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Triangulation Process: An Examination of Differentiation and Family Stress as Indicated by Bowen

Michael Robert Whitehead
Brigham Young University - Provo

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TRIANGULATION PROCESS: AN EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENTIATION AND
FAMILY STRESS AS INDICATED BY BOWEN

by

Michael R. Whitehead

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University

Master of Science

Marriage and Family Therapy Program
School of Family Life
Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Michael R. Whitehead

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

Date

Roy A. Bean, Chair

Date

James M. Harper

Date

Laura Padilla Walker

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Michael Whitehead in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

Date

Roy A. Bean
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the School

Richard B. Miller
Director, School of Family Life

Accepted for the College

Susan Rugh
Associate Dean; College of Family, Home, and
Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

TRIANGULATION PROCESS: AN EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENTIATION AND FAMILY STRESS AS INDICATED BY BOWEN

Michael R. Whitehead

Marriage and Family Therapy Program

School of Family Life

Master of Science

This study examined the Bowenian notion that triangulation is precipitated by the interaction between a person's level of differentiation-of-self and the amount of chronic familial emotional anxiety. Another aspect of this study was to examine the relationship between marital quality and child triangulation. The sample for this study was taken from the Flourishing Families project and included only the families that indicated marriage as their relationship status, resulting in a total of 336 families with a target child between the ages of 11 and 14. Initial bivariate analysis indicated that differentiation-of-self, and family stress would be associated with child triangulation. Upon further examination using structural equation modeling, findings indicate that neither differentiation-of-self nor family stress are associated with child triangulation. However, marital quality was highly negatively associated with differentiation-of-self and moderately negatively associated with child triangulation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature	2
Conceptualizations of Triangulation.....	2
Interparental conflict.....	3
Family fusion.....	5
Parent-child alliances.....	7
Triangulation Process.....	7
Differentiation and triangulation process.....	8
Family stress/distress and triangulation process.....	10
Summary of Proposed Study and Hypotheses	13
Methods.....	14
Sample.....	14
Procedure	15
Measures	16
Analysis.....	22
Results.....	22
Bivariate Associations.....	22
Structural Equation Model Results.....	23
Discussion.....	25
Clinical Implications.....	31
Limitations	32
Directions for Future Research.....	33

References.....	35
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List of Figures

Figure 1: Hypothesized Model.....	43
Figure 2: Standardized Regression Weight – Full	44
Figure 3: Standardized Regression Weight – Simple	45

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Descriptive Statistics</i>	46
Table 2. <i>Bivariate Correlations</i>	47

Introduction

Triangulation is a systems-level process, conceptualized in varied forms by family systems scholars, in which a dyadic relationship draws in a third person in order to distribute the stress and anxiety, or power, throughout the relationship triad (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Minuchin, 1974). As defined by Bowen (1978), triangulation occurs in a dyadic relationship when one or more of the following conditions are present: individuals in the relationship have a low level of differentiation and/or there is a high amount of emotional stress present in the relationship (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). A common manifestation of the emotional triangular relationship in family systems takes the form of the mother-child-father triangle. A great deal of research has been carried out documenting the possible harms of triangulation on all individuals involved, but the main concern has been noted in terms of child outcome (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Baril, Crouter & McHale, 2007; Bradford et al., 2003; Buehler, Krishnakumar, Anthony, Tittsworth & Stone, 1994; Buehler et al., 1997; Feinberg, Kan & Hetherington, 2007; Jenkins & Buccioli, 2000; Koerner, Jacobs & Raymond, 2000; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000; O'Leary & Vidair, 2005; Schindler, Thomasius, Sack, Gemeinhardt & Kustner, 2007; Wang & Crane, 2001; Wood, Klebba & Miller, 2000). In fact, the results have been fairly conclusive that triangulation tends to result in negative child outcomes including, "internalizing problems [such as] depression, withdrawal, anxiety, somatic complaints, and low self-esteem.... [And] externalizing problems [such as] aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse" (Buehler et al., 1997, p. 234).

Despite the large and growing research literature documenting individual and familial dysfunction associated with triangulation, the actual process that leads to

triangulation, though theoretically established, has had little empirical investigation (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowenian Theory states that triangulation is an emotional process that occurs when the emotional tension (anxiety) experienced by the dyad interacts with the individuals' levels of differentiation-of-self (Bowen, 1978). Theoretically, families under constant stress and anxiety may experience a higher tendency to triangulate. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parents' level of differentiation-of-self and parents' perception of chronic and periodic stress, and the association that these two processes have to triangulation. Another aspect of this study was to understand how marital quality interacts with these family processes.

Review of Literature

Conceptualizations of Triangulation

Researchers have focused on three different family-level processes that are conceptually associated with Bowen's concept of triangulation. Bowen (1978) theorized that triangulation (though a symptom of family distress) occurs as a result of or in response to one of three system-level interactions/processes. These processes include, first, interparental conflict (overt and covert) with the focus being on covert interparental conflict as a measure of drawing in a child into the parental dyad (Bradford et al., 2003; Buehler et al., 1994; Buehler et al., 1997). Second, they include lack of differentiation or family fusion which is often measured using the more observable variables of emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff (Knauth & Skowron, 2006; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). Thirdly, these processes include: parent-child alliances, which are often the product of some dysfunction on the part of one spouse

which leads to an alliance between the other spouse and a child. Often thought of as a power struggle (Minuchin, 1974), these alliances can occur when emotional intimacy is not being provided within the couple relationship but, instead, obtained in other relationships (e.g., parent-child; Franck & Buehler, 2007; Grych, Raynor & Fosco, 2004; Jacobvitz & Bush, 1996). Although the majority of the available literature focuses on the triangulation process known as interparental conflict, all three aspects of triangulation are explored below.

Interparental conflict. Interparental conflict (IPC) has been shown to be harmful to children especially when the conflict is expressed overtly, with behaviors such as screaming, slapping, hitting, and threatening the spouse (Buehler et al., 1994). It is widely agreed that when children view this overt conflict between parents, deleterious effects occur including: externalizing behavior problems (Bradford et al., 2003; Baril, et al., 2007; Buehler et al., 1994; Feinberg et al., 2007; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000; O'Leary & Vidair, 2005), increased childhood anxiety (Koerner et al., 2000; O'Leary & Vidair, 2005) and depression (Buehler et al., 1997; Jenkins & Buccioni, 2000; Wang & Crane, 2001; Wood et al., 2000). As parents become more aware of the possible effects of overt interparental conflict on children, they often try to avoid outbursts and other displays of disagreement and contention. While this approach can be beneficial in reducing some of the harmful effects associated with overt IPC, this is not an entirely healthy or lasting solution. In fact, when couples avoid overt conflict, yet persist in arguing about topics such as parenting and division of labor, it is likely that they will resort to more covert tactics

Covert IPC has been defined “as hostile behaviors and affect that reflect passive-

aggressive ways of managing conflict between parents” (Buehler et al., 1997, p. 235). Parents who utilize covert tactics tend to draw their children into the argument in order to harm or punish their spouse. This is one way of using emotional assets to triangulate others into the conflict, more particularly children. Specific examples of this type of triangling include, “trying to get the child to side with one parent; scape-goating the child; using the child to get information about the other parent... having the child carry messages to the other parent... denigrating the other parent in the presence of the child when the other parent is not present...” (Buehler et al., 1997, p. 235-236). Some may rationalize that when there is no physical violence, screaming, or overt conflict involved, that children do not suffer. Contrary to this belief, studies have found that covert IPC may be just as harmful as overt IPC (e.g., Bell, Bell & Nakata, 2001; Buehler et al., 1994; Buehler et al., 1997; Miller, Anderson & Keala, 2004; Wang & Crane, 2001). For instance, focusing on ego development in a sample of adolescents ($n = 156$ families), Bell and colleagues (2001) found that the parents who were least able to manage conflict in their marriage tended to triangulate their children, boys were scape-goated, and girls were drawn into parent-child alliances. Wang and Crane (2001) found that the interaction between marital dissatisfaction and triangulation contributed to childhood depression scores. Utilizing a mixed sample of clinical and non-clinical community members (clinical = 34, non-clinical = 40), they found that fathers’ reports of marital satisfaction and perceived family triangulation accounted for eighteen percent of the variance of childhood depression scores. This indicates that marital satisfaction and triangulation are related, but also that both have an influence on child outcomes. Both studies are significant in that they provide preliminary evidence that covert IPC does affect child

outcomes, suggesting the need for further empirical exploration.

Family fusion. According to Bowen (1978), family fusion describes the process of two or more people forming a united sense of being, largely at the cost of their sense of individual selves. This united sense of being leads to a loss of individuality, which creates anxiety/emotional tension for one or more individuals, resulting in various maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., emotional distance, marital conflict, or dysfunction of one or more family members). These behaviors are a maladaptive attempt to reclaim individuality. This drifting of individuals toward fusion occurs when an individual's level of differentiation-of-self is low. Bowen proposed that the lower the level of differentiation-of-self the greater the propensity toward fusion. The result of this process has been referred to as an, "undifferentiated family ego mass" (Bowen, 1978). One symptomatic behavior that results from fusion is triangulation. Triangulation, resulting from this process, occurs when a fused dyad needs a third person to dissipate the stress that is created in the original relationship from the desire to reclaim individuality.

The most common type of triangulation resulting from family fusion is the Bowenian concept of scapegoating. Bowen suggested that individuals can be used as a family "scapegoat," thereby bearing the burden of the family's stress so the others in the family can experience harmony. For example, an adolescent who constantly exhibits delinquent behavior or significantly rebels against the family values may be bearing the family burden, and playing the role of the scapegoat. The parents can then unite to "save" the wayward child, increasing the harmony felt by the parents. This process occurs most often in fused families, and can result in the adoption of the scapegoat role by one family member and then, subsequently, by another. During the adolescent life stage, when

individual identity development is occurring, triangulation and scapegoating have the increased potential to harm youth by: (a) not permitting individuals self-exploration, (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Bell & Bell, 1979) or (b) the assignment of inappropriately adult-like responsibilities (e.g., taking care of the family, emotionally care-taking of parents, bearing the burden of the family problems; Larson, Benson, Wilson & Medora, 1998; Lopez, 1991; Schindler et al., 2007; West, Hosie & Zarski, 1987; Yahav & Sharlin, 2000). Although the terms triangulation and fusion are not interchangeable, the process of fusion creates an unbearable load that then is relieved by triangulation. Hence a fused family experiences triangulation through the process described above.

Anderson and Fleming (1986) examined the ego development of adolescents in enmeshed families. When college students were asked about their family-of-origin processes, it was found that family-level fusion and triangulation were significantly negatively related to individual autonomy, initiative, and identity. Other studies have supported the conceptualization that scapegoating and fusion hinder the identity development of individuals who are triangulated (Bell & Bell, 1979; Larson et al., 1998; Larson & Wilson, 1998; Lopez, 1991; Protinsky & Gilkey, 1996).

Bell and Bell (1979) found that triangulation resulting from scape-goating and fusion of the parental subsystem was negatively related ($r = -.21, p < .02$) to child development (ego development, self acceptance and sociability, and socialization and self control). Others have confirmed that identity development is hampered when this type of triangulation takes place, along with other outcomes such as the adjustment to college, career decision making (Larson & Wilson, 1998; Lopez, 1991; Protinsky & Gilkey, 1996), and marriage (Larson et al., 1998). Another possible outcome among adolescents

who experience triangulation is externalized behaviors such as delinquency, anti-social behaviors, and substance abuse (Schindler et al., 2007; West et al., 1987; Yahav & Sharlin, 2000).

Parent-child alliances. Although parent-child alliances can be viewed as a family structure-based power struggle between parents and children (Minuchin, 1974), it is conceptually appropriate to also consider it in light of the Bowenian view of triangulation (Bowen, 1978). In fact, the presence of parent-child alliances is one very clear indication that triangulation is taking place in a family. Parent-child alliances can be viewed as a fused relationship between the parent and the child. Usually this is seen when one of the parents (often the father) is so occupied with some other aspect of his life that he neglects his marriage. The neglected parent draws another person into an emotional alliance, in which the triangulated person (e.g., child, lover, friend) becomes a surrogate spouse. If the triangulated person is the child, he or she often feels like an adult or peer with their parent, causing confusion during interparental conflict or pain and resentment when the parental dyad is more functional emotionally. This type of triangulation presents different complications, such as a harmed relationship with one parent (Grych, Raynor & Fosco, 2004; Jacobvitz & Bush, 1996), feeling like a parent to siblings, and externalizing (Franck & Buehler, 2007) and internalizing problem behaviors (Koerner et al., 2000; Lindahl, Clements & Markman, 1997; Wang & Crane 2001).

Triangulation Process

Bowen theorized that a triangle, an emotional relationship where three persons rather than two make up the relationship, is the smallest and most stable relationship unit (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen mentioned that a dyadic relationship can be stable in

times of calm and low emotional distress; however, at the moment of extreme distress (relative to each individual's levels of differentiation), a triangle is activated in order to stabilize the relationship. It is believed that the triangle dissipates the emotional stress from a dyadic relationship among the triad. The triangle remains in effect in order to distribute the emotional anxiety in the relationship. If more anxiety is experienced a series of interlocking triangles would form in order to further distribute the anxiety. When the anxiety decreases, the triangle would consist of an emotionally close dyad, with an uncomfortable outsider.

Triangulation, as a family process, occurs as a function of two interacting factors: (a) the dyadic partners' respective levels of differentiation (i.e., having an individual identity within the relationship, or not being emotionally reactive to relational stress) and (b) the level of stress experienced by the partners, whether that stress be a function of external (finances, work, life events) or internal factors (relationship distress, depression, anxiety).

Bowen hypothesized that persons with higher levels of differentiation will resist and/or manage greater amounts of relational stress and anxiety than will those with lower levels of differentiation. The interactions between emotional stress and triangulation (Benson, Larson, Wilson & Demo, 1993; Larson & Wilson, 1998), and levels of differentiation and triangulation have been examined (Smith, Ray, Wetchler & Mihail, 1998), however there was no instance in which all three constructs (differentiation-of-self, emotional distress, triangulation) were examined together.

Differentiation and triangulation process. Differentiation, as defined by Kerr and Bowen (1988), is twofold: (a) the ability for any individual to separate emotional

reactivity and logical assessment, and (b) the ability for an individual to function independently within an emotional relationship context. Bowenian theory holds that individuals with low differentiation are more likely to triangulate when they are faced with chronically stressful situations, are more likely to experience physical illness, and more likely to develop internalized symptoms than those with higher differentiation (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). In other words, if a person were highly differentiated, they would be less likely to be emotionally reactive in high stress situations than someone who is of a lower differentiation level. Therefore, one way of measuring a person's level of differentiation-of-self, would be to look at the presence of emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff; those with increased reactivity and/or cutoff present with lower differentiation-of-self and vice versa (Knauth & Skowron, 2006; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron et al., 2004). Bowen hypothesized that the level of differentiation-of-self is an indicator of the probability that triangulation will occur.

Smith, Ray, Wetchler and Mihail. (1998) compared the perceived level of triangulation in undergraduates with physical or cognitive disabilities ($n=36$, *female*=19, *male*=17) with an undergraduate control ($n=70$, *female*=44, *male*=26). Smith et al. (1998) found that triangulation and family fusion (low individual differentiation) were significantly related to one another in both the control and experimental groups ($r(69) = .60, p < .01$ and $r(35) = .5, p < .01$, respectively). These correlations indicate that individuals with lower levels of differentiation have an increased probability or risk that triangulation will co-occur. However, the interactive nature of the relationship between differentiation-of-self, anxiety and triangulation has not been examined exclusively.

Another important finding was that the difference between the levels of stress

required to create symptoms in persons with higher levels of differentiation was almost twice that of persons with lower levels of differentiation (Murdock and Gore, 2004). The most interesting finding was that differentiation and coping styles only shared about 16% of the total variance, which suggests that differentiation and stress coping styles, though similar, are not the same construct (Murdock and Gore, 2004). These findings support Bowen's hypothesis that those with higher levels of differentiation (compared to those of lower differentiation levels) require more intense levels of stress in order to create psychological symptoms. Consequently, it can be reasoned that with higher levels of differentiation, individuals and relationships have a higher resistance to stress and a lower propensity to triangulate.

Family stress/distress and triangulation process. The level of anxiety or emotional distress experienced within the system is thought to lead to an automatic triangulation process (Bowen, 1978). Emotional distress can be a result of any number of things including the physical illness of a family member, marital conflict, drug misuse of any member of the family and so forth. If the level of distress is too difficult for a dyadic relationship to manage, another individual will be triangulated into the relationship to decrease the distress felt by the dyad. As theorized by Bowen, it is important to note that triangulation will typically result in lower stress for the primary dyad (e.g., parents) while the triangulated individual (e.g., child) will have an increase of stress. When experienced over time, this increase in stress has the potential to create internalized and externalized problems for the child (as outlined above).

Two studies have examined whether anxiety mediated the relationship between triangulation and an individual's romantic relationships (Benson et al., 1993) or the

relationship between triangulation and career decision-making (Larson and Wilson, 1998) in a sample consisting of college students. First, Benson and colleagues (1993) tested whether family of origin processes influenced an individual's romantic relationship. They found that although anxiety increased negative communication patterns, it was not significantly related to triangulation. Second, Larson and Wilson (1998) tested whether family of origin processes influenced an individual's career decision making. They found that anxiety worked to decrease career decision making; however, triangulation showed no significant effect. Both studies hypothesized that this lack of influence from triangulation may have been a result of the individuals in their samples not living with their families-of-origin and, hence, away from triangulation processes. To test this hypothesis it is necessary to examine the association between family stress and triangulation while the child is still involved in everyday family processes. Most triangulation/IPC literature examines children who are either in their early childhood years, where triangulation seems to be minimal, or late adolescence, when the child is likely to be either getting ready to leave the home or have already left the home. Although necessary to know the interactions of triangulation and family stress in both early childhood and late adolescence, the early adolescent years tend to be a time of extreme transition, which may exacerbate the negative outcomes of triangulation. During this time period children typically move from elementary school to middle school to high school, not to mention the biological changes that take place. During this time of transition added family stress may play a significant part in the life of the adolescent. Since the connection between chronic family anxiety and triangulation has not been examined in this population, this needs to be done.

Although the connection between chronic family anxiety and triangulation has not been formerly established, some preliminary work has been done. Looking at siblings of disabled children, Breslau and Prabucki (1987) found that chronic family stress was positively related to regressive-anxiety, isolation, and depressive affect. Other findings include a longer duration of depression, mania or combined mood symptoms in outpatients with bipolar disorder when chronic stress was present in the family (Kim et al., 2007); severe depressive symptoms in outpatients diagnosed with dysthymic disorder, who experienced chronic stress with little family support (Dougherty et al., 2004; and Hayden & Klein, 2001); a negative relation between physiological recovery of acute stressors and amount of time lived in poverty from birth to age thirteen among children (Evans & Kim, 2007); and a positive relation between chronic stress and maladaptive behaviors (Gracic et al., 2004; and Taylor et al., 1997). These studies indicate that chronic family stress affects all members of the family. Expanding this research to directly examine the relation of chronic stress to triangulation, and then triangulation to family member outcomes is the next step to testing this aspect of Bowen theory.

Marital quality and triangulation process. Another important aspect to examine regarding triangulation of children is marital quality. Though Bowen (1978) does not specifically theorize about the relationship between marital quality and triangulation, it is implied in his hypothesis about the family projection process. The basis of the family projection process is that when two low differentiated individuals start to encounter the fusion dilemma (described above), they will exhibit ‘fusion symptoms’ composing of marital conflict, illness of one of the spouses, or projection of the problem onto the children. When marital conflict is experienced it tends to decrease the marital quality that

is experienced by each partner.

Previous studies have shown that marital quality is a predictor of triangulation of children (Fosco & Grych, 2008; Kerig, 1995; Lindahl et al., 1997). More specifically Lindahl and colleagues (1997) found that current marital quality was more predictive of triangulation than pre-child marital quality. Another important finding by Kerig (1995) was that families, who were rated highest in triangulation, had the most marital dissatisfaction. These two studies help us to understand that triangulation and marital quality are related and should be examined in conjunction with each other.

Summary of Proposed Study and Hypotheses

As stated previously, Bowenian Theory states that triangulation is the emotional process resulting from an interaction between anxiety and differentiation-of-self (Bowen, 1978). Theoretically, if the individuals in the dyad have higher levels of differentiation-of-self, they would require higher levels of systemic stress in order for triangulation to occur. Inversely, families under constant stress and anxiety may experience a higher tendency to triangulate. Though different aspects of Bowen's theory of differentiation-of-self have been tested and confirmed via research (Davis & Jones, 1992; Knauth et al., 2006; Murdock & Gore, 2004; Peleg-Popko, 2002; Skowron et al., 2004; Smith et al., 1998), there have been no studies (to date) examining the connection between differentiation-of-self and family distress in relation to triangulation. The purpose of this study was to examine the interaction of parents' level of differentiation-of-self with the parents' perception of chronic and periodic stress, and the connection these two processes have to children's perception of triangulation. Additionally, it was hoped that a greater understanding of how marital quality interacts with these family processes could be

gained.

Using structural equation modeling (see figure 1), this study will examine the associations between family stress, level of differentiation-of-self and triangulation. The first hypothesis tested was that parent levels of differentiation-of-self is inversely related with triangulation (Anderson and Fleming, 1986; Smith, et al., 1998). The second hypothesis tested was that family stress (parental report) is positively associated with triangulation (Breslau and Prabucki, 1987; Dougherty et al., 2004; Evans & Kim, 2007; Gracic, et al. 2004; Hayden & Klein, 2001; Kim, et al. 2007; Taylor et al., 1997). The third hypothesis tested was that family stress is positively related to parent level of differentiation which will be inversely related to triangulation (Bowen, 1978). Lastly, the association between marital quality (as another specific indicator of family-level distress) and triangulation is expected to be inversely related, and will be examined in this model (Fosco & Grych, 2008; Kerig, 1995; Lindahl et al., 1997).

Methods

Sample

The participants for this study were taken from the *Flourishing Families Project (FFP)*, which is an ongoing, longitudinal study of inner family life involving families with a child between the ages of 10 and 13. Ninety-five percent of the two-parent families were currently married (never divorced), while 29% of single parents had never been married, 12% were separated, 52% were divorced, and 7% were widowed. This study used only the 336 two-parent families (M age = 11.23, SD = .95). Forty nine percent of the adolescents from two-parent families were female. Seventy-six percent of fathers, 77% of mothers, and 75% of children were European American, 4% of fathers, 5% of

mothers, and 5% of children were African American, and 14% of fathers, 16% of mothers, and 20% of children were from other ethnic groups or were multiethnic. Sixty-eight percent of mothers and 69% of fathers had a bachelor's degree or higher. Two percent of the families made less than \$25,000 per year, 16% made between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, and 70% made more than \$50,000 per year; with 23% of mothers and 3% of fathers reporting being unemployed.

Procedure

Participant families for the FFP were selected from a large northwestern city and were interviewed during the first eight months of 2007. Families were primarily recruited using a purchased national telephone survey database (Polk Directories/ InfoUSA). This database claims to contain 82 million households across the United States and has detailed information about each household, including presence and age of children. Families identified using the Polk Directory were selected from targeted census tracts that mirrored the socio-economic and racial stratification of reports of local school districts. All families with a child between the ages of 10 and 13 living within target census tracts were deemed eligible to participate in the FFP. Eligible families were subsequently contacted directly using a multi-stage recruitment protocol. First, a letter of introduction was sent to potentially eligible families. Second, interviewers made home visits and phone calls to confirm eligibility and willingness to participate in the study. Once eligibility and consent were established, interviewers made an appointment to come to the family's home to conduct an assessment interview.

In addition to the random selection protocol used with the survey database, families were recruited into the study through family referral. At the conclusion of their

in-home interviews, families were invited to identify two additional families in the recruitment area that matched study eligibility. This type of limited-referral approach permitted us to identify eligible families in the targeted area that were found in the Polk Directory. The Polk Directory national database was generated using telephone, magazine, and internet subscription reports; therefore, families of color (especially those of lower socio-economic status) were under-represented in the database. By broadening our approach and allowing for some limited referrals, we were able to significantly increase the social-economic and ethnic diversity of the sample.

Through these recruitment protocols, a total of 692 potentially eligible families were identified within the survey database as living within the targeted census tracts. Of those, 372 were determined to have a child within the target age range. Of those, 64% agreed to participate ($n = 238$). Additionally, there were 372 families referred by participating families, 262 of whom agreed to participate (71%). The most frequent reasons cited by families for not wanting to participate in the study were lack of time and concerns about privacy. It is important to note that there were very little missing data. As interviewers collected each segment of the in-home interview, questionnaires were screened for missing answers and double marking.

Measures

Differentiation-of-self. Two latent variables were constructed, one for each parent, using two subscale measures from the Differentiation-of-self Inventory (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). The parents responded to 23 items based on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all true for me*) to 6 (*Very true for me*). Sample questions include, “I wish that I were not so emotional”, “I am overly sensitive to criticism” and “I often feel

inhibited around my family.” Higher scores on questions 1-11 indicate the respondent perceives him/herself as having higher emotional reactivity. The range of possible scores for this subscale are between 1 to 6, with means of 3.33 for mothers and 2.89 for fathers. Higher scores on questions 12-23 indicate respondent perceives him/herself as having a higher level of emotional cutoff. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 6, with means of 1.89 for mothers and 2.11 for fathers. Reliability was found to be .88 overall, .88 for emotional reactivity, and .79 for emotional cutoff (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), with similar Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients found in this sample (Overall: fathers = .908 (mothers = .896); Emotional Reactivity: fathers = .874 (mothers = .894); Emotional Cutoff: fathers = .886 (mothers = .884)).

Family Stress. One latent variable was constructed for each parent using answers to three different measures of family stress; the stressful life events, chronic stressors and work to family stress measures.

Parent’s experience of stressful life events was assessed using 10 items from Johnson (1986). Response categories included: 1 (*happened in the last year*), 2 (*happened over a year ago*), and 3 (*never happened*) in relation to stressors such as “death of a child,” “serious illness or injury in the family” and “loss of a job.” All items were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate higher levels of stress experienced. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 3, with means of 1.53 for mothers and 1.55 for fathers. Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .624 (fathers) and .645 (mothers) for this sample.

The severity of chronic stress in the parents’ lives was assessed focusing on various types of financial and health-related stressors (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu,

& Needham, 2005). Parents responded on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*did not occur*) to 5 (*occurred, extremely severe*) and higher scores indicate higher levels of chronic stress. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 0 to 5, with means of 1.19 for mothers and 1.12 for fathers. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) for this sample was found to be $P1 = .838$ ($P2 = .826$).

Participants' experiences of balancing work and family were examined assessing work-to-family negative spillover (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Participants responded to 4 items, based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*). Sample questions include, "job worries or problems distract you when you are at home" and "stress at work makes you irritable at home." Higher scores indicate greater levels of negative spillover from work to family. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 4, with means of 2.52 for mothers and 2.75 for fathers. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients were reported as .83 for negative work-to-family spillover (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), and were found to range from .77 (fathers) to .84 (mothers).

Triangulation. One latent variable was constructed using each participant's responses to a triangulation measure. Parental perception of their partner's attempts to triangulate their child were measured using a 4-item modified version of the Coparenting Questionnaire (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). Parents answered questions about how often they perceived certain parenting behaviors in their partner. Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) with sample items including, (a) "My partner delivers messages to me through this child rather than say them to me" and (b) "My partner tries to get this child to take sides when we argue." Higher scores on items 6-9 indicate higher levels of

triangulation as perceived by the partner. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 4, with means of 1.25 for mothers and 1.24 for fathers.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for this measure, including all subscales, was previously found to be between .69 and .87 (Margolin et al., 2001). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be .819 (Mother's), .774 (Father's) for this research sample.

Parental attempts to triangulate the child were measured using a 5-item modified version of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). The 5-items used are representative of the Triangulation subscales. Children answered how true items were with respect to each parent. Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) with sample items including, (a) "I feel like I have to take sides when my parents argue." and (b) "I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue." Higher scores on items 6-10 indicate higher levels of triangulation as perceived by the child. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 5, with means of 1.67. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for this measure was previously found to be .71 for the Triangulation subscale (Grych et al., 1992). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be .478 (Triangulation subscale) for this research sample.

Marital Quality. One latent variable was constructed for each parent using answers to four different measures of marital quality; marital commitment, marital quality, marital conflict and relational aggression.

The ten-item Couple Commitment-Sacrifice Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992) was used to measure the degree to which a marital partner is committed to the relationship. Respondents answered five questions based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*agree*). Sample questions include, "I want this

relationship to stay strong,” and “I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.” Higher scores on these questions indicate higher levels of commitment to their partner. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 7, with means of 6.24 for mothers and 6.24 for fathers. Stanley, et al. (2006) found the reliability to be .88 (commitment subscale). The reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha) for this sample was found to be .795 (mother’s) and .801 (father’s).

Marital quality was assessed using a modified version of the Norton Quality Marriage scale (Norton, 1983). The responses were based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 6 (*very strongly agree*). Partners responded to five questions including, “My relationship with my partner makes me happy” and “My relationship with my partner is very stable.” Higher scores indicate higher perceived marital quality. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 6, with means of 5.57 for mothers and 5.59 for fathers.

Respondents also recorded the degree of happiness in their relationship. Responses were based on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very unhappy*) to 10 (*perfectly happy*). High responses indicate extreme joy and low responses indicate extreme unhappiness. Berg, Trost, Schneider, & Allison (2001) found reliability to be .95 (Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient). The reliability tests for this sample indicated a Cronbach’s Alpha of .942 (mothers) and .946 (father’s).

To assess marital conflict, participants responded to eight common problems experienced in a couple relationship in terms of how often each item is a problem. Items were selected from the RELATE assessment battery (Busby, Holman, Taniguchi, 2001), including items such as, “rearing children,” “roles (Who does what)” and “financial

matters.” Responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 5, with means of 2.36 for mothers and 2.35 for fathers. Previous reliability (Busby, Holman, Taniguchi, 2001) for this measure was found to be .80 (males) and .83 (females). The reliability for this sample (Cronbach’s Alpha) was found to be .778 (mother’s) and .698 (father’s).

Relational aggression was measured using two subscales from the “Self-Report of Aggression and Victimization in Marriage” (SRAV-M) developed by Nelson and Carroll (2006). This measure is a modified version of the original Self-Report of Aggression and Victimization (SRAV) measure developed by Morales and Crick (1998) and extended to romantic relationships of young adults by Linder, Crick, & Collins (2002). The SRAV-M utilizes the same item stems as the SRAV, but was modified in language for committed couples where respondents were instructed to respond with respect to their current marriage relationship. Partners responded to twelve items including, “(My partner) ignores me when she/he is angry with me,” and “(My partner) has intentionally ignored me until I give in to his/her way about something.” Responses were based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Higher scores indicate higher perceived relational victimization. The range of possible mean scores for this subscale is between 1 to 7, with means of 1.94 for mothers and 2.24 for fathers. Reliability tests for this sample indicated a Cronbach’s Alpha of .88 (mother’s) .89 (father’s), with reliability coefficients ranging from .86 to .90 for the social sabotage and social withdrawal subscales.

Analysis

Initial data analyses included bivariate correlations among study variables and a mean difference test (T-test) for child's perception of triangulation. Findings from these tests, along with means and standard deviations, are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Structural equation modeling analyses were conducted (see Figure 1) to explore the relationships between differentiation, marital quality, the stressor variables and triangulation using AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle, 2008).

Results

Descriptive statistics, organized by parent youth gender, are presented for each variable in the study (see Table 1). Bivariate correlations among triangulation, parental stress, marital quality and parental differentiation for the sample are shown in Table 2. All the significant bivariate relationships were in the expected directions. All observed variables for the following latent variables were significantly inter-correlated in the expected directions: father's marital quality, mother's marital quality, were negatively associated with all measures of triangulation. Other important significant associations to note is that the observed variable of father's marital quality was negatively associated with the observed variables of father's differentiation, positively associated with mother's marital quality, and negatively associated with all measures of triangulation. Lastly, the observed variables of mother's marital quality were positively associated with the observed variables father's marital quality, negatively associated with father's triangulation, negatively associated with father's differentiation, negatively associated with mother's differentiation and negatively associated with child triangulation.

Bivariate Associations. More importantly was that positive associations between

father and mother reports of differentiation-of-self with child triangulation as well as mother and father reports of triangulation were found to be significant. On the other hand, only the positive associations between mother and father chronic stress with each other's reports of triangulation were found to be significant. Similarly, the positive associations between father's differentiation scores with father and mother chronic stress, and father and mother work to family stress were significant. Interestingly, only the positive associations between mother's differentiation scores with father's chronic stress and work to family stress were significant ; however the positive association between mother's differentiation with all measures of mother's stress were significant. In terms of the direct relationship, child perception of triangulation was found to be significantly bivariately associated with father chronic stress ($\beta = .164, p < .01$), father differentiation-of-self ($\beta = .247, p < .01$), father triangulation ($\beta = .141, p < .05$), mother chronic stress ($\beta = .128, p < .01$), mother stressful life events ($\beta = .169, p < .01$), mother differentiation-of-self ($\beta = .261, p < .01$), and mother triangulation ($\beta = .316, p < .01$).

Structural Equation Model Results. An a priori decision was made to estimate error covariance's between the latent parenting stress variables, the latent marital quality variables, the individual parental reports of triangulation, the mother's self report of marital conflict and relational aggression and marital conflict and marital quality, the father's self report of marital conflict and relational aggression and marital conflict and marital quality, the mother's individual report of chronic stress and work to family stress, the father's individual report of chronic stress and work to family stress, and between mother's individual report of stressor events and father's individual report of stressor events. This was done because it was expected that the association between the observed

variables of stress and marital quality would be highly correlated. It was also expected that the observed parent reports of triangulation would be highly correlated. Correlation of error terms ranged from $-.22$ to $.74$ and all were in the expected directions. Although the correlation of the error terms between mother's and father's latent variable of stress ($\beta = .74$) was high, it was expected because of the high bivariate correlation between the two. Correlation of error terms between the latent variable of father's and mother's marital quality was also high ($\beta = .72$), but also expected due to high bivariate correlation.

Model fit was evaluated using standard professional standards for χ^2 , comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA). Specific indicators of "good fit" include a non-significant χ^2 and/or a CMIN/DF below 3.0, a CFI value above .90, and a RMSEA value below .05 (Byrne, 2001). Indices regarding model fit suggest that the model is not completely supported by the data ($\chi^2 = 455.492$ ($df = 167$, $n = 336$), $p = .001$; CFI = .879; RMSEA = .072; CMIN/DF = 2.727). In particular, it should be noted that while CFI and RMSEA fit indices are slightly beyond the recommended values, the CMIN/DF value was found to be below 3.0 as recommended by Carmines and McIver (1981).

Using SEM, the standardized beta coefficients for the pathways between the variables are as follows: mother's marital quality and triangulation was found to be -0.52 ; father's marital quality and triangulation was found to be $-.37$; mother's marital quality and mother's differentiation was found to be $-.66$; father's marital quality and father's differentiation was found to be $-.67$; mother's stress and mother's marital quality was found to be $-.40$; father's stress and father's marital quality was found to be $-.45$.

As hypothesized, both partners' marital quality was significantly associated with

triangulation (mother – $\beta = -.52$, father – $\beta = -.37$). However, this was the only hypothesis that was supported. The relationship between stress and differentiation was not supported, nor was the relationship between differentiation and triangulation. The SEM results were unexpected as Bowenian theory suggests that these relationships should exist as hypothesized and, furthermore, the bivariate correlations came out significant in the appropriate directions and relationships.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between family stress, parental differentiation and triangulation and to validate the relationship between marital quality and triangulation. Bowen (1978) states that triangulation occurs as a result of a dyadic relationship experiencing one or more of the following conditions: individuals in the relationship have a low level of differentiation and/or there is a high amount of emotional stress present in the relationship (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The relationship between differentiation and triangulation has only been examined (to date) in one other study and was found to be supported (Smith, et al., 1998). Many studies have examined the connection between stress (anxiety) and differentiation (Bartle-Haring, Rosen & Stith, 2002; Griffin & Apostal, 1993; Knauth et al., 2006; Maynard, 1997; Murdock & Gore, 2004; Skowron et al., 2004; Smith et al., 1998), most providing support that lower differentiated persons experience greater constant stress (Griffin & Apostal, 1993; Maynard, 1997; Knauth et al., 2006) while another provided support that higher differentiated persons have an increased stress response threshold than lower differentiated persons (Murdock & Gore, 2004). No study has examined the theoretical interaction between stress, differentiation-of-self and triangulation.

Differentiation-of-self

The most surprising result was the non-significant relationships between the key concepts of differentiation, stress and triangulation. The core concept behind Bowen's (1978) theory of triangulation involves the interaction between individuals' level of differentiation-of-self and presence of family stress. As stated previously, a dyad tends to triangulate a third party into the relationship in order to relieve excess emotional stress, this occurs especially when the individuals in the dyad have low levels of differentiation-of-self.

Stress. The finding of non-significance in the direct relationship between differentiation-of-self and family stress was also surprising. Previous research has found that lower differentiated persons experience greater stress (Griffin & Apostol, 1993; Maynard, 1997; and Knauth et al., 2006) and that higher differentiated persons respond better to stress (Murdock & Gore, 2004). The results of this study found that while the latent variables of family stress were not directly associated with differentiation-of-self, the bivariate associations between father and mother chronic and work to family stress and each respective person's differentiation-of-self had a positive significant relationship (see table 2). It is also important to note that family stress was indirectly related to differentiation-of-self through marital quality. While these are interesting findings, it is important to consider the possible reasons why stress was not directly related to differentiation-of-self in this sample in contrast to previous studies and currently accepted theory.

Some possible reasons that this study resulted in non-significant associations between stress and differentiation-of-self include: 1) potential flaws in the measure of

differentiation-of-self, and 2) insufficient measurement sensitivity in the measures for family emotional stress.

First, due to the abstract and individual nature of differentiation, Bowen believed that the proper assessment of a person's level of differentiation-of-self required months of observation by a trained therapist. This obviously creates a problem when trying to operationalize the concept empirically and testing the concept during research. However, despite the ability to better assess for differentiation-of-self, it could be that the measure used for this sample was not sensitive enough. This study utilized only 23 of the 43 items, due to questionnaire length, which resulted in only the emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff subscales being used. The subscales not used for this sample were the I-position and fusion with others subscales. It is very possible that the lack of these additional subscales has resulted in the non-significant results.

The second possible reason for the contrary findings is that this study used measures of family stress that are inconsistent with Bowen's idea of family emotional stress. As understood by Bowen (1978) all "organisms" are adapted to dealing with acute anxiety, however dealing with chronic anxiety will result in emotional disturbances or symptoms if their level of differentiation-of-self is not suited (high enough) to dealing with the chronic anxiety. Other studies that have examined the connection between differentiation-of-self and stress (Griffin & Apostol, 1993; Maynard, 1997; and Knauth et al., 2006) have used the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, which has been shown to measure chronic anxiety with respect to acute stressors. Although the latent variable used in this study had an observed variable of chronic stress, the other observed variables measured acute stressors. The difference in instrument and emotional stress measurement is a very

probable reason for the discrepancy in findings.

Triangulation. Currently only one study could be found that has examined the association between differentiation-of-self and triangulation. While Smith and colleagues (1998) used different instruments to test for triangulation and differentiation-of-self, their findings did support the notion that a person's level of differentiation-of-self is associated with the propensity to triangulation. However, one important difference between Smith et al. (1998) and this study is that this study examined parental levels of differentiation-of-self, whereas Smith et al. (1998) used the triangulated person's level of differentiation-of-self. Smith and colleagues (1998) also used a sample of college students, whereas this study utilized a sample of children in their early adolescent years still living in the home. In order to support or refute the findings of Smith et al. (1998) in an early adolescent sample, it would be necessary to take the child's level of differentiation and triangulation scores to see if they are correlated. Due to the absence of such a measure for this wave of the sample, this was not done. In order to understand the difference in results between this study and that of Bowenian theory and Smith et al. (1998) it is important to outline the possible reasons for such differences.

There are a few possible reasons the findings in this study do not fit with Smith et al. (1998) and current theory. First, Smith et al. (1998) use a measure of individuation (PAFS-QVC) rather than differentiation-of-self. Bohlander (1995) extensively reviewed the differences between a Bowenian concept of differentiation-of-self and individuation, concluding that the two are not the same, but have differences that need to be sorted out in the literature. Since Smith and colleagues (1998) use the terms interchangeably, and the measure they used was that of individuation, it is hard to fully understand what their

results mean. At the time that Smith and colleagues (1998) conducted their study, the PAFS-QVC was likely the best measure available. However, shortly after the study was published two measures of differentiation-of-self were created (Miller et al., 2004). As mentioned previously regarding the association between differentiation-of-self and family stress, it is possible that the measure for differentiation-of-self was not sensitive enough to test for Bowen's construct, resulting in non-significant findings for triangulation as well.

Another possible reason differentiation-of-self and triangulation were not significantly related could be due to the non-clinical nature of this study's sample. Bowenian Theory (Bowen, 1978) was developed out of observation of a severely clinical population (e.g. hospitalized schizophrenia patients and their families). Therefore, it is possible that the concepts of triangulation and differentiation-of-self are different for families who are not experiencing extreme clinical symptoms. It is recommended that this possibility be examined as a possible explanation by comparing a clinical sample with a non-clinical sample in future research.

Lastly, it is also likely that due to the nature of social science research being driven by significant results, other studies with similar findings have not been published. If this is true it is possible that this aspect of Bowenian theory is not valid. Due to the lack of studies looking at differentiation-of-self and triangulation, it seems plausible that other manuscripts with similar findings did not get published due to being contrary to the currently accepted notion that this construct of Bowenian theory is valid. Though this last possibility is minimal it must be considered due to the current lack of literature and the nature of the results found herein.

Marital Quality. Differentiation-of-self was found to be highly significant in relation to marital quality, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Bohlander, 1999, Griffin & Apostal, 1993, Lim & Jennings, 1996, & Peleg, 2008). Correlations for both maternal and paternal marital quality and differentiation were quite high ($\beta = -.66, p < .05$, and $\beta = -.67, p < .05$ respectively – note: the increased score of differentiation denotes lower differentiation). This indicates strong associations between marital quality and differentiation for this sample. Griffin and Apostal (1993) found that as marital satisfaction increased, differentiation-of-self increased, which then was associated with a lower amount of anxiety in the relationship.

Triangulation

Stress. Although past research examining triangulation and family stress demonstrated a non-significant association between the two (Benson et al., 1993; Larson & Wilson 1998), these studies were conducted with a sample in the late adolescent years, primarily out of the home. It was important to examine this association again with this sample due to the age of the sample and the fact that the children in this sample lived at home. Although the non-significant relationship between family stress and triangulation was not entirely surprising, due to previous research, they still were contrary to Bowen's theory. As stated previously, some possible reasons for this include an inadequate measure for family emotional stress, or simply that this operationalization of Bowen's theory is not valid. The latter assumption seems to be easier to accept in this case, as Benson and colleagues (1993) and Larson and Wilson (1998) have both found that triangulation and stress do not have a significant association. Still more research needs to be done, to verify these findings as well as to expand the understanding of Bowen's

theory.

Marital Quality. Another important finding was the mother's marital quality was highly correlated to triangulation ($\beta = -.52, p < .05$) whereas father's marital quality was only moderately correlated to triangulation ($\beta = -.37, p < .05$). Since mothers interact with children more often than father's this finding was expected. Lindahl and colleagues (1997) found that current marital quality was associated with triangulation. The findings in this sample support the current literature that current marital quality and triangulation are associated (Fosco & Grych, 2008; Kerig, 1995; Lindahl et al., 1997) and indicate that mothers are more likely to triangulate than fathers when marital quality is low.

Stress and Marital Quality

The final important finding was that stress was inversely related to marital quality. In a review of current research, Randall and Bodenmann (2009) found that the inverse relationship between marital quality and stress is for the most part conclusive. The findings in this sample indicate that father's stress is more likely to contribute to a decreased marital satisfaction than mother's stress. Understanding the complex interactions between stress and marital quality will help to give therapist's direction when treating couples. The same goes for the other complex interactions explored in this study.

Clinical Implications

The significant findings in this sample have numerous implications for clinicians and future clients of family therapists. The relationships between father and mother stress should first be examined. The high correlation ($\beta = .74, p < .05$) between the latent variables of mother and father stress indicate that parents are typically "on the same page" when it comes to sensing or experiencing stress in the family. The strength in this

relationship noted for this sample indicates that parents are likely experiencing a similar amount of stress in the family, which has similar effects on marital quality and each person's levels of differentiation and propensity to triangulate.

With the moderate association between parental stress and marital quality, it is important to identify the possible clinical implications for a couple or family in therapy. As a family or couple enters therapy, they may present with low marital quality or child triangulation that may arise from family stress. This may mean that teaching couples and families stress-coping strategies for dealing with chronic stress, and/or helping them reduce current acute stressors will help reduce triangulation and increase marital quality. The associations between marital quality and differentiation-of-self bring to light the reality that working on family problems can be approached from many different angles.

Bowen (1978) indicated that an important goal for couple and/or family therapy is to increase individuals' levels of differentiation. His theory states that a therapist can work with a couple alone to increase differentiation levels within each partner, which will then create changes in the family system. The findings in this sample suggest that a therapist can work with a couple to increase levels of differentiation, which change would affect marital quality, to trickle down to triangulation propensity. This supports Bowen's overall theory of conducting therapy even if it does not support the intricacies of how his theory presents the processes that lead to a family needing therapy. In order to further understand the generalizability of these findings it is important to understand the limitations present in this study.

Limitations

One of the most obvious limitations of the current study is that the model did not

fit the data appropriately enough to fully suggest generalizability or confidence in the findings. It would seem prudent in future examinations of this construct, to identify the measures that seem to best fit Bowen's ideas of family emotional stress, triangulation and differentiation-of-self. Better measures for each of the variables would result in a better model to analyze the data. This would increase the confidence and generalizability of the findings.

Another important limitation was the lack of diversity in the sample. As presented earlier, the majority of the sample was of European descent and consisted of a non-clinical population. Bowen's theory is a theory of family dysfunction. Most of the constructs made up in the theory try to explain why a family experience symptoms of distress. The sample consisted of a population that can be considered generally healthy and is not likely in need of immediate clinical services. The incongruity between theory and sample seems to have played a role in the results. For instance, the average score for differentiation-of-self was 2.58 (mothers) and 2.48 (fathers) with a score of one indicative of high differentiation. The average scores for each of the other variable suggest a highly functional and satisfied population. In order to get an accurate examination of these Bowenian constructs it would also be important to examine this same model in a clinical sample of families or couples currently in therapy. It would then be easier to examine the results in light of the makeup of each sample.

Directions for Future Research

As stated previously it would be best to have a control and experimental group make up the sample, as well as measurements that better account for the makeup of the variables that need to be examined. It is also important to continue to look at the

association between differentiation and triangulation. This association is central to Bowenian theory, and it needs to be found valid or room needs to be made for a change in the understanding of Bowenian therapy so clinicians can better serve clients, and researchers can better expound on the lack of research present regarding Bowenian theory.

Lastly, a longitudinal study would help investigate the concept of emotional stress diffusion through triangulation, and would lead to further understanding of the association between differentiation-of-self and triangulation. The fact that little empirical support has been found for the association between emotional stress and triangulation lets us know that either that construct of Bowenian theory is invalid or researchers are not appropriately testing for it. Bowen (1978) points to a mediating relationship between stress, triangulation and differentiation. A reading of Bowen (1978) would indicate that differentiation mediates the relationship between stress and triangulation, leading the reader to the conclusion that a direct examination of that relationship would continue to turn up non-significant associations. Hence, it is important that any future examination of the relationship between stress and triangulation needs to also examine how differentiation affects that relationship.

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Figure 1: Hypothesized Model

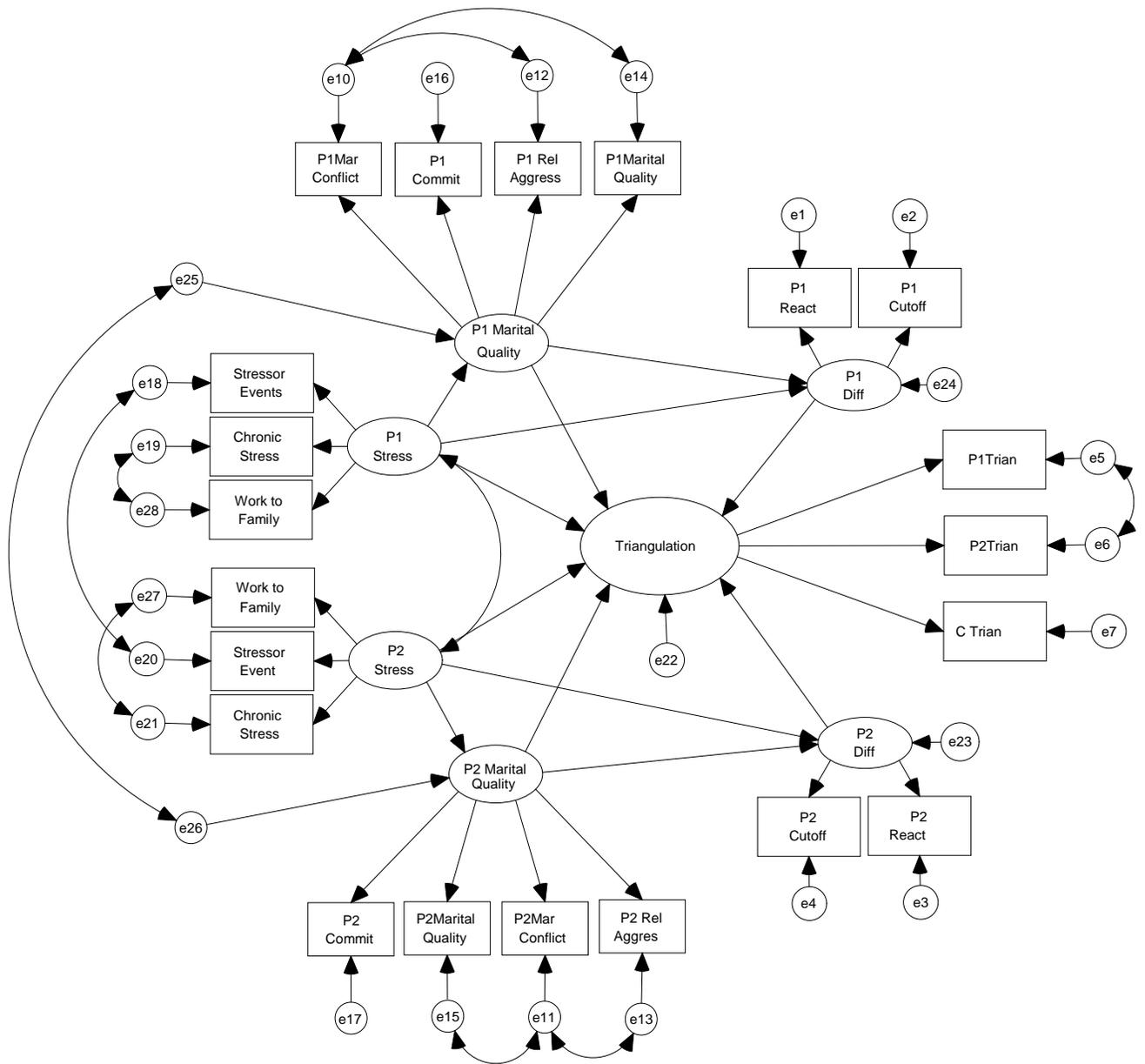
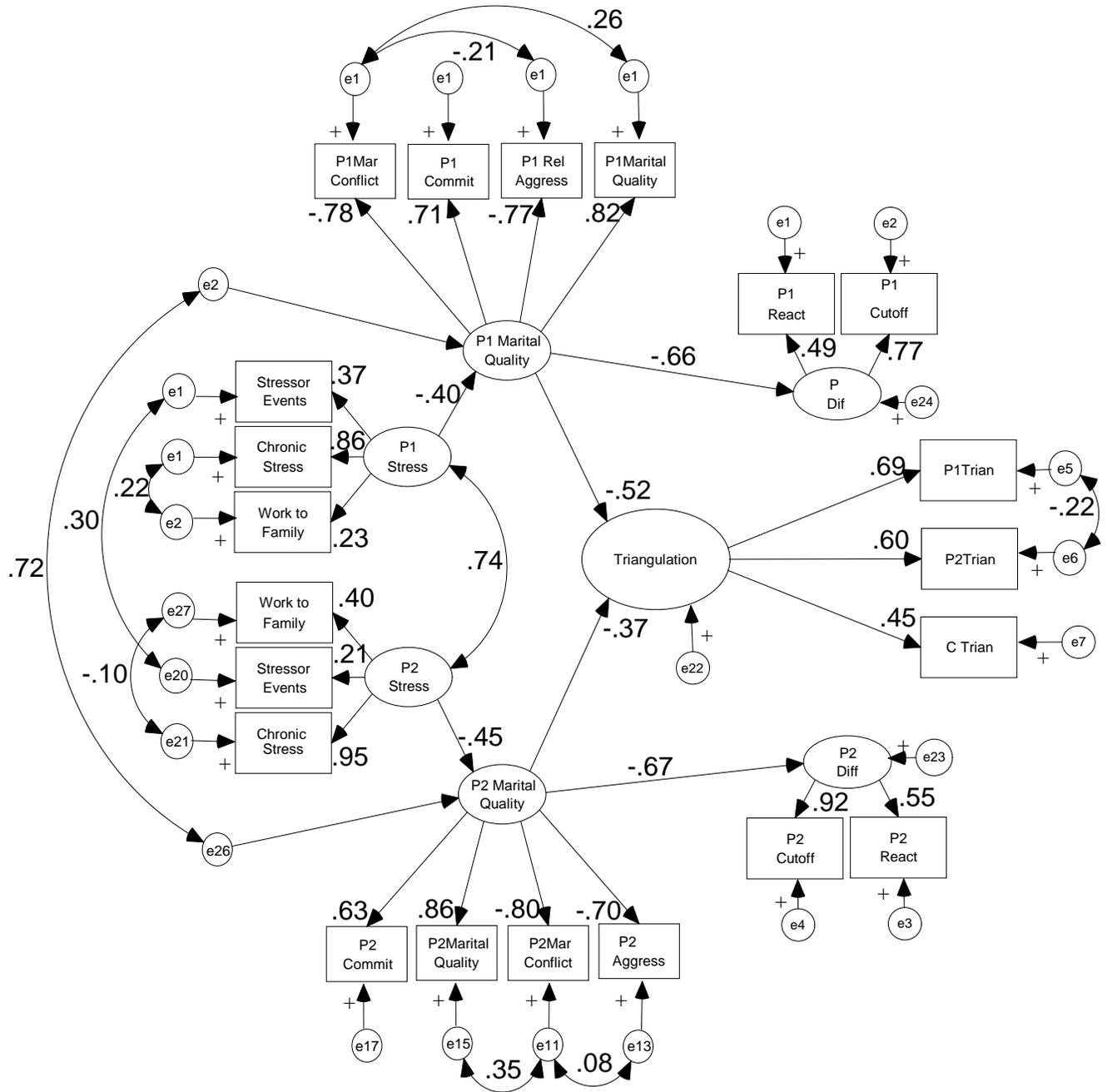
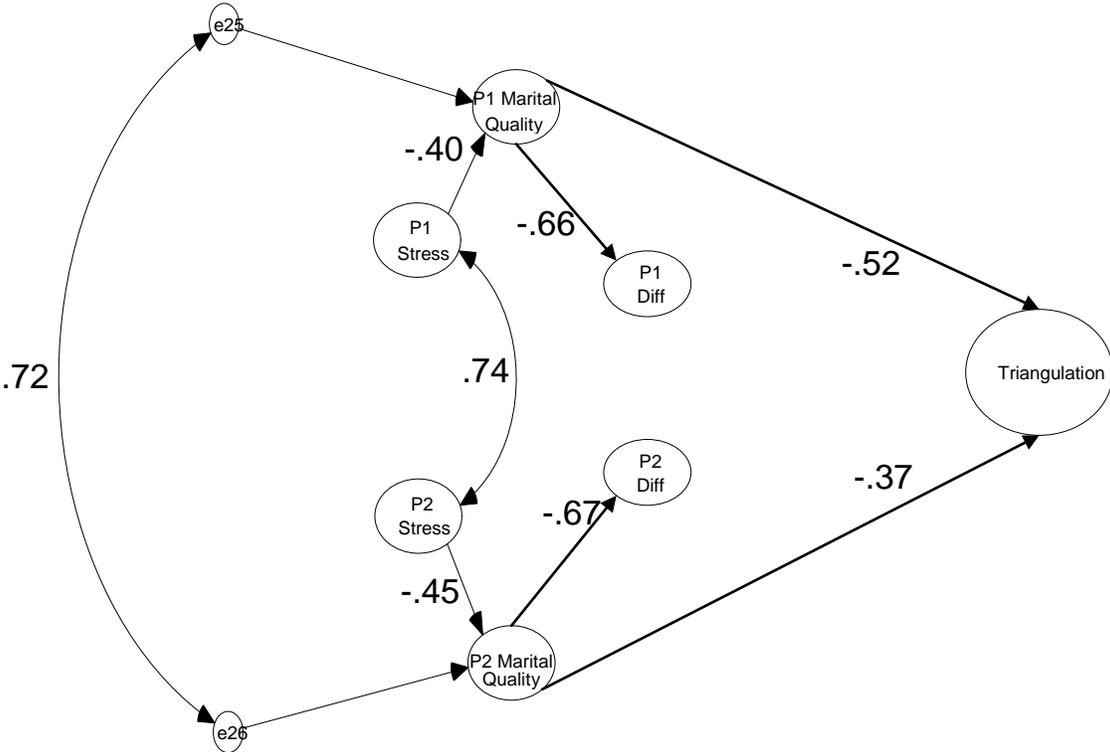


Figure 2: Standardized Regression Weight – Full



Note: Unless otherwise noted, all paths are significant to $p < .05$

Figure 3: Standardized Regression Weight – Simple



Note: Unless otherwise noted, all paths are significant to $p < .05$

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics

Measure	Mothers		Fathers	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Marital Quality				
Marital Commitment	6.241	.762	6.240	.772
Marital Quality	5.573	1.023	5.598	.982
Relational Aggression	1.936	.858	2.243	.974
Marital Conflict	2.368	.501	2.354	.555
Family Stress				
Chronic Stress	1.190	.784	1.129	.767
Stressful Life Events	1.536	.307	1.551	.285
Work to Family Stress	2.520	.734	2.756	.617
Differentiation-of-self (Total)				
Emotional Cutoff	1.892	.782	2.117	.797
Emotional Reactivity	3.336	.968	2.893	.880
Parental Triangulation	1.253	.454	1.240	.440
		Child Self Report		
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Child Triangulation		1.677	.711	

Table 2.

Bivariate Correlations		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1	F. Mar. Com.																			
2	F. Mar. Quality	.61**																		
3	F. Rel. Agg.	-.48**	-.58**																	
4	F. Mar. Conflict	-.42**	-.59**	.62**																
5	F. Chr. Stress	-.22**	-.30**	.33**	.45**															
6	F. Stress. Life Events	.01	.06	.06	.07	.19**														
7	F. W-to-F. Stress	-.18**	-.14*	.10	.19**	.25**	.01													
8	F. Diff. of Self	-.39**	-.53**	.43**	.48**	.33**	.02	.34**												
9	F. Triangulation	-.26**	-.33**	.47**	.46**	.24**	.02	.12*	.28**											
10	M. Mar. Com.	.32**	.45**	-.33**	-.35**	-.19**	.08	-.04	-.26**	-.17**										
11	M. Mar. Quality	.38**	.38**	-.43**	-.48**	-.25**	.03	-.13*	-.38**	-.28**	.64**									
12	M. Rel. Agg.	-.33**	-.49**	.45**	.45**	.15**	.04	.05	.33**	.26**	-.54**	-.60**								
13	M. Mar. Conflict	-.25**	-.51**	.37**	.51**	.31**	.05	.12*	.30**	.29**	-.52**	-.55**	.53**							
14	M. Chr. Stress	-.09	-.21**	.23**	.34**	.61**	.13*	.10	.22**	.07	-.21**	-.23**	.20**	.37**						
15	M. Stress. Life Events	-.02	-.07	.09	.08	.22**	.32**	.01	.04	.07	-.08	-.07	.13*	.23**	.32**					
16	M. W-to-F. Stress	-.05	-.11*	.11	.05	.04	-.07	.15**	.15**	.01	-.14*	-.14*	.15**	.13*	.23**	.03				
17	M. Diff. of Self	-.11*	-.29**	.24**	.24**	.12*	.06	.13*	.27**	.05	-.38**	-.40**	.43**	.46**	.27**	.17**	.23**			
18	M. Triangulation	-.22**	-.32**	.30**	.37**	.20**	-.05	-.07	.23**	.27**	-.36**	-.38	.51**	.34**	.22**	.02	.07	.26**		
19	C. Triangulation	-.13*	-.19**	.18**	.21**	.16**	.02	.06	.25**	.14*	-.22**	-.26**	.29**	.24**	.13**	.17**	-.01	.26**	.32**	

Note: N = 336,
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$