parents plays a central role in the generational transmission of working models of attachment” (ibid, p.424).

### **III. Triads in family systems theory**

#### *The early days: the triangle as the locus of pathology*

Family systems theory has had the primary triangle in mind since its inception. Ironically, it has stressed the pathogenic qualities of the triangle, and triangulation as a problematic process in which the child is covertly drawn into his parents’ conflictual relationship in order to regulate its tension (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999 p.xxvii). Terms such as “coalitions” (Caplow, 1968) “perverse triangles” (Haley, 1971) and “rigid triangle” (Minuchin, Baker, Roseman, Milman & Todd, 1975) all capture the conflictual quality of the triangular constellation and highlight the notion that “The emotional forces within the triangle are in constant motion, from minute to minute and hour to hour, in a series of chain reaction moves as automatic as emotional reflexes” (Bowen, 1972, p.115).

This focus on the triangle reflects the fact that historically, family-systems as a theoretical, research, and clinical discipline coalesced from pioneering studies in the 1950s of family dynamics, aiming to find the etiology and subsequently the cure for schizophrenia within families. Groundbreaking observational studies of families attempted to delineate relational patterns as causal factors in schizophrenia, such as parental collusion in pulling in the most vulnerable member, the offspring, devolving into

“undifferentiated ego mass” (Bowen, 1959), in a ‘double-bind’ relationship by producing contradictory messages on different logical levels of communication within the family (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956), or deviant communication that manifests in “alignments and splits” (Wynne, Ryckoff, Day & Hirsch, 1958).

Adhering to the idea that the whole is different from any single part and from the sum of its parts, early family system theorists focused on the family as the unit of analysis and the locus of pathology. The symptomatic member, the ‘identified patient’, is the one who is designated by the family to serve as a ‘homeostatic mechanism’ (Jackson, 1957) by keeping all three axes of a dysfunctional triangle together. Thus, the early theories conceptualized families’ organizational and functional stability (Steinglass, 1987) as regulatory patterns of “two against one” (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999, p.xxix).

The appeal of the ‘grand theories’ of pathogenic familial triangulated patterns (McFarlane, 1983) has obscured for at least a decade their lack of firm empirical support. However, since the 70’s, it has been argued that focusing on the system ignores the fact that specific strengths and vulnerabilities of individual family members often have a marked impact on the functioning of individuals, dyads and the system as a whole (Rosenblatt, 1994). It has become apparent both conceptually and empirically that a single level of analysis cannot possibly explain the varied trajectories of different families with similar features (P.A. Cowan & Cowan, 2006).

This critique has led to a conceptual development in family systems thinking: the incorporation of concepts from risk models. Thus, family systems theory and research have attempted in recent decades to identify risk or protective factors in family

functioning in order to predict probabilities of children's developmental outcomes. Some research has been done with clinical populations, following the tradition of the founding fathers, looking at interactional risk factors in the onset of schizophrenia (Tienari et al. 2004; Wahlberg & Wynne, 2001). Yet, the focus has shifted to risk factors in non-clinical populations. Most notably, the record-breaking rates of divorce in the 70's and 80's were a stimulus for a research boom on the impact of marital discord and fathers' absence on children (e.g. Heterington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These studies looked at the constituent parts of the family unit, such as the parent-child dyadic relationship or the couple's marital relationship. The full family unit was constructed in these studies only by studying the effects of dyadic interactions on other dyadic interactions. Sophisticated models have been developed for conceptualizing and quantifying influential patterns within the family, through the analysis of the interplay between two-person exchanges (Belsky, Gilstrap & Rovine, 1984; Parke, Power & Gottman, 1979).

Thus, the early theoretical and empirical emphasis on the triadic gestalt with the inception of family systems theory has been supplanted in the past three decades by a multidimensional look at various combinations of relationships: couple relationships, parent-child relationships, co-parenting, siblings relationships, intergenerational family patterns and the balance of social support and life stress in family members' relationships with people and institutions in the larger society. In other words, the primary triangle has been conceptually embedded in a communal, a cultural, and even a historical context (Belsky, 2005) while, paradoxically being deconstructed.

This trend has generated an ongoing controversy concerning the appropriate level of analysis of the family (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988). While some researchers claim that extrapolating the triad from its dyadic components is insufficient (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999; McHale 2007a), others contend that understanding adaptation in one domain (e.g. the couple relationship or the child's development) requires an ecological or contextual analysis of multiple aspects of family life (P.A. Cowan & Cowan, 2006). Parke (1988) addressed the 'whole-relationships' controversy by stressing the need to study each level in its own right and subsequently examine the connections. He argued that individuals, dyads and families may follow disparate developmental pathways. Whereas it is important to acknowledge the interplay between them, each constitutes a systems entity in its own right (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999).

### *Triadic intersubjectivity*

It is the field of infant mental health that has provided the leadership in promoting scholarship on entire triads since the early 90's (McHale, 2007a), despite the clear dominance of the dyadically-based attachment perspective. The mother-child bond might be compelling in its "sheer radiance, reach and ubiquity" (McHale, 2007a, p.372) yet, as poignantly asserted by Patricia Minuchin (1985) "studies of the parent-child dyad... do not represent the child's significant reality..." (p.296). Put differently, triadic relationships afford the developing child unique and distinctive social experiences that are as fundamental as dyadic experiences.

Thus, the family group perspective has started to permeate the research efforts of child-developmentalists. In 1995, Daniel Stern wrote "...the process of becoming a triad

must begin very early, roughly in parallel with becoming a dyad, under normal nuclear family conditions” (p.145-146). According to Stern, patterns of interaction involving mother, father and baby become fairly ritualized events very early on and therefore “... there is no reason to believe that the infant’s capacities to identify the invariants that describe dyadic patterns would not operate on triadic patterns of interactions as well” (p.146). Stern thus implies that representations of triadic experiences are, too, at the core of a multilayered developing self and constitute the schemas of ‘being-with-other’.

A year earlier Stern was part of a multidisciplinary effort, “The dynamics of interfaces” (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al. 1994) which explored the “interfaces” between the behavioral process of forming a triad (*triadification*) and the intrapsychic process of experiencing a triad (*triangulation*). The team used the Lausanne Trilogue Play (LTP) research paradigm (Corboz-Warnery, Fivaz-Depeursinge, Gretsche Bettens & Favez, 1993), a semi-standardized observational play-session which systematically explores the four possible configurations between the members of the family triad: (a) mother-baby engaged in play and father observes (“2+1”) (b) the reverse, (c) the three together and finally (d) the baby as third party. The researchers were particularly interested in three interactive family variables: ‘participation’ - the extent to which all partners are included in the interaction; ‘cooperation’ - the extent to which partners are acting together in a coordinated way and ‘affect sharing’ - the extent to which affects are validated and there is an emotional benevolence between partners (Favez, Frascarolo & Lavanchy, 2006).

Fivaz-Depeursinge, Favez, Lavanchy, de Noni & Frascarolo (2005) presented empirical evidence, using the LTP observations, revealing the infant’s early capacity for triangulation: infants as young as 12 weeks already engaged reciprocally with both

parents simultaneously, making “triangular bids” (Fivaz-Depeursinge 2008, p. 196) such as checking in with mother while exchanging smiles with father and then reorienting to father. Individual infants differed markedly in their propensity to make those bids, and part of this variability was accounted for by the concurrent degree of coordination that the families reached during play. The frequency of triangular bids was particularly high in seriously disturbed interactions of role reversal and hyper-vigilance. In contrast, the frequency of triangular bids was appropriately high when the parents manifested coordination and affective validation during the Trilogue play (Fivaz-Depeursinge 2008).

The triadic capacity demonstrated by such young infants provides, according to Fivaz-Depeursinge (2008) support for three-way ‘primary intersubjectivity’ [i.e the ability to share emotions with others (Trevarthen, 1979)]. With secondary intersubjectivity, several months later, the infant comes to realize that both he and others have “things-in-mind” and that the contents of minds can be brought into alignment, through social referencing, affect attunement, and joint attention (Stern, 1995). This competence, so crucial to the development of mental states awareness (Baron Cohen, 1991) is indicated at around 9 months by coordinated attention between a child and the interlocutor to an inanimate object, attention that is enhanced by earlier parental attunement (Legerstee, Markova & Fisher, 2007).

However, the findings that children are capable of triadic capacities at 12 weeks behoove us to consider the existence of coordinated attention between three people. “Why”, asks Fivaz, “would the discovery that her internal, private mental world is invisible to others but that she can share it (or not) with them be restricted to

communication about objects?” (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999, p.xxx). By looking at social referencing, affect sharing or affect signaling in the context of the primary triangle we “...could begin to grasp how the infant works at understanding the “family politics” (Dunn, 1988) well before she can reflect on it” (ibid). In other words, Fivaz and her colleagues suggest that triangular interactions may provide an essential antecedent to the young infant’s ability to ascribe mental states to others, by “introducing from early on a person as the third pole of attention” (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Lavanchy-Scaiola & Favez, 2010 p.136). This idea is a paradigmatic shift as it suggests that the nascent ability to grasp the mental life of others is embedded in far more complex socio-affective processes than the mother-child dyad (Reis, 2010).

Emde (1994a) suggested that from early on interactions of triadification are not necessarily ‘3-together’ experiences (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al. 2005) for the infant. Rather, an experience of exclusion during the first year could occur around competition for attention space when the three members of the family are together. In the toddlerhood the experience of ‘two against one’ (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999) might revolve around control, and later, the child may come to experience exclusion in the midst of triangulation that is related to sexual intimacy. Emde (1994b) does not directly address the question regarding the age in which the child has the cognitive ability to represent internally the relationship between two significant others, but implies that the oedipal stage is hardly the beginning of a triangular drama, but rather a manifestation of many developmental transformations.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Sharpless (1990) states that simple forms of triangulation that have representational status may not be present much before the fifteenth month. However, many ‘infant watchers’ emphasize, following Stern, the

*Toward the understanding of parents and children's triadic representations*

The Lausanne group and other labs in the United States and in Europe have been longitudinally studying the development of families' interactions in toddlerhood and beyond. While there have been modifications to the observational situation, in order to accommodate the changing characteristics of the developing child, the paradigm still retains its commitment to triadic, whole-family perspective on child development. With the increasingly complicated spatial interactions taking place, some of the codes involve assessments of individuals and dyads. However, these are derived from observations in the context of the triad, acknowledging that behaviors may not be organized in the same way across dyadic and family contexts (Johnson, 2001; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan & Lauretti, 2000).

Favez and his colleagues (Favez, Frascarolo & Lavanchy, 2006; Favez, Abbet & Frascarolo, 2006) have been conducting a follow up of the original Lausanne sample of 51 non-referred families when the children reached age five. They have been assessing the triadic interaction (or coordinated practice) through observing the family (including younger siblings) in a pretend family picnic. Favez's (Favez et al., 2006) preliminary results reveal the stability and coherence of earlier family interactions over time, even through periods of significant developmental change: families who effectively regulated affect, manifested flexibility in turn taking and were most inclusive when playing with a very young offspring, tended to do the same when the child was 5.

---

infant's early capacities to identify the invariants of triadic patterns. For instance, von Klitzing, Simoni & Burgin (1999) argue that representations of experiences in threesomes have an influence on the child much earlier, as demonstrated in their studies with 4 month-olds.

This ‘heterotypic continuity’ indicates that the principles of the interaction are the same at different formats of interaction and at different stages of development. The family-group-dynamic is thus a model which serves as a template for the family’s relational life. The fact that stable family structures begin to consolidate with the inception of the nuclear family, even pre-natally [as assessed using a doll-baby (Corboz-Warnery & Fivaz-Depeursinge 2001)] and remain stable for years to come, may be “one of the more remarkable discoveries in the burgeoning infant-family field” (McHale, 2007a, p. 377).

The stability of family structures from infancy onwards is of special importance given the maladaptive qualities manifested by some families. Fivaz-Depeursinge (2008) contrasted the ‘two for one’ or ‘cooperative’ alliance, where relationships are reciprocal and mostly positive and cohesive, with ‘two against one’ coalitions that are nonreciprocal and mostly negative because of covert conflict between the parents and their joint attempt to control the child. The former, argues Fivaz-Depeursinge, facilitates the child’s three-way communication with her parents, while the latter derail the development of the child’s triangular communication, which is co-opted to serve family homeostasis, to the detriment of family intersubjectivity. In these coalitions the child’s triangular bids are invalidated by the parents: they are either ignored or distorted (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Frascarolo, Lopes, Dimitrova & Favez, 2007).

Following Minuchin’s (1974) description of maladaptive interactive patterns in referred families, Fivaz-Depeursinge (2008) delineates three types of problematic coalitions that emerge in structured triadic play sessions:

*Detouring coalition:* The parents detour the tension between them onto the child, by turning together against her and ascribing her the role of the ‘other’, as a scapegoat, victim or a role-reversed parent vis-à-vis the parental sub-system. During play, the parents seem to work together as a team, but there are subtle signs of tension and forced agreement and the connection between them is established through the child (Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2008). Similarly, observing non-referred families, McHale (2007a) labeled families as ‘child-at-center’ when the child was the fulcrum of all attention and activity and his interests and initiatives drove the family interaction. The parents engaged with the child and not with each other and neither antagonism nor warmth and cooperation between the parents were much evident.

*Triangulation:* the parents struggle against each other by trying to ally with the child, who is torn between them. Subsequently, the child either takes on the role of a go-between or withdraws. In the context of the play session, instead of coordinating to play the same game, the parents simultaneously play different games with the child. The child oscillates between protesting at both parents by means of triangular bids and protecting himself from their intrusive and confusing stimulations (Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2008). This description corresponds to McHale and Rasmussen’s (1998) description of competitive coparenting: both parents were quite engaged with the child, but interactions were steered by adult preferences and initiatives, antagonism between parents was pronounced and warmth and cooperation were typically absent.

*Binding:* the child is tied to one parent against the other (Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2008). Similarly, in an ‘excluding’ form of coparenting (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), marked discrepancies were noted in the two parents’ levels of engagement with the child, so

much so that one a parent could be described as disengaged. In such families, neither coparental antagonism nor warmth and cooperation were prominent family features.

Clearly, not all instances of ‘false-steps’ in the triadic interactions, such as disrupted behavioral sequences, gaze interruptions, disordered body postures and other forms of poorly coordinated and mismatched communication (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999) amount to failure of family intersubjectivity. The theme of rupture driving development runs through developmental theory (McHale, 2007a) and affords the family opportunities for growth through repair (Tronick & Weinberg, 1997). However, missteps are more easily corrected in cooperative families, whereas in more disordered families they tend to escalate (Favez et al., 2006). The repair of missteps, or lack thereof, creates very different triadic affective experiences for the children, which are then consolidated into stable representations.

Several studies have looked at the *precursors* of the triadic interactive patterns: prenatal simulation of the LTP paradigm with a doll baby was found to predict alliances and coalitions in the postnatal LTP at 3 months (Corboz-Warnery & Fivaz-Depeursinge 2001); High negativity in pregnant couples’ discussion of conflicts predicted disordered family interactions 3 months after the birth of the infant (Shapiro, 2004).

Some of the most innovative work in the area pushes the boundaries beyond the study of interactive indicators, to explore how intrapsychic forces, or representations, contribute to the process of becoming a triad. McHale (McHale et al. 2004) found that significant pessimism in expectant parents’ descriptions of future family interactions predict a less harmonious triadic process at age 4 months. von Klitzing, Simoni and Burgin (1999) assessed the parents’ prenatal readiness for engaging in triadic

relationships, that is for “integrating the child as a third person into their relational world” (p.75) by analyzing their responses to a joint interview conducted in the third trimester of the pregnancy. The researchers looked at the triangular level of fantasies about the unborn child, as well as the quality of the dialogue between the parents about the unborn child and the narrative coherence of the descriptions of each parent’s own triadic childhood experiences. They reported that the parents’ prenatal ‘triadic capacities’, or their propensity to talk about the future family as a threesome rather than as self and infant, foreshadow the quality of triadic coordination during family interactions at four months postpartum. More specifically, the infant’s capacity for triangular bids was best predicted by the fathers’ belief in their own relational importance to the infant from the very beginning: the more fathers showed, in the prenatal interview, rich and flexible fantasies about their future infant without excluding the mother as an important relational person, the more the 4-month-old infant was able to contribute to a well-balanced relational contact with both parents during the Triadic Play assessment (von Klitzing, Simoni, Amsler & Burgin, 1999).

Other studies begin to illuminate individual differences in the *developmental sequela* of triadic interactions: Preliminary longitudinal studies have provided support to the hypothesized link between the quality of triadic interactions in infancy and mental functioning in later childhood: Von Wyl and her colleagues (2008) reported that early triadic family processes observed in a standardized laboratory play scenario when the child was 4 months old explained variance in children's emotional functioning at age three, over and above the effects of family stress factors. Favez’s research has found that interactive family processes in infancy are predictive of several aspects of the child's

performances in theory of mind tasks at age 5 (personal communication, March, 1st 2009). von Klitzing (von Klitzing & Burgin, 2005) found that parents who demonstrated higher capacities for triadic relationships during pregnancy had children who produced more coherent narratives with more affectionate themes on the MSSB at preschool age.

Taken together, the longitudinal studies highlight potential links between parental states of mind in relation to the triad and later triadic interactions. These interactions, in turn, might play a role in shaping various aspects of emotional functioning in later childhood, including the child's theory of mind competence.

#### **IV. Mentalization**

##### *Conceptual Origins*

Mentalization is the psychological capacity to make sense of one's own and others' behaviors by attributing mental states – intentions, feelings, thoughts, desires and beliefs, to action (Fonagy et al., 2002). It is a developmental achievement, involving both self-reflective and interpersonal components that permit children to “read” other people's minds (Baron-Cohen 1995); understand emotions and think about relationships (Dunn, 1999) and thus perceive acts as meaningful and predictable. Mentalization has therefore the potential to enhance self-knowledge and organization as well as social relationships (Slade, 2005; Dunn & Cutting, 1999; Murray, Woolgar, Briers & Hipwell, 1999).

Reflective Functioning (RF) is the overt and measurable manifestation of an individual's mentalizing capacity.

The concept of “Theory of Mind” (ToM) in cognitive developmental psychology, which focuses on the acquisition of the cognitive capacity to understand mental states (Leslie, 1994) is closely related to the notion of mentalization. ToM theorists consider

children's mental-state awareness to be an innately specified ability (Hughes, Deater-Deckard & Cutting, 1999). In another dominant perspective, children are held to construct a genuinely theory-like understanding of mind through observing other people's actions (e.g. Gopnik, 1996). This is a developmental theory-theory model, according to which the capacity to interpret the mind of others depend on 'cold cognition' – a formulation of a theory of how minds work (Jurist, 2008). Another perspective claims that children develop an understanding of others through the process of 'simulation', using their experience of their own thoughts and feelings to imagine other people's mental states (e.g., Harris, 1991).

All accounts of ToM portray the child as an isolated processor of information, who constructs a theory of mind using biological mechanisms (Fonagy, Redfern & Charman, 1997). Thus, the theory implies that no interactions are essential in turning the brain into a mind that can grasp the representational nature of mental life (Jurist, 2008).

Others have stressed the role of social experiences in the child's growing ability to represent others' perspectives and reason about relationships. Some research traditions emphasized the significance of different family cultures and parent practices in relation to children's mentalizing abilities (Dunn, 1999; Hughes et al. 1999).

Fonagy's (Fonagy et al. 1995; Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt & Target, 1994; Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998) influential theory positioned theory of mind within the attachment framework and thus is particularly sensitive to individual differences in mentalization capacities of children and adults. They maintain that the acquisition of the ability to hold mental states of others and self in mind is part of an intersubjective process between the infant and the caregiver. Early experiences with others, according to this

view, are the underpinning of the organization of self-other-affect representations and the emergence of intentional states (Dennett, 1978) that are later unconsciously invoked in interpreting human action.

What are the interactional mechanisms that facilitate the development of a mentalizing stance in the child? The caregiver facilitates the creation of mentalizing models through complex linguistic and quasi-linguistic processes, primarily by treating the child as a mental agent, through ascribing belief and desire to the young child. Sensitive caregiving thus bridges between physical reality (the baby's diaper is wet) and internal experience ("you want your diaper changed, don't you?") and enables the child to discover himself as a feeling and thinking being, whose internal world is recognized and validated (Fonagy et al. 2002).

Fonagy's (Fonagy et al. 1998; Fonagy et al. 2002) model is intimately connected to Winnicott's (1962a) notion of the 'true self' as emerging in the context of a caregiver's psychological understanding. Moreover, it elaborates on Bion's concept of the containing mother, whose ability and willingness to 'metabolize' and regulate the child's concrete internal experiences (beta elements) is crucial for the intactness of the child's own mental processes (Bion, 1962a). The maternal thinking process (alpha function) thus renders the unbearable feelings into tolerable experiences that are internalized by the child, along with the processing capacity itself. Bion (1962b) described a gradual ability to tolerate frustration and perceive absence not as a 'bad presence' that needs to be evacuated, but as a gap in gratification that allows symbolic thinking to take place. However, Fonagy et al. (1995) postulate a shift from the more traditional emphasis on internalization of the containing object to "the internalization of the thinking self from within the containing

object” (p.256). Thus, the infant has the opportunity to “find himself in the other as a mentalizing individual” (p.257).

The mentalization model thus intimately ties cognitive development to emotions (Jurist, 2008). Using the model of attachment as their point of departure, Fonagy et al. (1994; 1995) reframed Main’s concept of thinking about one’s own thinking (metacognitive monitoring) to assess the speaker’s awareness of emotional and motivational processes underlying behavior in self and other (H. Steele & Steele, 2008). Common mechanisms underpin attachment organization and the emergence of mentalization: non-defensive and organized access to memories, feelings, and intentions is evidenced in secure attachment (Main, 1991) and a flexible awareness of different states of mind in self and other is the core of mentalization (Fonagy et al 1995).

Fonagy et al. (1994) link the evolution of mentalization to the quality of interpersonal interactions: “A secure attachment relationship provides a congenial context, a secure base (Bowlby 1969/1982) for the child to explore the mind of the care-giver and that only through getting to know the mind of the other can the child develop full appreciation of the nature of mental states” (Fonagy et al., 1995, p.256).

Thus, the shape and coherence lent to self-organization by reflective functioning varies according to the interpersonal interactions of the attachment bond: Secure attachment in the child provides the psychosocial basis for acquiring an understanding of minds; a secure child feels safe to make attributions of mental states to explain the caregiver’ behavior. The avoidant child shuns to some degree the mental state of the other and the resistant child focuses on her/his own state of distress, to the exclusion of close intersubjective exchanges. Children who manifest disorganized attachment (Main &

Solomon, 1986) may be acutely sensitized to intentional states in the caregiver, but it does not organize their sense of self (Fonagy et al., 2002).

Deficits in the maternal reflective functions are the failure in mirroring (Winnicott, 1971): instead of finding himself as a thinking and feeling person in the mother's mind, the child is forced to take the mind of the other, "with its distorted, absent or malign picture of the child, as part of the child's own sense of identity" (Fonagy, 1999 p.7).

An expanding body of research in recent years has been studying the complex causal links between maternal mental processes, their behavioral corollaries, and the child's attachment status and developing theory of mind. The mother's understanding of mental states and readiness to "contemplate them in a coherent manner" (Fonagy et al. 1995, p.249) (mentalization) have been found to be powerful predictors of the child's concurrent or later attachment organization (e.g. Fonagy, Steele & Steele, 1991). Moreover, the maternal reflective capacities, as indexed from the AAI, predicted the child's theory of mind competence (Fonagy et al. 1995; Fonagy 1997). Taken together, these findings suggest that the parent's capacity to observe the child's mind facilitates the child's general understanding of minds, mediated by secure attachment: secure attachment is fostered through accurate and appropriate parental mentalization of the child, which in turn positively stimulates the development of mentalization capacity in the child (Fonagy 1999; Sharp & Fonagy, 2007). Mediating behavioral factors, such as the mother's general sensitivity, and perhaps more crucially, her ability to regulate the child's negative affective experiences (Grienenberger, Kelly & Slade, 2005) have been studied as well, demonstrating the need for a complex model to account for intergenerational transmission of reflective competence. Moreover, maternal RF was

particularly predictive of secure attachments in cases where mothers reported significant deprivation in childhood (Fonagy et al. 1994). Thus, RF serves as a protective factor that facilitates attachment security between infant and mother where the mother has suffered social deprivation in childhood (Fonagy et al., 1998).

Slade's work on parental reflective functioning (e.g. Slade, Aber, Bresgi, Berger & Kaplan, 2004; Slade 2005) has furthered advanced the theoretical and empirical efforts to explain the 'transmission gap' (van IJzendoorn, 1995) in attachment and mentalization intergenerational processes. Slade maintained that the mother's specified capacity to reflect on the mental states of her baby (i.e. *parental* RF) is more pertinent to the child's subjective felt security (as indicated in the Strange Situation) than her ability to reflect on her experiences with her parents (RF as 'captured' in the AAI). According to Slade (Slade et al. 2005), the parent's capacity to describe and contain complex mental states within the context of an ongoing, "live", affectively-charged and developing relationship is particularly crucial for a range of later developments in the child. Slade (Slade et al. 2005) has used the Parent Development Interview (PDI; Aber, Slade, Berger, Bresgi & Kaplan 1985; Slade, Brenbach, Grienberger, Levy & Locker, 2004) to elicit responses specifically about the parent-child relationship. These were scored for RF, using The Addendum to the Reflective Functioning Scoring Manual (Slade, Brenbach et al., 2004). The findings established a link between the mother's parental reflective capacities and her attachment organization. Parental reflective capacities were also linked to the infant's attachment status. These findings suggest that maternal RF may be the mediating factor between parent's attachment and child's attachment. More significant for the current study, Slade's work highlights the impact of the parental ability to reflect on mental states

in the ‘here and now’ of the affect-laden relationship on the child’s development. It opens the way to a more direct exploration of potential causal links between parental RF and the child’s own reflective capacities.

*The developmental arch of RF*

The foundations for meta-representations of self, other and affect are laid out in infancy, through parental ‘marking’ of infants’ affective displays and the consolidation of the attachment organization. However, additional maturational processes are required before the child may obtain the capacity to symbolize his and other’s mental states. Fonagy and Target (1996) delineate the child’s developmental transition from a dual mode of representing psychic reality into a singular reflective mode appreciative of subjectivity. The later stance involves the child’s understanding that “what in his mind are merely representations of thoughts and feelings and that reality, his own and others, can be interpreted in a myriad of ways” (Slade, 2005).

In a serious frame of mind, the three year old equates his or her thoughts or beliefs with the real, physical world outside of him. This lack of capacity to appreciate the merely representational nature of ideas and feelings was termed by Fonagy and Target (1996) ‘psychic equivalence’ mode of experiencing internal states. It is a highly concrete mode of ideation, yet it differs from psychotic thinking in a substantial way: it fits ‘mind to world’ – the thoughts and beliefs seem to mirror the real world, and not the other way around. Consequently, “...it is external reality, not the contents of the child’s mind, that is immensely and sometimes terrifyingly compelling; the child’s thoughts and beliefs seem very vulnerable and evanescent by contrast” (Foangy et al. 2002, p.261). It is notable that young children’s sense of the internal state of their own and others’ feelings

and desires, as opposed to thoughts, are more advanced, pointing to the developmental lead that emotions have.

In contrast to the tight isomorphic affinity between internal and external worlds in the 'psychic equivalence' mode of thinking, in the world of play young children free representations from their referents. In fact, argue Fonagy and Target (1996), in this 'pretend' mode of thinking it seems necessary for children younger than 3 or 4 to prevent correspondence between the imaginative world and the external reality. In play children manifest representational capacities, namely more developmentally advanced understanding of minds, because of the stripping of connection to external reality. The precariousness of 'pretend' stems from the potential encroachment of reality on thought, of the objective on the subjective.

In typical development in the fourth and fifth year of life, these two modes of thinking become increasingly integrated and a reflective or mentalizing mode of psychic reality is established. Instead of the prior equation of subjective and objective worlds, or their dissociation, children can now realize that inner and outer reality are linked, yet they differ in important ways. This cognitive integration and acquisition of the capacity to mentalize, to grasp the representational nature of thoughts and desires, is a monumental shift in self organization: it allows for a sense of continuity in self experience, simultaneously enhances individuation and connectedness, provides an attenuating function for psychic experience and helps life to be experienced as more meaningful (Fonagy et al. 2002).

Fonagy (Fonagy & Target, 1996; Fonagy et al. 2002) stresses that this achievement is not merely a maturational process, but rather can only be obtained through interaction

with the minds of others. The good enough parent enters the child's pretend world and symbolizes his internal state for him, while at the same time providing the frame, a reality oriented perspective. A recognizable yet distinct reflection of the child's internal state offers an external perspective, which bridges subjective and objective. The parent's stance in the transitional space (Winnicott, 1971) thus enables the child to "play with reality" (Fonagy & Target, 1996) and advance toward symbolism. If, on the other hand, the parent doesn't perform the dual task of holding the frame of external reality while offering reflection, the child will not be able to explore the other's mind and find himself in it and his transition toward mentalization will be compromised.

This developmental achievement is potentiated between the ages 3-6: much experimental work using the false belief paradigm demonstrates that theory of mind is acquired during the fourth year of life (e.g. Baron-Cohen, Tager-Flusberg & Cohen, 1993). However, the more complex conceptualization of mentalization highlights its a-binary nature and specifies the hierarchical mental processes that develop gradually across childhood (Pons & Harris, 2005). Moreover, Fonagy's (Fonagy et al. 1998) formulation differs from most developmentalists in considering RF to be a developmental achievement that is never fully acquired, i.e. maintained uniformly across situations and relational contexts: "the self is organized so that certain internal working models include considerable reflective components – expectations incorporating the mental states of self and other – while other working models of relationships appear impoverished, indicating only minimal mentalizing skills" (p.9). It is plausible, therefore, that manifestations of RF vary across relational constellation (dyadic, triadic), based on interpersonal history.

*Individual differences between young children's RF capacities*

Studies support the notion of the regulatory and structuring functions of the ability to make meaning (mentalization): preschoolers and elementary-school children (ages 3.5-6) who had internal representations of secure attachment (measured by a projective test, the SAT) also demonstrated concurrent belief-desire reasoning capacity (Fonagy, 1997). In a prospective study of the relationship of attachment security to mother (12 months) and to father (18 months) and performance on three tests of theory of mind at 5.5, children who had been securely attached to mother or father were more likely to succeed than insecure children. Children who had secure attachment to *both* parents had the highest likelihood to pass the tasks (Fonagy, 1997). These studies, and similar ones (Moss, Parent & Gosselin, 1995) support the claim that affect regulation and the acquisition of reflective function are interlinked and are both dependent on the quality of past and *present* interactions with other minds. Thus, 6 year-olds children who were exposed to a dysregulated and dysregulating mother (as in the case of maternal depression) and children who held negative representations of maternal involvement (e.g. child's play representations of maternal neglect) were more likely to fail in ToM false belief tasks (Murray et al., 1999). The authors suggested that the use of less 'Piagetian' and more emotionally charged RF tasks might have revealed much stronger associations between parental states of mind and child RF competence. The reason for that, arguably, is that internalized relational patterns are expected to have a more powerful impact on 'hot cognition', the ability to construct meaning of emotional experiences and thus to regulate them (Jurist, 2005), than on more emotionally-neutral ToM tasks.

Indeed, Steele (H. Steele et al., 1999) made a compelling case illuminating the links between the regulation of the strong mix of positive and negative affects and ‘emotional understanding’ - the ability of children to reflect on those feelings and comprehend them. As a follow-up to their longitudinal ‘London Parent-Child Project’, Steele et al. (1999) explored the capacity of six year-olds to understand sequentially distinct or mixed emotions, using cartoons depicting social and emotional dilemmas.

The finding confirmed the hypothesis that secure attachment to mother in infancy predicted the early and well-organized development by six-years of age of a superior understanding of mixed emotions. Extending Main’s ideas (Main et al., 1985), Steele and colleagues (H. Steele et al., 1999) suggest that the central and enduring benefit of early secure attachment experiences is likely to be a model generated in the child’s mind for not only autonomously regulating arousal states, but also competently connecting implicit feeling states with explicit verbal labels for a coherent and organized “understanding of emotion and mind” (p.174). This ability to contemplate diverse and ambivalent emotions as motivators, and consequences, of behavior arguably provides the mental basis for tolerating and working through conflictual feelings in the interpersonal realm, first and foremost the family.

The findings of Steele et al. (1999) are consistent with the research conducted by Dunn and colleagues involving home observations of children in interactions with other family members. Dunn (Brown & Dunn, 1996; Dunn, Brown & Beardsall, 1991) demonstrated that positive interactions with siblings and participation in family discussion about the causes of people’s behavior in toddlerhood were the precursors for individual differences in emotional understanding at age 6.

While Dunn's longitudinal studies did not look at the triadic interactions per se, they demonstrate that the social matrix of the wider family, beyond the dyad, may provide the basis for children's reflective functioning. Steele et al. (1999) suggested that the interactive network of verbal communications about emotions, observed by Dunn, might represent mediating pathways between early attachment security and the later development of emotional understanding. At the same time, inconsistencies noted in the literature around change and stability of RF capacities around the age of entry to elementary school, may suggest that other mediating factors might be at play, as the child's social world expands (Pons & Harris, 2005).

The promising body of research studying the ability of children to reflect on complex and conflicting emotions around age 6 underscores the notion that individual differences emerge in the context of parental states of mind and observable communicative engagement. As was discussed in an earlier section, triadic interactions have also been associated with children's reflective capacities (Favez, personal communication, March 1st 2009). These disparate lines of research point to the potential benefit of an integrative paradigm which systematically explores both the interactional and the representational components of family-level dynamics and their contribution to the 6 year old ability to process emotions and reflect on them.

## **V. Putting it all together: Triads and Mentalization**

### *A multi-determined representational world*

Home is where we start from; a family is what we are born into. We are raised by real people, on most occasions our parents, and our relations within them are the building blocks of the psychic structures of our minds. Despite important differences in their

epistemological approaches, all three schools of thought delineated here acknowledge the centrality of the real family, and the real triangle, in shaping who we are, how we relate and how we construe meaning out of our relationships with others.

The myriad of ways in which the family co-regulates itself, the ways the parents engage with each other and with their child, indeed with the world, are underpinned by each individual's representational world. In other words, the nature of family relatedness is determined by relational paradigms - the thoughts, feelings and fantasies about close relationships that the parents carry with them, out of their own childhood (H. Steele & Steele, 2008), and their own parents' history (Fraiberg, Edelson & Shapiro, 1975) as attitudes, taboos, expectations and labels get transmitted down the generations (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003).

The family patterned interaction "...conserves relationships and regulates and perpetuates many aspects of ongoing family life" (Reiss, 1989, p.193). It thus shapes the metaphorical boundaries and affective tone of the 'primary triangle' (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999), or the 'transitional space' (Winnicott, 1971) that the three family members create.

Thus, the family culture gets transmitted from one generation to the next, first through coordinated practices (Reiss, 1981). As the child grows and is capable of verbal representations, these schemas get elaborated upon as a corpus of "connected and shared tales" (Bruner, 1994, p.31) that "contain uncanniness rather than resolve it" (Bruner, 1994, p.30). This is a family narrative that interprets the human world in terms of intentions (Feldman, 1994).

Some theoreticians and researchers (e.g. Dunn et al., 1991) emphasize the pragmatics of the family communication patterns. However, in the various fields exploring the individual within the interpersonal matrix, there is a parallel interest in the unconscious or implicit processes (Bowen, 1978; Bowlby, 1977; Laplanche 1987; Stern et al. 1998) that give rise to our interpretive stance toward the social world. Mentalization theory offers an important bridge between the various schools (Jurist, 2008), as, following Sandler (Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962), it conceptualizes mental representations as cognitive-affective schemas, which are construed from the *social reality* of the child but also from the affectively tinged workings of his *imagination*.

*Age 6: psychic and external challenges and opportunities*

Optimally, development leads to the integration of memories of previously unrelated states of self into “an organized coherent and unified autobiographical self-representation” (Fonagy et al. 2002, p. 247). However, paradoxically, the notion of coherence of representations goes hand in hand with the idea of flexibility that accommodates developmental changes. Both family systems and attachment research have demonstrated through systematic research that self and other representations alter during different phases of the life cycle (Carlson et al 2004, P.A. Cowan & Cowan, 2006, Schermerhorn et al., 2008).

More explicitly, we can assume the existence of a dynamic interplay between various motivational systems and their implicit and explicit representations across development (Ammaniti & Stern, 1994). These ideas enable a multi-layered and creative account for the dramatic emotional, cognitive and social development that occurs between ages 4-6 and that get consolidated at around age 6-7, (changes that have been described throughout

the literature review). According to this view, the mental changes in the children's orientation to the world do not derive solely from the transformations of attachment representations, shifts in familial roles or the unfolding of psychosexual development. Rather, a myriad of evolutionary based motives for activity, self-regulation and social adaptation organize increasingly textured representations of self, other, affect and relationships (Emde, 1994b).

Viewed this way, the motivational system of bodily strivings is not solely vicissitudes of the drives, but as an organizer of childhood experience: bodily experiences are drawn on and elaborated imaginatively in order to represent a view of the relational world and its affective resonances (Mitchell, 1988). Thus, infantile sexuality has important links to the attachment system: "what makes a secure base secure is in large measure its physicality: the warmth, holding, feeding, reassuring heart beat... gentle touch which proximity to the parent gives to the infant – and that is something desired by both child and parent" (Holmes, 2007, p.137).

These conceptualizations speak to the delicate balance between reality and fantasy in the physical and emotional relatedness of the parent and child. A breach of the boundaries of intimacy and dependency in the parent-child relationship turns relationality into a "template for relational perversion" (Lieberman, St. John & Silverman, 2007, p.182). The 'passionate attachment' of the 5-6 year-old child is potentially a time of reactivation of unresolved themes of triangulation for the parent (Slade & Lieberman, 1997), who himself/herself was the 'oedipal child of the previous generation' (Fonagy & Target, 2004). The ascendance of the entire family into the 'culminating stage in a continuum of triadic experiences' (von-Klitzing et al., 1999) is a major familial

challenge: It tests the ability of each parent to hold the child in mind as well as to jointly regard him, rather than individually appropriate the child for unrecognized need fulfillment (Herzog, 2005). This ability is arguably underpinned by the parents' ability to *co-manage* their own and the child's dilemmas and opportunities in the triad "without excluding themselves or their partners from the relationship" to the child (von-Klitzing et al.1999) or excluding the child from their own relationship. In RF terms we could think of this as the parental ability, in the here and now of the lived triad, to hold self, child and partner in mind as subjects who are thinking of other subjects.

#### *A triangular mentalization space*

How do the parents' own triangular representations and the actual triadic relationships shape the 6-year-old reorganization as a unified, reflective self? As discussed earlier, children might demonstrate at a much younger age their reactions to the relationship between their parents (Sharpless, 1990). However, at age 5-6 the child's developing ego function, underpinned by neurological maturation, allows her to actually fathom the 'missing link' (Britton, 1989). A closure of the 'triangular space' by the recognition of the link that is joining in the parents, bounds the child's internal world. "This third position provides us with the capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves" (Britton, 1989, p.87).

Britton, a neo-kleinian, suggests that thirdness affords the child an observational position through the experience of being the outsider (Benjamin, 2005). Being the observer facilitates the child's sense of separateness, his ability for representational thinking and the capacity to integrate and modulate the hitherto polarized feelings.

Diamond and Yeomans (2007) contend that the multiple psychic positions entailed in the triangular space foster the child's capacity to reflect on his or her thoughts, wishes and desires in relations to the third and on the mental contents of the third object in relations to the primary mother-child dyad. In other words, triangulation moves forward psychic development and allows the ability to reflect.

However, Britton's exclusive focus on "mother with father" representation in the child's mind obscures other aspects of the child's 'triadic reality' (Herzog, 2005). Might the representations of 'self with mother', 'self with father' and 'self with mother and father together' be considered in promoting self organization? Arguably, self-regulation and separateness emerge through the recognition *of* and *by* the parents, and not the repudiation of early attachment ties (Benjamin, 1988).

I argue that it is the flexible mental shifts between various configurations (rather than solely being the odd one out) that allows for the working through of triangular experiences. In the recent words of the Lausanne group:

"We see the theme of the oedipal child confronted with his parents' couple separate relations... first and foremost in the context of the full system of triangular dynamics...the third-party position is in continuity with his experience from the outset, in the various developmental domains he has co-constructed with his parents from birth on". (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2010, p.137).

If historically and presently the child is granted by the parents the position of a participant in a shared three way inter-subjectivity, the child can see the parents as subjects and learn to live with the relationships they establish outside of their relationship to him. Identificatory processes with *both* parents are crucial for the child to internalize a

complex network of perceived relationships between self and others, and the perceived relationships *among* others (Aron, 1995).

More directly corresponding with the formulation of mentalization, a successful negotiation of the triad *by the entire family* facilitates the internalization not only of the self as an intentional being from the mind of one parent (the classic notion of RF) but a more complex process where the child takes in the *self* and the *others* as inter-connected intentional beings from the minds of both parents. In other words, both self, mother and father are internalized as subjects who influence and are influenced by each others' wishes, desires, beliefs and thoughts. The internalization of the self as an intentional being from two minds – mother's and father's, affords the child various perspectives that are still compatible (the same way the two eyes compose three dimensional vision based on slight discrepancies between their perceptions). In attachment parlance, this suggests that self-with-mother and self-with-father do not fuse into one representation, yet they can be interrelated to some degree, if child-with-mother is conceivable in father's mind (and vice versa). This focus on the child's relationship with each parent highlights the distinctive contribution of each parent to the child's evolving sense of self, including the child's capacity, at a later age, to reflect on how each of her parents influenced the person she has become (H. Steele & Steele, 2008).

Thus, second order representations (Target & Fonagy, 2002) involve the internalization of the father's mental representation of mother-child dyad and the mother's mental representation of the father-child relationship. Under optimal circumstances, what evolves is a kaleidoscope of perspectives that feel real and true to the child. Thus, the reflective capacity of the parental dyad shapes the child's ability to

tolerate growing emotional and cognitive complexity. In order for the child to be able to hold two contrasting dimensions of experience in mind at once (Aron, 1993), she needs parents who are willing to engage in conversations about feelings (Brown & Dunn, 1996) because they can themselves reflect flexibly on multiple view-points (McHale, Fivaz-Depeurisinge, Dickstien, Robertson & Daley, 2008; H. Steele et al. 1999). Arguably, the parents' ability to contain the child's unmodulated expressions of positive and negative emotions transforms these affective manifestations into 'affective communication' which entails awareness of and concern for others in the outward expression of feelings (Jurist, 2005). The child is thus becoming the 'interpreting self' whose 'meaning-making' mind mediates between reality and its representation (Ogden, 1985). By assuming this mental stance the child is able to mentalize – she can work through the manifestations of her representational world in her current experience (Jurist, 2005), or to understand the representational nature of her thoughts and feelings (Slade, 2005).

This capacity to 'play with reality' (Fonagy & Target, 1996) is a central precondition for the creation of a full inner fantasy life that can be used for affect regulation (Mayes & Cohen, 1992). The capacity for imaginative play is thus both the outcome and the precondition in the working and reworking of triadic experiences: it allows for enactments of competition and desire which are affectively laden but feel less terrifying than a rigid dissociation between objective and subjective or an equation of the two. Thus, fantasies move development forward with an emergence of an "authorial" self (Slade & Lieberman, 1997), capable of appreciation of multiple viewpoints.

*Hypotheses of the current study*

Parents' triangular representations inform the actual triadic interactive pattern and thus influence the cognitive and emotional development of the child from birth on. I argue that reflective functioning might be especially sensitive to the quality of triadic experiences because it involves multiple perspective-taking on thoughts and feelings, within the safety of close relationships.

In a 'good enough' observed triangle, participation includes all partners, cooperation allows smooth turn-taking and a consensual distribution of roles, and affects are shared and regulated. Moreover, the richness and freedom of the family's pretend play is indicative of the parents' ability to play with reality and thus transmit their reflective state of mind to their child, not only through the enhancement of attachment, but also through interaction (Fonagy et al. 1998).

I anticipate that the organization of the interaction will correspond with the way the parents narrate (via content and structure) their ability to hold the triad in mind and retain a reflective stance. In other words, the family's way of being together is assumed to be shaped by each parent's ability to be mindful of self and others and of the relationships with and between others (although clearly there would be discrepancies between the parents' individual abilities).

With regard to the child, I anticipate links between the represented triad in the minds of the parents, the observed triadic organization and the 6-year-old child's freedom to reflect, both spontaneously and when prompted, on complex and potentially unsettling affective experiences involving mixed emotions. In addition, my study will explore the possibility that gender plays a role in RF competence in the context of the triad.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

The core tenet of my study is that the developmental achievement of RF at age 6 is embedded in the nature of the triadic dynamics. The most direct way to assess the dynamic is by sampling the family's interactions. Using observational research provides access to the relationships among individuals rather than the characteristics of the individuals engaged in those relationships. Thus, observation allows sampling and investigating the dynamic, reciprocal, and transactional ways in which family members affect each other. Direct observations capture family patterns independently of the participants' conscious appraisals of their interactions, and therefore provide access to "the rich, nuanced and distinctive set of interpersonal dynamics characteristic of whole-family group interaction" (McHale, Kuersten & Lauretti, 1996, p. 5).

At the same time, because the study seeks to trace the interplay between current interactional patterns and the underlying existing (in case of the parents) and forming (in case of the child) mechanisms of self regulation, the concurrent use of projective instruments is also warranted. These measures afford the opportunity to pull for themes that are deemed pertinent to the specific developmental challenges of age 6. The measures can additionally demonstrate the construct validity of the observational method and vice versa. I will therefore be using a 'multi-method' approach (Emde & Fonagy, 1997) to capture the interface between interactional events and intrapsychic processes.

This exploratory study uses a small sample of families (n=6). Although it involves established measures, whose reliability and validity have been demonstrated in numerous studies, the small number of subjects limits the statistical power of any quantitative

findings. Moreover, my conceptual focus is somewhat different than the original usage for these measures. Thus, while I am using existing scoring systems to guide my interpretation of my findings, I analyze the data using a qualitative approach.

### *Sample*

Six triads from intact families, including a mother, father and their first born 6 year-old child (ages 6.0-7.0) were drawn from the New York City area through through ads in local libraries, after school programs, and parents' list-serves. To account for the possible effect of child gender, three of the families recruited had a first-born son and three a first-born daughter. Younger siblings were not included in the current study, nor was the study able to explore non-traditional triads (e.g. same gender partners).

Families were asked to participate in a research project studying the development of children's imaginative/cognitive capacities in the context of broader family relationships. In return for their participation, families were offered \$60 gift cards to Barnes & Noble and a DVD with edits of their joint interactions.

### *Setting*

The study was conducted at the Speech and Hearing lab of the Graduate Center, CUNY. The main playroom in the lab is equipped with two video cameras and is operated on a regular basis by a team of trained graduate students for the collection of data. The lab room contains a one-way mirror, and activities can be monitored from the adjacent room. The parent's interviews were conducted at the families' homes.

### *Procedures*

All three participating family members made a single visit to the lab. After going over the consent and child assent process and answering any further questions, the researcher

asked the parents to fill in a short demographic questionnaire. As a way to warm up for the research tasks, the family was invited to draw together. Next, the family was asked to engage in a joint semi-structured task where they pretended to be having a picnic together (see details below). Upon completion of the task, all three participants were offered a light snack. The parents were then asked to leave the room while the child remained with the PI and invited to play together with dolls scenarios (Story Stems), and the Affect Task, with the same examiner. Upon reunion with the child, free playtime was offered. The Picnic Task, snack, separation from parents, Story Stems, reunion and final activity were all video recorded. Following the visit to the lab, the PI visited the families' homes to conduct the Parents' Triadic Interview (see description below) with each parent separately.

### *Measures*

#### *The Parents' Assessment*

*Parents' Triadic Interview.* (PTI; Goren, Slade & Aber, 2010). The Parents' Triadic Interview applies the construct of RF to parental narratives concerning their relationship with their children and partners. Looking at the complexity of parental representations of current significant dyadic and triadic relationships affords the study a glimpse of the 'thinking others' that the child is internalizing and thus the underpinning for the child's mentalizing capacities.

The parents' triadic interview is modeled after the Parent Development Interview-Revised (PDI; Slade, Aber, Bresgi, Berger, & Kaplan, 2004): a 45 item semi-structured clinical interview intended to examine parents' representations of their children, themselves as parents and their relationships with their children (Slade, 2005).

Additionally, it incorporates questions from the Current Relationship Interview (CRI; Crowell & Owens, 1996), a semi-structured interview that assesses the respondent's states of mind in relation to his or her romantic partner. Since both PDI and CRI intend to assess internal working models of relationships, they utilize the discussion of charged interpersonal moments to tap into underlying regulatory mechanisms. While the CRI was originally developed to evaluate attachment patterns in relation to the partner, scoring for RF is applicable since the CRI pulls for demonstrable understanding of the links between behaviors, thoughts and feelings in self and other.

In addition, the Parents Triadic Interview consists of several additional questions, aimed at capturing the dynamics of a triad and the respondent's ability to keep both partner and child in mind as intentional beings and their dyadic link as a separate and viable relationship.

The PTI includes 4 sections: Section I focuses on the Marital dyad; Section II asks questions about the respondent and his or her child (Self-Child Dyad); Section III asks about the relationship between the respondent's spouse and the child (Partner-Child Dyad); Section IV asks about the Triad.

(For the complete Parents' Triadic Interview see Appendix A).

The PTIs were scored for Reflective Functions using an addendum to the Reflective Functioning Scoring Manual (Slade, Bernbach et al., 2004). RF is scored on a scale of -1 to 9, an 11 point scale that measures the presence of, and sophistication of, reflective thinking about the subject's representation of herself (or himself), the child and the partner.

Several scores were computed for each interview: an *Overall RF* score was assigned to the entire interview. Additionally, RF levels were also scored for 4 RF relationship

variables: *Marital Dyad RF* (the respondent's level of mentalization when discussing the relationship with their partner); *Self-Child Dyad RF* (RF when discussing the respondent's relationship with his or her child); *Partner-Child Dyad RF* (level of mentalization when discussing the relationship between his child and his partner); *Triadic RF* (the respondent's level of mentalization when discussing the relationship between all three members of the family).

Additionally, RF levels were scored for 3 RF locus variables: *RF Self* (the respondent's ability to link mental processes and behavior when discussing his or her own experiences, across all sections of the interview); *RF Partner* (the respondent's ability to link mental processes and behavior when addressing the experiences of his or her partner); *RF Child* (the respondent's ability to link mental processes and behavior when addressing the experiences of his or her child).

One judge scored the PTIs for RF. This is a clinical psychologist with significant experience using the scoring systems for coding various interviews, in varied research contexts. The coder was blind to match between partners and to any other measures in the study.

#### *Whole-Family Assessment*

*Picnic task.* By definition interactions revolving around a shared mealtime involve the distribution of food, the negotiation of conversation and the exchanges of emotional expressions (Favez et al., 2006). Thus, they set the stage for family members to enact their usual roles along the dimensions of cooperation, negotiation-skills, competition, dependency, physical contact, and care-taking.

Because of the multi-layered experience of mealtime interactions, researchers have often used naturalistic observations of mealtime interactions to assess family dynamics (e.g. Feiring & Lewis, 1987; Vuchinich, Emery & Cassidy, 1988). In fact, a family negotiation of a meal menu was reported to generate the highest rate of interaction applicable to alliance patterns among all the systems-based interaction tasks used by the Minuchin's family research (Gilbert, Christensen & Margolin, 1984).

A pretend meal in a lab setting (Frascarolo & Favez, 2005; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan & Lauretti, 2001) has been used in research in order to achieve a greater standardization while maintaining the family rituals, limit setting and affect sharing. In other words, it provides the opportunity for "...an ecological assessment of family interactions, close to real life conditions but in a standardized context" (Favez et al., 2006, p.7). At the same time, the pretend meal is a game that taps into the family's ability to imagine and be creative together.

The picnic task utilized in the current study is a semi-structured play session in the lab. Mother, father, and the firstborn child are invited to engage in a pretend game of having a family picnic: setting up, having the picnic and finally cleaning up (Frascarolo & Favez, 2005). The interaction is video-recorded in a room equipped with a picnic basket containing a blanket, plastic dishes and utensils, napkins, toy food (such as carrots, a watermelon, a loaf of bread), a pitcher and cups.

A research team at the Center for Attachment Research (CAR) at The New School in New York is currently working on adapting the scales originally used for the 'Schoolchildren and Their Families' project at University of California, Berkeley. (For a description of the original protocol see Cowan et al, 2005). In the modified scoring

system, 4-point scales are used to evaluate the interactions between the participants as the family plays together, along several dimensions related to family adaptation and cohesion.

For all ratings, global codes will be assigned to the entire picnic session.

Cowan & Cowan's (1992) scales, even in their modified version, are most suitable for capturing dyadic interactions within the triadic context. In the current study the patterns of ratings on these scales were used to assess the family organization and processes pertaining to the research's conceptual focus on triangles. Qualitative analysis was conducted along the Lausanne team's 3 interactive family dimensions:

- Participation (the extent to which all partners are included in the interaction)
- Cooperation (acting in a coordinated way)
- Affective sharing (validation of emotions and affective benevolence).

Scores were organized according to the typology of family organization (Fivaz-Depeurisinge, 2008; McHale, Kuresten-Hogan, Lauretti & Rasmussen, 2000; Minuchin, 1974) of Cooperative alliance versus coalitions.

### *Child's Assessments*

*Story Stems.* The benefit of designing experimental tasks for children that include props and play materials that make 'human sense' to them is well established (Woolgar, 1999), as the child script-based social knowledge is accessed symbolically through enactment with dolls. A considerable volume of research has identified links between the nature of children's doll play narratives and family environment experiences (Murray, 2007). In addition, there is an increasing recognition of the influence of parents' own representations and states of mind on child play representations (Schechter et al. 2007).

The Story Stems task involves a presentation of a series of open-ended socio-emotional dilemmas, each embedded within a brief scenario enacted by the experimenter using dolls and props. The child is then asked to complete the story stem with the aid of standardized, non-directive prompts. Thus, the technique taps into the child's thought processes and affect regulation as the child engages in constructing a resolution to an emotionally challenging story (Robinson, 2007). It offers a combination of openness to the child's dimensions of experience that are most significant to him or her. At the same time, the use of play scenarios and structured prompts allows the researcher to exercise some control over the agenda in order to gain maximum access to material that is either unlikely to arise spontaneously or that might be difficult to set up in a naturalistic way (Murray et al., 1999).

A subset of 6 story stems, 5 taken directly from the MacArthur Story Stem Battery (MSSB, Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum, & Emde, 1990), and the sixth (Burglar in the dark) adapted by Hodges, Hillman, and Steele (2004) were selected to assess the children's responses to a range of multi-participants socio-emotional dilemmas. All the stems consisted of a brief narrative introduced by the experimenter and ending with a dilemma. The PI staged the stem by moving playmobil dolls and props through relevant actions and speaking in character. The PI then invited the child to 'show me and tell me what happens next'.

The 6 story stems included in the present study were as follows:

- Spilled juice (a child accidentally spills juice at the dinner table);
- A gift to Mom or Dad (a child brings home a picture from school and has to decide whether to give it to mom or dad)
- Lost keys (parental argument);

- Three is a crowd (a friend wants to exclude the child's younger sibling);
- Exclusion (the child is sent to bed so parents can have some time alone together);
- Burglar in the dark (the child is laying in bed and hears a strange noise while the parents are downstairs).

The six story stems take about 30 minutes to administer. The child's responses are video taped and their narrative transcribed verbatim from audiotape.

The Rating Scales for the MSSB (Hill, Sharp, Hoover, Taliaferro, Fonagy & Leidecker, 2009) were used as a guideline for scoring along four dimensions: aggression, avoidance, coherence and intentionality. The intentionality scale is unique to this scoring manual: it assesses the extent to which mental states underlying the characters behavior in the stories are made explicit or can be readily inferred. This scale operationalizes a construct that is similar to mentalization but is more restricted in its scope, as mentalization refers not only to responding using the intentional stance but also to the range of competences required in implementing it effectively (Hill, Murray, Leidecker & Sharp, 2008).

The severity of aggression, avoidance and narrative coherence in the children's stories were all assessed as well, as the broad interpretive interest across approaches in affect regulation (Robinson 2007) matches the focus of the current study on cooperation, competition and rivalry in the context of triadic dynamics.

*Affect Task.* The Affect Task is a cartoon-based assessment of children's emotional intelligence. It evaluates their ability to recognize emotion or affect and to attribute appropriate affects in and following interpersonal conflicts (Steele, Steele & Fonagy, 1994). The Affect Task comprises basic and complex line-drawn facial expressions as well as 12 cartoons sequences depicting relational dilemmas. The cartoon situations all include a child at the center of the social interaction with a friend, sibling, parent(s) or a

teacher involved in the scene. The 12 sequences depict events that may be assumed to evoke a strong emotional reaction in the characters (e.g, a child is falling off the bike, mother and father are going on vacation, two children are building a tower with building blocks with disparate degrees of competence). All cartoons end with a panel showing a blank face on one or more characters.

The examiner initially asks for the child's help in looking at some "cartoons about feelings". The child is then shown a single sheet of paper with nine line drawings of emotions faces. These comprise six basic emotions faces (happy, sad, angry, surprised, disgust and fear), two complex emotion faces (happy/angry –mischief, surprised/sad – disappointed) and a neutral face. The child is asked to label the faces. Then he is shown each scenario and the examiner reads aloud the narrative that sets the scene. He then invites the child to show and tell which face fits the characters and why. Each child is then asked if the character could be feeling anything else at the same time and subsequently if the feeling can change later, thus eliciting responses of mixed emotions and sequentially distinct emotions.

All cartoon-responses are coded for the presence of an understanding of mixed emotions and sequential emotions on a four-point scale. (1=no evidence, 4=marked evidence).

Reflective functioning is coded based on the use, or failure to use, mental state language on a 4 point scale. 1- scant evidence that the child understands that motivations guide behavior 4- organized and consistent understanding of motivations guiding the character behaviors and of interdependence of these processes between child and other characters.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **Demographics**

Six non-referred mother-father-child triads participated in the study. Drawn from the New York City area, the sample was mostly Caucasian (11 out of 12 adults) and all participants were middle class. The parents ranged from 29 to 51 years of age, with a mean of 40 years. As required by the eligibility criteria for the study, all were in a stable cohabiting relationship at the time of the study, and all were married, with an average of 12 years together. The participants were well educated and consisted of 5 college graduates and 7 with some or full graduate education. Two of the mothers and all six fathers were employed full time.

The children in the study ranged in ages between 6.1 to 6.11 years of age. The mean age was 6.5, with a mean of 6.3 for the boys and 6.8 for the girls. All children received their education in mainstream schools, 3 in public and 3 in private schools. Four out of six children had younger siblings.

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

The data collected for each participating family included two PTI interviews (one for each parent), a videotaped picnic session of the triad; and story stems and affect task responses which were collected during an individual session with the child. All measures (interviews, picnics, story stems and affect task) were analyzed qualitatively by the PI, who relied on established coding manuals to inform her analysis. The PTI interviews were also coded for RF scores by a trained coder, using the addendum to the Reflective Functioning Scoring Manual (Slade, Bernbach et al., 2004).

The main goal of the data analysis was to explore possible patterns beyond individual families, along the theoretical dimensions delineated earlier:

1. Triadic representational capacities of the parents. These were assessed on the Parental Triadic Interview (PTI) as the respondents' ability to reflect flexibly on a variety of family relations (one's own relationship with partner, one's own relationship with child, child-partner relationship and the triad).
2. The quality and organization of the family interaction, assessed in terms of members' participation, cooperation and affective tone during the Picnic play.
3. The quality of the child's reflective function. Assessed through thematic and performance aspects of the child's representational abilities in the Story Stems and the Affect Task.

The data is organized in sequence, starting with findings regarding parental triadic representational capacities as measured on the PTI, followed by the observed families' interactive features on the picnics and lastly, the children's representational capacities.

### **The PTI interviews: The cooperative/strained/ disrupted parents**

Reflective Function is scored on a scale of -1 to 9 with an average score of 5.

Several scores were computed for each interview: These include an *Overall* RF score (which refers to RF score for the entire interview). Additionally, RF levels were also scored for 4 RF relationship variables:

1. *Marital Dyad RF* refers to the respondent's level of mentalization when discussing the relationship with their partner.
2. *Self-Child Dyad RF* refers to the level of mentalization when discussing the respondent's relationship with his or her child

3. *Partner-Child Dyad RF* refers to the respondent's level of mentalization when discussing the relationship between child and partner.
4. *Triadic RF* refers to the respondent's level of mentalization when discussing the relationship between all three members of the family.

Additionally, RF levels were scored for 3 RF locus variables:

- 1) *RF Self* refers to the respondent's ability to link mental processes and behavior when discussing his or her own experiences, across all sections of the interview.
- 2) *RF Partner* refers to the respondent's ability to link mental processes and behavior when addressing the experiences of his or her partner, across all sections of the interview.
- 3) *RF Child* refers to the respondent's ability to link mental processes and behavior when addressing the experiences of his or her child, across all sections of the interview.

Of these scores, only the first 4 were included in further analyses due to low standard deviation and incomplete data.

The overall scores in the current sample ranged between 3.5 to 6.5, with a mean of 5.166 and a standard deviation of 0.9066. A score of 3.5 is a low rating that involves only simple references to mental states. A score of 6.5 is approaching a high rating that is given to the ample and flexible use of mental states and provides a sophisticated picture of emotional representation. Similar ranges and standard deviations were obtained for the scores of Marital Dyad RF, Self-Child Dyad RF and Partner-Child Dyad RF. The descriptive statistics for these scores are presented in table 1. The scores for each respondent are presented in table 2.

Table 1.  
*Descriptive statistics for Overall and Relationship RF scores on the PTI*

RF Score	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall	3.5-6.5	5.166	0.9066
Marital Dyad RF	3-6	4.6875	0.886
Self-Child Dyad RF	4.5-6.5	5.1875	0.87337
Partner-Child Dyad RF	3-6	4.916	0.949

Table 2.  
*Subjects' RF scores on the Parent Triadic Interview*

Respondent #	Overall RF	Marital RF	Self-Child RF	Partner-Child RF
Mother 515	6.5	5.5	6.5	6
Father 515	6	5.5	6.5	6
Mother 325	6.0	5B	6.5	6
Father 325	5	5	5.5	5
Mother 447	5.5	5	5	5.5
Father 447	6	6	5	4
Mother 217	4.5	5.5	4	4.5
Father 217	5.5	4.0	5.0	5.0
Mother 809	5B	4	4.5	5.5
Father 809	4	4	4.5	4
Mother 637	3.5	3	4.5	3
Father 637	5B	4	5B	4.5

The qualitative approach is the core of the analysis of the PTIs, and it will be presented here and in the next chapter at length. First, however, it should be noted that a quantitative analysis was employed in an exploratory way, in order to see whether patterns emerged, despite the small sample size. For each couple a set of 4 composite scores was computed, by calculating the family mean for each RF score. The analysis detected two groups of families based on the couple's mean RF scores: The High RF couples (families 515, 345, 447) and The Low RF couples (families 217, 809, 637). This finding should be regarded cautiously as it was based on a sample size of 6 and utilized composite scores that averaged out differences between partners in each family.

Arguably, a qualitative, ‘clinical’ analysis of the PTI interviews could offer a more nuanced understanding of individual mentalization capacities and the interplay of representational abilities between the partners in each family. The analysis suggested that three different types of families could be conceptualized. They are briefly presented, followed by a detail description:

➤ ***The Cooperative Parents*** (families 515, 325). Both partners have an Overall RF score of average (5) or above. These couples manifested complementarity in their RF profiles: both partners manifested the highest level of reflectiveness when they discussed the relationship between Self and Child. Their middle RF scores were obtained when discussing the relationship between Child and Partner and the lowest RF scores when discussing the Marital Dyad section.

In these families the marital unit is portrayed as stable and happy for the most part, as are the separate child-parent dyads and the triad. The parents showed the capacity to reflect on the relationship between their partner and their child in a realistic yet warm way, and their need to insert themselves was limited. The interviews conveyed a strong sense of an alliance.

➤ ***The Strained Parents*** (families 447, 217): similar to the cooperative parents, the Overall RF scores for both partners here were around the average. However, these couples manifested non-complementarity in their RF profiles: one partner evidenced the highest degree of reflectiveness while discussing the Marital dyad, whereas their spouse was more reflective discussing their partner’s relationship with the child.

In these families, the marital unit was turbulent and stormy and the separate child-parent dyads were somewhat unbalanced: one parent has a more intense relationship with the

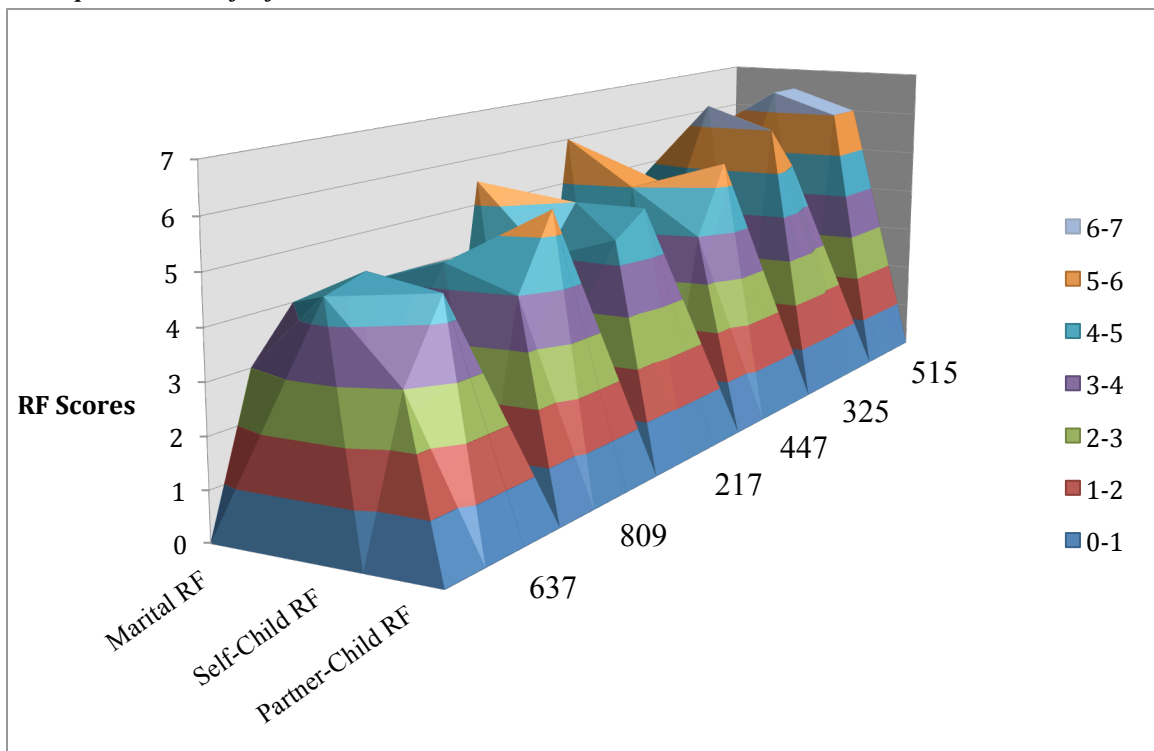
child and the other has to tolerate it. The partners, although very attuned to the third relationship, voiced a mix of concern and admiration in talking about the partner-child relationship and had a harder time maintaining the role of the observer. These families evidence fluctuations between an alliance and coalitions.

➤ **The Disrupted Parents** (families 809, 637): Both partners have Overall RF scores below average. Their lowest RF score is for the Marital dyad and for most the highest is the Self-Child dyad.

In both instances, the marital unit was embroiled in frozen and disavowed anger. The separate child-parent dyads were perceived as competing. The third relationship evoked mostly negative feelings. The role of the observer was violated. These families are typified by coalitions.

A three dimensional representation of the RF scores for each family in chart 1 provides a visualization of each family ‘architecture’ of mentalization capacities.

Chart 1.  
3-D representation of 6 families’ RF scores



**The Cooperative Parents:**

These respondents provided coherent and cohesive narratives, including spontaneous references to their own parents and to childhood memories. They demonstrated adherence to the structure of the interview while showing emotional engagement. The interviewer noted positive transference feelings and clarity around boundaries.

*Marital Dyads:* Cooperative couples are characterized by average or higher RF scores when discussing the marital dyad. More significantly, the couples show coherence and eloquence in their responses, which is associated with secure attachment (Main et al., 1985; Slade, Grienenberger, Bernbach, Levy & Locker, 2005). They describe a loving relationship and the ability to play together: They give evocative examples of pleasure together, conveying a strong sense of their relationship as a couple, independent of their partnership in raising a child together, i.e. co-parenting (McHale, 2007b). They refer openly to disagreements and convey a sense that they can address them and can shift between self- and co-regulation.

*Self-Child Dyads:* the parents in the Cooperative triads have their highest RF when discussing the relationship between self and child. Their emphasis is on their role as the regulator of child's feeling. These parents intuitively convey an understanding that their relationship with the child shapes the ways the child regulates and understands his or her feelings and the ways in which he relates interpersonally. At the same time, they show appreciation of the child as a separate, unique person. In both families there are some differences between the roles played by the parents: both fathers emphasize their roles of mentors (teach the child about the outside world) whereas the mothers act more as

facilitators of child's self-knowledge. This division of roles appears less closely tied to the gender of the child than in the other families.

There is no minimizing of difficulties in the relationship with the child but these parents convey the feeling of good enough parenting. Difficulties are regarded as part of the process and surmountable. There is a strong sense that relationships are dynamic and reparable.

*Partner-Child Dyads:* This is the most complex and demanding section in the PTI manuscript: here the respondents are asked about a relationship they are not part of. To respond to the demand questions, they need to consider the behavior and mental processes of three minds: their partner's, their child's and their own. The responses were assessed thematically for an ability not to infringe on the third relationship in the "lived" interactions described. In addition, the responses were analyzed for tendency to digress into "I" or "us" in questions pertaining to the partner-child dyad only (performance analysis).

As they think of the 'other' relationship, the parents in the cooperative triads portray their partner mostly in a positive and supportive way, as a nurturing and competent adult who meets the child's emotional needs and can be very playful and creative. Difficulties in the relationship are acknowledged, (even voluntarily, not just when a demand question is presented) but the overall atmosphere is positive and supportive.

Taking the role of the third is not easy – all parents adopted a more active tone than the questions pull for and described how they intervene or would like to intervene when there is tension between their partner and their child. Although some of the intervention described is carried out through the child (either siding with him or admonishing him),

parents in the cooperative triads tend mostly to describe their own role as supporting the other parent – helping them work things through by providing respite in child care, by backing the other parent up in front of the child and by being a partner for conversation and reflection. On the whole, there is recognition of the separate relationship, enjoyment, and respect for it. The ability to adhere to the role of the observer is evidenced in the limited tendency to insert the “I”, while talking about the third relationship.

The Triad section of interview includes a question about an important transition in the life of the family – the birth of the target child. The families in the cooperative triads reported a sense of immense joy and a powerful feeling that the child is their joint creation and joint responsibility – having a child together strengthens their marriage and adds a dimension of co-parenthood to their relationship. When asked about the current transition (child’s going to school and subsequent impact on couple dynamics) both couples noted the seamless and gradual changes in the fabric of the family. They focused mostly on the co-parenting aspects of child development: jointly supporting the child in terms of education, socialization and adherence to structure. There was little emphasis on themselves as a couple– maybe because this dimension is already consolidated and stable.

### **The Strained Parents:**

*General:* The sample included two families in which one parent has a substantial history of trauma. Father 447 and mother 217 both endured the loss of a father at a young age, immigration and neglect. Their interviews (and to a lesser degree those of their partners) were very emotional, quite dysregulated and lacking in structure and coherence, especially when discussing their relationship with their child. Both respondents convey a

strong sense of resilience, but also volatility in their ability to reflect. The violations of quantity, manner and relevance, evidenced in these respondents' tendencies to be guided by their concerns and associations and not by the questions are in line with preoccupied attachment organization (Main et al., 1985). Their partners appear somewhat better structured and contained.

*Marital Dyad:* The two couples manifest somewhat of a a-symmetry in their reflective capacities: the traumatized partner is at his or her most reflective when discussing the marital dyad. The other spouse is more attuned to the child-partner relationship. The qualitative thematic analysis of the narrative reveals that the marital relationship is characterized by turmoil and plenty of fighting, alongside love, passion and playfulness. The traumatized partner expresses heightened fear and anger in the relationship while the other partner shows more faith in its future and ability to weather the emotional storms. In both families there is a relationship of pursued and pursuer, with both father 217 and mother 447 idealizing their trauma-survivor partners, who are indeed, in both cases, charming and charismatic. For these couples, the distinction between talking about marital aspects of the relationship compared to co-parenting aspects is blurred compared to the cooperative triads, as the respondents tend to shift, unaware, between talking about their marriage to discussing the ways they co-parent their child. It is possible that the trauma survivors use the marital relationship to rework attachment ties with own parents. Thus, being both partners and children of their spouses is reflected in more porous boundaries between the couple and the parenting dimensions.

*Self-Child Dyad:* The uniqueness of these two triads is manifested in the response of the trauma-survivor parent. Both father 447 and mother 217 were dysregulated when

discussing their relationship with their child; this impaired their ability to reflect. Both work hard to see the child as a separate subject and to work through projections and distortions. The task is further complicated by the fact that in both cases the child is of the same gender as the traumatized parent. Thus, Mother 217 describes a pattern of being cared for by her daughter and father 447 gets caught up in rivalry with his son. Both convey a strong sense of guilt and anxiety about the child's future. Their partners are better at perceiving the child as separate, and show less guilt. However, both look up to their partners for guidance around parenting.

Similar to the cooperative triads, in these couples both fathers represent the agent of socialization in the family – i.e. introducing the world to the child, whereas the mothers introduce the child to himself. However, the gender of the child in these families plays a more central role in the parental relatedness: the little boy is challenged by his father more than the little girl is by her father. The little girl is more equal to her mother than the boy to his. The absence of cases in this sample where the traumatized parent and the child are of opposite genders makes it difficult to discern whether this has to do with gender sameness or with a more general parental tendency for enmeshment.

*The Partner-Child Dyad:* In these two triads the way the other parent is portrayed is more complex and confusing (to the interviewer, and presumably to the parents themselves). There is a strong notion that the other parent is a loving and a positive attachment figure. However, the non-traumatized parent conveys some confusion: on the one hand idealization of their partner, but also a vague notion that the spouse-child relationship is intense, a little too stimulating, maybe slightly out of control. The combination of warmth

and unease might be the reason these parents pay very close attention to the relationship between their spouse and their child.

In addition, the partner-child relationship is portrayed not only as an attachment relationship. There are clear references to the existing love affair between the boy and his mother and the fading one between the girl and her father. The same-gender parent is portrayed as an identification figure (with focus on shared interests), but at the same time as somewhat blurring generational boundaries with the child. The undertone is more competitive when discussing the partner's facets of relatedness to the child and there is some worry about exclusion. Additionally, there is less sense of co-parenting and increased tendency to counter the other partner or withdraw.

All four respondents in the 'strained' couples had a harder time maintaining the role of the observer while discussing the 'third' relationship. Rather, when talking about the other dyad, they tend to slide into a description of the triad ("they had fun time writing a song about me") or toward the child-respondent dyad ("I just remembered something I wanted to add earlier"). The evocation of the 2+1 configuration (with the respondent as the odd one out) potentially therefore gives rise to feelings of being left out, pushed out, or sought out by child against the other parent.

The account these parents offer regarding the birth of the target child is mixed: it is portrayed as an exhilarating and unifying experience but also as one in which both dads felt left out. As they prepare for the next phase in their child's development, these families emphasize the child's increasing independence, which allows them to focus on other relationships (their own relationship, younger siblings)

### **The Disrupted Parents:**

*General:* These parents obtained the lowest scores in the study. Pseudo-coherence coupled with some self-serving remarks created a contradictory narrative, which appears to be in line with the dismissing classification of attachment (Main et al., 1985). These families evoked a sense of unease and worry in the interviewer, who felt pressured to choose sides. This is typical of rigid triads, where inter-familial and external boundaries are frequently disturbed (Minuchin, 1974).

*Marital Dyad:* The scores of these couples were below average. They describe marital relationship suffused with tension. Although they report occasional flare-ups of conflict, these couples usually deal with their disagreements through avoidance and denial. Their interviews offer very little sense of the couple as an independent unit, as the respondents immediately include the child in their account. By doing so they detour from their conflictual relationship through triangulation (Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2008). Yet, the anger and bitterness come across quite powerfully in these interviews.

*Self-Child Dyad:* In these families the RF scores for self-child are the highest in the interview but are still low relative to the entire sample. Although the parents are more attuned to their child than to their partner, the narratives fail to evoke a vivid and convincing portrait of the 6 year old. Parents are dismissive of any pains or concerns that might be lurking in this dyadic relationship and seem quite invested in a 'things are great' version. This avoidant approach creates some discrepancies in the description of the child. There is awareness that the relationship is one of an attachment figure with a dependent child, but the ability to see oneself as regulating the emotionality of the child is limited. Rather, the child is portrayed as a potential ally, who can alleviate his or her parent's isolation in the family system. Gender plays an important role in these families:

in the case of the parent of the opposite gender of the child, there is an unmistakable tendency to see the child as a substitute partner, who is more available and responsive than the actual adult spouse. Both mothers see the child as a positive reflection of themselves and quite openly prioritize their relationship with the child over the relationship with the husband. In contrast, both fathers see the child as unavailable, locked in a dyadic system with mother. In these families, the maternal relationship is privileged and fathers need to work hard to define their relationship with the child as separate and meaningful, without mother's blessing.

*The Partner-Child Dyad:* The parents consider the relationship between their spouse and their child in critical terms. The relationships portrayed are not between a reliable attachment figure and an offspring, but rather between companions. Both fathers convey the feeling that the mothers value the relationship with the child because it fulfills narcissistic needs. On their part, both mothers in this group indicate that their partners' contribution to the child is rather limited. Thus, the attachment of the child to other parent is portrayed as somewhat superficial.

Given this fierce competition for attention and love it comes as no surprise that the affective tone in these descriptions is negative: bitterness, poignant indifference, sadness and gloating are all in abundance, a hallmark of coalitions (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Frascarolo, Lopes, Dimitriva & Favez, 2007). Moreover, there is frequent violation of roles: all four parents are self-referential in the questions that tap explicitly into partner-child relationship. They are preoccupied with comparison of their skills and their subsequent status in the family with those of their partners. It is evident that these

parents struggle to co-parent: they feel outmaneuvered for the child's affection, underappreciated or dismissive of their partner.

There is very little sense of joy in their account of the family adaptation after the birth of the child, which seems more than anything else to have opened a chasm in the marital relationship. Unlike other triads, the respondents in the disrupted triads noted very little change in dynamics as their child grows: the family patterns are static and repetitive, reinforcing a feeling of hopelessness.

### **Analysis of the picnic sessions: Cooperative/Strained/Disrupted Triads**

The picnic sessions were analyzed by the PI along the dimensions of Participation (the extent to which all partners are included in the interaction), Cooperation (acting in a coordinated way) and Affective sharing (validation of emotions and affective benevolence). The qualitative analysis suggested again three types of triads, consistent with the PTI typology:

#### **The Cooperative Triads (families 515, 325)**

In these picnics all three family members were included and engaged. In fact, both families mentioned the absent siblings during the picnic, making plans to have the younger child included in the post-picnic pretend activity (“will pick her up from play-date and play soccer” Or: “we’ll save food for him for the stroll”). During the picnic, mother and father interact with the child and with each other – there is an exchange of glances, plans and objects. All three members are engaged.

In both triads the child is the one who sets the pace and agenda for the meal and the parents follow his or her lead. The two families vary in the degree the child indicates a need for autonomy: girl 325 is a little controlling at the beginning; boy 515 is actually a

little hesitant and withdrawn. The parents help them transition into the game. They offer scaffolding (encouraging the child to move to the next activity, challenging him to take on a responsibility) but more importantly they help the child regulate their level of tension and engagement. The result is a gradual increase in the shared sense of comfort and joy. The parents are very supportive of each other in making the picnic successful: they echo and expand on each other's ideas and orient the child, in words and subtle body gestures, to the other parent. The results are picnics that flow nicely with a predictable narrative arc (setting up, eating, cleaning), but also embellished by creative additions: the ants that march on the picnic blanket, the planned bike ride.

What is most striking about these triads is the warmth among all family members: the joy is very tangible: there is laughing, hugging and singing and the conversation is lively and animated. The parents use plenty of encouragement and praise with their child and the children reciprocate love by borrowing ideas and gestures, by feeding their parents and by cuddling against them. The parents also show warmth to each other: there is spontaneous conversation between them about other shared joys, such as trips abroad. They laugh and banter.

There are instances in the picnics of missteps, such as the moment when mother 515 mocks her husband lightly for 'spilling' all his food, or when father 325 pokes fun at his daughter for 'cutting the cheese'. However, the moments are fleeting and repair is achieved rapidly through humor and affection. Similar to the view they expressed in the interviews, these parents seem to regard missteps as reparable.

**The Strained Triads (families 217, 447):**

In these two picnics, there are many shifts in the alliances of participants during the play. The families are clearly capable of engaging together as a triad and their joy is palpable. However, the play is not as smooth. More specifically, transitioning in and out of the game is ridden with anxiety and maintaining an inclusive and positive state of mind is more difficult. In each family this strain has a slightly different flavor: in one (447) father is a little provocative with his son at the beginning, persistently challenging the boy's 'authority' by touching the food on the blanket before the child deems it 'ready'. He later recruits the boy in a shared secret that mom is not privy to, thus triangulating through exclusion/inclusion and creating a 2 against 1 coalition. In the other family (217), the father works hard to keep everyone engaged and included, opening the interaction to include the mother, who indicates she feels left out, and withdrawing to the background when the mother needs to take center stage.

In both families it seems that one parent has a heightened need to be recognized and included. Although they enjoy the triad and can be quite harmonious at times, they impulsively push their way into more contentious dyadic interactions, at times through subtle provocations and seductions. Co-parenting is clearly impacted by this, as instead of consistent support of the other parents there are moments of overriding their needs and moments of clear competition.

Consequently, the emotional tone is more volatile than in the picnics of the Cooperative Triads: whereas in the former there is a gradual elevation in joy and laughter, the Strained Triads shift between excitement and discomfort, over-activity and a halting play. Their collective mood is more volatile and confusing to both the participants and the observer.

They show a lot of warmth and affection to each other, including clear warmth between the parents, but there is also more hostility and tension.

Similarly, the structure of their play is more fluid: their picnic doesn't progress through the predictable sequence of setting up, eating and cleaning, but digresses frequently.

There is more chaos and less of a synchrony between the various participants' activities.

There are moments when all three members look at a loss and not sure what to do next.

Family 447 deals with this by imploding: they pretend to fall asleep. Family 217, in contrast, gets wild and quite dysregulated and moves into a food fight.

**The Disrupted Triads (families 809, 637):**

In these triads the configurations of participation are more limited: there is very minimal contact between the parents, who are both intently focused on the child. There is almost no eye contact between the parents and the support they offer each other in moving the play forward and engaging the child doesn't go beyond polite echoing of the other parent's ideas and suggestions. The parents juxtapose rather than coordinate their engagement with the child.

The children seem to follow the adults' lead and make only minimal bid for triadic interaction. Instead, they interact with one parent at a time. In family 809 the excluded parent oscillates between competition (for instance, raising one's voice to exceed the volume and emotional tone of the other parent; colluding with all of the child's ideas so to retain his engagement and monopolize his attention) and hurt withdrawal. In contrast, in family 635 the pervading feeling is one of three isolated individuals.

The atmosphere is tenser: there is less movement around the room compared to other families and no bodily contact. Rather, there is subdued praise for the child. The cautious

play suggests that the family doesn't trust its own ability to repair missteps. The narrative arc is more rigidly adhered to, lest the tension escalates into rupture.

**Child RF measures: Low Aggression/ High aggression.**

The Affect Task assesses children's capacity to assign appropriate mixed and sequential feelings to cartoon characters in various scenarios. It was used successfully in the past in a British sample of non-referred middle class children, around the age of 6 (Steele, Steele, Croft, & Fonagy, 1999). However it is not widely used, and might be most effective as a research tool with clinical or underserved populations. In the current sample, all 6 children participating evidenced similar ability to recognize a range of emotions and assign them in the context of the scenarios. Responses were quite uniform and compared to the Story Stem task did not convey strong emotions. It is possible that subject burden contributed to the lower level of engagement and that the task, which is more structured than the story stems, tapped into 'cold cognition' rather than into the child's representational world. Consequently the following qualitative analysis focuses solely on the Story Stems task.

The qualitative analysis of the story stems was anchored in quantitative codes along four dimensions: aggression, avoidance, coherence and intentionality. One dimension, aggression, dramatically distinguished between 2 children and the other 4: boy 809 and girl 635 (whose parents' interviews and family picnics placed them in the 'Disrupted' type) showed more aggression and fewer peaceful resolutions of conflict situations, as well as minimal indications that they perceived their parents as nurturing and reliable attachment figures. They evidenced intentionality and coherence levels that were comparable to those of the other four children. However, their functioning was splintered,

with more instances of narrative breakdowns and abrupt drops in coherence due to dysregulation. In contrast, the other 4 children showed more stability in their ability to link mental processes to behavior and to monitor the narrative arc, coupled with much higher level of affect regulation.

### **Children of the Cooperative Triad and The Strained Triad.**

The children from the Cooperative Triads and the Strained Triads were almost indistinguishable in their performance on the story stems task. Gender appeared to account for differences in their representational world as much as the parental RF profile or the quality of the picnics.

All four children evidenced low levels of aggression. When it was present, it was portrayed in the form of the child asserting himself and protesting own or sibling's exclusion (boys), or strict parents who demanded responsible and compliant behavior from the children (girls).

In terms of pro-social behavior, the parents were represented in a mixed way: they were demanding, but reassuring and regulating. The stories included positive attitudes from the children toward others, including kind and protective behavior toward the younger sibling in 'Three is a Crowd' story.

The girls provided longer and much more elaborate responses, with evolving storylines and long dialogue exchanges between characters. In contrast, both boy 447 and boy 515 provided brief responses to the story stems. Typically, their avoidance manifested by short stories with some appraisal of the dilemma at hand, and then a rapid move to an ending without an elaborate working through or a clear effective action. Consequently, they had similarly low aggression and mid range coherence and intentionality scores. Boy

447 in particular appeared inhibited and guarded. Although he was quite at ease with the PI, the pretend play made him uncomfortable – he described rather than enacted the stories. Consequently, there was very little interaction between the figures in his stories. Beyond the above mentioned gender factor (boys providing shorter stories), the inhibition manifested by this boy might be related to the struggles of the triad: It is possible that for this boy, overregulation of emotions is a way to try and support the triad and facilitate more harmonious relationship between the parents. This tendency was also apparent with the other child within the ‘Strained Triad’ type, girl 217 (whose case is presented more fully in the next chapter). These two children appear to work to protect the triad at a personal cost, the girl through care taking, the boy by repressing anger and by intellectualizing. Interestingly, they were the only ones responding to the ‘Lost Key’ stem with a narrative in which the child serves as a successful mediator between the parents. The two children in the Cooperative Triads (515, 325) represented in their stories a faith in the reparative qualities of relationships. They showed some ability to intuit the state of mind of their parents in the story and have that impact the parent-child interaction, without turning the child into a parentified figure (the case of family 515 is presented in the next chapter).

In summary, these four children have some capacity to represent their attachment figures as complex and multi faceted, arguably indicating an ability to tolerate ambivalence. The triad is portrayed as mostly collaborative, although there are examples of competition.

### **Children of the Disrupted Triads**

Both girl 637 and boy 809 showed a significant degree of aggression in their stories, mostly perpetrated by the child toward his/her parents. In the case of the boy 809, the

aggression was directed predominantly against his father, whereas the mother in the stories did not intervene and thus passively colluded with the child. In the case of girl 637, the child aggresses against both parents when she feels undermined and rejected by them. There is also substantial aggression and hostility between the parents. Thus, in both cases, the stories created by the children illustrate rapid shifts to coalitions, associated with intense anger and hurt.

There is also a sense of shame and guilt: both children in the stories are shunned and find themselves isolated. Their aggression endangers their intactness and well-being (he is falling a sleep under the family car, facing the risk of being run over by his parents, she is grounded in her room, while the house is being ransacked). Rivalry with the parents is marked, however there is little evidence for a sense of triumph or defeat, but rather a deep sense of isolation and disconnect. In these stories, the triads are under aggressive attack from the child, who then retreats (a collapse of omnipotence into despair). Interestingly, for both children this happens in the Exclusion story (parents ask the child to leave the room and then they kiss). The two children cannot tolerate parental intimacy that brings about disastrous results.

There is limited collaboration and ability to rely on others for help, reassurance or soothing. The attachment figures, when they are not hostile and bossy, are often portrayed as passive or as inaccessibly idealized.

Both children show frequent occurrences of dysregulation; aggression is accompanied by a drop in the level of coherence of their stories. In the case of the boy, at times there is additional hindrance to a coherent evolution of the narrative arc: he avoids addressing the

emotional implications of the dilemma at the core of the story. In contrast, the girl seems to grasp and acknowledge the dilemma, but subsequently gets quite dysregulated by it. Thus, both children struggle to recognize the social dilemma and then act effectively to resolve it. Instead, their stories are characterized by lack of resolution and acts of aggression. Other mechanisms to tolerate the tension are retreats into a private world: the girl portrays her character as reading a book in the middle of a heated conflict, the boy is fascinated by the physical qualities of objects.

Intentionality starts at an ordinary level, namely, initially mental states can be easily inferred from behaviors. However, as feelings escalate and are not contained in the story by trustworthy and effectual parental figures, self and other's minds become more vague and opaque and a more arbitrary quality pervades the scene, one in which there are no evident links between action and states of mind or intentions of the participants.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, quantitative analyses were employed in an exploratory way. The RF scores for the PTI interviews were analyzed, in order to explore possible differences in parental mentalization capacities over and above the specific families. Regarding the 12 respondents as independent subjects (rather than embedded in families), a 2-way repeated measure analysis of variance was performed to check for effect of the relationship context (Marital, Self-Child, Partner-Child) on RF scores. A moderate effect size (.177) was found of relationship type. Pairwise comparison further revealed an approaching significance difference ( $p=.092$ ) between Marital RF ( $\bar{x}=4.688$ ) and Self-Child RF ( $\bar{x}= 5.229$ ), with the latter being higher than the former – namely, the

respondents' mean RF score when talking about their relationship with their child was higher than when talking about their relationship with their partner. All mean differences are presented in table 3.

Table 3.  
***Pairwise Comparisons: Relationship Type RF***

(I) Relationship Type RF	(J) Relationship Type RF	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Marital $\bar{x} = 4.688$	Self-Child $\bar{x} = 5.229$	-.542	.290	.092*
	Partner-Child $\bar{x} = 4.917$	-.229	.282	.436
Self-Child $\bar{x} = 5.229$	Marital $\bar{x} = 4.688$	----	----	----
	Partner-Child $\bar{x} = 4.917$	.313	.204	.157
Partner-Child $\bar{x} = 4.917$	Marital $\bar{x} = 4.688$	----	----	----
	Self-Child $\bar{x} = 5.229$	----	----	----

\* Approaching significance at  $P < .05$

## Chapter 5

### Case Vignettes

The essence of this exploratory study was the close analysis of six triads, from the vantage point of a researcher-clinician. The study sought to appreciate the clinical uniqueness of each primary triangle, or triad, while identifying common or shared dynamics and processes across families.

All six families communicated in their narratives and play rich and compelling stories. Unfortunately, the scope of this written project allows for the presentation of only three cases in detail, as illustrations for the threefold typology Cooperative/Strained/Disrupted triads. The cases presented below tell individual stories of family life and at the same time stand as examples for broader, more generalizable, phenomena, with important clinical implications.

#### **A Cooperative Triad: Family 515**

##### **Background:**

Family 515 is comprised of Mother Michelle, Father Joel and their children Cody (6.1) and Ben (1). Both parents work in the computer technology field. They are in their mid thirties.

**Michelle's PTI Interview:** overall score 6.5.

Michelle was a highly reflective interviewee. She provided elaborate and detailed responses that were nevertheless succinct and coherent. She was cooperative and forthcoming but at the same time conveyed a sense of clear boundaries with the researcher. Throughout the interview she showed evidence of actively searching for

meaning yet not assuming knowledge of the other's mind. She shifted quite fluidly between reflecting on her own relationship with either son or husband to reflecting on their dyad as the observer/witness. She was open in her responses and able to acknowledge conflict, doubts, and uncertainties. The most striking feature of her interview was her ability to think of ruptures in relationships as inevitable, yet reparable and actually moving relationships forward. Thus, she demonstrated capacity for self and other regulation. Her love for her husband and children, intense but not sentimental, came across very vividly.

*Marital Dyad: (5.5).* Michelle's responses when talking about her relationship with her husband convey a strong sense of intersubjectivity and mutuality of emotions. This emerges around the co-parenting of their children, but also independent of them. Husband and wife actively have fun with each other in ways that evoke their younger selves – for instance, finding a video game they used to play as students and playing it again in the city, 10 years later. They are attuned to each other around areas of disagreement as well, and according to Michelle are becoming better at recognizing when their ability to listen and mentalize is shutting down:

*Like I don't think we were great communicators when we were first married, because I think we thought it would all be like friendship, you know, and everything would flow, and we wouldn't actually have to meet obstacles and deal with them at the same time. So I think as, you know, the first couple of years of marriage progressed, and we started really trying to be better at listening, which is honestly a conscious effort, right, then I think it got better and better... Like (now, D.G) we're pretty conscious of when we feel like we're both getting maybe anxious or we're feeling too emotional about what we're saying and not being objective. And so we're pretty good about saying, "You know, I'm starting to feel frustrated. Time out," you know, and we just don't talk about it that day.*

*So we'll come back at it maybe the next morning or a different day when we both feel like we can, we've thought about it and we can talk about it.*

*Self-Child Dyad: (RF: 6.5)*

Michelle vividly described how her feeling of closeness with her son is established through mutual discovery – they venture on a quest to find an answer to a homework question or to build a Lego project together and at the same time build a stronger connection. It is a dynamic endeavor in which the process is as rewarding as the outcome. Similarly, she grasped not only how she helps Cody regulate his feeling state, but also how his mental state is affecting her and vice versa. Her discussion of the handling of angry feelings is a good example: She saw it as a bidirectional process that can be contained and managed through behavioral rules (time out). However, the essence of overcoming the anger is the understanding of their mutual impact:

*I'm usually not that frustrated at first unless he — like a couple of times he'll come out of his room over and over again, and he's really angry. And then it's hard for me, and I try to like walk away and take a deep breath and just not be frustrated, because if I'm frustrated it fuels him, and I know that...But that often involves, you know, just being really on my toes and trying to, you know, like keep him in his room for a few minutes, but walk out here.*

*...We feel like he needs to make the conscious choice to take control of himself and be in his room and calm himself down and, you know, get back to square one, and then he can come out. So I feel like, I feel like that empowers him more than if I make him do something or I start threatening, and I'm taking away privileges and toys because he won't stay in*

*... So we kind of feel like — it's hard not to feel. You start to get that like tension in your body and you feel tense because of it. But it's easier because I walk out and I realize, you know, I'm going to read a story to Ben during this, because he can pause while I walk him back in and come back. And it's interrupted, but at least I'm having positive*

*interaction with Ben. And he sees that Ben's getting a story read and he's not. So that also gives him something to think about.*

*Partner-child Dyad (RF: 6).*

Although Michele's RF was lower when she talked about the dyad that she is not part of, compared to the one that she is part of (Self-Child dyad), she still maintained a high ability to shift quite fluidly to reflecting on the relationship between Joel and Cody. She was quite empathic of her husband, who had lost his own father at a young age, feeling that he has been working hard to turn the loss into personal growth. She trusts his nurturing and loving qualities (which she senses as well and is grateful for), while at the same time wondering if he needs some coaching from her when it comes to effective parenting.

***Q: And what's difficult or painful for him in their (father-son) relationship?***

*A: There are probably two things. One is probably that he's not around as much as he would like to be. He kind of, he's got a crazy, busy job, and then he works with our temple. I feel like that's something that is difficult for him. And I also feel like that he finds it frustrating that he doesn't intuitively sometimes know how to handle Cody when Cody is not behaving. I think he finds it frustrating that he can't just parent sort of off the cuff, that he has to stop and think more. I feel like that's kind of an obstacle for him. But I feel like neither of those things are going to rip anything apart or, you know, neither of those things are things that will ruin anything, and they are things that we talk about and that we work on. So that's good.*

**Joel's PTI Interview: (RF: 6)**

Similar to his wife Michelle, Joel's responses were complex and he was able to see multiple perspectives; he was especially good at seeing mental states in context and talking about how one observable mental state can hide another, deeper feeling. Many of

his examples involved an interaction and discussing mental states from the point of view of their impact on self and other. Even more than his wife, Joel was very attuned to a developmental perspective, spontaneously describing the evolution of relationships over time and the influences of one's childhood on their own attitudes to parenting. Joel, who is clearly (and by his own admission) more emotional than his wife, articulated the importance of emotional security in the family as the backbone of well being.

*Marital Dyad (RF: 5.5).*

Joel has a strong sense of the mutual influence he and his wife have on each other: she strives to have him be more engaged with the family, 'shepherding' him through parenthood as much as she 'shepherds' the children through life. He, in turn, tries to temper her intensity and her susceptibility to getting a little too rigid and impatient, teaching her how to compromise more. There is very little resentment or anger, but an open recognition of these differences and appreciation that as partners they can learn from each other.

*She grew up — she has — Michelle has great memories of her own childhood and the experiences that she had as a child, whether they were family trips or things that were more routine that she did together with her sister and her parents, and she feels very passionate about — maybe recreating is too strong a word — but essentially creating similar experiences for her children and us to be as a family. So she's the kind of mom that when the kids are happy she's happy. And so I think when I am participating — when I — I think when she feels like I'm really being a partner in creating those experiencing and that family time, I think it brings her a lot of joy.*

*Self-Child Dyad (RF: 6.5)*

Joel is at his most reflective capacity when he talks about his relationship with his son Cody. He works hard to define the delicate, constantly shifting balance between their fun-suffused friendship and their father-son generational mentoring in which dad teaches the son how to be a man. Joel feels that the security and trust between them stem from this dynamic mix. He is very attuned to the uniqueness of his bond with his son and to the fact that the presence of a third, by definition, alters the relationship. He describes clicking with his son around a spontaneous moment of looking at baseball cards together:

*But it was great, and there was definitely just a real spirit of closeness to that. And it was incredibly simple time. I mean, we weren't really doing anything other than being together.*

He then asks to add:

*You know, we went from that to playing games with Michelle too, which was also — it was great but — and he had a blast, and we all had a — and it was really fun. But you know what I've noticed is he's different when it's just the two of us, you know.... ..But it was a totally different feeling. And they were both wonderful feelings, but it's a totally different feeling just sitting together in his room talking as we were playing with things and looking at baseball cards, than sitting at the table with Michelle. ...I've noticed that since he was an infant... And I remember talking to him and pointing at trees and talking to him like — he was an infant, so I'm like, "Tree. Tree," and picking a leaf and letting him touch it. [Laughter] It's just always been that way. And maybe part of it is a response from me when it's just him and I and feeling a little bit closer and a more personal connection with him. And over time I just think it's — it's similar — you know, there are similar — I notice similar responses from him when it's just the two of us. There is just more of a peace and calm and willingness to communicate that isn't always there.*

*....I mean, that Cody (at school with friends - DG) I am sure is even different than the Cody at home with just the family. And then you strip it down another level to, well, it's just Cody and dad, and I think it's even more different.*

In this very nuanced musing, Joel is working through his feelings around the contextual nature of intimacy. He realizes how relationships impact other relationships. His portrayal of the shifts from dyad to triad to multiple participants is quite sophisticated: there is inclusion and ability to expand the alliance to a three-way intersubjectivity, without denying the longing for the one-on one intimacy.

Later in the interview, Joel describes moments of difficulties in the triad; when Michelle sides with their son Cody and thus undermines dad's authority, or when Cody turns to mom for comfort, signaling dad as the outsider. These are painful moments for Joel, but his sense of exclusion is tolerable and is mitigated by the joy of being together as a family. This ability to recover and shift back to 'three together' is a strength for this family, that was also witnessed in the picnic.

*Partner-Child Dyad (RF: 6)*

Joel was eloquent in describing his own mismatch with Cody (the same difficulty that Michele described between father and son). He was also sensitive to mismatch in temperament between son and wife: Michelle is constantly in a rush, not always sensitive to Cody's need for support in transitions:

*“So when you take a child who, you know, once he's doing something doesn't want to stop, and a mother who really wants to move or do a lot [laughter], it can be like oil and water. And I think it's challenging for him. And, again, it's something that she and I have talked a lot about, and I've tried to help temper somewhat, but I think at times he may feel like it's a little bit too much”.*

Joel identifies with Cody in that regards, but feels he can help both mother and child overcome their difficulties. There is no sense of triumph as he observes their missteps. Similarly, there is no sense of envy when he talks about the joy their relationship brings him. On the contrary - he benefits from their secure attachment:

*“You know, I mean, Michelle just, you know, Michelle really genuinely loves him, and he really genuinely loves his mom. And they — I mean, you know, throw out the stuff that — you know, throw out the bumps in the road and they have an amazing relationship as mother and son. And it definitely — that gives me a lot — to me that adds to the comfort and the peace I feel from our home when I literally walk into our home. And that’s huge. I mean, that definitely gives me a lot of joy”.*

### **Family Picnic**

Dad starts off invitingly: “Shall we guys have a picnic?” Cody hands over the blanket to his parents to spread on the floor, and they introduce a playful tone right away, suggesting it can be used as a Jedi robe instead. Cody joins in, picking a bottle of juice for use as a light saber.

The picnic starts with a lot of parental scaffolding: dad offers his help getting stuff out of the picnic basket, mom directs Cody with questions about the sitting arrangement and number of plates. They are both respectful when Cody indicates that he wants to set the dishes out without help. Dad announces that he had packed the picnic. Mom to Cody: “then we are in trouble, we’ll be eating Chips Ahoy”. Dad hears her and doesn’t seem to mind. The lighthearted banter continues throughout the picnic, revolving mostly around dad’s table manners. For the most part it is leveled at dad directly without involving Cody, who is busy exploring the content of the basket and setting up. Comments that mom directs at dad such as ”keep your food on your plate, sweetheart” unleash loud giggles from both parents. Dad responds with rebelliously clowning around some more.

Cody wants to add peppers to the fruit salad, and asks mom for help in pretending they are actually a fruit. Mom orients him to dad, who has an idea: we can pretend they are actually Kiwi. Dad then teaches Cody how to set the cutlery, giving mom credit for the mnemonic he uses. Mom coyly denies but enjoys the compliment.

Mom takes charge by saying to Cody: “serve it up!” and then to dad, equally assertively: “dad, you want to get your bowl over here”. Dad becomes a little rebellious and he moves the fruit salad to his plate instead, but then asks to get a second serving in his bowl. The theme of his appetite and his attempts to ‘cheat’ in order to get more food is now becoming a running joke. Cody hands out the food and gives dad extra. Both parents notice and comments affectionately that he knows dad is hungry. Dad pets him lovingly on his back. There is more physical demonstration of parental love when Cody, like his dad before him, pretends to chop the food with his hands. Mom and dad are both impressed by his karate movements, commenting on his ‘strong muscles’ and petting his arms. Before they eat they say grace and toast to Cody’s little brother Ben who is not participating in the picnic.

The family pretends to eat: dad is continuing to be the clown, by pretending to swallow a huge piece of wooden pear, which he hides in his shirt. Mom and Cody laugh approvingly. However, dad is soon in trouble again, as some of the food falls off his plate. Mom, who earlier made them both laugh by pompously instructing dad to keep his food on the plate now scolds him again: “you are a mess”. In response, dad wipes himself and his son with big swiping movements, tickling the boy in the process. Dad shifts the game to making plans for after the picnic, suggesting that it’s a nice day and they should be outdoors. Mom misses a beat, taking time to realize he is playing pretend. As dad

teases her for her lack of imagination, Cody quickly cuts in: “I’m done!!” Dad then suggests that they would clean up. While he is busy putting the fruit pieces together, mom gets silly with the boy, using the plates as Frisbees, then dueling with the plastic forks. Dad takes on the role of the limits setter, asking both to stop. He tells Michelle with fake severity: “You don’t play with knives, mom”. The picnic is over and the parents teach Cody how to fold the blanket. Mom then picks him up and hugs him tight.

**Comments:**

This picnic is characterized by very tangible joy expressed by all three members of the family. There is laughing, hugging, singing, and conversing animatedly. Both parents show a lot of love and warmth to Cody, who relishes the interaction. They also show plenty of affection toward each other, laughing, establishing frequent eye contact and bantering. There is a subtle edge to their exchange, as mom insinuates that dad is a big baby and she is the responsible adult. She also shows her intensity in a brief exchange with Cody, when she sharply reminds him to use the word ‘please’. Dad is instrumental in repairing these missteps, being the peace keeper who softly urges them both to ‘try again’. He diffuses potential tension and escalation by humor and patience, and mom and Cody follow his lead easily and smoothly. Their game is creative and pleasurable.

In the picnic all family members are included, even the little sister who is actually absent. Mom and dad interact with Cody and with each other. Cody shows love and concern to dad (feeds his hungry dad, imitates his prowess by ‘chopping’ the fruit with bare hands). Cody is also very engaged with his mom. The only time he tenses up is when dad teases her lightly. Both parents, especially mom, are involved in a very hands-on way, and structure the play quite a bit. They support each other in this task, often orienting Cody to

the other parent through speech or subtle body movements. Despite their scaffolding, they respect and empower Cody's increasing push for autonomy. The picnic ends with the parents jointly teaching Cody a new skill.

This family shows high degree of warmth and participation of all three members. It is rich and flexible in its configurations and there is high cooperation between the parents. There are moments when mom shows a little rivalry with dad, whom she lightly patronizes. The family recovers easily from these moments of contention, largely due to dad's forgiving demeanor. This is an example of a cooperative triad.

**Cody's Story Stems:**

Cody's stories convey a strong sense of the parental couple, who work in concert: they are engaged in a conversation during dinner in the Spilled Juice story and together check under the child's bed to make sure no burglar is hiding there (Burglar story).

Interestingly, the parents deny kissing in the Exclusion story (a similar 'solution' was concocted by other children in the sample as well).

In Cody's mind the parents clearly serve as a secure base to go back to, when the environment appears dangerous. They are portrayed as either benign or nurturing. The protagonist in his story, a boy named Jack, is gentle as well: only once does he adaptively assert himself when a friend excludes his little brother (Three Is a Crowd story). In all other stories the boy is consistently cooperative. He keeps both parents in mind and is quite inclusive: in the Gift for Parent story he gives the picture to dad but proposes to make another one for mom, to ensure she doesn't feel left out. In fact, Cody was the only child in the sample who actively made this triadic bid. Aggression is missing from Cody's stories: often, when the story presents a conflict he resorts to avoidance (curtailed

stories, abrupt endings, minimal elaboration). Similarly, because of his short stories, intentionality is easily inferred but is not explicitly described.

Thus, it seems that Cody's representational world consists of positive figures and an expectation for protection and for affect regulation by the attachment figures. Thus, in his stories Cody conveys a strong sense of 2+1 or 3 together alliances. Coalitions or confrontations are avoided and denied (parents even claim they are not kissing). This is particularly interesting given the playful dueling between Cody's parents during the picnic session. It is very possible that Cody, at least in the presence of a relative stranger, is over-regulated. Negative feelings are not fully owned and easily expressed and conflict situations lead to avoidance.

### **Example:**

#### **Burglar story**

Q: Let's try one more. How about that? Yeah? So this time, we also—we're going to include a bed this time. Let's have a bed. It's a bed for Jack and a blanket. So he's in bed, and it's nighttime, and they're downstairs again on the couch, talking, and Jack is in his bed in his room, and suddenly the lights go out. It's dark, and he hears a sound [knocking sound]. So he jumps out of his bed. [Aggh], it's a burglar. It's a thief. [Aggh] what happens next? Show me.

A: [Uh], he runs down to his mom and dad and said, "There's a burglar. There's a burglar."

Q: Now what did they do?

A: [Uh], they checked his room.

Q: Uh-huh? Uh-huh,

A: (Cody silently walks both parents figures to child's bed, they look under the bed)

Q: Under the bed

A: (Cody has parents go back to child)  
As the parents: "There's no burglar."

(As the boy): "Okay." (Child walks back to his room and gets into his bed).

Q: [Hmm], how does he feel now?

A: Safe.

Q: He's safe. Okay, good.

### **A Strained Triad - Family 217**

#### **Background:**

Family 217 is comprised of mother Victoria, father Gabe, their daughter Sophia (6.8) and sons Rick (4) and Adam (1). Mother is in advertising and dad works in the tourism industry.

**Victoria's PTI interview:** overall score 4.5

Victoria stands out in the study of predominantly low risk middle class population: she was born in a poor Asian country and as a minor experienced poverty, multiple losses, homelessness and abandonment. Victoria has managed, through her humor, talent, engaging manner and a good amount of luck, to extricate herself from that world – to have a family and education. Her current life is much more stable and normative.

However, it is not sheltered from stressors facing many young middle class families: money is tight, both parents work full time and raise three young children.

Victoria's overall score of 4.5 puts her slightly below average. She is aware of feelings and she is aware of other minds, hence her profound guilt and concern about burdening others with her emotions. But she often does not or is not able to use her understanding of herself in the service of regulation. She showed an awareness of her vulnerability – which is a promising indication for change, but at times in the interview was flooded and couldn't reflect well.

*“Sometimes my emotions like really dictate what I can and cannot do. And, you know, I can’t, I can’t like control them sometimes. Like right now I don’t want to cry and I’m crying”*

*Marital Dyad* (RF: 5.5) Victoria is most reflective when she talks about her relationship with her husband, Gabe. Their relationship is one of earned security, trust won the hard way after many turbulent years together. Victoria finds Gabe to be solid and very clear about his love and commitment to her, not deterred by the many tests she has put him through.

They are, according to her, quite different: she is quite volatile in her emotional life, he perhaps reins in his emotions a little too much. Under a lot of situational stress (both overworked, having to move to a smaller apartment), their differences get polarized and they become more reactive. Victoria is painfully aware of that:

*“There’s some dynamic that we have, where he is like total calmness, and I’m total excitement and getting like really excited or upset. And then he gets more calm, and he’s like, “You’re being hysterical,” like that kind of vibe...*

*It feels like a personal attack to me, because I feel like he’s not listening to me. And I’m like this concerns and da-da-da, and (he – D.G) like not taking them seriously. He’s just like — it feels like he’s dismissing me and just like, you know”.*

Victoria is aware that as a couple they struggle to deescalate conflicts and instead get caught up in repetitions. Their protection, it seems, is their ability to rediscover each other and appreciate the same qualities that make them clash at times of heightened tension: her raw emotionality revitalizes him, his stability makes her feel safe. Victoria describes how over the years they have somewhat modified each other’s emotional life: he is less avoidant of feelings, she is less ambivalent. Furthermore, they are playful together in a way that is restorative:

*“ You know, we’re out somewhere. He finds a couple of leaves and some sticks and makes a boat. Like anything. It’s just like — you know, it’s not, it’s not forced at all. He’s a very natural, natural player.... He’s a good player. And with me he’s playful too. We’re not playing so much lately, because we’re so stressed out. But if we’re on vacation, that’s how I know we’re probably going to make it... We don’t have vacation enough, but that makes me feel like, okay, we’re kind of okay”.*

*Self-Child Dyad (RF: 4).*

This part of the interview was painful for Victoria and evoked a lot of her trauma history. She was quite tearful and disorganized. Victoria is tormented with guilt that being a traumatized child who is now a full time working mother of three burdens her daughter tremendously. Victoria has a sense that her own vulnerability compels Sophia to be thoughtful and sensitive. Mother is also worried that underneath this ‘model child’ there is a girl who internalized a feeling that life is not just challenging, but impossibly overwhelming. These are complex ideas about defenses, but Victoria is too flooded to articulate them coherently. Her profound guilt distorts her accountability and turns it into self-hatred: when answering questions about her impact on her daughter she struggled with the blurred lines between herself and her daughter:

*...I think it’s hard for her, and I think she doesn’t, I think she doesn’t like having two brothers. And that kills me, because I feel like it’s my fault. But I don’t know.*

**Q:** *How is your guilt affecting her?*

*A: [Sighs] How is that affecting her? I think it gives her a sense that something is wrong, you know, because I think it, she, it gives her a sense like there’s something wrong with my life, like this is too hard, this is too much... like whatever, if I’m okay with it, she’ll be okay with it, whatever it is. Even if we have nothing, and even if I work all the time, even if have seven kids, if I am okay with my life, she’s like, “This is my mom*

*and this the way it is. We have seven kids and we live here. And this is okay, because she looks okay, this is okay.” It’s sort of like my sort of like distress is like, “There’s something really wrong here. Wow, this is really hard.” You know, she gets a sense of like her life is, there’s something really hard about it.*

*Partner-Child Dyad (4.5)*

It is noteworthy that Victoria sees her husband as the one able to make space for a third in a relationship whereas she operates more on a dyadic level. As she talks about the relationship between Gabe and Sophia, she shifts to the mother-child dyad and to the triad from the father-child dyad, indicating that she still has some difficulties being the odd one out. But she is aware of it, and grateful to husband for sensing it:

*They weren’t super close from the beginning, because I was like, Sophia, you know I was like super mom. Like it was like this crazy thing that was happening. And he sort of was like background like putting, you know, like was like, you know, in the background doing things, like sprinkling fairy dust or whatever, I don’t know. And it was just me and her on center stage. It’s crazy. But he handled it really well, much to his credit. And their relationship is just super strong. It just like slowly grew, slowly grew. He was able to understand that for some reason I needed to have this thing with a child, with a baby. Victoria feels (and in his interview Gabe communicates a similar sentiment) that her*

*relationship with Sophia needs to be more dyadic, although it gradually opens up to others. According to Victoria, Gabe has been able to tolerate being the odd one out, without putting mother in the same position:*

*Like there has always been like an inclusion of the rest of the family in their relationship, you know. And I feel like my relationship with Sophia in the beginning was really just me and her, but that it also grew in a way to include him and include everybody. So it’s not — you know, we do like have a special thing, you know. It’s like these girls, whatever. But he’s — you know, there’s always like, there’s always like a place for me in their*

*relationship and a place for everybody — you know what I mean — even though they have a very special thing. They are just very inclusive.*

**Gabe's PTI. Overall score: 5.5**

Gabe has a very particular language style that is a bit circular. He tends not to finish his sentences which renders many of his answers inexplicit in terms of link between mental states and behavior. However, he clearly has a third perspective in mind and he can talk about relationships both from the dyadic as well as triadic perspective.

*Marital Dyad: RF 4*

This is Gabe's least reflective section of the interview (like most subjects), whereas for his wife it was the highest. Like her, he can identify the patterns of conflict and reparation but he is less coherent about the circular impact they have on each other. Perhaps he is somewhat protective of her and minimizing the impact of her volatility on him. Like his wife he feels that they are very good at reconnecting and enjoying each other, independent of their children.

Gabe realizes that Victoria sees his approach to challenges as avoidance and complacency. He doesn't share that view, yet he understands that Victoria's perception of him is colored by her trauma:

*“When she feels that I am being passive about problems or something. That drives her nuts. Uh, the feeling of insecurity, uh, gives her a lot of — that's something that we are very different too. Uh, like she — like she will worry about, uh, things like, you know, like money, like — like — like oh, like, yeah, money or — or — or even having a place or — because she has been in positions where she had no money at all, and she has been in positions where she didn't have a place and — and I've — our backgrounds are totally different, you know? Like I've never been in the streets, and I've never been like no money at all. I've always had a family kind of that I know always they're going to give*

*me a hand if I happen to need it, you know. And, uh, sometimes that kicks in and that freaks her out a little bit. And that's coming from many, many, many years ago.*

He is forgiving and loving, in his words; 'adoring' his wife.

*Self-Child Dyad (RF: 5)*

Gabe, like his wife Victoria, is sensitive to the impact of financial struggle and the birth of younger siblings on his daughter Sophia's experience in the family: the parents are less available, and Sophia is expected to be a mature and responsible girl: *"She changed, I think, a lot, uh, when her brothers came, you know, and she became very independent very fast. That was her salvation, you know, to become independent"*.

Father realizes that despite her seeming such a self-sufficient child, who can entertain herself, Sophia is a young girl, who needs her parents' love in order to thrive. He lovingly describes how she melts into his hugs and how he too enjoys the mutuality and reciprocity of her affection. He is a little worried about her tendency to be the good girl, even or especially when she struggles, but he attributes it more to being the oldest sibling in a large family with two busy parents.

Gabe struggles with his guilt about neglecting Sophia somewhat, being so burdened by other tasks in life. He is also worried about losing his temper with her sometimes, when she is slow to get organized in the morning.

*You know, like sometimes it's like because you are dealing with these guys who are still like pee in their pants sometimes, you know, like I — I do treat Sophia sometimes like she is 15, you know. I'm like, okay, get your clothes, get ready, see you upstairs. And she's kind of lost in the morning, you know, and — and is like, uh — yeah, it feels bad, I'm going like, you know — you know, don't — why don't I remember these things, you know, before I blow up on her, you know"*

However, unlike Victoria, his guilt is not debilitating and he can better think of Sophia as a separate person. She is not just reactive, but an active agent, who at times might even be a little oppositional in the morning. He is actively trying to tease out various explanations when he wonders about their disagreements:

*The morning time is like crazy, and she'll make me blow up kind of thing, you know, on purpose, I think. Or maybe she's just confused, I don't know. It's — it's — I don't know. It's — it's very weird. Or maybe I have issues around that time and around those, uh, like being late, I don't like being late..., like I'm hard on her or things that make me like click in a bad way is, uh, things that I don't like in Victoria, too, you know.*

*Partner-Child Dyad (RF: 5)*

Gabe is very aware of the intensity of the bond between his wife and his daughter. He thinks about it in more positive terms than Victoria and sees it mostly as a facilitating relationship for Sophia: Victoria is very accepting and non judgmental of her daughter. He alludes to the difficulties stemming from Victoria's traumatic childhood experiences, but is careful to focus on the positive. There is perhaps some denial on his part, but also potentially a reparative experience for Victoria, who is very worried about her impact on Sophia.

*Uh, I think very intense from the beginning, you know, like the bond Victoria had with her first kid, you know, Sophia, and the bond Sophia as a baby had with Victoria was crazy. It was like — they were like — like this all the time, you know. It was really beautiful... I — I've been around many, many babies and moms like in the last seven years, you know, and — and I thought they were — I mean, they are my wife or my daughter, so I'm going to look at them in a very, oh — in a special way. But, uh, I think they were always very intense, you know, to each other like connected.*

Gabe acknowledges that having to deal with the mother-child dyadic focus was painful at the beginning:

*“...suddenly your wife is — the first months, you know, it's like — like suddenly your wife is just totally in love with this little thing, you know, and not even looking at you kind of thing; in fact, rejecting you in the beginning, you know”*

When it comes to the present, Gabe is more evasive about his feelings. Perhaps he needs to minimize, or things have opened up somewhat between his wife and daughter and have become more inclusive:

*“I see they have a huge bond, you know, and I'm — I think their relationship, Victoria and Sophia, is stronger than me and Sophia, but it doesn't bother me at all, you know? Like I'm happy for them to have that, you know, and I have a different thing going on. Uh, like I don't — like that kind of stuff doesn't bother me at all, you know. I'm very like, uh — that doesn't make me feel insecure or whatever, you know.”*

He notices that their bond has recently developed in a new dimension (doing girlie stuff together), whereas for him and Sophia connecting requires more of an effort. Gabe accepts his role of secondary bond with daughter, affected by her developmental shift and by her mother's need to rework her own childhood through motherhood. At an earlier phase of the interview he said:

*... You know, before, it used to be just like daddy, she was totally in love with daddy, and she was hanging from my neck and that was easy. Everything she wanted was like kisses from me, and now, you know, now she'll be like now that's [unintelligible] for her basically. Now it's other things, you know... I guess the same way that I was explaining how her, uh, interests and mine have grown apart, I think hers and Victoria's kind of, uh, have grown more together or — or have always been very very together, you know.*

### **The Family Picnic:**

Dad: “all right, picnic time” and all three of them spread the blanket together. He sets a positive tone, saying: “I like this grass, nice and short”.

Sophia is in charge of the basket. She hands out bowls and tosses one to dad, who is out of reach. Dad mildly rebukes: “someone is being helpful” and they all laugh. Sophia wants to choose what she doles out of the basket but lets mom take a couple of things out. As she dreamily explores the content of the basket dad directs her by asking for a sandwich. Sophia reacts with a dismissive “ok, whatever” and prepares a sandwich out of bread, pear, apple and watermelon. As she introduces each surprising ingredient, she asks both her parents if they would like it included. Dad is heartily endorsing her unusual choices, and mom more reluctantly follows his lead.

Both parents watch her, laughing at the impossibly thick sandwich and at the unusual combination. They also toast, just the two of them, with their milk cups as Sophia looks on curiously. Dad finally gets his sandwich, and asks “is that for me or for mamma?” He pretends to open an incredibly wide mouth to bite on it, and makes everyone laugh by complaining that the ‘corner sandwich’ is not edible. Sophia promises to fix it and her parents watch as she rearranges the vegetables. Mom strokes dad’s leg and he takes her hand in his hand.

Instead of making dad’s sandwich more manageable, Sophia pretends to be pouring milk and yogurt onto it. They all laugh at the silly sandwich. Mom is the one who comments on the aggressive undertone of it (“do you want to give us a tummy ache?”) whereas dad minimizes it (“she can’t wait for dessert”). Still, he gently insists that Sophia will make a more conventional looking sandwich, with Salami. After twice failing to respond to his request, Sophia finally accommodates his preference.

The atmosphere is quieter, less whimsical – dad explains about the air bubbles in Swiss cheese. Mom is stroking his leg again. Mom asks hopefully “is the sandwich for me?”

and Sophia promises: “I’ll make you one”, but mom complains ”I am so hungry. Feed me”. Sophia: “ I am making one for you right now”. Gabe suggests sharing with mom, girl approves. He then asks if Sophia is going to eat. Sophia pretends to make a ‘reverse sandwich’ for herself (bread in the middle), pouring milk and yogurt on it. She glimpses regularly at mom and dad, to get their reaction to all she adds. As their attention shifts to something else she pretends to talk to her food. That gets them both interested: dad moves closer, followed by mom and they pretend to be the food talking back to girl. The mood becomes loose: Sophia and mom pretend to eat their food ravenously and they lick their ice cream straight from the container. Dad is more orderly, eating his ice cream with his pinky, to “watch my diet”. He looks a little uncomfortable when mom eats so wildly. He then shrugs as in ‘if you can beat them join them’ and eats as noisily.

The level of excitement goes up even more: Sophia uses her spoon to remove imaginary smears of food off her face and eat them. Dad suggests: “can I eat it from your face?” mom repeats, with a much more expressive tone “can I eat from your face”? both parents swoop in, girl moves back, giggling and objecting. They shift back and then in again – it only stops when mom realizes that they are out of the camera’s coverage. They calm down for a second, not sure what to do next. Then mom initiates eating with a spoon from dad’s face and invites Sophia to eat with her from his face. He is reluctant and moves back a little but then, again, seems to surrender himself to it. Mom pretends to lick his face and Sophia uses a spoon to collect pretend soup from his beard. He hugs his daughter and tickles her as his wife pretends to lick his face. Mom: “I think it’s a food fight”. Dad: “oh my god, stop it (at the same time lifting a yogurt as a weapon)”. At this point the interviewer comes in, unaware of their play but feeling it’s time to wrap up.

**Comments:**

In this picnic, the girl, whose younger brothers are absent, is showing more capricious behavior than the responsible first-born portrayed by her parents. She is playful with her dad, as she prepares a whacky sandwich for him, but she is also a little provocative and dismissive of him. Dad works to set some limits within the play, careful not to compromise the joyous and carefree atmosphere. He eventually gets her cooperation. Sophia appears very attuned to cues from mom that the pretend play can get quite wild. She is also remarkably high on triangular bids – she checks with both parents for their response as she prepares the sandwiches, even though only dad asked for it. She speaks to both and her eyes scan both. The parents both focus on her, but they also share their own little moments, just the two of them, as they toast and as they briefly hold hands, twice. Mom is respectful of child's wish to take the food out of the basket. She is also happy to initially let dad take center stage with his quip about the weird looking sandwich. But she is hungry for attention, and both partner and daughter take note of that. From this point on, mom is the one who pushes the level of excitement up: although it was dad's idea to eat from Sophia's face, mom moves in very energetically. She does the same with licking him. She declares a food fight.

Dad is very inclusive. He is more subdued than his wife and looks a little uncomfortable when the play loses its structure. His attempts to slow things down, while remaining in pretend mode, are confounded by his recognition that, increasingly, the play is on mom's terms. As he joins in he becomes the center of mother and daughter's attention and the locus of their affection and excitement, but he is required to surrender himself to them.

This picnic is quite fluid in its structure (or lack thereof). It shifts from playful food sculpturing to a collective hug with dad in the center, to a food fight. Although dad tries to control it, mom okays a more impulsive play and then leads the dysregulated tone. The only structure is provided by the setting (the coverage of the camera, the researcher walking in). The family shifts loosely between various constellations: girl and dad playing and mom observing; parental focus on girl; parents focus on each other; mom and daughter's loving/assaultive focus on dad. The switches from an alliance to coalitions are very quick, indicated subtly by the shifts in mood – from shared joy to nervousness, from fun to provocation.

This is a family with the potential for being cooperative – they have the capacity to play together and have fun, but at the expense of structure. By relinquishing their parental authority (and actually instigating the rambunctious behavior), mom and dad move into a peer-like status with Sophia. Although it is not a 'two against one' coalition, it is certainly not a consistent 'two for one' relationship in which the parents support the child's emotional development.

**Sophia's story stems:**

Sophia's responses on the story stems evoke a representational world in which the parents offer reassurance and comfort, but can also be slightly strict and join forces in scolding her. The child herself offers reassurance to parents and acts as a mediator during conflicts. She also deals with tension, such as potential jealousy in the triad by turning into the trouble-maker. Thus, Sophia operates in a representational world in which figures shift quite quickly from one way of relating to another. Anger and rivalry might be moderate, but they are somewhat unpredictable.

Sophia is a very empathic girl who is capable of holding many perspectives in mind and understanding the nuances of feelings. Her enactment in the story stems included direct reference to feelings underlying behaviors. Her attentiveness to others (most notably adults) manifested in the content of her story and in the frequent eye contact she made with the PI, checking-in ever so often during the play. It is possible that in the case of Sophia, the reflective capacity stems from pressure to be adult-like. It is notable that the stories with her highest reflective capacity are those in which the child has the initiative (almost the duty) to repair the situation. She needs to be in charge and her way of achieving that is not through aggression and control (like the children in the ‘disrupted’ triads) but through heightened attunement to other minds. It begs the question whether a reversal in the containing capacity leads her to excel like this.

**Example:**

**Lost Keys**

Q: All right, let’s see what mom and dad are doing now. They’re standing like this, looking at each other. And then Elisa is coming into the room, and she sees them looking at each other like this. Look at my face (angry expression). And mommy’s saying, “You lost my keys.” “I did not.” “Yes, you did. You always lose my keys.” “I did not lose them this time.” So what happens next?

A: (As Elisa): “Mom and dad, what are you fighting about?”

(As mom) “Elisa, your father lost my keys.”

(As dad) “I did not.”

(As mom) “Yes, you did.”

(As dad) “I did not.”

(As mom) “Yes, you did.”

(As Elisa) “Can you just stop fighting? It’s getting a little bit annoying. I just had a fight with my best friend, Lilly, and we worked it out. So, dad, tell me the story what happened with you and mom’s keys.”

(As dad) “Well, I was walking. I was walking in the subway. I was holding mom’s keys really near to the edge and they accidentally dropped in.”

(As mom) “You did, you did not.”

(As dad) “I accidentally did.”

(As mom) “Elisa, could you figure this out?”

(As Elisa) “Okay. Dad, you have to be more careful with, with mom’s keys, and I know you always lose mom’s keys. And it’s true he did not lose your keys, he accidentally dropped them in the subway, right. {Sigh}, so is everything worked out?”

(As mom) “No, I’m still mad.”

(As Elisa) “But you’re not mad at him, right?”

(As mom) “Well, I’m not really mad at him.”

(As Elisa) “Good, and now we work things out. Now, we just need to get mom new keys.”

(As mom and dad) “Good idea. Good idea.”

Q: Good idea.

A: Yeah.

### **A Disrupted Triad – Family 637**

#### **Background:**

Family 637 is comprised of Mother Frances, Father Tim and their two young children Stella (6.11), and Michael (4). Mom works in public relations. She works long hours and travels frequently. Dad has a publishing business. He works mostly from home. They had the children in their early 40’s.

**Frances' PTI Interview:** overall score 3.5

Frances's interview was the shortest one in the study. She engaged in it in the same manner she signed up for the study: focused resolution to do it, with minimal curiosity about the process. As she herself described her typical style of engagement: "simply cut through the B.S".

Frances could identify feelings and occasionally used a mental state language, but her minimal elaboration failed to demonstrate a genuine understanding of mental life underlying behavior. She used many action words, many of them were associated with "fun" - a sensation of thrill, it seems, that nevertheless remained vague. She prided herself on being a doer, who can power through sleep deprivation and stress, and gets the job done. I found her description of herself as "kind of foggy and aloof" at times of stress as very accurate – she attempted to distance herself from the impact of her own feelings and strove to be self sufficient financially and emotionally.

*Marital Dyad (RF: 3)* Frances' struggle to link behavior to mental states was quite glaring when she discussed her relationship with her husband of 16 years, Tim. They are, in her view, a "tenured" system. They can "...*finish each other's sentences....Tim knows what I'll do, and I know exactly what he'll react to*". However, their sense of close familiarity with each other doesn't suggest a dynamic, evolving relationship. Quite the contrary, Frances provides a minimal developmental perspective to their relationship. Rather, it evokes the image of a set of gears that needs to be kept aligned. Moreover, knowing each other so well doesn't generate intimacy or sense of safety: when disparities in income and career trajectories strain the relationship, Frances feels that the rupture can escalate, rather than be worked through and resolved. The anxiety this threat evokes is

minimized as Frances uses the distancing “you” instead of talking from a more personal “I”. Her description of fun with her husband is quite impoverished:

**Q: What gives you most joy about the relationship with him?**

*A: I think when we go out and have fun together. We spend time with our kids and have a good kind of family. We do good, crazy adventures together, and I think that's kind of fun.*

Frances finds it hard to elaborate on her response, despite many prompts. It is also notable that she detours from her dyadic relationship with Tim to include the children.

She resorts to the same maneuver when asked about a clicking moment with her partner:

*I don't know. We just went to the park and had fun with the kids. We just had a really good walk, which was kind of fun, cruising around the neighborhood. Tim has been making fun of me because of my summer reading choices, which are really juvenile, or he was cheering me on because I was on some weird diet. I don't know.*

*Subject-Child Dyad (RF: 4.5):* Frances is more reflective when she discusses her relationship with her daughter Stella. She has some, albeit vague, notion that the 6 year old Stella needs her help and support in regulating her feeling states, especially when she is tired. She has a much harder time understanding how her own mental states affect her child. Frances values autonomy and she is pleased that Stella is developing to be ambitious and driven just like her. She wishes to have a girl who is precocious and strong, who will be able to join mother in her adult world, rather than mother entering the world of childhood. Thus, their moments of shared fun are adult-oriented: shopping and having their nails done. Stella, mom reports proudly, is a great travel companion who is very adaptable and adventurous.

*Partner-Child Dyad (RF: 3)*

Frances had a hard time reflecting on Tim's relationship with Stella. More than anything else, her thoughts about their relationship sounded like an extrapolation of her own relationship with the girl. She recognizes that their relationship is playful, perhaps in line with seeing Tim as a creative person. However, their playfulness is strikingly similar to Frances' own adventures with Stella.

In thinking about the 'third' dyad, the one to which she doesn't belong, Frances almost actively avoids reflection, collapsing any nuances between her own relationship with Stella and Tim's relationship with the girl into a prettified, neutralized, account.

***Q: What do you think makes him most happy about the relationship between them?***

*A: oh, that it's reciprocated, and I think it's like a pure, unadulterated love, you know. So I think that's kind of special.*

***Q: And what's the most difficult aspect of it for him?***

*A: The same thing as mine, absolutely the same thing. Where she just gets exhausted and becomes challenging, needs to just get put to bed, or when she's harassing Michael.*

***Q: And you, watching the two of them, what gives you the most joy, and what's difficult for you about the two of them?***

*A: Nothing really. You know, it's a good relationship, good, healthy, happy. I can't complain about any of it.*

***Q: And what the most joyous part of it for you?***

*A: Oh, that everybody gets along so well and that they have fun.*

**Tim's PTI interview:** Overall RF score: 5B

In sharp contrast to his terse wife, Tim is verbose. He has a long-winded way of answering questions, which interestingly he is aware of. Tim uses a lot of negation, humor, clichés and distancing devices ('you') to minimize the intensity of his negative feelings. Even when he communicates genuine feelings, it is often obscured by a smoke

screen of verbiage. He starts most of his responses very generally, almost flippantly, and then with prompting and probing gets more specific.

*Marital RF: (RF: 4)*

Tim appears angrier with his wife than he'd like to admit. During his interview he commented jokingly that the researcher would be summoned to testify in their divorce trial, subtly seeking her support and alliance with him.

Tim has a hard time thinking of relationships as a dynamic process of mutual recognition, compromise and working through. For Tim, the relational field is constructed of comparisons and competitions. With his wife he reports plenty of little arguments in front of their children:

*"We're both pretty independent, pretty demonstrative, blunt – I'm extremely blunt and so is she, oh my god, and so when you have that kind of relationship there's not one person who's going to be subservient. You know, who's going to go along...subservient is the wrong word".*

Whereas in daily disagreement Tim paints a picture of participants of equal stature, he feels very dependent on his wife. He is no match in term of ambition and determination. Frances is the author of their shared life, and Tim is merely being handed the script.

When asked how has the relationship with her affected him, he responses:

*"I would have never lived here. I would have lived in Michigan, where I grew up. I would have been a teacher. I would have just had a boring life. I would have been pretty successful, pretty, you know, average. And the only reason that I ever left that place and left that world was because I could. And the reason why I could was because of her, because she wanted to do it. She drove it. She's the driver.*

***Q: And how has it changed her?***

A: *Not one bit. [Laughter] She's — Frances is iconoclastic. See, I know the word. I have, I can back it up. She is going to do what she is going to do, and you can come along.*

Tim's portrayal of his wife as a relentless and mindless striver is quite perceptive. Her mind is opaque to her and consequently it is opaque to him. What's striking, however, is that he accepts it, almost embraces this disconnect with no attempts to wonder why she is so inaccessible. What lies beneath her "incredible obsessive drive" doesn't engage him. At best, Tim struggles with his own feelings around this dynamic and he shifts dramatically in his portrayal of his feelings. On the one hand: "...*I feel like, I feel like I'm living my dream every day ...I've got these kids who are just, you know, dynamite. I live in this house that is beyond anything I ever imagined. I have another one that's even better*". On the other, he expresses resentment about his irrelevance in Frances' solo performance.

With plenty of silenced tension within the marital couple, the children are designated an area of relative safety and agreement. Thus, Tim, just like his wife, detours to them:

*"And so, child-centric is a big thing for us. Like all of our time is spent talking about our kids, thinking about what we could do for them, thinking about their lives and their personalities... but we as a couple, outside of their presence, yeah that's the common denominator. That's one of the only things we talk about (pause) in depth"*.

*The Self-Child Dyad: (RF: 5B)*

Tim's low RF when it comes to thinking of his relationship with his daughter Stella is evident in his incoherent picture of the little girl. Dad states for example that she struggles "with nothing", but later it transpires that among the children Stella is the one who has the most remarkable, if infrequent, tantrums. Tim also jokes a lot during this

section of the interview that unlike many other kids around, Stella doesn't need a shrink, yet.

The most striking aspect of father-daughter relationship is Tim's conflict around Stella's increasing independence and expanding social world. He is proud of her, but is very sensitive to the prospect of losing her love and need for him. His daughter is his emotional safe haven as much as he has been hers:

***Q: What about a time recently that you were not clicking?***

*A: ...we have this ritual every night where I tuck her in... And then I kind of — then there's the daddy blanket, which is me coming in to get a kiss. And she was just like, "Oh, go away." It was just kind of like a, you know, a brat. And I said, I said, "What happened to you? When did you change? Where did you learn this?" ... So I'm noticing a few more moments like that, like she's definitely changing. She's not, she's not like this needy kid that's always going to run to her dad like young girls do. Now she's like this, she's like a woman, you know. She's very independent.*

***Q: And so how did that make you feel, that she said, "Oh, go away"?***

*A: Oh, that's what happens in our relationship. I have a feisty, independent, iconoclastic daughter just like her mom, so I mean, you're just used to it.*

Dad feels that because of the developmental thrust he is losing an ally in the family. He and Stella used to be close and shared secrets. Now she is leaving him and is turning to her mother as an identification figure. In Tim's mind, mother is the intruding third, who lures the girl out of her intimacy with dad.

*The Partner-Child Dyad (RF: 4.5)*

Tim acknowledges that Frances' emotional investment in her daughter is fueled by fear and guilt about the effect of her absenteeism, as much as by love and joy. His understanding of her behavior with Stella is thus more nuanced than in the context of the

marital dyad: Frances is no longer a machine but an insecure mother, terrified that her professional ambitions jeopardize her bond with her daughter. He actually understands it better than Frances herself.

It's hard for Tim, however, to hold onto this insight, because of the unbearable implications for him, the third: in a family politics of competing needs for love, he is bound to be the loser - the maternal love saps the marital love completely. Tim works hard to minimize his hurt, discussing Frances' journey into parenthood in universal terms:

*"It's just like, with each kid it's just like another — you know, you think, "How can I possibly have any more love inside of me and more passion to spend?" And you have to give it up from somebody. And so it's just — in my opinion, this is only natural, to take it away from your wife or your husband and divide it up for your kids."*

Tim's sense of exclusion is profound. He feels he is being dumped not only by his wife but also by his daughter. Her developmental thrust towards her mother (she is now a little woman herself, according to him) works in synergy with her ongoing attempts to keep a connection with her busy mother. Tim describes his relief that his wife and daughter manage to have a relationship. However, in subtle ways he portrays their relationship quite critically as opportunistic: Stella enjoys her mother's overly permissive attitude and Frances is validated as a mother. This is done at his expense:

*"So, I mean, that's really — when I say jealousy, it's like not real jealousy. It's not like — it's not me sitting there saying, "My kids love her more than me." But there's a part of you, the natural competitive person. I was, I was closer to Stella than Frances was when she was, you know, three, four, five. Yeah. So, you know, I don't know, four percent, seven percent, whatever, is jealous. It's like you want to have that special relationship with your kid... But, you know, Frances can not show up, can work late like*

*five nights in a row, and come home, and all is forgiven, no problem. Right? And I'm like, "What about me? I was here the whole time," you know".*

Tim is thus anxiously monitoring the changes brought about by Stella's maturation. In profound ways, however, he feels that things have remained the same. Since Stella's birth, the couple unit has been neglected and the neglect is a constant, unwavering reality. Tim suggests, only half jokingly, that his wife deliberately preserves this static situation by having more children.

**The Family Picnic:**

Frances, Tim and their daughter Stella had a heart wrenchingly short and dry picnic: their time together was characterized by minimal movement in the room, lack of imagination and endless parental yawns.

They spread the picnic blanket, set up the plates and cutlery, and Stella handed out the food, developing an efficient system of distribution of portions. The three ate quickly with minimal eating gestures, cleaned up, ate ice cream at lightening speed and packed up the dishes.

It was clear that this interaction was awkward and difficult for all three, and they showed it in different and distinct ways: Stella was the most animated one, (too?) jovially encouraging her parents to "Save your appetite for dessert". But it was clear that stimulating her parents has taken its toll. She herself had a hard time pretending to eat and she was keen to move to the cleaning up phase. Throughout the interaction she was somewhat controlling: she kept all of the food by her side, inaccessible to her parents. She seemed to derive more pleasure from administering food and taking it away than eating it. There were clear signs of hostility toward both parents: offering Tim some cheese, she pushed it close to his eyes and said: "stuff your face". She was similarly

controlling of her mother, withholding some food from her. Her parents did not protest or intervene during those subtle incidents.

Tim was very ill at ease and withdrawn. He did not pretend to eat his food and said close to nothing for a good five minutes, perhaps showing in a passive aggressive way his annoyance with the task that mom had signed up for. When he spoke he mildly commended Stella for the way she ran the picnic and then under his breath expressed dissatisfaction with the ice cream she ‘brought’. Frances laughed nervously frequently and made fleeting attempts to get into a playing mood. She repeatedly tried to negotiate with her daughter a trade off of food: more hot dogs and less fruit. It seemed like she was getting hungry and almost forgetting that the coveted hot dog was in fact a wooden toy carrot.

She and Tim didn’t exchange glances and seemed unified by two things only: their focus on Stella and their quiet sense of entrapment, being at the mercy of a tedious task and their little girl. They yawned very often, usually with Frances first and Tim mirroring her a split second later.

The overall feeling was that each family member was left to themselves - a sense of separate individuals, almost strangers, who somehow find themselves together in a confined space and have to make the most out of this unfortunate event. Stella tried to bring the family together by orchestrating the play, calling the shots, deciding on schedule, seducing and punishing with food. If she were not the center of attention control, what would happen? Mom appeared to appreciate her daughter’s bossiness and smiled when Stella yelled to her brother (who could be heard playing in the adjacent

room) “go away”. Dad, in contrast, showed subtle signs of resenting his daughter’s controlling demeanor.

**Comments:**

This family is characterized by the child, Stella, being the fulcrum of all attention and activity. Her interests and initiatives drive the family interaction. Her parents engaged with her minimally, with very little enthusiasm and with clear strain. They did not interact with each other or support the other parent’s interaction with Stella. The interaction was very inhibited and affect was tightly suppressed, lest missteps would lead to a disaster. There was very little warmth between the parents and also little explicit antagonism. It looked like focusing on Stella was a safe way to short-circuit the tension between them. Anger was more apparent between Stella and each of her parents. This triad exhibited very little pleasure and creativity playing together.

**Stella’s Story Stems:**

Stella started off quite well: in the first story (Spilled Juice) mom helps the girl (albeit in a curt and cold way) and the juice is wiped off the floor. However, very quickly the collaborative spirit was supplanted by rivalry and aggression: in the next story (Picture to Mom or Dad) both parents jointly became critical of the girl’s creation, thus bypassing jealousy and competition by colluding against the child. The story included marked escalation in violence and culminated with Stella freezing, having the child figure push the parents hard and saying under her breath: “they are dead now”.

In the Exclusion story the protagonist girl (Stella named her Louisa and repeatedly referred to her as “I”) is not only being asked to play in her room but gets further excluded by being grounded the next day. Stella’s excitement as she enacted the parents’ kiss was vehemently denied (“I am bored” screams the girl from her bedroom). The

disavowed aggression and jealousy turn into an external force that breaks into the house and steals everything.

In sum, Stella's stories were consistently characterized by significant aggression: there was sustained aggression between children in 'Three Is a Crowd' (calling the little girl "mean dog" repeatedly) and conflict flared up again after the initial reconciliation. There was hostility and physical aggression between parents and from the child towards parents.

Stella's escalation of aggression and danger in many of the stories and the accompanying dysregulation impaired the coherence of her stories; despite the fact that they start as coherent narratives there are breaks in the storyline and lack of resolution. Similarly, intentionality broke down and action became random. Although she demonstrated a capacity to understand how intentions and feelings impact behavior (intentionality can be inferred) she often shifted to a lower level of intentionality ("and then") quality of narrative, as her affect regulation collapsed.

### **Example: Lost keys**

Q: So now Louisa is — she comes into her room, all right. And she sees mom and dad looking at each other like this. Look at my face (interviewer is showing an angry face). And —

A: What are you doing?

Q: (As mom) "You lost my key".

(As dad) "I did not".

(As mom) "Yes, you did. You always lose — my keys".

(As dad) "I did not lose them this time".

So show me what happens next.

A: (As girl) “Stop yelling and get out of my room. Go away. You and you. (pushes parents over. ) I’ll talk with you later, (to dad) but first, you need to get here. Don’t fight. Tell her the truth. Tell mom the truth and tell her the truth. That’s all I want you to do. That’s it. Simple order”.

(As dad to mom) “I really stole your keys. I took them, I lost them Goodbye.”

(dad pushes mom)

(As mom) “Oh, why?”

(Girl to mom) “Now it’s your turn. You were right. So you’re not in trouble at all. Nothing to do. Now you just go and tell him he was wrong.”

(Mom to dad) “You were wrong. Thank you.” (Stella has a very angry face, uses sarcastic tone)

(Girl) Oh, got them out of my room. Let’s see. I want to take a book. Okay. Wow, that’s cool. Mom, dad, I think you’re over this fight already. Let’s go.”

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the explanatory value of a three-person-psychology in understanding the evolution of mentalization capacity in childhood.

A growing body of literature, mostly from the family-systems perspective, demonstrates the profound impact of the mother-father-child relational matrix on a broad spectrum of children's emotional indices (e.g. Johnson et al, 1999; Kerig, 1995; McHale and Rasmussen, 1998; Minuchin, Rosman & Baker, 1978; von Wyl et al 2008). The present study differed from prior research in that it sought first to delineate a theory regarding the triadic underpinnings of a hitherto dyadic concept, mentalization. According to this new formulation, children's capacity to link behavior and underlying mental processes at age 6 depends on the internalization of *self* and *others* as inter-connected intentional beings from *multiple minds*.

This exploratory study was conducted with 6 triads of mother-father and their 6-year-old firstborn child. It was hypothesized that parents' capacity to mentalize about the mother-father-child triangle ('triadic RF capacities') would impact the quality of the child's representations of self and others as intentional beings. Furthermore, the study explored the possibility that the interactive qualities of the triad mediate between parental mentalization and child mentalization.

Due to the small sample size and limitations on quantitative coding of the data, the findings in this study are based on qualitative analysis. As expected, associations were found between the parents' representations of the triad, the quality of the triadic interactions and aspects of the child's representational world.

Specifically, qualitative analysis revealed that families vary considerably in parental ability to reflect on the here and now, ‘lived’ three relational axes of the family triangle. The most highly reflective couples, labeled ‘cooperative’, evidenced an ability to mentally shift smoothly between configurations – talking in a nuanced and coherent way about their experiences as a couple and as parents as well as openly reflecting on the relationship between their partner and their child, thus showing both a cognitive capacity for perspective taking and an emotional ability to hold, regulate and fully experience one’s own and others’ emotions in a non defensive way without becoming overwhelmed or shutting down (Slade, 2005). As hypothesized, when cooperative parents played with their child, the triad formed a ‘3-together alliance’ (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al. 2010), characterized by inclusion, flexibility, warmth, playfulness, easy repair of missteps, and coherent narrative arcs. The children of cooperative triads exhibited adaptive representations, characterized by low aggression and a tendency for pro-social and empathic behavior in addressing social dilemmas. Additionally, they showed average to high coherence and intentionality in their representational world.

At the other end of the mentalization continuum, the ‘disrupted’ couples showed a low level of overall reflectiveness, with considerable rigidity in their representational organization. Most notably, they evidenced difficulties in thinking of themselves as a couple and tended to detour in their narrative to the child. They evidenced a limited ability to reflect on the partner-child dyad as a separate and meaningful relationship, and instead exhibited negative feelings towards the third relationship. Consistent with theory, during triadic play, the ‘disrupted’ families exhibited minimal three-way intersubjectivity and tended to manifest competition and angry withdrawal, the hallmark of ‘2

against 1' coalitions (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al. 2010). The children in the 'disrupted triads' exhibited substantially higher aggressive themes in their story stems representations than the other children in the study. Their levels of narrative coherence and intentionality were more labile, with a tendency to breakdown at times of emotional dysregulation.

A third pattern emerged in the qualitative analysis: the 'strained triads' had couples with non-complementary RF profiles on the PTIs: one parent, with a background of trauma, had a compromised ability to reflect on his or her relationship with the child, due to distortion and blurred boundaries. The other parent 'stepped in' and showed a high reflectiveness while thinking about the partner-child relationship. These couples reported substantial volatility in their marital relationships. During triadic play, the interactions evidenced similar instability in affect regulation, with rapid shifts between cooperation, joy and coordination to dysregulation and competition. Thus, these families fluctuated between functioning as alliances and coalitions. In their reflective functioning, the children of these triads were indistinguishable from the cooperative triads, showing a similar pattern of low aggression, pro-social and empathic behavior in addressing social dilemmas, with average to high coherence and intentionality. The boys in both cooperative and strained triads showed a tendency to avoid the emotional charge of the dilemma.

The findings in this study support the hypothesis that individual differences in children's ability to effectively grasp their own and other's mental processes can be to some extent linked to the quality of their parents triadic RF. Stated differently, parents who can see themselves, their partners and children as intentional beings and who mentally engage in

a flexible way in multiple relationships, may facilitate a capacity in their children to self-regulate their feelings and to negotiate social dilemmas in peaceful and inclusive ways.

The link between parental triadic RF and children's capacity to attribute intentionality and coherence is more complex: the children with more reflective parents show more consistent functioning in these domains, whereas children with less reflective parents are more prone to fragmentation in their tendency to tell coherent stories in which the characters have easily inferred intentions, and their capacity is impaired under the pressure of intense emotional reaction.

In line with its exploratory hypothesis, the study demonstrated that families are congruent in their engagement across representational and interactive domains: families in which the parents evidence high triadic RF capacities also interact in a participatory, coordinated and attuned way. This finding suggests a possible mediating pathway between parental triadic RF and child RF: the family's thoughtful behaviors and attitudes are internalized by the child as validation of his or her emotional experience and the three-way intersubjectivity and affect regulation foster self-regulation. In contrast, families where parental representations are distorted by projections transmit to the child a confusing and dysregulating sense of self and others through invalidating interactions. The children show more aggressive themes in their own representations and a defensive tendency to shut down their mentalizing capacities at emotionally charged moments (Hill, Fonagy, Lancaster & Broyden, 2007).

The preliminary findings of this study are illustrative of the interface between the intrapsychic, the interactional and the intergenerational. They thus offer support to Stern's bold statement that "different types of family alliances may prove to have the same

predictive clinical power as the attachment patterns” (Stern, 1999, p. xii). The findings highlight the potential theoretical and clinical advancements existing in dovetailing the focus on intergenerational transmission of regulatory skills, currently at the core of the mother-infant dyadic research (Nahum, 2010).

### **Implications for the theory of triadic interaction – the practicing family**

1. *Stability across representational and interactive domains*: The finding of this study have implications for the field of three person psychology, currently promoted predominantly by longitudinal infant research, within the family systems frame.

The links found between parental triadic RF and the observed three-way interactions lend support to previous longitudinal studies of parental triadic representations. Most notably, von Klitzing and colleagues found that parental triadic relational capacities, assessed prenatally, predict the quality of interactions in play settings four months later (von Klitzing, Simoni & Burgin, 1999).

The researchers’ operationalization of ‘parental triadic capacities’ is relevant to the current findings: it is an in-depth interview conducted jointly with both expectant parents. The interview tapped into the relationship between the couple, and assessed the quality of their dialogue; the richness of their mental representation of their yet to be born child and their ability to grant space to the other partner in those representations. Finally, the interview pulled for representations of the respondents’ own parents’ marital relationship (von Klitzing et al., 1999).

Von Klitzing and colleagues’ triadic interview is conceptually close to the PTI in its emphasis on mental representations of all three facets of the primary triangle. However, the interviews differ significantly in their coding systems: the PTI in the current study

relies on the established RF coding system; thus it generated a set of scores that are more comparable with the plethora of RF studies on dyads. Additionally, in the current study the interviews were conducted separately with each parent, thus eliminating the interactive component of joint narration and offering strong evidence for stability across interactive and representational domains.

The current finding regarding an intriguing concurrent association between parental triadic RF and the quality of triadic play with a 6 year old firstborn provides support to these earlier findings concerning the links between the representational and interactive dimensions of parenthood in infancy. Thus, the current study demonstrates that parental representations shape the child's experience of 'being together with others' well into the early school years, despite the child's significant development and growing autonomy.

## *2. Family organization typology*

The current study assessed interactive performance along the domains of cooperation, participation and affect sharing during the family picnic play. It identified two patterns of family organization which correspond with existing formulations in the literature, based on micro-analytic observations of Trilogue play in infancy and toddlerhood (e.g. Fivaz, 2008).

The play of Cody and his family is readily evoked by Fivaz's description of the cooperative triads in infancy: "the family gracefully plays together, making their dance look deceptively simple...No opportunities for affective contact are missed" (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999, p. 35). The primary triangle may not be perfect,

but it is good enough<sup>4</sup>.

In the case of Stella and her parents, the sharp difference in intensity level between the girl and her very passive parents is typical of the sub-category of detouring coalitions, where the child works relentlessly to engage both parents and contain the tension between them (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Frascarolo, Lopes, Dimitriva & Favez, 2007).

Coalitions in general "...display an inability to transition from positive to negative back to positive states and make it difficult to view their interactions as a unit" (Nahum, 2010, p. 144). Thus in coalitions, the configuration of 'three together' is very difficult to achieve, '2+1' rarely happen and the most prevalent configuration is '2 against one'.

Surveying the growing literature generated by the Lausanne group and others on practicing triads in infancy, it is apparent that coalitions elicit the greatest clinical interest due to their potential pathogenic qualities. Their interactive qualities are elaborated and described in details and are embedded in the rich theoretical model of Minuchin's structural family systems. Similarly, the cooperative alliances manifest easily identifiable interactive features which are stable over time. In literature they are often presented as the healthy and happy contrast to the coalitions.

In contrast, the 'strained triads' are fairly neglected in the literature, probably due to their position in between more extreme and distinct interactive patterns. The 'strained triads' are no doubt still relatively high on the continuum between function and dysfunction, however in these triads family members "have to work fairly hard to continue through ups and downs and in the face of sharp contrast between the styles of the parents. One of

---

<sup>4</sup> The field of triadic research is following dyadic-focused studies in the move from emphasis on optimal attunement to the process of misstep and repair (Tronick & Beeghly, 2011).

them may be too anxious or too intense and the parents are more effective together than separately” (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999, p. 39). This is quite clearly the case in the three-way play of Sophia and her parents.

It is notable that so far there has been very little reference in the literature to the distribution of the various family organizations among both non-clinical and referred populations. The finding in the current study that a problematic family organization (‘disrupted triads’) constitute one third of the sample requires replications in larger samples.

### **Implications for mentalization theory**

#### *1. Dimensions of child mentalization*

In the current study, two measures were employed to assess children’s mentalization capacities: the Affect Task and the Story Stems.

The affect task did not yield differences between the children in the sample, as they all successfully provided multiple emotions to correspond with the social dilemmas presented to them. The task might be closer for Theory of Mind false belief tasks, as it challenges the child to take the perspective of another in an accurate manner, and is likewise not particularly emotionally charged.

In contrast, the Story Stems task has been used widely to explore child social representations (e.g Oppenheim, Emde, Hasson & Warren, 1997) and is particularly suitable to assess aspects of mental functioning pertaining to the construct of mentalization: story stems challenge the child’s thought processes and affect regulation as the child engages in construction and revision of the story’s resolution. The primary

performance feature of the task, narrative coherence, is akin to metacognitive monitoring (Main et al. 1985). The themes that the stems pull for (conflicts and threats) activate the child's affect regulatory mechanisms. In the current study, a coding scale of intentionality was added, in order to directly assess the child's ability to assume an interpretative stance regarding the characters' motives, attitudes, emotions or plans.

The Story Stems task asks children to enact the scenarios with little figures, thus bringing the experience closer to actual or "online" interaction rather than the "off-line" social cognition of the affect task. Indeed, the most substantial difference between the children was discovered in the affective component of mentalization. In the current study, children vary considerably in the frequency, intensity and escalation of aggression as manifested in their enacted narratives. Children whose parents' reflective capacities were hindered by anger and jealousy ('disrupted triads') were themselves more prone to operate as "immediate—that is to say unmediated—experiencer of life" (Fonagy, Steele, Moran, Steele, & Higgitt, 1991, p. 201). One of the most robust findings in previous studies was the association between dysregulated aggressive responses to the MacArthur Story Stems and externalizing behavior problems in non-clinical volunteer samples (Warren, Oppenheim & Emde, 1996; Zahn-Waxler, Schmitz, Fulker, Robinson & Emde, 1996). The current study therefore points to the possibility that the inability of the parents to keep all aspects of the primary triangle in mind put the child at risk for psychopathology. In sharp contrast to the dysregulation and spilling over aggression of the 'disrupted triad' children, the boys belonging to the other types of triads tended to avoid the emotional charge of some of the stories. It is possible that this attempt at overregulation is indicative of these boys' relatively immature representational capacity, due to their age (they both

only turned 6) and gender – both factors that are known in literature to be associated with lesser representational capacities (Carpendale & Chandler, 1996; Holmberg, Robinson, Corbitt-Price & Wiener, 2007). However, the overregulation could be more adaptive than the dysregulation exhibited by the children of the disrupted triads. This tendency was anecdotally reported in other cases of children in cooperative triads (Favez et al. 2006).

The measure of coherence in the story stems had a weaker link to parental RF capacities and interactive qualities, unlike the robust association between parental triadic capacity and child capacity for coherent narrative, found in an earlier study with 4-year-olds (von Klitzing & Burgin, 2005). In the current study, which involved older children (6-7 y.o), it is possible that all children were able to cope better with the meta-cognitive aspects of the task compared to von Klitzing's sample. However, breaks in the coherence of the children from the disrupted families, due to affective dysregulation, support the assertion that “the higher the quality of the parental partnership and the more prepared the parents were for living as a threesome, the more positive the developmental space they could offer to the child for his or her own autonomous development, thus children of parents with high triadic capacities could better develop their own flexible inner representations and had better narrative capacities” (von Klitzing & Burgin, 2005,p. 34). Similarly, these preliminary results suggest that the ability to maintain an intentional stance even during intense emotional moments is associated with parental high triadic RF. This finding is in line with findings regarding the link between intentionality and secure attachment to mother (Hill, Murray, Leidecker & Sharp, 2008).

## 2. Outcome studies: parental triadic RF as predictor of child RF:

The findings of this preliminary study offer support to the tenet that parental RF in the context of the triad predicts child RF. It thus adds a new facet to longitudinal studies demonstrating that maternal representational capacities (indexed on mother's AAI) predict child's theory of mind or mentalization capacities at age 5-6 (Fonagy 1997; Steele et al. 1999).

The current study does more than support previous findings on RF: it potentially shifts the theory and research paradigm in two important ways: First, it highlights the use of RF scores of *both parents together* to predict child RF. Secondly, it expands the construct of parent RF beyond the parent-child relational axis. It argues that parental ability to mentalize about the three members of the family triangle serves as a more accurate template for the child's ability to link behaviors to minds.

*2.1 Parental RF as a construct of maternal and paternal RF scores:* The scant studies comparing the sequela of maternal RF compared to paternal RF on child mentalization make it impossible to establish whether, like attachment organization, child mentalization is 'relationship specific' or whether it is 'child specific'. An additional complication is the fact that child RF is not well defined categorically (in a way akin to child attachment classification) or even quantitatively. Theoretically, however, it is plausible that manifestations of child RF vary across relational contexts, based on interpersonal history (Fonagy et al. 1998).

The current study indicates that there might be a complex additive relationship between parental RF scores in predicting child RF capacity. The evidence for this claim comes from the fact that the children in the 'strained' triads were indistinguishable from the

children in the ‘cooperative’ triads in their scores on RF measures. This despite the fact that their parents were less consistently reflective compared to the cooperative parents, and that one parent showed particular deficits in his or her ability to keep the child in mind. It is possible that the ability of a second parent to ‘step in’ and hold the partner-child in mind serves as a protective factor for the child’s evolving RF capacities. The exact mechanism by which this happens is unclear, however Target and Fonagy (2002) suggest that one potential special role of the second object is in the prevention or lessening of introjections of the primary object into the self. Instead, if the second object has an accurate representation of the dyad, it “can help to create a representation of the dyadic relationship that is consistent with the child’s concurrent experiences so it may be internalized as a representation... which feels real and true to the child” (p.60).

If, as appears to be the case in the ‘disrupted’ triads, both parents have rigid and distorted representations of the family relationships in their minds, the child is at risk of failing to develop second order representations and this failure leads to “.. projective or enactment pressure on the child” (ibid, p.61).

### *2.2 Parental RF as a triadic concept:*

RF outcome studies have so far operationalized two types of parental RF: adult RF in the context of representations of one’s childhood (RF indexed on AAI; Fonagy et al 1998) and adult RF in the context of representations of one’s parenthood (RF indexed on PDI; Slade et al, 2005). The promising findings of the current study suggest that there is value in measuring RF in the context of multiple ongoing family relationships. As argued before, these various representations impact the child’s triangulation (formation of first and second order representations of self and others in the context of his relationship with

both parents). But what is the importance of the marital RF – given that it's the relationship the child is not part of? Arguably, the way the mother represents the father as a partner (and not just as a co-parent) has significant bearings on her openness to allow the father be a close relational person for the child (Winnicott, 1964; Lebovici, 1982) and vice versa. The ability of both parents to see the other as a whole person, with all the positives and negatives, and the reflection of this ability through narrative was found to be strongly interrelated with the child's representational competence (von Klitzing & Burgin, 2005).

### **Trauma and RF**

Although not part of the study's initial focus, the findings shed light on the complex links between traumatic life events and RF capacities. It is well established in the literature that the capacity for mentalization is undermined in a significant proportion of individuals who have experienced trauma, as trauma can bring about a collapse of interpersonal interpretative function (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004).

The two parents in the study who disclosed a history of multiple losses were not formally assessed for trauma related symptoms and diagnoses. However, both volunteered many details on significant losses and stressors in their childhoods and both manifested affective tonality indicative of the lingering effect of trauma. Thus, their cases may offer anecdotal findings about the links between trauma and RF.

The two parents showed considerable resilience and relatively intact reflective capacities - an ability that clearly serves as a protective factor in their relational world (Fonagy et al., 1998; Schechter, Coots, Zeanah et al., 2005). However, a close look at the elements

of their reflective capacities revealed a particular weakness in mentalization in the context of their relationship with their child, compared to other family relationships. Thus, it is possible that for adults with a background of childhood relational trauma, *parenthood* is especially potent in evoking past painful experiences and inchoate anxieties. Painful affects that had been split-off from memories of the traumatic past might reappear as ‘ghosts in the nursery’ (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975). Under the most adverse circumstances, parental unresolved traumatic experiences generate a disorganized attachment status in the child, through the caregiver a hostility/helplessness frightened/frightening state of mind (Lyons Ruth & Bronfman & Atwood 1999; Main & Hesse, 1990). Furthermore, in a study regarding trauma and maternal representations, Schechter et al (2005) found that among mothers with a significant history of trauma, low RF was associated with attribution of malevolent intent to the child; unrealistic expectations of the child often due to role-reversal, and impaired differentiation.

Scholars and clinicians (e.g. Slade 2007; Schechter & Willheim, 2009) have emphasized the reparative role of a clinician as a containing figure who can keep both mother and child in mind. The current study points to the potentially restorative power of *families* in reworking attachments, overcoming trauma and possibly enhancing mentalization capacities. In the current study, subjects with a history of childhood trauma utilized their marital relationship as an arena for working through their childhood experiences of abandonment and loss. Most notably, they did so while showing a relatively high reflective capacity (marital RF was their highest score). Their partners appeared able to contain the interpersonal turmoil in the marriage, and to simultaneously keep the child-

traumatized parent relationship in mind, thus possibly enhancing mentalization in both child and partner.

### **Marital RF lower than Self-Child RF**

An unexpected finding in the study was that parents, irrespective of the type of their triadic functioning, were less reflective about their marital relationship (Marital RF) than about their own relationship with their child (Self-Child RF). This tendency approached statistical significance despite the small sample size.

Thus, the majority of the respondents in the study were more aware of their children's mental life and their own mental life as parents than the mental life of self and spouse in the marriage. A similar finding was reported by a group of Italian researchers, who found expectant fathers to be more reflective about their (future) relationship with their children than about their ongoing relationships with their wives (Lis, Zennaro, Mazzeschi & Pinto, 2004). In the case of the Italian prospective fathers, one might argue that a new relationship heralds a major reorganization in the relational matrix and thus triggers a more mentalistic stance. The current study indicates that well into the child's 7th year, parents tend to apply their capacity to link behavior to underlying mental processes more fully into understanding their evolving relationship with their firstborn child, than grasping their relationship with their spouse. This is true for couples with an overall low RF capacity as well as couples who are good mentalizers and are keenly aware of the developmental aspects of the marriage relationship. Consequently, it appears that the joint secure-base provided by the marital-relationship, even at its best, serves as a backdrop to the child's development. More broadly, the findings suggest that parents'

lend themselves to their children by organizing their complex system of relational representations around them, thus serving as a facilitating environment.

Arguably, the developmental thrust of the growing child adds a sense of dynamism to the parent-child relationship compared to a relationship between two relatively formed persons in the case of the marital relationship. Evolutionary pressures clearly play an important role in tuning parents into their relationship with their child (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Moreover, evolutionary biologists suggest that the selective pressures of belonging to a cooperatively breeding social group give rise to the human capacity to empathize with other adults and to wonder what others are thinking and feeling: at the core is the need to trust and rely on others in caring for the offspring, and be deemed trustworthy and reliable in turn (Hrdy, 2009). A support for this argument would be a more reflective stance when discussing a partner's relationship with the child (Partner-Child RF) compared to own relationship with partner (Marital RF). In the current study such trend was observed, although it did not reach statistical significance.

### **Oedipal Theory revisited**

The premise of the current study is that mentalization is facilitated by two other minds. This 'triadification' of mentalization theory renders it compatible with burgeoning contemporary retelling of the Oedipus myth as a familial negotiation of multiple configurations of attachments. According to this view, a resolution of the Oedipal struggle is the ability to tolerate the emotional and cognitive complexity of separateness and recognition, a capacity achieved through many configurations of relatedness within the family system. What follows is that it's not the coming to terms with a particular

configuration (e.g. exclusion) that promotes mental growth, but rather it is the nature of the multi-layered representations for each particular family, which can support or hinder development. Instead of a universal phase of triangular inter-generational rivalry and competition or an obsolete concept, the Oedipal drama might be seen as a nuanced, family-specific negotiation of being with others. In other words, Freud's Oedipus might be a certain Oedipus, emerging out of the meeting between the child's "innate triangular capacities and the available interactive configurations" (Nahum, 2010, p. 149) that begins long before the Oedipal stage. Admittedly, this new conceptualization emphasizes the goodness of the triadic interactions at the expense of gender differences and infantile sexuality.

The findings of the current study suggest that in more harmonious and cooperative triads (i.e. in alliances) the classic Oedipal issues of rivalry and exclusion will be subtler and more workable. In contrast, in the strained triads, there would be more potential for 'two against one' partnerships and more persistent Oedipal themes. In the most problematic cases, of disrupted triads, static triangulated dynamic of coalitions are the norm, as uncoordinated, non-participatory ways of relating short-circuit the child's capacity for multiple perspective by pre-empting sharing, thus providing little opportunity for the family to move beyond rivalry, exclusion and hurt.

Interestingly, the qualitative differences in Oedipal themes were most evident in the parents' narrative: in the Cooperative triads each parent portrayed self and partner as attachment figures and gender did not appear to play an important role. In contrast, in less cooperative families there was more of an emphasis on the ongoing primacy of mother-child bond (regardless of the child's gender), coupled with greater appreciation of

developmentally-based vicissitudes in the father-child relationship. Specifically, in the strained triads parents discussed existing/fading 'love affair' between the child and the parent of opposite gender and indicated blurred generational boundaries with same-gender parent. In the disrupted triads parents perceived the child mostly as an ally and (in the case of opposite gender parent) as a substitute romantic partner.

When it comes to the children themselves, the children of the disrupted triads enacted in their story stems clear Oedipal themes of intense aggression toward the parents, coupled with persecutory anxieties about revenge and punitive representations of the parents.

Moreover, parental intimacy appeared intolerable and led to catastrophic results. As was noted, the interesting finding regarding the other triads was the tendency of the younger boys to express limited emotional resonance. Clearly, that raises the question about their defensiveness as an outcome of a conflict or of representational immaturity.

More generally, despite the added 'observable' interactive dimension, the Oedipus complex still requires a careful empirical operationalization. Many would say, in fact, that it defies empirical research and belongs in the clinical exploration of the psychoanalyst's office (Green, 2000)<sup>5</sup>. Freud himself offered the following conciliatory statement: "The direct observation of children has the disadvantage of working upon data which are easily mis-understandable. Psychoanalysis is made difficult by the fact that it can only reach its data as well as its conclusion after long detours. But by cooperation the two methods can attain a satisfactory degree of certainty in their finding" (1905, p.201).

---

<sup>5</sup> Birksted-Breen (The Gender Conundrum, 1993, p.17) refers to the cultural divide between the diachronic (mainly Anglo-Saxon) and synchronic (French) perspectives. The diachronic approach is concerned with the development of the child into the adult. It relies on observational and biological data. The synchronic approach focuses on the structures of the mind and how they interrelate. It is not concerned with the historical past and notions of causality. The Lausanne group, in its attempts to integrate family systems approach and metapsychology seems to upend this notion.

A related issue brought to the fore in this study is the importance of fathers as a central influential force in child development. While in the families studied here some division of labor was noted (fathers as mentors compared to mothers as facilitators), fathers are not uniformly assigned the role as the intruding third/separating agency of the child-mother dyad, as arguably has been the mainstay in psychoanalytic writing (Freud, 1909; Mahler & Gosling, 1955; Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1975; Klein 1945). Rather: “nothing can be said about “the father” in general. Something can be said about a particular father conjoined with a particular mother” (Chiland, 1982, p.371. cited in Target & Fonagy, 2002). Thus, each father-mother-child triangle is unique in its specific dynamic interaction between parental history, internal representations and interactive patterns. This study and other psychoanalytically-oriented studies that include the father may stand as a corrective to a struggle of the post-Freud psychoanalytic world to accord the ‘third’ a real status, certainly in French psychoanalysis, as well as in object relations and relational approaches (Etchegoyen, 2002; Reis, 2010). Including fathers in our thinking of child development has additionally far reaching implications in terms of clinical prevention and interventions, as well as policy making.

### **Limitations of the study**

The primary limitation of this study is the small number of cases, which preclude quantitative analysis with adequate statistical power. There is clearly a need for this study to be replicated using a larger sample size and quantitative analysis.

Furthermore, the fact that this sample mainly consisted of low-risk, middle-class families limits the generalizability of the findings.

Second, there were limitations to the use of instruments. As the concepts concerning family functioning and children's mentalization capacities were new and exploratory, this study focused first and foremost on studying mechanism and generating hypotheses and not on producing epidemiological data. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, there was no formal coding of the picnics, the Story Stems and the Affect Task by trained raters blind to the other measures. Instead, the PI used established coding systems to inform her more qualitatively-oriented data analysis. Future studies should clearly employ firm coding protocols on all measures in order to enable quantitative cluster analysis of all instruments.

Third, there is still a problem in assessing RF in children's play narrative. The narratives elicited by the story stems open windows onto children's inner worlds. But it is still not fully clear how to use the narrative portrayals to infer information about children's representations. Additional research is needed to improve coding strategies, and to evaluate construct validity.

Taken together, the limitations presented prevented this study from directly comparing the predictive power of dyadic (e.g PDI) versus triadic parent interviews. It is possible that parental RF rating on the PDIs (assessing RF only in the context of the parent-child relationship) would have been equally successful in predicting representational outcome variables. Additionally, it is possible that scores for only one parent on the PTI, rather than both parents, can predict the child's representational capacities.

### **Future directions**

The Parental Triadic Interview is a promising step in moving the three-person studies into the level of representation: its application of RF scores to multiple relational axes enables

direct comparison with other parental measures, such as the PDI and AAI. Theoretically meaningful composite scores might enhance its utility in quantitative analysis. Particular attention should be paid to the Partner-Child section of the interview, which had the highest standard deviation (see Table 1, p. 75).

This study set out to evaluate the associations between the triadic mentalization capacities of the heterosexual marital dyad and the child's representational capacities. Future studies should expend this focus to investigate the impact of other family constellations on child representational outcome, such as same-sex couples and their children. Another exciting direction is the study of the impact of a second child on mentalization capacities of both parents and their firstborn child. In particular, the birth of the second child creates a new triangle of mother-firstborn-young sibling, which can have important implications for the development of RF.

Additional work could focus on the possible links between the three types of triads on the PTI (cooperative, strained and disrupted) and attachment organization (secure, preoccupied and dismissive, respectively). Such studies can illuminate the links between marital attachment and the ways in which partners shape each other's mentalization capacities and focus.

Finally, in assessing the triadic representational capacities of married couples, the interviewer was keenly aware of the clinically and theoretically ripe matter of her own position as the third. Future research could benefit from incorporating this dimension as a source for evaluating triads.

## **Conclusions**

This study is a response to a growing trend towards a three-person model in explicating child development. The preliminary associations found in its sample of 6 triads between parental triadic RF, the quality of interaction of the triad and the child's representational capacities is a step toward redrawing the intergenerational transmission of RF capacities as a multi-person process. The study points out to the possibility that couples vary considerably in their architecture of relation-type mentalization capacities. Parents who can carry in mind the myriad of family relationships also engaged with their children in coordinated, participatory and affectively-attuned ways, thus jointly fostering their child's ability to cognitively and emotionally grasp the representational nature of their minds. In contrast, couples whose representations of the family relationships are more rigid and distorted preempt triadic inter-subjectivity and thus compromise their child's affective regulatory skills and representational capacities.

Indirectly, the study highlights the 'relationships specific' functioning of triad, loosening rigid gender-based roles ascribed to mothers and fathers in child development literature. Implications for the theory of resolution of the Oedipus complex was considered, reframing it as a highly varied phenomenon, emerging from a history of interactive experiences with mother and father.

## APPENDIX I

## The Parent Triadic Interview

**Introduction**

Today we're going to be talking about your experiences as a family. We will focus on your child (name) – and his/her relationships with his parents, you and (partner's name). But let's just start off by your telling me a little bit about your family as a whole– who lives in your family? How many children do you have? What are their ages?

**I. The Marital Dyad**

## A. View of the relationship

1. I'd like to begin by getting a sense of the kind of person you are. Can you choose 3 adjectives that describe you? (Pause while they list adjectives.) Now let's go back over each adjective. Does an incident or memory come to mind with respect to \_\_\_\_? (Go through and get a specific memory for each adjective.)
2. What about your partner, what kind of person is he/she? Can you choose 3 adjectives that describe him/her? (Pause while they list adjectives.) Now let's go back over each adjective. Does an incident or memory come to mind with respect to \_\_\_\_? (Go through and get a specific memory for each adjective)
3. I'd like you to choose 3 adjectives that you feel reflect the relationship between you and your partner. Now let's go back over each adjective. Does an incident or memory come to mind with respect to \_\_\_\_?
4. Describe a time in the last week when you and your partner really clicked. How did you feel? How do you think your partner felt?
5. Now describe a time in the last week when you felt really upset with your partner. How do you think he/she felt?

## B. Affective experience of marriage

6. What gives you most joy in being in a relationship with your partner?
7. What gives you the most pain or difficulty in being in the relationship with your partner?

8. What about him/her? What's most joyous and most difficult in the relationship for him?

### C. Development

9. How has becoming involved with your partner changed you/ affected you as a person?
10. How has it changed your partner?

## II. The Self-Child Dyad

### A. View of the Child.

11. Now, let's get a sense of the kind of person your child (name) is... In an average week, what would you describe as his/her favorite things to do, his/her favorite times?
12. And the times or things he has most trouble with?

### B. View of the Relationship

13. I'd like you to choose 3 adjectives that you feel reflect the relationship between you and (your child). (Pause while they list adjectives.) Now let's go back over each adjective. Does an incident or memory come to mind with respect to \_\_\_\_? (Go through and get a specific memory for each adjective.)
14. Describe a time in the last week when you and (your child) really "clicked". (Probe if necessary: Can you tell me more about the incident? How did you feel? How do you think (your child) felt?)
15. Now, describe a time in the last week when you and (your child) really weren't "clicking". (Probe if necessary: Can you tell me more about the incident? How did you feel? How do you think (your child) felt?)
16. How do you think your relationship with your child is affecting his/her development or personality?

### C. Affective Experience of Parenting

17. What gives you the most joy in being a parent?
18. What gives you the most pain or difficulty in being a parent?
19. How has having your child changed you?
20. Tell me about a time in the last week or two when you felt really angry as a

parent. (Probe, if necessary: What kinds of situations make you feel this way?  
How do you handle your angry feelings?)

20a. What kind of effect do these feelings have on your child?

21. Tell me about a time in the last week or two when you felt really guilty as a parent. (Probe, if necessary: What kinds of situations make you feel this way?  
How do you handle your guilty feelings?)

21a. What kind of effect do these feelings have on your child?

22. Tell me about a time in the last week or two when you felt you really needed someone to take care of you. (Probe, if necessary: What kinds of situations make you feel this way? How do you handle your needy feelings?)

22a. What kind of effect do these feelings have on (your child?)

23. When your child is upset, what does he/she do? How does that make you feel? What do you do?

24. Does (your child) ever feel rejected?

### III. The 'Third' Dyad

#### A. View of the Relationship

Now we're going to talk about (partner's name + child name)

25. I'd like you to choose 3 adjectives that you feel reflect the relationship between your partner and your child. Now let's go back over each adjective. Does an incident or memory come to mind with respect to \_\_\_\_?

26. Why do you think your partner behaves the way he does with your child?

#### B. Affective experience of the participating parent

27. What do you think gives your partner most joy about his/her relationship with your child?

28. What gives him/her the most pain or difficulty about the relationship with the child?

29. What about your child? What gives him/her the most pain and the most joy about his/her relationship with your partner?

30. How has becoming a parent changed your partner as a person?

#### C. Affective experience of the witness

31. What gives you most joy about the relationship between your partner and your child?

32. What gives you the most pain or difficulty about their relationship?

#### IV. The Triad

33. Let's now think about all three of you, together. How has the birth of your child affected your partnership with your husband/wife?

34. Now that your child is 6 and is in grade school, how is he/she affecting your partnership with your husband/wife?

35. Can you think of a recent incident when the three of you were not clicking. Who had the most difficult time? Why?

36. Describe a recent enjoyable experience with partner and child, all three of you. What made it so pleasurable? How do you think (partner and child's names) felt during that experience?

Anything else you'd like to add? Thank you very much!

## References

- Aber, J. Slade, A., Berger, B., Bresgi, I., & Kaplan, M. (1985). *The parent development interview*, Unpublished protocol, The City University of New York.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- Altman, N., Briggs, R., Frankel, J., Gensler, D., & Pantone, P. (2002). *Relational child psychotherapy*. New York: Other Press.
- Ammaniti, M. & Stern D. N (Eds.). *Psychoanalysis and development: representations and narratives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Aron, L. (1993). Working toward operational thought – Piagetian theory and psychoanalytic method. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 29, 289-313.
- Aron, L. (1995). The internalized primal scene. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 5, 195-237.
- Baron-Cohen, S. (1991). Precursors to a theory of mind: Understanding attention in others. In A. Whiten (Ed.) *Natural theories of mind: evolution, development and simulation of everyday mindreading* (pp.233-251). Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Baron-Cohen, S., (1995) *Mindblindness: an essay on autism and theory of mind*. Bradford Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Baron-Cohen, S., Tager-Flusberg, H., & Cohen, D. J. (Eds.) (1993). *Understanding other minds. Perspectives from developmental cognitive neuroscience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Bateman, A., & Fonagy, P. (2004). *Psychotherapy for borderline personality disorder*. Oxford: University Press.
- Bateson, G., Jackson D. D., Haley J., & Weakland J. (1963) A note on the double bind. *Family Process*, 2 154-161.
- Beebe, B. & Lachman, F.M. (2002) *Infant research and adult treatment: Co-constructing interactions*. New York: Analytic Press.
- Belsky, J. (2005). Attachment theory and research in ecological perspective: insights from the Pennsylvania infant and family development project and the NICHD study of early child care. In K. E. Grossmann, K. Grossmann & E. Waters (Eds.)

- Attachment from infancy to adulthood. The major longitudinal studies.* (pp. 71-97).  
New York & London: The Guilford Press.
- Belsky, J., Gilstrap, B., & Rovine, M. (1984) The Pennsylvania infant and family development project: I. Stability and change in a family setting at one, three and nine months. *Child Development*, 55 692-705.
- Belsky, J., Rovine, M., & Fish, M. (1989). The developing family system. In M.R. Gunnar & E. Thelen. (Eds.) *The Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology*, vol. 22. *Systems and Development*. (pp. 119-166). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Benjamin, J. (1988). *The bonds of love*. New York: Pantheon.
- Benjamin, J. (1998) *The shadow of the other: intersubjectivity and gender in psychoanalysis*. New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Benjamin, J. (2004) Beyond doer and done to: an intersubjective view of thirdness. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 73, 5-46.
- Benjamin, J. (2005) What mothers and babies need: The maternal third and its presence in clinical work. IN: S. Feig Brown (Ed.) *What do mothers want?* (pp.37-54). Hillsdale NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Bion, W., (1962a ). *Learning from experience*. London, New York: Karnac
- Bion, W., (1962b). A theory of thinking. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 43, parts 4-5. Reprinted in: W. Bion (1967). *Second Thoughts*. (pp.110-119) William Heinemann Medical Books
- Birksted-Breen (1993). *The Gender Conundrum. Contemporary Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Femininity and Masculinity*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Boston, M. (1991). The splitting image: a research perspective. In : R. Szur & S. Miller (Eds.) *Extending Horizons*. pp. 319-337. London: Karnac
- Bowen, M. (1959) *Family relationships in schizophrenia*. Symposium on schizophrenia San Francisco 1958 New York: The Ronald Press Company.
- Bowen, M. (1972) Toward the differentiation of self in one's own family. In: M. R. Gunnar & E. Telem (Eds.) *Systems and Development*. Pp. 110-165. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Aronson.

- Bowlby, J. (1969/1982). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1977) The making and breaking of affectional bonds. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130, 201-210. Reprint in J. Bowlby, (1979). *The making and breaking of affectional bonds*. London: Routledge 126-160.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). The Origins of attachment Theory. In: *A Secure base – clinical applications of attachment theory*. pp. 20-38. London: Routledge.
- Bretherton, I. (1985). Attachment theory: retrospect and prospect. In: J. Bretherton & E. Waters (Eds.) *Growing points of attachment theory and research. Monographs of the society for research in child development*, 50 pp. 3-35.
- Bretherton, I., Oppenheim, D., Buchsbaum, H., Emde, R.N., & The MacArthur Narrative Group. (1990). *McArthur story-stem battery*. Unpublished manual.
- Bretherton, I., Ridgeway, D., & Cassidy, J. (1990). Assessing internal working models of attachment relationship: an attachment story completion task, In: M. T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E. M. Cummings (Eds.) *Attachment in the preschool years: theory, research, and intervention*. ( pp. 273-308). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Britton, R. (1989) The missing link: parental sexuality in the Oedipus complex. In: J, Steiner (Ed). *The Oedipus complex today*. pp.83-101. London: Karnac Books
- Brown, J. & Dunn, J. (1996). Continuities in emotion understanding from three to six years. *Child Development*, 67, 789-802.
- Bruner, J. (1994). The narrative construction of “reality”. In: M. Ammaniti & D. N. Stern (Eds.) *Psychoanalysis and development: representations and narratives*. (pp. 15-38) New York: New York University Press.
- Caplow, T. (1968). *Two against one: coalition in triads*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Carlson, B & Sroufe, L.A. (1995) The contributions of attachment theory to developmental psychopathology. In D. Cicchetti & D. Cohen, (Eds.) *Developmental Psychopathology*. New York: Wiley
- Carlson, B & Sroufe, L.A., & Egeland, B. (2004). The construction of experience: A longitudinal study of representation and behavior. *Child Development*, 75 (1), 66-80.

- Carpendale, J. I. & Chandler, M. J. (1996) On the distinction between false belief understanding and subscribing to an interpretive theory of mind. *Child Development*, 67, 1686-1706.
- Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P.R. (Eds.) (1999). *Handbook of attachment: theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Chasseguet-Smirgel, J. (1975). *The ego ideal*. London: Free Association Books.
- Chiland, C. (1982). A new look at fathers. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 37, 367-379.
- Cohn, D. A., Silver, d. H., Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P.A., & Pearson, J. (1992). Working models of childhood attachment and couple relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 13, 432-449.
- Corboz-Warnery, A., Fivaz-Depeursinge E., Gertsch Bettens, C., & Favez, N. (1993) Systemic analysis of father-mother-infant interactions: The Lausanne triadic play. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 14(4), 298-316.
- Corboz-Warnery, A., Fivaz-Depeursinge E. (2001) From couple to family: does the prenatal alliance predict the family's future? *Cahiers critiques de therapie familiale et de pratique de reseaux*, 27, 17-34.
- Cowan, C.P. & Cowan P. A. (1992) *Child and parenting ratings. School children and their families project*. Unpublished manuscript. University of California, Berkeley.
- Cowan, P. A. & Cowan, C. P. (2003). Normative family transitions, normal family process, and health child development. In: F. Walsh (Ed.) *Normal family processes: growing diversity and complexity* (pp. 424-459). New York: The Guilford press
- Cowan, P. A. & Cowan, C. P. (2005). Five-domain models: putting it all together. In: P. Cowan, C. Cowan, J. Ablow, V. Johnson, V., & J. Measelle, (Eds.). (2005). *The family context of parenting in children's adaptation to elementary school*. (pp. 315-334). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cowan, P. A. & Cowan, C. P. (2006) Developmental psychopathology from family systems and family risk factors perspectives: Implications for family research, practice, and policy. In: D. Cicchetti & D. J. Cohen (Eds.) *Developmental psychopathology*. New York: John Wiley & Sons

- Crowell, J. A., & Owens, G. (1996) *Current relationship interview and scoring system*. Unpublished manuscript. State University of New York at Stony Brook.
- Davies, J. M (2003). Falling in love with love: Oedipal and post-oedipal manifestations of idealization, mourning and erotic masochism. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 13, 1-27.
- Davies P. T., & Cummings, E.M. (1994). Marital conflict and child adjustment: An emotional security hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116,(3), 387-411.
- Davies, P. T., Sturge-Apple, M.L., Winter, M.A., Cummings, E.M., &Farrell, D. (2006). Child adaptational development in contexts of interparental conflict over time. *Child Development*, 77 218-233.
- Dennett, D. C. (1978). *Brainstorm*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Diamond, D. & Yeomans, F. E. (2007). Oedipal love and conflict in the transference/countertransference matrix: Its impact on attachment security and mentalization. In: D. Diamond, S.J. Blatt & J. D. Lichtenberg (Eds.) *Attachment & sexuality* (pp. 201-236). New York: The Analytic Press
- Dunn, J. (1988). *The beginnings of Social Understanding*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dunn, J. (1999). Introduction: new directions in research on children's relationships and understanding. *Social Development*, 8(2) 137-142.
- Dunn, J., Brown, J., & Beardsall, L. (1991). Family talk about feeling states and children's later understanding of other's emotions. *Developmental Psychology*, 27(3), 448-455.
- Dunn, J., & Cutting, A. (1999). Understanding others, and individual differences in friendship interactions in young children. *Social Development*, 8, 201-219.
- Easterbrooks, A. M. & Goldberg. W. A. (1984). Toddler development in the family: Impact of father involvement and parenting characteristics. *Child Development*, 55, 740-752.
- Emanuel, R. (2002). On becoming a father: reflections from infant observation. In: J. Trowell & A. Etchegoyen (Eds.). *The importance of fathers*. pp. 131-146. London: Brunner-Routledge.

- Emde, R.N. (1994a) Three roads intersecting: changing viewpoints in the psychoanalytic story of Oedipus. In S. Ammaniti & D.N. Stern (Eds.) *Psychoanalysis and development*. New York: New York University Press.
- Emde, R. N. (1994b). Commentary: triadification experiences and a bold new direction for infant mental health. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 15(1) 90-95.
- Emde, R.N., & Fonagy, P. (1997). Guest Editorial. An emerging culture for psychoanalytic research? *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 78, 4, 643-652.
- Etchegoyen, A. (2002) Psychoanalytic ideas about fathers. In: J. Trowel & A. Etchegoyen (Eds.). *The Importance of fathers*. pp. 20-42 New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Favez, N., & Abbet, E., & Frascarolo, F. (2006, July). *Preschooler's family narratives of an emotional event: Interactive precursors during infancy and toddlerhood*. Poster presented to the meeting of the World Association of Infant Mental Health, Paris.
- Favez, N., Frascarolo, F. & Lavanchy, C. (2006). From family play to family narratives. *The Signal Newsletter of the World Association for Infant Mental Health*
- Feiring & Lewis (1987). The ecology of some middle class families at dinner. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 10 (3), 377-390
- Feldman, C. (1994) Genres as mental models. In: M. Ammaniti & D. N. Stern (Eds.) *Psychoanalysis and development: representations and narratives*. pp. 111-120 New York: New York University Press.
- Feldman, M. (1989). The Oedipus complex: manifestations of the inner world and the therapeutic situation. In: Steiner, J. (Ed.) *The Oedipus complex today: clinical implications*. (319-337). London: Karnac Books
- Fivaz-Depeursinge (2008). Infant's triangular communication in "two for one" versus "two against one" family triangles" case illustrations. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 29(3), 189-202.
- Fivaz-Depeursinge E., & Corboz-Warnery, A. (1999). *The primary triangle*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., Favez, N., Lavanchy, C., de Noni, S., & Frascarolo, F. (2005). Four-month-olds make triangular bids to father and mother during trilogue play with still face. *Social Development*, 14(2), 361-378.

- Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., Frascarolo, F., Lopes, F., Dimitrova, N., & Favez, N. (2007). Parents–child role reversal in trilogue play. Case studies of trajectories from pregnancy to toddlerhood. *Journal of Attachment and Human Development*, 9(1), 17–31.
- Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., Lavanchy-Scaiola C., & Favez, N. (2010). The young infant’s triangular communication in the family: access to threesome intersubjectivity? conceptual considerations and case illustrations. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 20, 125–140.
- Fivaz-Depeursinge E., Stern, D. N., Burgin, D., Byng-Hall, J., Corboz-Warnery, A., Lamour, M., & Lebovici, S., with R. Emde, discussant (1994). The dynamics of interface: Seven authors in search of encounters across levels of description of an event involving a mother, father and baby. *Infant mental Health Journal*, 15, 69-89.
- Fonagy, P. (1997). Attachment and theory of mind: Overlapping constructs? *Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry Occasional Papers*, 14, 31-40.
- Fonagy, P. (1999) Attachment, the development of the self and its pathology in personality disorders. In Maffei, C., Derksen J. & Groen H. (eds.) *Treatment of personality disorders*. (1999) New York: Plenum Press.
- Fonagy, P. Gergely, G., Jurist, E. & Target, M. (2002) *Affect regulation, mentalization and the development of the self*. New York: Other Press
- Fonagy P., Redfern, S., & Charman T. (1997) The relationship between belief-desire reasoning and the projective measure of attachment security (SAT). *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 15, 51-61.
- Fonagy, P., Steele, H., Moran, G., Steele, M., & Higgitt, A. (1991). The capacity for understanding mental states: The reflective self in parent and child and its significance for security of attachment. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 13, 200–217.
- Fonagy P., Steele, H., Leigh, T., Kennedy, R., Mattoon, G., & Target, M. (1995) Attachment, the reflective self and borderline states: The predictive specificity of the Adult Attachment Interview and Pathological emotional Development. In: S. Goldberg, R. Muir & J. Kerr (Eds.) *Attachment theory: social, development and clinical perspectives* (pp.233-278) New York: Analytic Press.

- Fonagy, P., Steele, M. & Steele, H. (1991). Maternal representations of attachment during pregnancy predict the organization of infant-mother attachment at one year of age. *Child Development*, 62, 891-905.
- Fonagy, P., Steele, H., Moran, G., Steele, M., & Higgitt, A. (1991). The capacity for understanding mental states: The reflective self in parent and child and its significance for security of attachment. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 13, 200–217.
- Fonagy, P., Steele, M. & Steele, H., Higgitt, A., & Target, M. (1994). The Emmanuel Miller Memorial Lecture 1992. The theory and practice of resilience. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 35, 231-257.
- Fonagy, P. & Target, M. (1996) Playing with reality: I. Theory of mind and the normal development of psychic reality. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 77, 217-233.
- Fonagy, P. & Target, M. (2004). Playing with the Reality of Analytic Love. Commentary on paper by Jody Messler Davis “falling in Love with Love”. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 14(4). Pp. 503-515.
- Fonagy, P., Target, M., Steele, H., & Steele, M. (1998). *Reflective-functioning manual, version 5*. Unpublished manuscript, University College London.
- Fraiberg, S., Edelson, E., & Shapiro, V. (1975). Ghosts in the nursery: A psychoanalytic approach to the problems of impaired infant-mother relationships. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 45. Pp. 387-421
- Frascarolo, F. & Favez, N. (2005). Une nouvelle situation pour évaluer le fonctionnement familial : le jeu du Pique-Nique. *Devenir*, 17 (2), 13-17.
- Freud, S. (1900) *The interpretation of dreams*. S.E Vols. 4-5. London: Hogarth Press
- Freud, S. (1905). Three essays on the theory of sexuality. *On sexuality* (pp.45-170) London: The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 7.
- Freud, S. (1909). Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy. In S.E Vol. 10. London: Hogarth Press
- Freud, S. (1910) A Special type of object choice made by men In: *Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 11, pp.163-175.
- Freud, S. (1918) “From the history of an infantile neurosis (The ‘Wolf Man’)” *Case histories II* (pp.227-366) London: The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 9.

- Freud, S. (1923a) "The infantile genital organization (an interpolation into the theory of Sexuality) *On sexuality* (pp.303-312) London: The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 7.
- Freud, S. (1923b) *The ego and the id*, SE, 18, PP. 233-259. London: Hogarth Press
- Freud, S. (1924) The Dissolution of the Oedipus complex. In: *On sexuality* London: The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 7, 313-322.
- Freud, S. (1927) "The Future of an Illusion" *Civilization, society and religion* (pp.179-242) London: The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 12
- Freud, S. (1930) *Civilization and its discontents*. SE: 21 223-243. London: Hogarth Press
- Freud, S. (1931). *Female sexuality*. S.E. 21 London: Hogarth Press
- Frosch, C. A., Mangelsdorf, S.C., & McHale, J.L. (2000). Marital behavior and the security of preschooler-parent attachment relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *14* , 144-161.
- George, C., Kaplan, N., & Main, M. (1985). *The Adult attachment interview*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychology, University of California at Berkeley.
- Gilbert, R., Christensen, A., & Margolin, G. (1984). Pattern of alliance in nondistressed and multiproblem families. *Family Process*, *23*, 75-87.
- Gopnik, A. (1996). Theories and modules: creation myths, developmental realities, and Neurath's boat. In P. Carruthers (Ed.), *Theories of theory of mind* (pp. 169-183). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goren, D., Slade, A., & Aber, J. (2010) *The Parent Triadic Interview*. Unpublished manuscript. City University of New York
- Green, A. (2000). Science and science fiction. In: J. Sandler, A.M. Sandler & R. Davies (Eds.) *Clinical and observational psychoanalytic research: roots of a controversy*. (pp.41-72) London: Karnac.
- Green, A. ( 2004) Thirdness and psychoanalytic concepts. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, *73*, 1, 99-134.
- Greenberg, J. (1991). *Oedipus and Beyond*. Cambridge and London: Harvard university Press.
- Greenberg, J. (1996). Psychoanalytic words and psychoanalytic acts. *Contemporary Journal of Psychoanalysis*, *32*, 195-203.

- Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Moran (Eds.) *Syntax and semantics III: speech acts* (pp.44-58). New York: Academic Press.
- Grienberger, J., Kelly, K. & Slade, A. (2005). Maternal reflective functioning, mother-infant affective communication, and infant attachment: Exploring the link between mental states and observed caregiving behavior in the intergenerational transmission of attachment. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(3), 299-311.
- Grossmann, K., Grossmann, K.E., Fremmer-Bombik, E., Kindler, H., Scheuerer-Engelisch H., & Zimmermann, P. (2002). The Uniqueness of the Child-Father Attachment Relationship: Father's Sensitive and Challenging Play as a Pivotal Variable in a 16-year Longitudinal Study. *Social Development*, 11(3), pp. 307-331.
- Grossmann, K., Grossmann, K. E. & Kindler, H. (2005). Early care and the roots of attachment and partnership representations: The Bielefeld and Regensburg longitudinal studies. In. K. E. Grossmann, K. Grossmann & E. Waters (Eds.) *Attachment from Infancy to Adulthood. The Major Longitudinal Studies.* (pp. 98-136). New York & London: The Guilford Press
- Haley, J. (1971). Toward a theory of pathological systems. In: G. Zuk & I. Boszormenyi-Nagy (Eds.) *Family Theory and Disturbed Families.* Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Harris, P. L. (1991). The work of imagination. In: A. Whiten (Ed.), *Natural theories of mind: The evolution, development and simulation of everyday mindreading* (pp. 283-304). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Herzog, J. M. (2005) Triadic reality and the capacity to love *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 74:1029-1052.
- Hetherington, E. M., Cox, M. J. & Cox, R. (1982). Effects of divorce on parents and children. In: M. E. Lamb (Ed.) *Nontraditional families* (pp. 233-287). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- Hill, J., Fonagy, P., Lancaster, G., & Broyden, N.(2007) Aggression and intentionality in narrative responses to conflict and distress story stems: An investigation of boys with disruptive behavior problems. *Attachment & Human Development*, 9(3), 223 – 237
- Hill, J., Murray, L., Leidecker, V., & Sharp, H. (2008). The dynamics of threat, fear and intentionality in the conduct disorders: longitudinal findings in the children of women

- with post-natal depression. *Philosophical Transaction of the Royal Society*, 363, 2529-2541.
- Hill, J., Sharp, H., Hoover, D., Taliaferro, G., Fonagy F., & Leidecker, V. (2009). *Ratings scales for the MSSB and the Reading Doll's House Task*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Liverpool.
- Hinde R. A. & Stevenson-Hinde, J. (Eds.) (1988) *Relationships within families* Oxford: Oxford Science Publications.
- Hodges, J., & Steele, M. (2000). Effect of abuse on attachment representations: Narrative assessments of abused children. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 26, 433-455.
- Hodges, J., Hillman, S., & Steele, M. (2004). *Little Piggy Narrative Story Stem Coding Manual*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Holmberg, J., Robinson, J., Corbitt-Price, J. & Wiener, P. (2007) Using narrative to assess competencies and risks in young children: experiences with high risk and normal populations. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 28,(6), 647-666.
- Holmes, J. (2007). Sense and Sensuality: Hedonic Intersubjectivity and the Erotic Imagination. In: D. Diamond, S.J. Blatt & J. D. Lichtenberg (Eds.) *Attachment & sexuality* (pp. 137-160). New York: The Analytic Press
- Hrdy, S. (2009) *Mothers and others. The Evolutionary origins of mutual understanding*. New York: Belknap Press
- Hughes, C., Deater-Deckard, K., & Cutting, A. L. (1999). 'Speak roughly to your little boy'? Sex Differences in the Relations Between Parenting and Preschoolers' Understanding of Mind *Social Development*, 8(2) 143-160.
- Isabella, R. A. & Beslky, J. (1985). Marital change during the transitions into parenthood and security of infant-parent attachment. *Journal of Family Issues*, 6, 505-522.
- Jackson, D.D. (1957). The question of family homeostasis. *The Psychiatric Quarterly Supplement*, 31, 1, 80-90.
- Johnson, V. K. (2001). Marital Interaction, family organization and differences in parenting behavior: explaining variations across family interaction contexts *Family Process*, 40, 3, pp.333-342.
- Johnson, V. K., Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (1999). Children's classroom behavior: the unique contribution of family organization. *Journal of Family Psychology*, (13), 3, 355-371.

- Jurist, E. L. (2005), Mentalized affectivity. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 22, 3, 426-444.
- Jurist, E. L. (2008) Minds and yours: new directions for mentalization theory. In: E. L. Jurist, A Slad & Bergner S (Eds.) *Mind to mind: infant research, neuroscience and psychoanalysis*. pp.88-114. New York: Other Press
- Kerig, P. K. (1995) Triangles in the family circle: effects of family structure on marriage, parenting, and child adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 9, (1), 28-43.
- Klein, M. (1940) Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states In: *The Writing of Melanie Klein, Vol. 1 Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works 1921-1945* London: Hogarth Press (1975). 344-369
- Klein, M. (1945) The Oedipus complex in the light of early anxieties. In: *The Writing of Melanie Klein, Vol. 1 Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works 1921-1945* London: Hogarth Press (1975). 370-419.
- Klein, M (1952) Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant . In: *The Writing of Melanie Klein, Vol. 2 Envy and Gratitude and other works 1946-1963* London: Hogarth Press (1975). 61-93.
- Kline, M., Johnston, J. R., & Tschann, J. M. (1991). The long shadow of marital conflict: A model of children's post divorce adjustment. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 297-309.
- Lamb, M. E. (1975) Fathers: Forgotten contributors to child development. *Human Development*, 18, 245-266.
- Laplanche, J. (1987). *New foundations for psychoanalysis*. (D. Macey, Trans.) Oxford: Blackwell.
- Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J. B. (1973) *The language of psycho-analysis* section on Phallus (pp312-314) New York: Norton
- Laurent, H. K., Kim, H.K., & Capaldi, D. M. (2008). Prospective effects of inter-parental conflict on child attachment security and the moderating role of parents' romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(3) 377-388.
- Lebovici, S. (1982). The origins and development of the Oedipus complex. *Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 63, 201-215.

- Legerstee, M., Markova, G., & Fisher, T. (2007) The role of maternal affect attunement in dyadic and triadic communication. *Infant Behavior & Development, 30*, 296-306.
- Leslie, A. M. (1994) ToMM, ToBy, and agency: core architecture and domain specificity in cognition and culture. In: *Mapping the mind: domain specificity in cognition and culture* (ed. L. Hirschfeld and S. Gelman, pp. 119-148. Cambridge University Press. New York.
- Lieberman, E. F., St John, M., & Silverman, R. (2007). "Passionate attachments" and parental exploitation of dependency in infancy and early childhood. In: D. Diamond, S.J. Blatt & J. D. Lichtenberg (Eds.) *Attachment & sexuality* (pp. 179-200). New York: The Analytic Press
- Loewald, H. (1977). The waning of the Oedipus Complex. In: *Papers on psychoanalysis*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lyons Ruth, K., Bronfman E., & Atwood G. (1999). A relational diathesis model of hostile-helpless states of mind: Expressions in mother-infant interactions. In: (J. Solomon & C. George (Eds.) *Attachment Disorganization*. pp 33-70. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mahler, M., Pine, F., Bergman, A. (1975). *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mahler, M. S. & Gosling B.J. (1955). On symbiotic child psychosis: Genetic, dynamic and restitutive aspects. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 10*, 195-212.
- Main, M. & Hesse, E. (1990). Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences are related to infant disorganized attachment status: Is frightened and/or frightening parental behavior the linking mechanism? In: (M. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E. M. Cummings (Eds.) *Attachment in the Preschool Years: Theory, Research and Intervention*. pp. 161-182. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Main, M. (1991). Metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive monitoring and individual differences in attachment organization during childhood. In: C. M. Parkes, J. Stevenson-Hinde & P. Marris (eds.) *Attachment across the life cycle*. pp 145-152. Routledge.

- Main, M. (1995) Recent studies in attachment: overview, with selected implications for clinical work. In S. Goldberg, R. Muir, & J. Kerr (Eds.) *Attachment theory: social, developmental, and clinical perspectives*. (pp. 407-474). Hillsdale: NJ: Analytic Press.
- Main, M., Kaplan, N., & Cassidy, J. (1985). Security in infancy, childhood and adulthood: a move to the level of representation. In: J. Bretherton & E. Waters (Eds.) *Growing Points of Attachment Theory and Research*. Monograph 50 of the society for research in child development, pp. 66-104.
- Main, M. & Goldwyn, R. (1994). Adult attachment scoring and classification system. Unpublished scoring manual, Department of Psychology, University of California at Berkeley.
- Main M. & Solomon, J. (1986). Discovery of an insecure-disorganized/disoriented attachment pattern. In: T. B. Brazelton & M. W. Yogman (eds.) *Affective development in Infancy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, pp. 95-124.
- Mayes, L. & Cohen, D,J, (1992). The development of a capacity for imagination in early childhood. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 47, 23-48.
- McFarlane, W.R. (1983b). Introduction. In: W.R. McFarlane (Ed.), *Family therapy in schizophrenia*. (pp.1-16) New York & London: Guilford Press
- McGoldrick, M. & Carter, B. (2003) The family life cycle. In: F. Walsh (Ed.) *Normal family processes: growing diversity and complexity* (pp. 375-398). New York: The Guilford press
- McHale, J. (2007a) When infants grow up in multiperson relationship systems *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 28(4), 370-392.
- McHale, J. (2007b) *Charting the bumpy road of co-parenthood*. Washington Dc: Zero to Three.
- McHale, J., & Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., Dickstein, S., Robertson, J., & Daley, M. (2008). New Evidence for the social embeddedness of infants' early triangular capacities. *Family Process*, 47, 445-463.
- McHale, J., Kazali, C., Rotman, T., Talbot, J., Carleton, M., & Lieberman, R. (2004). The transition to co-parenthood: Parents' pre-birth expectations and early coparental

- adjustment at three months post-partum. *Development and Psychopathology*, 16, 711-733.
- McHale, J., Kuersten, R., Lauretti, A. (1996). New directions in the study of family-level dynamics during infancy and early childhood. In J. McHale & P. Cowan (Eds.) *Understanding how family level dynamics affect children's development: Studies of two-parent families*, *New Directions for Child Development*, 74, 5-26.
- McHale, J. P., Kuersten-Hogan, R. & Lauretti, A. (2001). Evaluating coparenting and family-level dynamics during infancy and early childhood: The coparenting and family rating system. In P. K. Kerig & K. M. Lindahl (Eds.) *Family Observational Coding Systems* (pp.151-170) Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- McHale, J., Kuresten-Hogan, R., Lauretti, A., & Rasmussen, J. L. (2000). Parental reports of coparenting and observed coparenting behavior during the toddler period. *Journal of Family psychology*, 14(2) 220-236.
- McHale, J. & Rasmussen J. (1998) Coparental and family group-level dynamics during infancy: early family precursors of child and family functioning during preschool, *Development and psychopathology*, 10, 39-59.
- Mikulincer, M., Florian, V., Cowan, P.A., & Cowan, C.P. (2002). Attachment security in couple relationships: A systemic model and its implications for family dynamics. *Family Process*, 41(3) 405-432.
- Minuchin P. (1985). Families and individual development: Provocations from the field of family therapy. *Child Development*, 56, 289-302.
- Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Minuchin, S., Baker, L., Roseman, B. L., Milman L. & Todd, T.C. (1975) A conceptual model of psychosomatic illness in children. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 32 1031-1038.
- Minuchin, S., Roseman, B. L., & Baker, L.(1978) *Psychosomatic families*. Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mitchell. S (1988). *Relational concepts in psychoanalysis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mitchell, S. (1993). *Hope and dread in psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic Books.

- Morgan, D. (2007) The internal couple and the Oedipus complex in cases of perversion  
In: D. Morgan & S. Ruszczynsky (eds.) *Lectures on violence, perversion and delinquency* (pp. 43-58) London: Karnac Books.
- Moss, E., Parent, S., & Gosselin, C. (1995, March). *Attachment and theory of mind: cognitive and metacognitive correlates of attachment during the preschool period.*  
Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Murray, L. (2007). Future directions for doll play narrative research: a commentary.  
*Attachment & Human Development, 9*(3), 287-293.
- Murray, L. Woolgar, M., Briers, S., & Hipwell, A. (1999). Children's social representations in dolls' house play and theory of mind tasks, and their Relation to family adversity and child disturbance. *Social Development, 8*, 179-200.
- Nahum, J. (2010). Prefiguring and Refiguring Triangular Interpersonal Relationships: Commentary on Paper by Elisabeth Fivaz-Depeursinge, Chloé Lavanchy-Scaiola, and Nicolas Favez. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 20*:141–150.
- Ogden, T. (1985). On Potential Space. *The International journal of Psychoanalysis, 66*, 129-141.
- Oppenheim, D., Emde, R.N., Hasson, M., & Warren, S. (1997). Preschoolers face moral dilemmas: A longitudinal study of acknowledging and resolving internal conflict. *Journal of Psychoanalysis, 78*, 943 – 957.
- Parke, R. D. (1988) Families in life-span perspective: A multilevel developmental approach. In: M. E. Hetherington, R. M. Lerner & M. Perlmutter (Eds.), *Child development in life-span perspective* (pp. 159-190). Hillsdale, Nj: Erlbaum.
- Parke, R. D., Power, T.G. & Gottman, J. M. (1979). Conceptualizing and quantifying influence patterns in the family triad. In M.E. Lamb, D. J. Suomi & G. R. Stephenson (Eds.) *Social interaction analysis: methodological issues* (pp.207-230) Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pons, F. & Harris, P. L. (2005). Longitudinal change and longitudinal stability of individual differences in children's emotion understanding. *Cognition and Emotion, 19*(8), 1158-1174.

- Reis, B. (2010). A human family: commentary on paper by Elisabeth Fivaz-Depeursinge, Chloe Lavanchy-Scaiola and Nicolas Favez. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 20, 151-157.
- Reiss, D. (1981). *The family's construction of reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Reiss, D. (1989). The represented and practicing family: contrasting visions of family continuity. In A. J. Sameroff & R. N. Emde (Eds.) *Relationship disturbances in early childhood*. (pp. 191-200). New York: Basic Books.
- Robinson, J. L. (2007). Story stem narratives with young children: Moving to clinical research and practice. *Attachment & Human Development*, 9(3), 179-185.
- Roiphe, H., & Galenson, E. (1981). *Infantile origins of sexuality*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Rosenblatt, P. C. (1994). *Metaphors of family systems theory: Toward new constructions*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Sandler, J. (1994). The Unconscious and the representational world. In: M. Ammaniti & D. N. Stern (Eds.) *Psychoanalysis and development: representations and narratives*. (pp. 63-78) New York: New York University Press.
- Sandler, J., & Rosenblatt, B. (1962/1987). The representational world. In: *From safety to superego: selected papers of Joseph Sandler*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Schechter, D., Coots, T., Zeanah, C. H., Davies, M., Coates, S.W., Trabka, K., Marshall, R.D., Liebowitz, M., & Myers, M. (2005). Maternal mental representations of the child in an inner-city clinical sample: Violence-related posttraumatic stress and reflective functioning. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(3), 313 – 331
- Schechter, D. S., & Willheim, E. (2009). When parenting becomes unthinkable: Intervening with traumatized parents and their toddlers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 48(3), 249-253.
- Schechter, D. S., Zygumnt, A., Coates, S., Davies, M., Trabka, K. A., Mccaw, J., Kolodji, A. & Robinson, J. L. (2007). Caregiver traumatization adversely impacts young children's' mental representations on the MacArthur Story Stem Battery. *Attachment & Human Development*, 9(3), 187-205

- Schermerhorn, A.C., Cummings, E.M., & Davies, P.T. (2008). Children's representations of multiple family relationships: Organizational structure and development in early childhood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(1) 89-101.
- Sharp, C., & Fonagy, F. (2007). The parent's capacity to treat the child as a psychological agent: constructs, measures and implications for developmental psychopathology. *Social Development*, 17, 3, 737-754.
- Sharpless, E. A. (1990). The evolution of triadic object relations in the preoedipal phase: contributions of developmental research. *Psychoanalytic Contemporary Thought*, 13, 459-483
- Shapiro, A.F. (2004) *Examining relationships between the marriage, mother-father-baby interactions and infant emotional regulation*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Washington, Seattle.
- Shouldice, A., & Stevenson-Hinde, J. (1992) Coping with security distress: the separation anxiety test and attachment classification at 4.5 years. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 33. 331-348.
- Slade, A. (2005) Parental reflective functioning: An Introduction. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(3) 269-281.
- Slade (2007) Disorganized mother, disorganized child: The mentalization of affective dysregulation and therapeutic change. In: *Attachment theory in clinical work with children: bridging the gap between research and practice*. D., Oppenheim & D.F., Goldsmith. (Eds.); pp. 226-250. New York: Guilford Press
- Slade, A., Aber, J. L., Bresgi, I., Berger, B., & Kaplan, (2004). *The Parent Development Interview –Revised*. Unpublished protocol, The City University of New York, NY, USA.
- Slade, A., Bernbach, E., Grienberger, J., Levy, D., &Locker, A. (2004). *Addendum to Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele reflective functioning scoring manual for use with the Parent Development Interview*. Unpublished manuscript, New York, NY: The City College and Graduate Center of CUNY.
- Slade, A., Grienberger, J., Bernbach, E., Levy, D. & Locker, A. (2005) Maternal reflective functioning, attachment and the transmission gap: A preliminary study. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(3) 283-298.

- Slade, A. & Lieberman, A. (1997) Affective development during the fourth and fifth years of Life. In Noshpitz (Ed.) *Handbook of child and adolescent psychiatry: Volume I. Infants and preschoolers: development and syndromes*, pp 112-122. New York: Wiley
- Solomon, J., George, C., & Dejong, A. (1995). Children classified as controlling at age six: evidence of disorganized representational strategies and aggression at home and at school. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7 447-463.
- Sroufe, L .A., Carlson, E.A., Levy, A., & Egeland, B. (1999). Implications of attachment theory for developmental psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, 11, 1-13.
- Sroufe, L .A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E.A., & Collins, W. A. (2005) Placing early attachment experiences in developmental context: The Minnesota longitudinal study. *Attachment from infancy to adulthood: The major longitudinal studies*. (pp. 48-70). New York & London: The Guilford Press.
- Steele, H., & Steele, M. (2005). Understanding and resolving emotional conflict: The London parent-child project. In. K. E. Grossmann, K. Grossmann & E. Waters (Eds.) *Attachment from infancy to adulthood: The major longitudinal studies*. (pp. 137-164). New York & London: The Guilford Press.
- Steele, H., & Steele, M. (2008). On the origins of reflective functioning. In: F. Busch (Ed.) *Mentalization, theoretical considerations, research findings, and clinical implications*. (pp. 133-158). New York: The Analytic Press
- Steele, H., Steele, M., Croft, C., & Fonagy, P. (1999). Infant-mother attachment at one year predicts children's understanding of mixed emotions at six years. *Social Development*, 8, (2) 161-178.
- Steele, M., Steele H., & Fonagy P. (1994) *The affect task protocol and coding guidelines*. Unpublished manuscript, University College London.
- Steinglass, P. (1987) A System view of family interaction and psychopathology. In: T. Jacob (Ed.), *Family interactions and psychopathology: theories, methods, and findings*. New York: Plenum.
- Stern, D. (1995). *The motherhood constellation*. New York : Basic Books.

- Stern, D. (2010) Foreword to Fivaz-Depeursinge, Lavanchy-Scaiola, and Favez Paper. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 20:121–124,
- Stern, D., Sander, L. W., Nahum, J. P., Harrison, A. M., Lyons-Ruth, K., Morgan, A. C., Bruschiweiler-Stern, N., & Tronick, E. Z. (1998) Non-interpretive mechanisms in psychoanalytic therapy. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 79, 903-921.
- Target & Fonagy, (2002). Fathers in modern psychoanalysis and in society: the role of the father and child development. In: J. Trowell & A. Etchegoyen (Eds.). *The importance of fathers*. (pp. 45-66) London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Target, M., Shmueli-Goetz, Y. & Fonagy, P. (2002). Attachment representations in school-age children: The early development of the Child Attachment Interview (CAI). *Journal of Infant Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 2(4), 91-105.
- Tienari, P., Wynne, L.C., Sorri, A., Lahti, I., Laksy, K., Moring, J., Naarala, M., Neiminen, P., & Wahlberg, K. E. (2004) Genotype-environment interaction in schizophrenia-spectrum disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 184 216-222.
- Trevarthen, C. (1979). Communication and cooperation in early infancy: A description of primary intersubjectivity. In M. Bullowa (Ed.) *Before speech: The beginning of interpersonal communication*. (pp.321-347). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tronick, E. & Beeghly, M. (2011). Infants' meaning-making and the development of mental health problems. *American Psychologist*, 66 (2) 107-119.
- Tronick, E., & Weinberg, M. (1997). Depressed mothers and infants: Failure to form dyadic states of consciousness. In L. Murray & P. Cooper (Eds.) *Postpartum depression and child development* (pp. 54-81). New York: Guilford Press.
- Trowell J., & Etchegoyen A. (Eds.). *The Importance of fathers*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- van IJendoorn, M. & de Wolff, M. S. (1997). In search of the absent father – meta-analysis of infant-father attachment: a rejoinder to our discussants. *Child Development*, 68, 604-609.
- Volling, B. L., & Belsky, J. (1992). Infant, father, and marital antecedents of infant-father attachment security in dual-earner and single earner families. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 15, 83-100.
- von Klitzing, K., & Burgin, D. (2005). Parental capacities for triadic relationships during

- pregnancy: early predictors of children's behavioral and representational functioning at preschool age. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 26(1) 19-39.
- von Klitzing, K., Simoni, H., Amsler, F. & Burgin, D. (1999). The role of the father in early family interactions. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 20(3), 222-237.
- von Klitzing, K., Simoni, H. & Burgin, D. (1999). Child development and early triadic relationship. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 80, 71-89.
- Von Wyl, A., Perren, S., Braune-Krickau, K., Simoni, H., Stadlmayr, W., Bürgin, D., & von Klitzing, K. (2008). How early triadic family processes predict children's strengths and difficulties at age three. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 5(4), pp. 466-491.
- Vuchinich, S., Emery, R. E. & Cassidy, J. (1988). Family members as third parties in dyadic family conflict: Strategies, alliances and outcomes. *Child Development*, 59, 1293-1302.
- Wahlberg, K. E. & Wynne, L.C. (2001) Possibilities for prevention of schizophrenia: Suggestions from research on genotype-environment interaction. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 30(1), pp. 91-103.
- Wallerstein, J. S. & Kelly, J. B. (1980). *Surviving the breakup*. New York: Basic Books
- Warren, S. L., Oppenheim, D., & Emde, R. N. (1996). Can emotions and themes in children's play predict behavior problems? *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 35, 1331 – 1337.
- Winter, M. A., Davies, P. T., Hightower, A. D., & Meyers, S. C. (2006). Relations among family discord, caregiver communication, and children's family representations. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 348-351.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1962a). Ego integration in child development. In: D. W. Winnicott (Ed.) *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment* (pp.56-63). London: Hogarth Press, 1965.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1962b). The theory of the parent-infant relationship- further remarks. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 43, 238-245.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971) *Playing and reality*. London: Tavistock.
- Woolgar, M. (1999). Projective doll play methodologies for preschool children. *Child Psychology & Psychiatry Review*, 4,(3) 126-134.

Wynne, L. S., Ryckoff, I.M., Day, J. & Hirsch, S. I. (1958). Pseudo-mutuality in the family relationships of schizophrenics. *Psychiatry*, 21,(2), 205-220.

Zahn-Waxler, C., Schmitz, S., Fulker, D., Robinson, J., & Emde, R. N. (1996). Behaviour problems in 5-year-old monozygotic and dizygotic twins: Genetic and environmental influences, patterns of regulation, and internalization control. *Development and Psychopathology*, 8, 103-122.