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Testing Bowen's Family Systems Theory: The Focused-On Child

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TESTING BOWEN'S FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY:
THE FOCUSED-ON CHILD

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Katherine M. Kitzmann

1990

APPROVAL SHEET

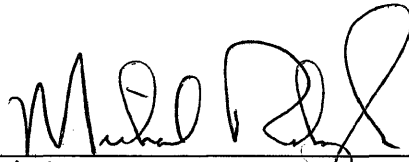
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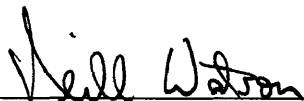
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Abstract

Widely used in therapy, Bowen's family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr, 1981; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) is a rich source of hypotheses about multigenerational family processes; however, the theory has not yet generated much empirical research. This study was designed to test hypotheses about a key concept in Bowen's theory, that of the focused-on child in the family projection process. The process by which a child becomes focused on is a special form of triangulation in which one child more than the other children is involved in the parents' relationship, and consequently becomes less differentiated from the family.

The extent to which a subject was focused on in his or her family was defined by absolute measures (referring to the subject's personal experience in the family) as well as relative measures (comparing the subject's experience with that of the other children in the family). A questionnaire incorporating the Intergenerational Fusion and Intergenerational Triangulation subscales of the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984) as well as questions about family relationships and family history was administered to 96 male and 133 female undergraduate students.

Hypotheses taken directly from family systems theory, as it is described by Bowen and Bowenian writers, concern the intensity of the triangulation process, the selection of one child to be focused on, and the consequences of having been focused on. It was expected that measures of being focused-on would correlate positively with: (a) presence of emotional cutoff in the family system, (b) dysfunction of other family members, (c) noncomplementarity of parents' birth order positions, (d) parental conflict, (e) unique birth order position, (f) similarity of subject's and parent's birth order positions, (g) grandparental death around the time of subject's birth, (h) poor adjustment outside the family (involvement with therapy, dissatisfaction with academic status, and dissatisfaction with relationships made at college), and (i) willingness to marry outside of the family's race or ethnic group.

Partial correlations (controlling for gender, number of siblings, and social desirability) found strongest support for the hypotheses regarding parental conflict, family member dysfunction, and involvement in therapy. Very little support was found for the role of some important Bowenian concepts such as cutoff and uniqueness of birth order position.

Discussion addresses the possibility that variability in responses may indicate that the focused-on-child construct is not a unitary one. Further test of family systems theory will allow it to evolve, and thus to be part of the larger scientific realm admired by Bowen. However, this may also necessitate the revision of widely held clinical assumptions.

**TESTING BOWEN'S FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY:
THE FOCUSED-ON-CHILD**

Testing Bowen's Family Systems Theory: The Focused-On Child

In the field of family therapy, Murray Bowen stands out as a theorist who claims his family systems theory to be intricately tied to science. Bowenian therapists have written at length about family systems theory in relation to the biological and anthropological sciences (Bowen & Kerr, 1988; Noone, 1988), based on the theoretical notion that systems operate in a similar manner in all spheres of nature. According to this view, emotional process is not a uniquely human phenomenon, and might be better understood in terms of larger natural systems. Within this context, Bowen describes humans' emotional differentiation as comparable to the differentiation of cells or the differentiation of species, setting up a model of family processes based on analogy with the other natural and biological sciences.

Although Bowen views family systems theory as belonging to the scientific domain, he has not applied empirical methods to his hypotheses, and family systems theory has so far not generated much empirical research; this is true despite Bowen's insistence that his "primary effort has gone into making psychotherapy as scientific and predictable as possible" (Anonymous, 1972, p. 115). Interestingly, several characteristics of the theory make it amenable to empirical research. Bowen and his disciples have set forth remarkably specific and testable hypotheses, especially about the role of sibling position in family processes and about the eruption of dysfunction in the family system (Bowen, 1966; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Friedman, 1988). Many of the hypotheses concern life events that are easily operationalized (e.g., time of birth, death, marriages). Further, Bowen contends that the processes he formulates exist in all families (Anonymous, 1972), regardless of intellectual or socioeconomic factors, thus allowing empirical test to be carried out on any family.

As mentioned earlier, Bowen's theory is based in large part on the notion that individuals have varying levels of emotional differentiation from other people, most notably their families of origin. Family members experience opposing forces that direct them both to grow to be emotionally separate people, and to remain emotionally connected with the family; the individual's final level of differentiation is determined by the interplay of these forces (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen himself assigns numerical values to represent the individual levels of differentiation of clients he sees in therapy, but resists operational definition of this central concept. Therefore, the theory's fundamental construct of "levels of differentiation" is unavailable to empirical test. However, Bowen is explicit about the origins and manifestations of "undifferentiation" and it is these mechanisms that are available to confirmation or disconfirmation.

One concept that is central to an understanding of the mechanisms of differentiation, and which is unifying to the theory as a whole, is that of the focused-on child. Bowen states that in any family, the children who eventually enjoy the highest levels of functioning are those who were least triangled into the family emotional system (Bowen, 1966), whereas a child who is the object of the parents' projected anxiety is said to become emotionally impaired. This occurs when one child becomes the focus of the parents' anxious attempt to maintain a sense of togetherness in the family as family members attempt to differentiate. The idea is central to Bowenian theory in several ways. First, the process by which the parents focus on one child occurs as a special case of triangulation, the concept that integrates all aspects of Bowen's theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Triangulation is said to occur in all relationships as a means by which the anxiety experienced by a dyad can be spread throughout the relationships of a triad, providing a more stable structure. This process

is thought to be especially strong in the relationship between the focused-on child and the parents. Second, the dysfunction that results from the process of focusing on one child is described in terms of a decreased level of self-differentiation, a uniquely Bowenian conception of emotional health. Finally, the repetition of the process over several generations is said to result in severe dysfunction (i.e., schizophrenia) (Bowen, 1978a). The concept thus serves as a good testing ground of the theory, and was used as the basis of this research.

Family systems theory makes an implicit distinction concerning the nature of the processes of triangulation and projection that is important in terms of definitional clarity and empirical test. On one hand, Bowen describes being focused-on as an individual (and almost intrapsychic) experience; on the other, he describes being focused-on as important because the triangulation is experienced more acutely by one child than by the others, with differential effects. Thus the focused-on-child construct must be examined in absolute as well as relative terms. Also, because family systems theory makes predictions about both the antecedents and the consequences of being focused on, the focused-on-child construct can be measured from several perspectives. These can be summarized as: current and past events in the family system that are likely to intensify the triangulation process; events and characteristics that are likely to influence the selection of the focused-on child; and hypothesized consequences of having been focused on. This study will address hypotheses made by family systems theory as they concern each of these perspectives.

Predictors of Intensity. Triangulation is a mechanism for dealing with anxiety. Therefore, anything that increases the anxiety level in the extended or nuclear family, or which is associated with a decreased ability to deal with anxiety, should be expected to intensify the triangulation process. One important example is that of emotional

cutoff (or estrangement) between family members. The relationship of cutoff to the family projection process can be thought of in two ways. First, because Bowen states that cutoff is indicative of unresolved emotional attachment, cutoff should be indicative of a generally low level of differentiation and a decreased ability to deal with anxiety. Second, in the case where spouses detach themselves from their families of origin, they become more dependent on each other, rendering the family's emotional process more intense (Bowen, 1966). Cutoff occurring anywhere in the family should therefore be associated with more intense triangulation, but especially cutoff which is cross-generational, as in the case of parents being cutoff from their own parents.

Similarly, family systems theory holds that dysfunction in other family members can intensify the triangulation process anywhere in the family including the process taking place between the parents and the focused-on child. Dysfunction can be thought of either as the result of already existing high levels of anxiety, or as creating anxiety. In either case, the triangulation process should become more intense as family members attempt to deal with the tension caused or indicated by other members' dysfunction. Significant types of dysfunction are varied, and include emotional, physical, and work-related problems, as well as problems in relationships (such as divorce).

Whereas family members' problems in general may be associated with increased tension and the intensification of the triangulation processes taking place throughout the family system, one special problem that may have the most direct influence on the focused-on child is conflict between the parents. Because this conflict is likely to take place in the home, the focused-on-child may be a convenient person to be triangled-in in an attempt to avoid or reduce the conflict.

Because Bowen views the birth order of the parents as a determinant of satisfaction with the relationship, birth order should also be related (indirectly) to the intensity of the triangulation process: a marriage whose structure is unbalanced in terms of birth order should exhibit increased tension, increased conflict, and consequent triangulation of a child in the parents' relationship. Bowen's emphasis on birth order can be traced to Toman's birth order studies concerning the personality profiles based on Adlerian ideas about different sibling positions in normal families (Toman, 1961). Bowen extended Toman's description of the characteristics of functioning by children of various sibling positions to include an analysis of levels of functioning (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). In terms of marital satisfaction, Toman (1962; 1971) predicts that the most successful marriages are ones in which each spouse maintains the birth order position of the family of origin, making the marital match complementary. (Research regarding complementarity and satisfaction is equivocal. Support for Toman's idea has been found in some studies [Weller, Natan, & Hazi, 1974; Kemper, 1966] but not in others [Levinger & Sonnheim, 1965; Birtchnell & Mayhew, 1977; Vanderkooy Vos & Hayden, 1985].) In terms of the effect of parents' birth order on the focused-on-child's experience, a noncomplementary match between the parents' birth orders (e.g., both parents are oldest, both are youngest, or both are only children) should be associated with increased conflict in the marriage and in turn with increased intensity of the triangulation process.

Predictors of Selection. Bowen states that the selective involvement of one child is a crucial question in understanding the family therapeutically (cited in Meissner, 1964). He describes the selection of this child as influenced by several factors, including special relationships between either parent and the child and the

existence of traumatic events that disrupt the family during or near the time of a child's birth (Anonymous, 1972).

Family systems theory places great emphasis on the idea that children's sibling positions influence the family's expectations and behavior toward them; thus, sibling position should influence the selection of the focused-on-child, who plays a special role in the family. Bowen sees the study of personality based on birth order as a means of understanding the family's level of differentiation (Bowen, 1966) and the direction of the family projection process: "no single piece of data is more important than knowing the sibling position of people in the present and past generations" (Bowen, 1965, p. 56) In terms of the family projection process, Bowen hypothesizes that a child who is special in some way will be more likely to be focused on. Thus, having a unique sibling position (oldest, youngest, or only child, or the only or oldest child of one gender) should influence the selection process.

Sibling position is also important in terms of the similarity of a child's and a parent's birth order. Friedman (1988) hypothesizes that the focused-on child is more likely to share a sibling position with one of the parents, intensifying the special relationship between them and in turn intensifying the projection process. When a sibling position is repeated over two generations (e.g., the father was the only boy among four girls; his son is also the only boy among three girls) the characteristics associated with that position are even more evident (Kerr & Bowen, 1988); this may draw more attention to the child who shares a sibling position with a parent.

In terms of traumatic events that disrupt the family near the time of a child's birth, it is not theoretically clear if the child born near a disruption would be focused on because of the parents' generally higher level of anxiety during this period (Brown,

1988; Tooley, 1975) or if the child would be seen in some sense as a replacement for loss (Walsh, 1978). Freidman (1985) asserts that family life events (both celebrations and losses) often correspond to the eruption of symptoms in the family process, but also to the creation of fusion between family members. Bowen emphasizes the example of a mother showing intense attachment to a child born after her own mother's death (cited in Meissner, 1960). Mueller and McGoldrick-Orfanidis (1976) hypothesize that after the loss of a grandparent, the schizophrenic child takes care of the opposite-sex parent by allowing that parent to take care of the child; the fused nature of the relationship may be due to the parent's inability to deal with the loss of his or her own opposite-sex parent, with the child becoming a replacement for the lost grandparent.

The question of how much the selection process is influenced by loss is an interesting one because it is one of the few Bowenian concepts that have been put to empirical test. Walsh (1978), in a study of schizophrenic patients, found that 41 per cent of the patients' families had experienced a grandparent's death (either maternal or paternal) within two years prior to or following the birth of the patient; this rate was in contrast to the 20 per cent found in families of patients with other disturbances, and 8 per cent in the control group. These groups were not significantly different in terms of socioeconomic status, age of subject or parents, education level, or family size. Walsh (1978) states that these results could be due either to the parents' emotional unavailability after the death, or to attention to the child that puts him or her in a replacement role. These findings are potentially quite significant; however, they have not been replicated elsewhere. (Two Swiss researchers, Bovet and Schmid, report in an unpublished manuscript that they found partial support for Walsh's results, and

Walsh reports that she has found further evidence in collaboration with McGoldrick [Walsh, 1978]; other attempts have not been reported).

Consequences of Being Focused On. According to Bowen, the focused-on child achieves a low level of differentiation and continues to be influenced by the forces acting to keep the family together in a fused state. The child's low level of differentiation causes emotionality and subjectivity to have a strong influence on relationships, in which the child functions not independently but in reaction to others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Thus, when an impaired focused-on child experiences stress or anxiety in relationships, he or she presumably relates in an extreme manner, becoming overly involved or perhaps cutoff. In the very poorly differentiated individual, relationships outside the family tend to be superficial and brief (Bowen, 1978c), and he or she may eventually become isolated from others (Anonymous, 1974). In general, the focused-on child shows unresolved emotional attachments to the parents (Anonymous, 1974) as well as other forms of dysfunction such as persistent health problems.

Empirical evidence of the possible detrimental effects of the family projection process comes from a 1986 study by Anderson and Fleming, who found negative correlations between measures of triangulation and fusion and measures of subjects' ego identity as defined by Rasmussen's Ego Identity Scale, using a sample of college students from intact families. These correlations were significant for measures of each of Erickson's five states of ego development, which the researchers interpreted as evidence that adolescents who are less individuated within their families are more likely to have had difficulty in the stages leading up to identity formation. (Anderson and Fleming's measures of fusion and triangulation were based on the intergenerational fusion and intergenerational triangulation subscales of Bray,

Williamson, and Malone's [1984] Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire).

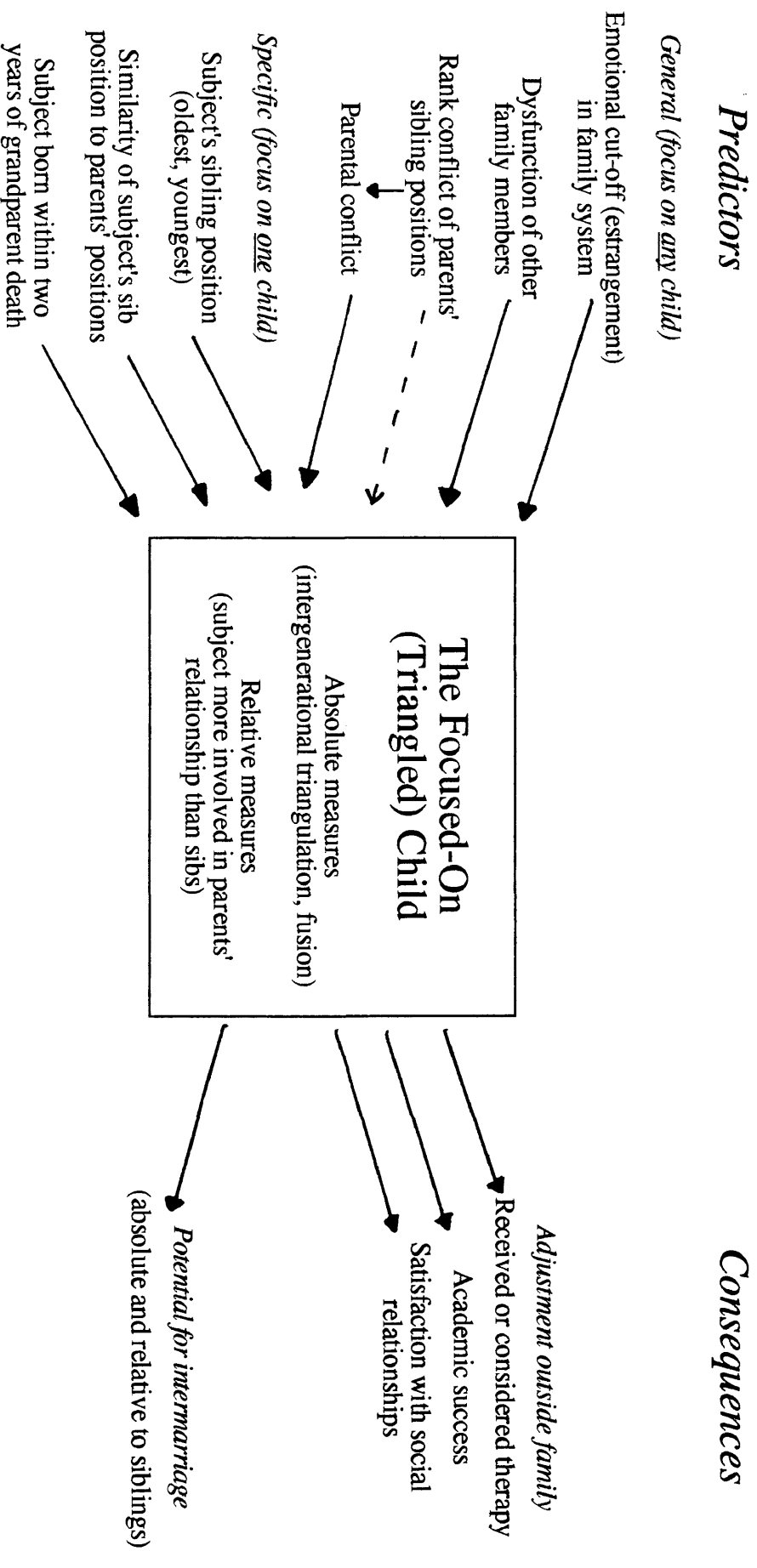
Another study by Bell and Bell (1979) used an indirect measure of triangulation based on the congruity of perception and attitude among different pairs of family members, on the assumption that allies in a coalition would tend to become similar to one another and more dissimilar to the excluded person. Congruity was assessed in terms of family members' descriptions of the family climate as reported on a shortened version of the Moos Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974). In a sample of normal families matched for size, race, and socioeconomic class, the researchers found a negative correlation between their measure of familial triangulation and the adolescent child's summary score of measures on four scales of functioning: ego development as indicated by Loevinger's sentence completion task, popularity and mutuality of choices, self-acceptance and sociability, and socialization and self-control.

Quite separate from the notion that the focused-on child will experience poor adjustment in relationships outside the family, Friedman (1988) hypothesizes that the focused-on child will be more likely than the other children to marry someone of a different race or religion. He states that "in any ethnic family, the child marrying out is the child most important to the balance of the parents' relationship" (Friedman, 1988, p. 123). Intermarriage is seen in this context as a mechanism for avoiding the fusion of the relationship with the parents, similar to the example of cutoff. In this sense, the focused-on child might be expected to be more open to "marrying out" than the other siblings, who presumably have higher levels of differentiation and thus less need to escape any fusion in their relationship with the parents.

Purpose of this Study

This research project was designed to provide a means of correlating the presence of the hypothesized predictors and consequences of triangulation with the intensity of the family projection process as experienced by young adults (who in this study were college students). Some of the hypotheses concern life events, which are rather easy to operationalize; others concern the subject's evaluation his or her experience as it compares with that of the other children in the family. The focused-on-construct was measured in two ways: first, in terms of the subject's own experience of being triangled in to the parents' relationship; second, in terms of a comparison between the subject's and siblings' experiences. It was predicted that measures of the focused-on-child construct would correlate positively with the following hypothesized predictors of intensity and selection: (a) the presence of intergenerational cutoff in the family system, (b) dysfunction of other family members (c) parental conflict, (d) noncomplementarity of the parents' birth order positions, (e) special birth order position of the subject, (f) subject and a parent sharing a sibling position, (g) subject being born near the time of a grandparent's death. It was also hypothesized that the absolute and relative measures of the focused-on-child construct would correlate positively with the following hypothesized consequences of having been focused-on: (a) involvement in therapy, (b) dissatisfaction with academic progress away from home, (c) dissatisfaction with social relationships formed at college, and (d) willingness to marry outside of the family's race or ethnic group. A measure of subjects' social desirability response set was included as a possible moderator of these relationships. A summary of these hypotheses is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
The Focused-On Child: Hypotheses from Bowen Theory



Method

Subjects

Subjects were 96 male and 133 female undergraduate students at a state university. They ranged in age from 17 to 22; the mean age was 19. Subjects were 88% white, 4% black, 4% of Asian descent, and 4% Hispanic. Only subjects who had at least one sibling, and whose parents were both still living, were used in this study. Most students received credit toward completion of an Introductory Psychology course.

Design and Procedure

A family background questionnaire (see Appendix A) designed to measure constructs relevant to the family projection process was administered to subjects in a group setting. Questions included items concerning family relationships, family history, and self-report measures of social adjustment at college; the questionnaire also incorporated subscales of the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984). The Crowne-Marlowe social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) was also included in the questionnaire packet.

In each of the two years in which the study was conducted, a notice was posted announcing that subjects were needed to complete a questionnaire concerning attitudes about their families. Volunteers signed up for a one-hour session in which to complete the questionnaire; each session had 20 to 25 participants. Subjects were informed of the general nature of the study and told that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Subjects read and signed consent forms which guaranteed the confidentiality of their responses. A summary of the findings was mailed to those subjects who provided an address for that purpose. All subjects were also given the

researcher's office phone number in case any questions arose about the study or about the subject's participation in it.

Research Variables

Measures of relevant constructs and the corresponding research variables are described in terms of measures of the focused-on-child construct, measures of the intensity of the process, measures of the selection process, and measures of the consequences of the process.

Measures of the Focused-On-Child Construct. The focused-on-child construct was operationally defined both in terms of the subject's personal experience of being triangled in to the parents' relationship (called absolute measures) and in terms of a comparison of the subject's and siblings' experiences (called relative measures).

Absolute measures include the Intergenerational Fusion and the Intergenerational Triangulation subscales of Bray, Williamson, and Malone's (1984) Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (version C, appropriate for college students without children; see Appendix B). Each of these scales is comprised of eight 5-point Likert-scale items. On the Fusion subscale, subjects rate their agreement with statements such as "I often get so emotional with my parents that I cannot think straight." This subscale is designed to assess the close relationship between two people that is generally experienced as positive but which may have negative consequences (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984). On the Triangulation subscale, subjects rate the frequency of events by responding to questions such as "How often do you feel compelled to take sides when your parents disagree?". This subscale is designed to assess the close relationship between three people which is usually experienced as stressful by one person in the triad. Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984) note that these two processes were previously viewed as the same, but that

research does not support this conceptualization. Reliability tests of the PAFS-Q have shown the scales to have Cronbach alpha coefficients of above .80 in separate studies (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984); the alpha values in this study were .64 for triangulation, .74 for fusion. (The authors of the PAFS-Q also analyzed the scales' validity in terms of content, construct, and concurrent validity, the latter analysis being based on the PAFS-Q relationship to the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales [FACES-I, Olson, Bell, & Portner, 1978] and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale [DAS, Spanier, 1976]). Relative measures of the construct included items indicating (a) whether the subject is included in the pair of family members with the closest relationship, (b) whether the subject's relationship with one parent is rated as stronger than the relationship between the parents; and whether, when compared to siblings, the subject (c) knows more about the parents' relationship, (d) intervenes more frequently in the parents' relationship, (e) currently spends more time with the parents when the family is together, (f) has the worst temper, and (g) reacts more strongly to parental criticism (see Appendix C). The measure of emotional reactivity was comprised of three questions such as "Which child reacts most strongly to your parents' criticism (you or a sibling)?" The measures of familiarity with the parents' relationship was comprised of two questions, such as "Which child knows the most about the parents' relationship (you or a sibling)?" The strength of the subject-parent alliance was assessed by the question, "Which two people in the family have the closest relationship?" Theoretically, a variable representing a subject's level of being focused on is assumed to take on continuous values in the population, as Bowen (1976b) states that the family projection process exists in all gradations of intensity. For purposes of this study, however, the relative measures of being focused on were coded dichotomously.

Predictors of Intensity.

(1) The construct of cutoff is defined as the existence of purposeful non-communication lasting for at least two months between any two members in the subject's family of origin or either of the parents' families of origin. Subjects were asked if any two people in their family (including grandparents, aunts and uncles, parents, and siblings) had purposely not talked with each other for a period of three months or more, either currently or in the past (see Appendix D). The variable was examined in terms of where the cutoff occurred (intergenerationally or intragenerationally), when it occurred (past or present), and whether or not it involved the subject. These factors were coded dichotomously.

(2) Dysfunction in other family members was assessed by a check-list format of nine problems including psychiatric hospitalization, loss of job, and serious health problems. The score was the total number of problems checked (see Appendix E).

(3) Parental conflict was measured by the subject's evaluation of the parents' relationship on a 7-point Likert scale asking the subject, "Rate your parents' relationship with each other" and by three 7-point bi-polar scales: positive-negative, close-distant, and harmonious-conflictual. These four scores were highly correlated (r ranged from .81 to .91) and so were combined as one value. The score on this measure was the mean (see Appendix F).

(4) The variable of complementarity of parents' sibling position was defined as a three-level variable, with complementary pairs (oldest/middle, oldest/youngest, or middle and youngest) assigned an ordinal rank of 2, semi-complementary pairs (middle/middle, only/any) a rank of 1, and noncomplementary pairs (oldest/oldest, youngest/youngest, only/only) a rank of 0. This category scheme was adopted from Vos and Hayden's (1985) study on marital adjustment (see Appendix F).

Predictors of Selection.

(1) The similarity of the subject's and each parent's birth order positions was coded on an ordinal scale similar to the one used to designate the complementarity of parents' sibling positions. This variable was also be examined in terms of whether the subject is more similar to the same-sex or opposite-sex parent (see Appendix G).

(2) The specialness of the subject's sibling position was ranked dichotomously. Subjects who were oldest, youngest, only of one gender, or oldest of one gender were assigned a score of 1; subjects who did not fit these categories were assigned a score of 0. The variable of birth order was also analyzed separately in terms of differences among oldest, middle, and youngest children.

(3) The variable of grandparental death as contiguous with the focused-on child's birth was defined as having occurred within two years prior to or following the subject's birth. This variable was coded as 1 or 0, corresponding to presence or absence of a grandparent's death within the given time frame.

Consequences. The first consequence, poor social adjustment outside the family setting, was examined on five dimensions:

(1) Satisfaction with academic performance was measured by the subject's response to a 7-point Likert scale item asking "How satisfied are you with your school performance to this point?".

(2) Having considered dropping out of college was assessed by a 5-point Likert-scale question, "how seriously have you considered dropping out of college?".

(3) Satisfaction with friendships made at college was measured with a 7-point item asking "How satisfied are you with the social relationships you have formed at school so far?"

(4) Social adjustment was also measured by the question, "Do you consider yourself anti-establishment?" (on a 5-point Likert scale).

(5) Emotional adjustment was measured by the subject's previous and current involvement with therapy ("Did you receive psychological counseling of any kind before coming to school?" and "Have you received professional counseling since you've been in school?"; if either was answered yes, the item was coded positively), and subject's response to a 7-point Likert scale item asking "How seriously have you considered therapy?".

The second hypothesized consequence, concerning willingness to marry outside of the family's race or ethnic group, was measured in terms of subject's dating experiences and the subject's evaluation of how likely he or she was to marry someone of another race. Subject's history of dating people of a different race or ethnic group was measured by the questions "Have you ever dated someone of another ethnic group?" and "Have you ever dated someone of a different race?". If the subject responded yes to either of these questions, this item was coded positively. The subject's likelihood of marrying outside of the family's culture group was assessed by two 5-point Likert scale by the questions, "How likely would you be to become romantically involved with someone of a different race or ethnic background?" and "How likely would you be to marry someone who was not of your own race or ethnic background?". The mean response on these two items was used as the response value. Subjects were also asked whether they or one of their siblings were the most likely child in the family to become romantically involved with someone who was not of the family's ethnic background.

Control Variables. Subjects' gender, number of siblings, and score on the Crowne-Marlowe social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) were used as

control variables to be held constant or examined as possible moderators of the hypothesized relationships.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

As noted above, the variables used to define the focused-on-child construct were operationalized with both absolute and relative measures. The absolute measures are the PAFS-Q fusion scale and the PAFS-Q triangulation scale. The six relative measures of the focused-on-child construct (comparing the subject's and siblings' relationships with the parents, see Appendix C) were factor analyzed using the principle components algorithm from SPSS-X. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and accounting for 48% of the variance were rotated to a varimax solution. Based on the factor loadings, shown in Table 1, and conceptualization based on the theory, several of the relative measures were combined to form three composite variables representing (a) reactivity to parental criticism, (b) contact or familiarity with the parents' relationship, and (c) being part of the primary alliance in the family. Reactivity was defined as the mean of response values for items indicating who is most reactive to parental criticism, who has the worst temper, and who intervenes most in the parents' arguments. Familiarity was defined as the mean response on items indicating who knows most about the parents' relationship and who spends more time with the parents. Being Part of the Primary Alliance was defined by an item indicating whether the subject was included in the pair of people who have the closest relationship.

Table 2 shows correlations between the measures of being focused-on and scores on the Crowne-Marlowe social desirability scale, gender, and number of siblings (two-tailed tests). Gender was significantly correlated with the relative

Table 1.
**Factor Loadings from a Principle-Components Analysis of the
 Relative Measures of the Focused-On-Child Construct**

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Has the worst temper	.80	
Reacts more strongly to criticism	.76	
Has more contact with parents		.57
Knows more about the parents' relationship		.70
Intervenes more frequently when parents disagree		.55

Note. These five relative measures were combined to form two composite measures representing reactivity to parental criticism and familiarity with the parents' relationship. A third relative measure was based on whether or not the subject was included in the closest (dyadic) family alliance.

Table 2.
Pearson Correlations Between the Focused-On-Child Measures and Control Variables

	Gender	Number of siblings	Social desirability
<i>Absolute (PAFS-Q)</i>			
Intergenerational triangulation	.08	.02	-.08
Intergenerational fusion	-.02	.10*	-.21**
<i>Relative to Siblings</i>			
Reactivity to parental criticism	.15*	.01	.08+
Familiarity with parents' relationship	.15	.00	.22**
Parent-child primary alliance	.15*	-.14*	.10+

Note. Correlations are significant at: += $p < .10$, *= $p < .05$, **= $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

measures of reactivity ($r = .15, p < .05$) and with parent-child alliance ($r = .15, p < .05$), with females showing higher scores on each of these measures. Number of siblings was correlated with fusion ($r = .10, p < .05$) and negatively correlated with the parent-child alliance ($r = -.14, p < .05$). Social desirability was correlated with fusion ($r = .21, p < .01$), and with reactivity ($r = .08, p < .10$), and negatively correlated with familiarity ($r = .22, p < .01$), and the parent-child alliance ($r = -.10, p < .10$). Gender, number of siblings, and social desirability were therefore statistically controlled in later analyses.

Relationship Among the Focused-On Child Measures

Correlations among the two absolute and the three (composite) relative focused-on-child measures (one-tailed tests) are shown in Table 3. In general, there was a high correspondence between the two absolute measures ($r = .36, p < .01$) and a high correspondence among the three relative measures (r ranged from .11 to .26, p in all cases $< .01$), but lower correspondence among the two sets of measures. An unexpected negative correlation was found between the relative measure of being most familiar with the parents' relationship and the absolute measure of fusion ($r = -.12, p < .05$)

Testing the Main Hypotheses

The main hypotheses were tested using partial correlations between the focused-on-child measures and the measures of the constructs from each of the hypotheses. The partial correlations controlled for gender, number of siblings, and social desirability. In order to check for interactions with gender, separate analyses of covariance were conducted for each hypothesis. Main effects for gender were found in two instances: the relationship between the focused-on-child measures to being born near the time of a grandparent's death, and to being cutoff from the family, were both stronger for females than they were for males.

Table 3.
Pearson Correlations Among the Focused-on-Child Measures

	Absolute		Relative to siblings		
	Triang.	Fusion	Reactiv.	Familiar.	Alliance
<i>Absolute (PAFS-Q)</i>					
Intergenerational triangulation	1.00	.36**	.12*	.05	.19**
Intergenerational fusion		1.00	.06	-.12*	.01
<i>Relative to siblings</i>					
Reactivity			1.00	.22**	.11*
Familiarity				1.00	.26**
Parent-child alliance					1.00

Note. Correlations significant at: += $p < .10$, *= $p < .05$, **= $p < .01$ (one-tailed tests).

Table 4 shows the partial correlations (two-tailed tests) between the predictors (of intensity and selection) and the focused-on-child variables. Table 5 shows similar correlations for the hypothesized consequences. It should be noted that the absolute and relative focused-on-child measures did not provide the same pattern of support for the hypotheses, although these two types of measures were correlated with each other. This suggests that subjects who reported high levels of fusion and triangulation did not consistently report that their experience was more intense than that of their siblings. In addition, the highest correlations were in the range of .5; because of the large sample size, statistically significant support for the hypotheses was sometimes found at r values of less than .2. Thus, statistical significance may not reflect true theoretical significance in all cases. However, in all cases, the more conservative two-tailed tests were used to test the main hypotheses.

Hypotheses Concerning Intensity

Cutoff. Cutoff elsewhere in the family system (reported by 20% of the subjects) appeared unrelated to the absolute focused-on-child measures, but did correlate significantly with the subject's familiarity with the parents' relationship ($r = .13, p < .05$). A measure of any cutoff in the family system (possibly including the subject; reported by 39% of subjects) was significantly related to triangulation ($r = .24, p < .05$) but not to the other focused-on-child measures. Figure 2 shows the mean values for triangulation and fusion depending on whether or not there was cutoff anywhere in the family system; analysis of covariance (cutoff by gender, controlling for number of siblings and social desirability) showed a main effect for fusion ($F(1, 136) = 5.3, p < .05$) and for triangulation ($F(1, 136) = 5.1, p < .05$). Overall, however, there was weak support for the hypothesis that cutoff is related to intensity of the process of being focused-on.

Table 4.
Partial Correlations Between the Predictors (of Intensity and Selection) and the Focused-on-Child Variables

	Absolute		Relative to siblings		
	Triang.	Fusion	Reactiv.	Familiar.	Alliance
<i>Intensity</i>					
Cut-off in family system, not involving subject	.10	.02	.06	.13*	.09
Any cut-off	.24*	.10	.01	.10	.03
Family member dysfunction	.16*	.12+	-.01	.03	.08
Rank conflict of parents' sibling positions	.07	.10	.00	-.03	.06
Parental conflict	.51**	.20**	-.04	.04	.23**
<i>Selection</i>					
Unique sibling position	-.05	-.02	.02	.10+	.05
Sibling position: oldest	.11+	-.08	.07	.29**	.07
Sibling position: youngest	-.08	.12+	-.01	-.20**	.01
Similarity of subject-parent sibling positions	.04	-.04	-.09	.05	.03
Born within 2 years of grandparent death	.11	.17**	.01	-.08	.02

Note. Gender, number of siblings, and social-desirability response set are statistically controlled. Partial correlations are significant at: += $p < .10$, *= $p < .05$, **= $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

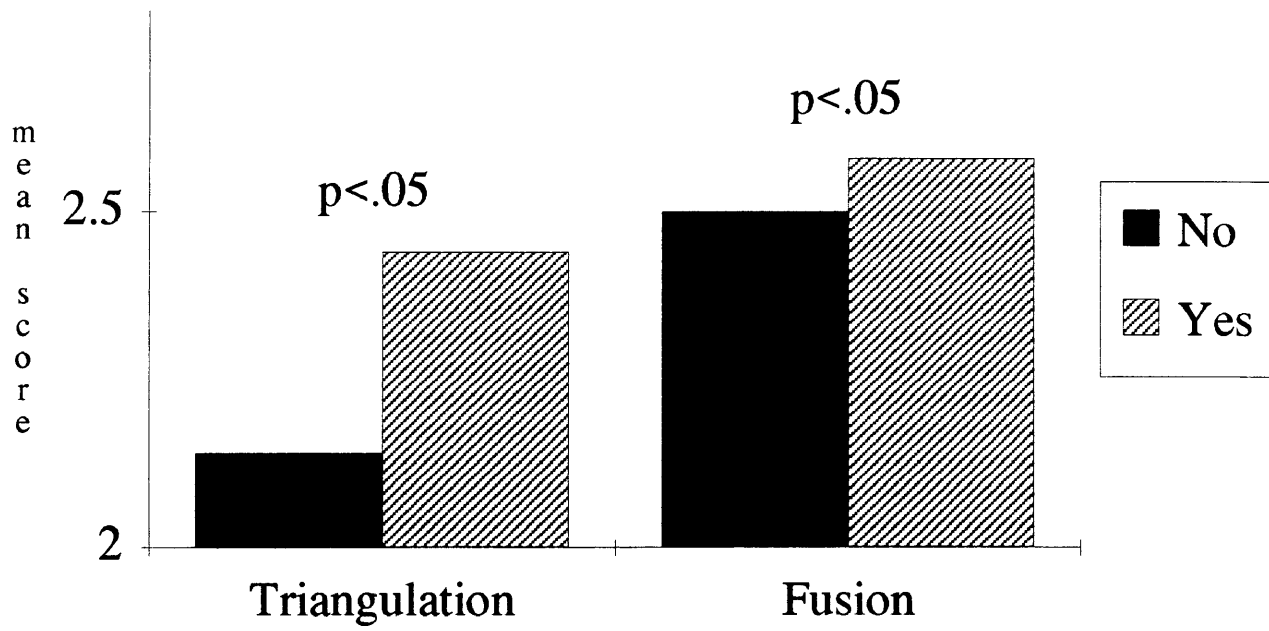
Table 5.
Partial Correlations Between Focused-on-Child and Predicted-Consequence Variables

	Absolute		Relative to sibling		
	Triang.	Fusion	Reactiv.	Familiar.	Alliance
<i>Adjustment outside family</i>					
Received therapy	.18**	.12+	.05	.10	.13+
Considered therapy	.23**	.11+	.01	.08	.05
Satisfaction with academics	-.06	-.04	-.09	.03	.05
Satisfaction with relationships	-.09	-.13+	.00	.03	.01
Comfort in arguments	-.06	-.13+	-.06	.02	-.04
<i>Potential for intermarriage</i>					
Outside dating	.00	.04	.06	.12+	.05
Likelihood of intermarriage	.01	.19**	-.08	-.04	-.13+
Most likely sib to marry out	.02	.24**	.11	-.08	-.04

Note. Gender, number of siblings, and social-desirability response set are statistically controlled. Partial correlations are significant at: †=p<.10, *=p<.05, **=p<.01 (two-tailed tests).

Figure 2

Any Cut-Off in Family System



Family member dysfunction. On a list of nine types of dysfunction experienced by the subject's parents and siblings, the mean number reported was 1.9 (see Appendix H for distribution of problems). Dysfunction in other family members correlated significantly with triangulation ($r = .16, p < .05$) and with fusion ($r = .12, p < .10$) but was not related to the relative measures of being focused on. Figure 3 shows mean values of triangulation and fusion as a function of family member dysfunction. Analysis of covariance (family problems by gender, with social desirability and number of siblings controlled) showed a main effect for family problems in the case of triangulation ($F(2) = 3.7, p < .05$) but not for fusion. For purposes of the analysis of covariance, three levels were defined corresponding to 0 problems reported, 1 or 2 problems reported, and 3 or more problems reported; these levels were represented by 22%, 43%, and 35% of the sample, respectively. Overall, these analyses provide moderate support for the hypothesis that family member dysfunction is related to the intensity of the process of being focused-on.

Rank conflict of parents' sibling positions. Rank conflict between the parents' sibling positions, thought to be indirectly related to parental conflict and thus to the triangulation process, was in fact not correlated with any of the focused-on-child measures.

Parental conflict. Conflict in the parents' relationship was significantly related to triangulation ($r = .51, p < .001$) and to fusion ($r = .20, p < .001$) as well as to the measure of whether the subject was part of the primary alliance in the family ($r = .23, p < .001$). Figure 4 shows the mean values for triangulation and fusion as a function of the level of parental conflict (for triangulation, $F(2, 219) = 36.4, p < .001$; for fusion, $F(2, 219) = 4.8, p < .001$). For purposes of the analysis of covariance, three levels were created representing mean values of 0 through 4, 4.1 through 5.9, and 6

Figure 3

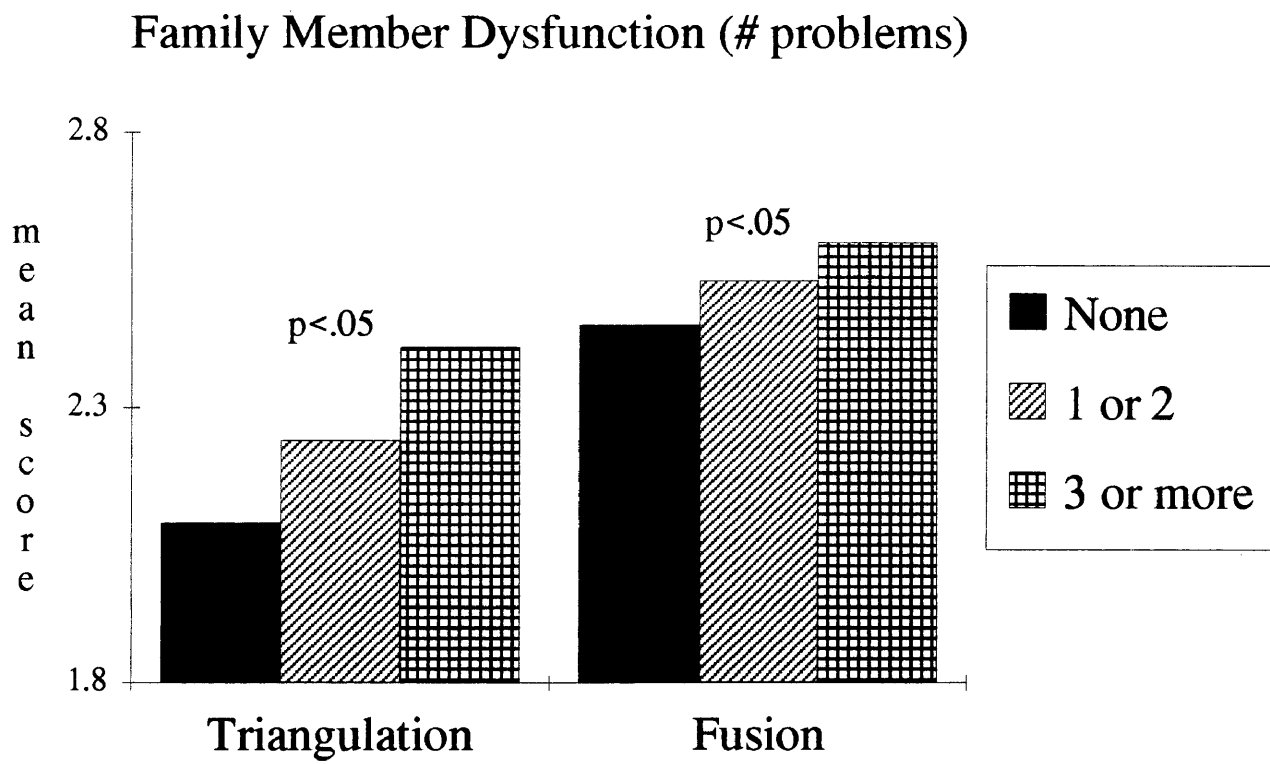
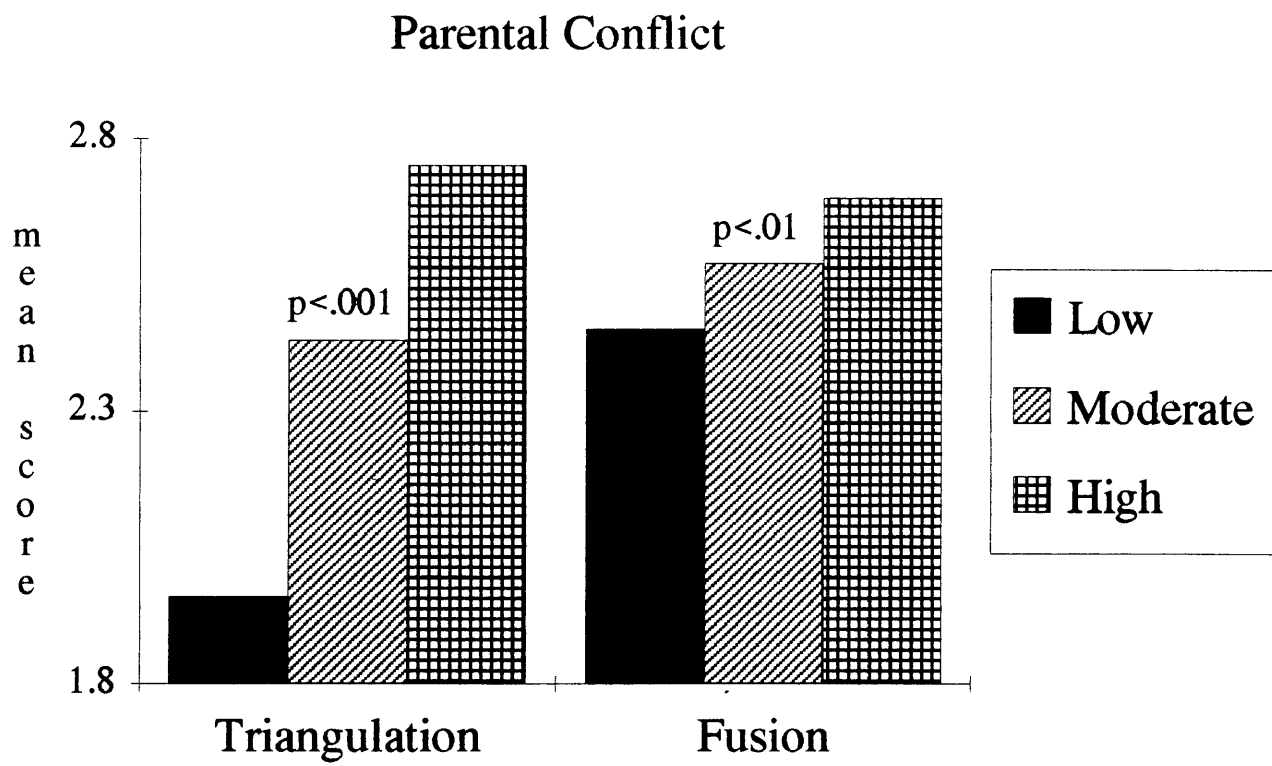


Figure 4



through 7; these levels represented 20%, 30%, and 50% of the sample, respectively. Overall, these analyses provide relatively strong support for the idea that parental conflict is related to the intensity of the process of being focused-on.

Hypotheses Concerning Selection

As noted above, Table 4 also shows partial correlations (two-tailed tests) between the focused-on-child variables and the measures of the selection of one child.

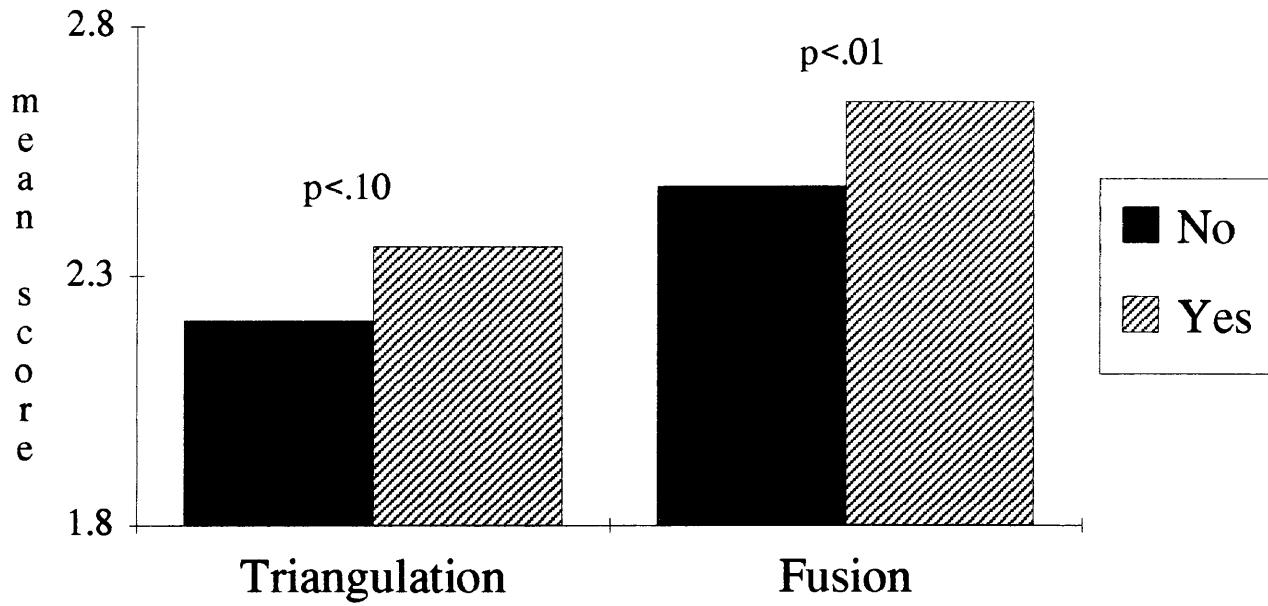
Special birth order. When the variable for special birth-order position included all possibilities for being unique (oldest, youngest, oldest of gender, only of gender) it was found to be uncorrelated with the focused-on-child measures (it was slightly related to familiarity with the parents' relationship, $r = .10$, $p < .10$). However, 88% of subjects had a "unique" sibling position, limiting the possible strength of the correlation. When this variable was broken down into specific ways of being unique, it was found that oldest children reported being significantly more familiar with their parents' relationship ($r = .29$, $p < .001$) and experiencing more triangulation ($r = .11$, $p < .10$), while youngest children reported significantly less familiarity with their parents' relationship ($r = -.20$, $p < .001$) and more fusion ($r = .12$, $p < .10$). However, analysis of covariance failed to find significant differences among these means. Overall, these analyses provide moderate support for the hypothesis that birth order affects the selection process.

Similarity of subject's and parents' birth orders. This variable was found to be unrelated to any of the focused-on-child measures.

Subject birth contiguous with grandparent's death. This variable was found to be significantly correlated with the measure of fusion ($r = .17$, $p < .001$) but not with any of the other focused-on-child measures. Figure 5 shows mean triangulation and fusion scores as a function of whether or not the subject was born near the time of a

Figure 5

Subject Born within Two Years of a Grandparent's Death



grandparent's death. Differences were significant for fusion ($F(1, 217) = 6.7, p < .01$) and for triangulation ($F(1, 217) = 2.4, p < .10$). Overall, these analyses provide moderate support for the idea that being born near a loss may affect the selection process.

Hypotheses Concerning Consequences

As noted earlier, Table 5 shows the partial correlations (two-tailed tests) between the focused-on-child variables and the measures of predicted consequences of having been focused-on.

Adjustment outside of the family. Satisfaction with academics was unrelated to the focused-on-child measures. Wanting to drop out of college was correlated only with triangulation ($r = .12, p < .10$). As expected, satisfaction with relationships and comfort in arguments were both negatively correlated with fusion ($r = -.13$ in both cases, $p < .10$), but they were unrelated to the other measures of being focused-on. Being anti-establishment was correlated with fusion ($r = .12, p < .10$) and with triangulation ($r = .13, p < .10$). Finally, having received therapy (reported by 15% of the subjects) was relatively strongly related to triangulation ($r = .18, p < .001$), and somewhat related to fusion ($r = .12, p < .10$) and to being part of the primary alliance ($r = .13, p < .10$). Overall, moderate support was found for the hypothesis that the focused-on-child would have poor social adjustment away from home, although this was most strongly expressed by the subject being involved in therapy.

Potential for intermarriage. Having dated someone of another race or culture (reported by 43% of the sample) was slightly related to the familiarity with the parents' relationship ($r = .12, p < .10$), but not to other measures of being focused-on. However, likelihood of intermarriage was significantly correlated with fusion ($r = .19, p < .001$), as was being most likely child to intermarry (reported by 43% of subjects; r

= .24, $p < .001$). An unexpected negative correlation was found between being in the primary alliance and the likelihood of intermarriage ($r = -.13$, $p < .10$). Overall these analyses provide moderate support for the hypothesis that the focused-on-child would be more likely to intermarry.

Role of the Control Variables

Overall partial correlations (controlling for gender, number of siblings, and social desirability) provided support for the main hypotheses about one-third less of the time than did Pearson correlations. Separate analyses by gender (either for correlations or for analyses of variance) showed significant differences in two cases: the relationship between the focused-on-child measures and being born near the time of a grandparent's death was stronger for females ($F(1) = 5.7$, $p < .05$), as it was for cutoff involving the subject ($F(1) = 5.0$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The results provide support for some, but not all, of the hypothesized relationships between the focused-on-child measures and the predictors and consequences of being focused on. Figure 6 shows a summary of the support found for each of the hypotheses. Strongest support (albeit still only in the range of .5) was found for the idea that parental conflict and family member dysfunction were related to the intensity of the triangulation process, and for the idea that involvement in therapy would be one of the expected outcomes of having been focused on. No support was found for the notion that the sibling position of the parents would be directly related to conflict or indirectly related to the triangulation process, or for the notion that similarity of the child and parent's birth order positions would be related to the selection process. Similarly, no support was found for the idea that the focused-on-child would be dissatisfied with his or her academic performance at college, although this result may

Figure 6.
Summary of Support for Hypotheses about the Focused-On Child

<i>Predictors</i>		<i>Consequences</i>	
<i>General (focus on any child)</i>		<i>Adjustment outside family</i>	
Emotional cut-off in family system	Weak	Received or considered therapy	Strong
Dysfunction of other family members	Strong	Satisfaction with academic achievement	None
Rank conflict of parents' sibling positions	None	Satisfaction with social relationships	Weak
Parental conflict	Strong		
<i>Specific (focus on one child)</i>		<i>Potential for intermarriage</i>	
Subject's sibling position (oldest, youngest)	Moderate		Moderate
Similarity of subject's sibling position to parents' position	None		
Subject born within two years of grandparent death	Moderate		

be an artifact of the process used to select the sample. Moderate support was found for the other hypotheses concerning cutoff, subject's birth order position, being born near the time of a grandparent's death, considering dropping out of school, being anti-establishment, and being willing to intermarry.

Of the hypothesized predictors of being focused on, dysfunction in other family members and conflict between the parents showed the strongest relationship with measures of fusion and triangulation. Interestingly, these factors refer to current and ongoing manifestations of anxiety, as opposed to the more remote factors of birth order position and time of birth.

Only moderate support was found for the notion that emotional cutoff was related to levels of fusion or triangulation, even though cutoff, like parental conflict and family member dysfunction, is a relatively current phenomenon. In fact, cutoff involving family members other than the subject appeared completely unrelated to the subject's experience of the projection process, whereas cutoff involving the subject did appear to be related. This may be due in part to the possibility that cutoff involving the subject was actually cutoff between the subject and a parent, which could be seen more as a description of being focused-on than as a predictor of the intensity of the process.

Among the hypothesized consequences of having been focused on, strongest support was found for the notion that the focused-on-child was more likely to be involved in therapy or to have considered therapy. Whereas the rather specific consequences of dissatisfaction with academic achievement and with social relationships were found to be nearly unrelated to the focused-on-child measures, involvement in therapy may indicate that there is a broad range of consequences of having been focused-on (including the numerous problems that might lead one to seek counseling).

Overall, the study found very little support for hypotheses concerning birth order, an idea which is important to family systems theory. Moderate support was found for the idea that being the oldest or the youngest child is related to the intensity of being focused on, with oldest children appearing more triangulated and youngest children appearing more fused. This may be related to the finding that oldest children were most familiar with the parents' relationship, while youngest children were least familiar with it: oldest children may be more likely to be involved in the stressful triadic relationship involved in triangulation, and youngest children may be more likely to be involved in the more pleasant dyadic relationship involved in fusion.

Although this study was not designed to evaluate the role of gender in the experience of being focused-on, it is interesting, in light of criticism that Bowen's definition of mental health is a stereotypically male one (Bograd, 1988; Avis, 1988), that there was some evidence that gender was a mediating variable in subject response. Because gender was correlated with two of the focused-on-child measures, reactivity and parent-child alliance, it was used as a control variable in the correlational analyses. Further analyses of variance conducted as a way to examine each main hypothesis in terms of gender also found significant differences in two cases: the relationship of the focused-on-child measures to being born near the time of a grandparent's death, and to being cutoff from the family, were both stronger for females than they were for males. It is possible that these differences are due to socialization practices and beliefs that see females as caretakers and responsible for the maintenance of family ties (McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989).

Thus, there is evidence in terms of sibling position and of gender that there may be different ways in which the individual experiences being focused-on. If this is true, there may also be different ways in which the positive effects of not being

focused on may be experienced. In either case, the experiences may not fit the traditional Bowenian concept of mental health. The question of how individual experience fits with the theoretical construct of emotional autonomy is further complicated because Bowen uses two terms to describe the process of becoming autonomous: individuation and differentiation. As Anderson and Sabatelli (1990) point out, these concepts might better be conceptualized as distinct, with the former referring to an individual developmental process and the latter to the family's pattern of distance regulation. Theoretically, these issues point to the possibility that being focused-on is not a unitary construct.

This possibility is further supported by the finding that subjects who reported high levels of fusion and triangulation did not consistently report being more fused or more triangulated than their siblings (in that the absolute and relative measures did not provide the same patterns of support for the hypotheses). In nearly all cases, the absolute measures of being focused on (those referring only to the subject's experience) provided better support for the hypotheses than did the relative measures (those comparing the experiences of two or more siblings). Although the absolute measures may be satisfactory indicators of the intensity of the process as experienced by the subject, it is not clear, without access to similar measures by the other children in the family, if a subject with high scores on the absolute measures necessarily experiences the most fusion and triangulation in the family. Although subjects were asked to compare their own experience with that of their siblings, other family members, if asked to make the same comparisons, may draw different conclusions. It is possible that in a family with high levels of anxiety, all the children experience the triangulation process equally, but experience and express the process very differently.

The question of how a child experiences the triangulation process, and the effect that the experience has on future functioning, is important for Bowen's theory in two respects. First, family systems theory maintains a role for the individual within the system, and in fact describes individual level of differentiation as a rather stable trait-like attribute. Second, the theory maintains that the effects of having been triangled into the parents' relationship (especially in terms of a lowered level of emotional differentiation) are permanent and are even transmitted to the next generation by way of selective mating that pairs two individuals of similar (low) levels of differentiation. In this sense, further empirical test of Bowen's theory would fit into the larger realm of recent research related to functioning across social systems (e.g., how functioning in the parent-child dyad is related to later functioning in the child-peer dyad) for which the model of individuation provides the framework (Grotevant, 1989). Further research might also address the early development of the triangulation process as it relates to developmental theories of attachment.

Despite its emphasis on the individual, Bowen's theory still purports to be systemic, and is based in large part on the role of triads. For this reason, the finding that the triangulation process was most strongly affected by ongoing parental conflict is interesting in light of the recent development of theory and research regarding the nature of conflict as triadic (Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988). Research on the genesis and resolution of conflict seems to address the more dynamic and constantly changing aspects of the general triangulation process, suggested earlier to be more relevant than the other Bowenian view of triangles as stable structures in which new family members replace old ones in ongoing struggles.

The recent research on triadic conflict, based on behavioral analysis by an outside observer, points to this study's primary limitation of being based on self-report

in a questionnaire format. Although much family research uses a similar format, it is not clear how well "insider" evaluations provided by family members correspond to "outsider" evaluations by raters or therapists (Hampson, Beavers, & Hulgus, 1989). In addition, Bowen's theory describes the family projection process in particular as something observable by the clinician (but not necessarily understood by the participants). This study was confined to insider evaluation, but was further limited to the report of only one family member, problematic because family members, especially siblings, may see each other differently than they see themselves. Access to other family members' responses both to absolute and to relative measures of the focused-on-child measures would provide the evidence needed to conclude whether or not the process of triangulation is actually selective, with differential effects on individual children in the family. Behavioral observation by an outsider would also make the analysis more comparable to that described by Bowen as a clinician.

The correlational nature of this study also limits causal interpretation of the data. Although the study of family processes as they occur naturally may be best suited to correlational analysis, a longitudinal study may provide more information about hypothesized temporal relationships in the course of the family's life cycle. Further research in this area may benefit from the recent development of the statistical tool of path analysis, given that there is a clear theoretical justification for presuming a cause and effect relationship among the variables of family systems theory. This analysis may be better used on data incorporating all the family members' experiences, not just one member's perceptions of them.

This study is also limited because it uses a sample of college students that is not representative of the population of young people in terms of race or socioeconomic background. Only one-fifth of the subjects came from families with five children or

more; nearly half had only one sibling. Also, only 19% of the subjects' parents had divorced, a much lower rate than the national average. Although Bowen states that the processes described by family systems theory exist in all families, the subjects used in this study had already attained some degree of independence from their families of origin (they had applied to college and had moved away from home) and so detection of debilitation even if they were focused-on children was made even more difficult. In general, the homogeneity of this sample limits the external validity of the results. On the other hand, the possible strength of the relationships found in this study is statistically limited due to the truncated range of values; the relationships found in the general population are likely to be higher than those found here.

Grotevant (1989) points out that systemic ideas in general, although widely used in therapy, are not easily taken up by research because of the difficulty in operationalizing the theoretical constructs, the difficulty in falsifying the theory, and the interdisciplinary nature of the theory's applications. Whereas Bowen's family systems theory does present some of these problems (e.g., the notion of levels of differentiation, based on Bowen's personal clinical judgment, is impossible to operationalize), parts of the theory are available to empirical test. This is true because Bowen and other like-minded theorists have set forth very specific hypotheses about the precursors and consequences of family processes, some of them based on life events that are easily operationalized. It is this clarity, and consequent falsifiability, that make Bowen's family systems theory scientifically useful. However, just as this study found only moderate support for the traditional Bowenian notions that cutoff, sibling position, and time of birth are related to the triangulation process, so might further empirical research reveal that widely held clinical assumptions may need revision. Such revision would generate new empirical test and the theory's evolution,

thus allowing Bowen's family systems theory to be an active part of the scientific realm he so much admires.

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Sex male female Age _____Year in school 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5thAre you now or have you ever been married? yes noDo you have any children? yes no

If yes, how many? _____

What is your religious background? (Check one.)

 Catholic Protestant
 Jewish Other (_____)

Do you attend religious services at least monthly?

 yes noDid your parents ever separate or divorce? yes no

IF YES: How old were you then? _____

Has either parent remarried? yes noIf yes, who? mother father

Are your biological parents married and living together?

 yes no

Is either of your parents deceased?

 mother father
 neither both

If yes, how old were you at the first parent's death? _____

Number of siblings in your family (not including yourself): _____

Are you the oldest of your sex? yes no

Your birth order among your natural siblings:

 oldest middle
 youngest onlyDo you have at least one sibling of your own sex? yes noDo you have at least one sibling of the opposite sex? yes no

How many brothers do you have? _____

How many sisters do you have? _____

IN THE SPACES BELOW, PLEASE WRITE THE SEX AND AGE OF THE CHILDREN IN YOUR FAMILY, INCLUDING YOURSELF.

<u>Birth Order</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>
(oldest) 1	—	—
2	—	—
3	—	—
4	—	—
(youngest) 5	—	—

What is your mother's birth order among her siblings?

 oldest youngest
 middle only

How many brothers did your mother have? _____

How many sisters did your mother have? _____

Was she the oldest of her sex? yes no

What is your father's birth order among his siblings?

 oldest youngest
 middle only

How many brothers did your father have? _____

How many sisters did your father have? _____

Was he the oldest of his sex? yes noWere you born within SIX MONTHS before or after the death of one of your MOTHER'S parents (your maternal grandparents)? yes noWere you born within SIX MONTHS before or after the death of one of your FATHER'S parents (your paternal grandparents)? yes no

Were you born within TWO YEARS before or after the death of one of your MOTHER'S parents?

 yes noWere you born within TWO YEARS before or after the death of one of your FATHER'S parents? yes noWere any of your siblings born within SIX MONTHS before or after a grandparent's death? yes noWere any of your siblings born within TWO YEARS before or after a grandparent's death? yes noDid either of your father's parents die before your father was 18? yes noDid either of your mother's parents die before your mother was 18? yes no

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS, USING THIS SCALE.
WRITE THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

- ___ I sometimes wonder how much my parents really love me.
- ___ I often get so emotional with my parents that I cannot think straight.
- ___ I worry that my parents cannot take care of themselves when I'm not around.
- ___ I am usually able to disagree with my parents without losing my temper.
- ___ My parents do things that embarrass me.
- ___ My parents say one thing to me and really mean another.
- ___ My parents frequently try to change some aspect of my personality.
- ___ My present-day problems would be fewer and less severe if my parents had acted or behaved differently.

PLEASE INDICATE THE FREQUENCY OF THE FOLLOWING EVENTS, USING THIS SCALE:

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	often	very often

- ___ How often do you feel compelled to take sides when your parents disagree?
- ___ When your parents disagree, how often do you feel "caught in the middle" between them?
- ___ It feels like I cannot get emotionally close to my mother without moving away from my father.
- ___ It feels like I cannot get emotionally close to my father without moving away from my mother.
- ___ Children's problems sometimes coincide with marital conflict or other stress in families. In your view, how often does this happen in your family?
- ___ How often do your parents disagree about specific ways to treat you (for example, how to respond to requests for money)?
- ___ How often does your mother intervene in disagreements between you and your father?
- ___ How often does your father intervene in disagreements between you and your mother?

PLEASE INDICATE THE FREQUENCY OF THE FOLLOWING EVENTS, USING THIS SCALE:

1	2	3	4	5
never	sometimes	half the time	most of time	all the time

- ___ To meet my mother's expectations concerning my school/work, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my father's expectations concerning my school/work, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my mother's expectations concerning my relationships, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my father's expectations concerning my relationships, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my mother's expectations concerning my appearance, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my father's expectations concerning my appearance, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my mother's expectations concerning my life style, I feel I must modify my behavior.
- ___ To meet my father's expectations concerning my life style, I feel I must modify my behavior.

How satisfied are you with your school performance to this point? Please circle the number that applies.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat extremely
satisfied satisfied satisfied

How satisfied are you with the social relationships you have formed at school so far? Please circle the number.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat extremely
satisfied satisfied satisfied

How difficult has it been for you to be away from home (how "homesick" have you been)? (Circle.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat extremely
difficult difficult difficult

Who would you say was the most affected by your leaving home? (Check the one that applies.)

mother mother and father equally
 father everyone equally
 a brother or sister

How much was this person affected by your leaving home? (Circle the number that applies.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat extremely
affected affected affected

Did you receive psychological counseling of any kind before coming to school? yes no

Have you received professional counseling since you've been in school? yes no

How seriously have you considered counseling? (Circle.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat extremely
seriously

Has anyone in your immediate family (parent, child, sibling, spouse) ever...

had a serious medical illness? yes no
had a drinking problem? yes no
had a drug problem? yes no
received psychological counseling? yes no
been hospitalized for an emotional
or chemical dependency problem? yes no
lost a job? yes no
been in trouble with the law? yes no
had a weight problem? yes no
been divorced? yes no

Have you ever...

had a serious medical illness? yes no
had a drinking problem? yes no
had a drug problem? yes no
received psychological counseling? yes no
been hospitalized for an emotional
or chemical dependency problem? yes no
lost a job? yes no
been in trouble with the law? yes no
had a weight problem? yes no
been divorced? yes no

Have you made a friend at school with whom you can argue without ending the friendship? yes no

Think of your BEST friend at school. How comfortable do you feel arguing with him or her? (Circle the number.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat extremely
comfortable comfortable comfortable

Sometimes people deal with problems by not talking to each other or by "disinheriting" each other. Are any of the members of your family currently involved in this type of relationship with each other? Think about you and your siblings, your parents, your aunts and uncles, and your grandparents. If such a relationship now exists, check the appropriate pairs of people.

you & a parent your mother & your father
 you & a grandparent your sibling & a grandparent
 you & a sibling your sibling & your parent
 you & an aunt/uncle your sibling & an aunt/uncle

Now think about if such a relationship has ever existed in your family in the past, lasting for two months or more. Check whichever pairs apply:

you & a parent your mother & your father
 you & a grandparent your sibling & a grandparent
 you & a sibling your sibling & your parent
 you & an aunt/uncle your sibling & an aunt/uncle

When your mother and father married, were they of the same religious background? yes no

What is your race?

Black Asian Other ()
 White Hispanic

Are your parents of the same race? yes no

With what ethnic background, if any, do you identify? _____

NOW RATE THESE SAME RELATIONSHIPS MORE SPECIFICALLY
(Circle the number on the scale provided.)

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MOTHER

distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	close
weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strong
conflictual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	harmonious

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER

distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	close
weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strong
conflictual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	harmonious

MOTHER AND FATHER'S RELATIONSHIP

distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	close
weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strong
conflictual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	harmonious

PLEASE RATE YOUR ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ON THE FOLLOWING SCALES:

How much did your parents influence your decision to come to William and Mary?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

How much have your parents influenced your decisions concerning summer employment?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

How seriously have you considered dropping out of college?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very seriously

How much have family issues interfered with your school work?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

How much have your parents influenced your choice of classes?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

How often do you do things specifically because they are different from what your parents do or would like?

1	2	3	4	5
never	sometimes			always

Do you consider yourself anti-establishment?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all				very much

PLEASE CIRCLE T OR F TO INDICATE "TRUE" OR "FALSE" IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT YOURSELF.

- T F Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.
- T F I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.
- T F It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.
- T F I have never intensely disliked anyone.
- T F On occasion I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life.
- T F I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.
- T F I am always careful about my manner of dress.
- T F My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant.
- T F If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen, I would probably do it.
- T F On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my abilities.
- T F I like to gossip at times.
- T F There have been times when I felt like rebelling.
- T F No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.
- T F I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something.
- T F There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.
- T F I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
- T F I always try to practice what I preach.
- T F I don't find it particularly difficult to get along with obnoxious, loud-mouthed people.
- T F I sometimes try to get even, rather than to forgive and forget.
- T F When I don't know something, I don't at all mind admitting it.

PLEASE CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

How strongly do you identify with the ethnic group you just mentioned? (Circle.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very

How strongly do your parents identify with this ethnic group? (Circle.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very

Have you ever had acquaintances of other ethnic groups?

yes no

Have you ever had a close friend of another ethnic group?

yes no

Have you ever dated someone of another ethnic group?

yes no

Have you ever had a boyfriend/girlfriend of another ethnic group? yes no

Have you ever dated someone of a different race?

yes no

How likely would you be to become romantically involved with someone of a different race or ethnic background? (Circle the number.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very
likely likely likely

How likely would you be to marry someone who was not of your own race or ethnic background? (Circle the number.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all somewhat very
likely likely likely

Of the children in your family, who would be most likely to become romantically involved with someone who was not of your family's ethnic background? you a sibling

How would your parents react if you or one of your siblings married someone of a different ethnic background? (Circle.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
highly neutral highly
disapprove approve

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REFER TO YOUR OWN PARENTS AND YOUR SIBLINGS.

In your family, how many children are living at home with your parents? _____

When the whole family is together, which child intervenes most frequently when your parents argue or disagree? you a sibling

PLEASE CONTINUE TO REFER TO YOUR OWN PARENTS AND SIBLINGS

When the whole family was together when the children were growing up, which child intervened most frequently when your parents argued or disagreed? you a sibling

Which child lives farthest away from your parents? you a sibling

When the whole family is together, which child spends the most time with your parents? you a sibling

When the whole family was together when the children were growing up, which child spent the most time with your parents? you a sibling

Which child is best able to disagree with your parents without losing his or her temper? you a sibling

Which child reacts most strongly to your parents' criticisms? you a sibling

Which child has the most contact with your parents? you a sibling

Which child knows the most about your parents' relationship? you a sibling

Which two people in your own family have the closest relationship? (Check one.)

- mother & father you & a sibling
- you & your mother two of your siblings
- you & your father mother & a grandparent
- a sibling & mother father & a grandparent
- a sibling & father other: _____

Which two people in your own family argue the most? (Check one.)

- mother & father you & a sibling
- you & your mother two of your siblings
- you & your father mother & a grandparent
- a sibling & mother father & a grandparent
- a sibling & father other: _____

Please rate the relationship with your mother (Circle.) -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

Please rate the relationship with your father: -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

Please rate your parents' relationship with each other: -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

PLEASE CONTINUE TO INDICATE "TRUE" OR "FALSE" IN RESPONSE TO THESE STATEMENTS ABOUT YOURSELF:

- T F I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.
- T F At times I have really insisted on having things my own way.
- T F There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.
- T F I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrongdoings.
- T F I never resent being asked to return a favor.
- T F I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.
- T F I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car.
- T F There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortunes of others.
- T F I have almost never felt that I was punished without cause.
- T F I sometimes think that when people have a misfortune they only got what they deserved.
- T F I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Your time and effort in filling out this questionnaire are greatly appreciated.

Appendix B

Intergenerational Fusion subscale of the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire. Subjects are asked to rate on a Likert scale their agreement with the following statements:

I sometimes wonder how much my parents really love me.

I often get so emotional with my parents that I cannot think straight.

I worry that my parents cannot take care of themselves when I'm not around.

I am usually able to disagree with my parents without losing my temper.

My parents do things that embarrass me.

My parents say one thing to me and really mean another.

My parents frequently try to change some aspect of my personality.

My present-day problems would be fewer and less severe if my parents had acted or behaved differently.

Appendix C

Intergenerational Triangulation subscale of the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire. Subjects are asked to rate the frequency of the following events, on a Likert scale:

How often do you feel compelled to take sides when your parents disagree?

When your parents disagree, how often do you feel "caught in the middle" between them?

It feels like I cannot get emotionally close to my mother without moving away from my father.

It feels like I cannot get emotionally close to my father without moving away from my mother.

Children's problems sometimes coincide with marital conflict or other stress in families. In your view, how often does this happen in your family?

How often do your parents disagree about specific ways to treat you (for example, how to respond to requests for money)?

How often does your mother intervene in disagreements between you and your father?

How often does your father intervene in disagreements between you and your mother?

Appendix D

Relative Measures of Being Focused On

Assessing Emotional Reactivity:

Which child reacts most strongly to your parents' criticism (you or a sibling)?

Which child is best able to disagree with your parents without losing his or her temper?

When the whole family is together, which child intervenes most frequently when your parents argue or disagree?

Assessing Familiarity with the Parents' Relationship:

Which child knows most about your parents' relationship?

Which child has the most contact with your parents?

Assessing the Subject-Parent Alliance:

Which two people in the family have the closest relationship?

Appendix E

Cutoff

Sometimes people deal with problems by not talking to each other or by "disinheriting" each other. Are any of the members of your family currently involved in this type of relationship with each other? Think about you and your siblings, your parents, your aunts and uncles, and your grandparents. If such a relationship now exists, check the appropriate pairs of people.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & a parent | <input type="checkbox"/> your mother & your father |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & a grandparent | <input type="checkbox"/> your sibling & a grandparent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & a sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> your sibling & your parent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & an aunt/uncle | <input type="checkbox"/> your sibling & an aunt/uncle |

Now think about if such a relationship has ever existed in your family in the past, lasting for two months or more.

Check whichever pairs apply:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & a parent | <input type="checkbox"/> your mother & your father |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & a grandparent | <input type="checkbox"/> your sibling & a grandparent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & a sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> your sibling & your parent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you & an aunt/uncle | <input type="checkbox"/> your sibling & an aunt/uncle |

Appendix F

Dysfunction in Other Family Members

Has anyone in your immediate family (parent, child, sibling, spouse) ever...

had a serious medical illness?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
had a drinking problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
had a drug problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
received psychological counseling?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
been hospitalized for an emotional or dependency problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> chemical <input type="checkbox"/> no
lost a job?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
been in trouble with the law?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
had a weight problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
been divorced?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

Have you ever...

had a serious medical illness?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
had a drinking problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
had a drug problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
received psychological counseling?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
been hospitalized for an emotional or dependency problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> chemical <input type="checkbox"/> no
lost a job?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
been in trouble with the law?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
had a weight problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
been divorced?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

Appendix G

Parental Conflict

Please rate your parents' relationship with each other:

-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

Now rate this same relationship more specifically:

MOTHER AND FATHER'S RELATIONSHIP

distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	close
weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strong
conflictual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	harmonious

Parental Conflict: Indirect Measures (taken from Vanderkooy Vos and Hayden, 1985)

Birth order matches rated as complementary:

. Oldest/Youngest; Oldest/Middle; Middle/Youngest

Birth order matches rated as semi-complementary:

Middle/Middle; Only/Any

Birth order matches rated as non-complementary:

Oldest/Oldest; Youngest/Youngest; Only/Only

Appendix H

Similarity of Subject's and Parents' Birth Order Positions (taken from Vanderkooy Vos and Hayden, 1985)

Birth order matches rated as highly similar:

Oldest/Oldest; Youngest/Youngest; Only/Only

Birth order matches rated as semi-similar:

Middle/Middle; Only/Any

Birth order matches rated as nonsimilar:

Oldest/Youngest; Oldest/Middle; Middle/Youngest

Appendix I

Family Member Dysfunction:

Problem History of Subjects' Parents and Siblings

	N	%
Weight problem	104	45.4
Serious medical illness	74	32.3
Received psychological counseling	69	30.3
Divorce	49	21.5
Drinking problem	40	17.5
Lost a job	36	15.9
Trouble with the law	34	15.0
Hospitalized for emotional or drug/alc	17	7.5
Drug problem	15	6.6

Mean # of problems cited = 1.9

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The author was born in St. Louis, Missouri on October 4, 1964. She received a B.A. in Modern Languages from the College of William and Mary in 1986, and an M.A. in Psychology from the same institution in 1990. She will pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Virginia.