

# On Track With the Triad: Investigating Triadic Interaction, Parental Rearing Attitudes & Preschool Child Characteristics



## Attitudes & Preschool Child Characteristics

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### Introduction

- Previous research on parent-child relationships has focused on the dyad (Ainsworth et al., 1974; Belsky et al., 1984).
- Research on triadic interaction in the family (father-mother-child) is a new and exciting method of investigation of the family dynamic, which could provide unique information on parental inter-influence in child-rearing practices.
- Relatively limited research on the triad (see McHale et al., 1995).
- This study employs a new instrument for measuring triadic interaction (*Triadic Interaction Coding System*; Cowan & Cowan, 1996).
- Assume that both parental child rearing attitudes and child temperament should be related to quality of triadic interaction.

### Objectives & Hypotheses

1. Determine whether there is a gender effect on triadic interaction
  2. Explore the association between parental rearing attitudes and triadic interaction
  3. Determine whether child temperament has an effect on the triad.
- Hypotheses are exploratory due to absence of prior research on which to base predictions.

### Methods

#### Participants and Procedure

- Twenty-one preschool children, ranging in ages 3-5, participated in two separate laboratory visits with each of their parents, as well as one home visit with the triad all present.
- Triad interaction was observed in the home visit through a toy train set activity (10 minutes).



#### Measures

- During their laboratory sessions, each parent completed the *Child Behaviour Questionnaire* (CBQ; Rothbart et al., 2001) which assesses child temperament on three dimensions: Surgency, Negative Affect, and Effortful Control.
- Each parent also completed the *Questionnaire of Evaluation of the Attitudes and the Educational Practices of the Parents* (QEAP; Rouzier, 1986) which assesses attitudes and educational practices of parents on two dimensions: Autonomy and Rigidity.
- The *Triadic Interaction Coding System* (TICS; Cowan & Cowan, 1996), used to assess triadic Alliance, Mother Warmth, Father Warmth, Cooperation, and Competition in triadic interaction in a home visit circumstance.



- Due to a low n in three of the four subcategories, we dichotomized the Alliance variable to become: balanced (n=16) and unbalanced (n=5).

### Results

#### Preliminary Analysis

- Normality of the scales is acceptable and no outliers have been found.
- The scales are all highly correlated with each other, in the expected direction (all  $p$ 's < .01).
- We tested the associations between 5 potential covariates (child gender, child age in months, number of years of mother's education, number of years of father's education, and family's gross income) and the 5 triadic variables. Four associations are significant:
  - Child gender is associated with maternal warmth ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ) and cooperation ( $r = .48, p < .05$ ).
  - Child age is associated with cooperation ( $r = .44, p < .05$ ) and alliance ( $t(19) = 2.56, p < .05$ ). (See Figure 1)
  - Maternal warmth is greater towards girls ( $m=6.31, sd=.59$ ) compared to boys ( $m=4.50, sd=1.66$ ) ( $t(19) = -2.952, p=.008$ ). (See Figure 2)
  - Greater cooperation in the triad when a girl is present ( $m=4.50, sd=.46$ ) compared to boys ( $m=3.31, sd=1.35$ ) ( $t(19) = -2.40, p=.03$ ). (See Figure 3)

- There is a tendency that fathers ( $m=5.64, sd=1.00$ ) are warmer than mothers ( $m=5.19, sd=1.61$ ) ( $t(20) = 1.96, p = .07$ ).

#### Main Analysis

In order to explore the main research questions the following analyses have been run between the markers of child temperament, parental attitudes and each of the 5 triadic scales: 1) Pearson bivariate correlation for the father warmth and competition scales; 2) Partial correlation for maternal warmth, controlling for gender; 3) Partial correlation for cooperation, controlling for gender and age; and 4) ANCOVAs for alliance, controlling for age. Significant results are presented below.

- The more effortful control shown by the child, there is greater father warmth ( $r=.43, p < .05$ ).
- The more promotion by the mother of the child's autonomy, there is greater mother warmth ( $r = -.68, p < .05$ ).
- The more promotion by the mother of the child's autonomy, there is greater cooperation observed in the triad ( $r = -.68, p < .05$ ).
- There is a tendency for less cooperation in the triad when there is more effortful control shown by the child ( $r = -.42, p = .08$ ).
- There is a tendency for the triad to be more balanced ( $m=57.93, sd=5.43$ ) compared to unbalanced ( $m=53.00, sd=5.35$ ) when the father is more rigid ( $F(1,18) = 3.94, p = .06$ ).
- There is a tendency for the triad to be more unbalanced ( $m=5.13, sd=.31$ ) compared to balanced ( $m=4.54, sd=.96$ ) when the child is perceived as more assertive (surgency) by the father ( $F(1,18) = 2.57, p = .07$ ).
- There is a tendency for the triad to be more balanced ( $m=5.29, sd=.69$ ) compared to unbalanced ( $m=4.83, sd=.68$ ) when the father perceives the child as having effortful control ( $F(1,18) = 3.50, p = .08$ ).

Figure 1: Alliance and Child Age

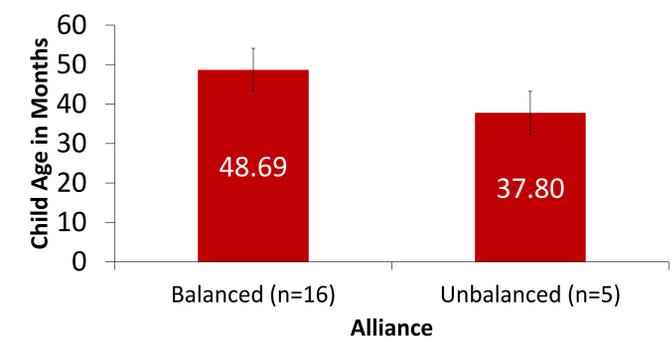


Figure 2: Mother Warmth and Child Gender

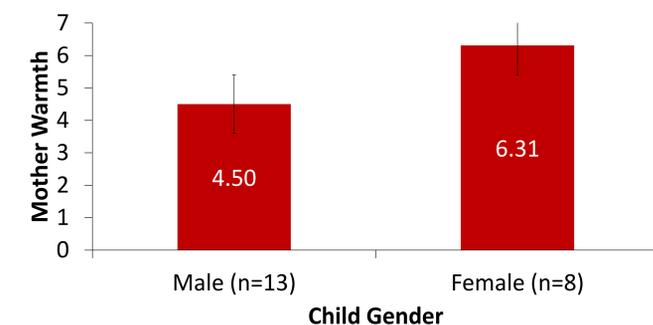
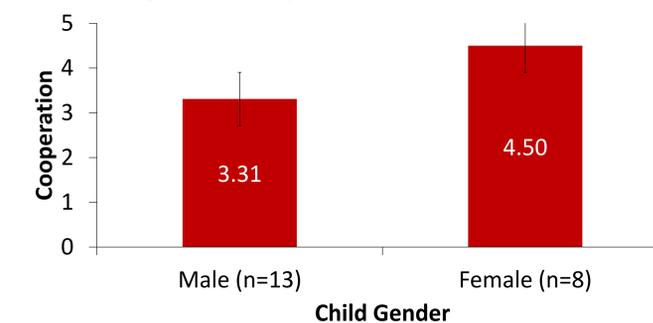


Figure 3: Cooperation and Child Gender



### Discussion

- Our results indicate that there is a gender influence on parental rearing attitudes. Mothers seem to be warmer with their daughters as fathers are equally warm with both genders. Interestingly, fathers tend to be warmer than mothers, which could be a result of the activity selected (building a train track)
- Results also showed that there is a child temperament influence on triadic behaviour and alliance. Interestingly, child's assertiveness and effortful control seems to disturb the triad (more unbalance and less cooperation). This result needs further investigation.
- The size of the sample group in this study acted as a limitation in establishing associations between variables.

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