

# Stability in Family Communication

## *A Case Study of Inclusion and Exclusion*



FOTO LENA HAMMAR

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to illustrate patterns in family communication. Twenty Swedish families who were expecting their first child were part of a multi-center study using the Lausanne Trilogue Play Paradigm, developed by Elisabeth Fivaz-Depeursinge and her team. This sample has been studied at three points in time in the child's life: (1) during infancy, (2) at the age of four, and (3) at fifteen years of age. For the present article, one case has been chosen to focus on how inclusion (versus exclusion) in family interaction helps a family member to maintain his or her role in a given task. The clinical implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* Triad, inclusion, synchronization, family communication, engagement

### Sammanfattning

Syftet i denna studie är att beskriva mönster i familjekommunikation. 20 svenska familjer deltog när de skulle bli föräldrar till sitt första barn i en multicenterstudie där Lausanne Trilogue Play-Paradigm användes, utvecklat av Elisabeth Fivaz-Depeursinge och hennes team. Familjerna har studerats vid 3 tillfällen: (1) under spädbarnstiden (2) vid fyra års ålder (3) vid 15 års ålder. I den här artikeln har en av familjerna ur den studien valts för att beskriva hur inkludering (kontra exkludering) i familjekommunikationen, hjälper en familjemedlem att vara i sin roll vid genomförandet av uppgiften. Hur detta kan användas kliniskt kommer att diskuteras.

*Nyckelord:* FYLLES INN AV FORFATTER I 1. KORREKTUR

### Introduction

Imagine Sofie, fifteen years old, in conversation with her parents. They discuss a weekend that she will spend by herself in their home while her parents are away. Abruptly, with a bit of worry in her face and voice, mother says: «Maybe grandmother should come and stay with you?» Sofie responds by giving mother a questioning look, and by turning to father with an even more openly questioning one. She then says: «No, I can handle being on my own.» However, in both her voice and face there are still signs of a question. Father responds with



a smile, saying: «Yes of course you can, I just think mom is a bit worried. It is the first time you will be on your own in the house.» Sofie lightens up and again looks at mother, who now smiles gratefully at father. She says: «Sofie, do you think you'll be all right?» Sofie, still looking at mother, but with a quick glance at father responds: «Yes, I think it'll be fun.» Then father, turning to mother, says: «We will have a nice time at the hotel and it's not too far away if something were to happen.» The discussion continues and the family members mirror one another's positive facial expressions, which move among them in a synchronized way along with verbal turn-taking.

This scene depicts how micro-moments of co-parenting include all three individuals in order to take care of the affect anxiety in an engaged way.

### Background

In the vignette, the engagement of a third person in a dyadic interaction is both clear and natural. As a structured situation is used, in which the family members have different tasks, a triad is, in this article, defined by the author as *a situation in which all three partners are working together on a task, but have different roles in different parts of the task*. Since late 1990, studies of interaction in the triad to explore child development have been in focus. The marital relationship (Katz & Gottman, 1996), co-parenting (McHale & Cowan, 1996) and alliances (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Corboz-Warnery & Frascarolo, 1996) are important factors. In this article, the focus is on a single case study taken out of a group of twenty. The child in this case study belongs to the category of socially well-developing children. Also, micro-variables that should be sought, and that can be used to intervene in family communication, are illustrated.

### The Lausanne Triadic Play Task

The Lausanne Triadic Play task (LTP, later called Trilogue; Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999) was developed to capture not only various dyads but the triad as a whole with all its subsystems. The family plays and interacts in four phases according to this structure: one parent and child, the other parent and child, all three, and finally the parents interact with each other. The non-active partner in three of the four phases is simply present. The family is placed in a triangle and instructed to regulate their transitions into the four different phases.

One parent plays/interacts with the child while the other parent is simply present; then, when they feel ready to change, the one parent who has been the



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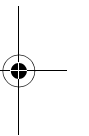
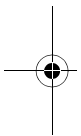
active one is now simply present while the child plays/interacts with the other parent. These two phases are usually referred to as two-plus-one (2+1). The third phase (1+1+1) calls for three-together play, in which the child plays/interacts with both parents. In the fourth phase, also a 2+1 phase, the child is the third party, while the parents have a conversation. At both three and nine months, the family is to play without toys, and at eighteen and forty-eight months with selected toys.

### Assessing alliances

The LTP session permits an assessment of alliance, defined by Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery (1996) as cooperation and coordination. In functional family alliances, the three partners are included in the interaction, while at the same time keeping to their roles (active versus third party), and the parents support each other in front of the child. In problematic alliances, exclusion and interferences or withdrawal from roles are the main patterns. For example, one parent may block, or interrupt, a play sequence initiated between the other parent and the baby (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Corboz-Warnery & Frascarolo, 1996).

LTP sessions have been used extensively in both normative and clinical samples in many countries. Studies have explored the degree to which an infant's triangular capacities and better co-parental adjustments make the infant more socially capable (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006). In the better functioning alliances, the child makes triangular bids in moments of happiness and pleasure more often than is the case for children in poor alliances (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2010). Observations by Carneiro found a link between prenatal co-parenting and good postnatal family functioning at three months (Carneiro et al., 2006). A study with adolescent mothers, their partners and their infants using the LTP at four months showed a high degree of dysfunctional family alliances (Lehmann et al., 2011). Longitudinal studies using the LTP have indicated that a highly stable alliance is predictive of better outcomes in children at the age of five years, especially regarding «theory of mind.» However, they find that the child outcome is affected by the temperament of the child, which has its own effect on the interaction (Favez et al., 2012).

In assessing the quality of an alliance, one needs to consider the quality of the family's communications. Communicating, however, is not only about talking, but also about sharing emotions and the inner life of feelings and thoughts. How space is given and taken and how roles are handled in the family have to do with our inner world and expectations of parenting (McHale et



al., 2004; McHale & Rotman, 2007). For example, Bürgin and Klitzing (1995) showed that if the father in his inner thoughts about the family triad views all three as being included, the development of the triad is positively affected. Elisabeth Fivaz-Depeursinge (2004) and her team have found evidence that «three-some intersubjectivity» in the triadic family communication contributes to more engaged interaction.

### The marital relationship and co-parenting

The transition to parenthood is a critical period for the formation of the family, and marital satisfaction often declines during this period (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). During this transition, the family system that had previously consisted solely of the marital relationship now expands to include the co-parenting unit, as well the mother-infant and father-infant units. What was once just a dyad has now become a triad and three dyads. Co-parenting is a triadic interaction in which mother and father might support, or undermine, each other's position regarding their child, as opposed to the marital relationship, which is dyadic and does not necessarily involve the child (Cowan & McHale, 1996).

The marital and parental subsystems have been found to be interrelated. Feldman (2007) found that father involvement could decrease maternal depression and anxiety, increase reciprocity in both dyadic units, and increase harmony in the family triad.

A study of prenatal marital interaction found that husbands' communication with their wives in a conflict situation at six months of pregnancy was associated not only with their later involvement as fathers with their three-month-old babies, but was also positively correlated with the infants' smiling or crying (Shapiro, 2005). McHale and Cowan (1996) have studied how dysfunctional marital interaction during conflict is transferred to co-parenting interaction, rendering the co-parenting system more hostile and competitive. A harmonious, supportive marriage makes parents more sensitive, responsive, and more involved when they are co-parenting. Therefore, the quality of interaction in the parents' relationship has a «spillover effect», with evidence of a transfer of moods, emotions, or behaviors, and these affect the child's later development (Katz & Gottman, 1996).

Infants from good co-parenting relationships engaged more easily in triangular interaction, and received more sensitive and adjusted responses, than did infants who grew up with conflictual co-parenting (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999; McHale & Cowan, 1996). Fivaz-Depeursinge and Favez

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explored the dyadic pattern of intrusion in the LTP paradigm. They described how – in a happy marriage – the parent in the third party role could be helpful to the child in an intrusion by seeing the nonverbal signals of the child and directly responding to these signals.

On the other hand, in cases where the marital relationship is under stress, the other parent can behave in a hostile manner and withdraw. In the latter case, the co-parenting cannot function in a supportive way; instead it is as if the parents are acting *against* the baby. A competitive co-parenting style during the first year is predictive of the child's externalizing symptoms at the age of four (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006). Furthermore, an excluding co-parenting style is linked to the child's internalizing symptoms at the age of four (Elliston et al. 2008).

A reversal of roles between parent and child in a conflictual marital relationship has even been observed to stabilize the parents' relationship. In this case, the child takes on a role as an ally of one of the parents, and in this way reduces the conflict and tension in the triad (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2007). The complexity shows the interdependence of family members' behaviors in the triadic context (Cannon et al., 2008).

### Alliance and coalition in family systems

In family systems, Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery (1999) asked the following question to define the alliance: *Does the family work together as a team and do the partners, namely the parents and infant, help each other?* They point at four levels to analyze the alliance. Organization: Is everybody included in the task? Participation: Is everybody in his/her role when doing the task? Joint Focus: Is everybody's focus on the ongoing task? Engagement: Is everybody emotionally engaged? In alliances that are not positive, Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery have described three types of coalitions: (1) binding, where the one parent ties the child to her/himself against the other parent; (2) competitive, where the parents compete for the child's attention; and (3) detouring, where the parents join together and hide their conflict by scapegoating the child. In 1974, Minuchin showed how a child can take the lead with either positive or negative affect initiatives and thereby distract the parents from the tension between them. For example, the child may begin singing or become irritable to get parental support and thus defuse the tension (see also Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2007). In clinical observations, Minuchin and his colleagues have demonstrated that these dysfunctional patterns in families to



«cover up» conflict between parents are linked to pathological outcomes in children, such as psychosomatic symptoms (Minuchin, Rosman, & Baker, 1978).

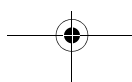
### Interactional synchrony

Interactional synchrony is described in a setting with three people by Condon (1982). He found that micro-movements, tone of voice and facial expressions were perfectly coordinated and synchronized with each other. In another study, the family triad synchronization was described as follows: «The turns between the members interlace and there is a dance of interaction that takes place where all members have the space to express themselves» (Hedenbro, 2002, p. 10 ). In the study «Synchrony in the Triad» (Gordon & Feldman, 2008), synchronization was found to be a key issue in micro-analytic observations of social behavior. These relational behaviors are patterned configurations that become internalized. Over time, they lead to repeated experiences and can shape infant development

In a comparative study between US and Swedish families (Shapiro et al., 2006), the most important alliance behavior found was «to be in step,» meaning that the rhythm had to be shaped together and synchrony in interaction was created by that rhythm.

### Method

The purpose of the multi-center study was to explore interaction in the family with children from newborns up to the age of fifteen years and their parents. One focus was to see how the contributions from the different individuals were interlaced in a synchronized way so that everybody was involved and included. Children and their parents were followed longitudinally and prospectively using videotaped, standardized observations of their triadic interactions according to the Lausanne Triadic Play structure when the children were three, nine, eighteen, and forty-eight months old, and again when the children were four years old and fifteen years old. The gap between four and fifteen years occurred partly because the multi-center study stopped at four years. At seven years, the families were seen again, but not in the LTP situation. No team had developed ideas of how to continue the LTP at a later age until the Italian team came up with an additional LTP-type situation at fifteen, in which the family's task is to create a story about parents going away for a weekend and the child staying home by her/himself (S. Mazzoni personal communication, November 2011).



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## Coding Instrument

The CPICS was designed to facilitate the study of the flow of interaction, sequence-by-sequence, among all three members of the triad. Observers viewed the videotapes and then registered the interactions on forms. For detailed information about the coding used in the CPICS, please refer to the coding manual (Hedenbro & Lidén, 2002), where the key variables used in the case are described.

- Engagement is mutual affect sharing among the three members
- Contributions (11 types) are intentional or unintentional verbal or non-verbal behaviors of a member of the triad that become the starting point of a new sequence of interaction (a new turn-taking sequence).
- Affirmation occurs when the parents respond positively verbally or nonverbally to the child.
- Turn-taking is initiated by a contribution and ends when another contribution changes the focus of interaction. A turn can be a single contribution followed by an affirmation and a response, or it can be a series of events.
- Inclusion occurs when each member gives space to the other's interaction or activity and helps another member stay in her/his role without being excluded.
- Synchronization is a process of emotional engagement and coordinated interaction between and among the three partners, in which they are all included. The inter-rating agreement on the different categories using Pearson's correlation test was good, except for one category in the American families and two categories in the Swiss German-speaking families. As cultural differences may exist in child-parent-interactions, such categories are not used.

## The Swedish families in the multi-center study

The multi-center study started in 1996, and was led by Elisabeth Fivaz-Depeursinge in Lausanne, Switzerland, collaborating with Dieter Bürgin in Basel, Switzerland, Monica Hedenbro in Stockholm, Sweden, and John Gottman in Seattle, USA. In the multi-center study, each country developed its own coding system. The analysis of the codes for the Swedish cases was taken from the Swedish larger Child Parent Interaction Coding System (CPICS), which focuses on both individual events and sequences of interaction (Hedenbro & Lidén, 2002).

The Swedish families were recruited from a maternity healthcare clinic in a Stockholm suburb. Families who spoke Swedish, lived together, and were expecting their first child, were invited to participate. Twenty newborn babies, along with their mothers and fathers, entered the multi-center study.

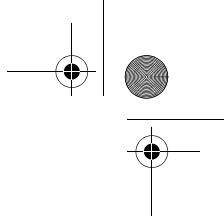
In this Swedish sample of twenty, the expectant fathers' mean age was thirty years (range twenty-four to forty-two), and expectant mothers' mean age was 27 years (range twenty-one to thirty-two). Nine of these men and ten of these women had completed a college or university education. Twelve of the infants in the study were boys, and eight were girls. One baby was born ten weeks prematurely and one via Caesarean delivery. At the follow-up when the children were fifteen years of age, five couples had divorced and were not filmed, but answered questionnaires. One family whose child had developed autism did not take part in the follow-up, and in two other families, the child did not want to take part in filming.

The LTP setting was used when the child was fifteen years of age. As with the Italian sample, this family was instructed to create a story that started with «Mother and Father are going away for a weekend and you are going to stay home. What do we have to talk about and prepare?» They completed this task in four phases, analogous to the LTP.

### **The case study**

The family in the case study is a representative family from the twenty Swedish families. It has been chosen to illustrate family interactions with a child, a boy, who at four and fifteen years of age is assessed as belonging to the category of socially well-developing children. The case illustrates the stability of family communication, by focusing on synchronization, engagement and inclusion. The observations made here are based on data from the longitudinal study using Lausanne Trilogue Play.

The parents are in their thirties and are middle class. The boy has a sister who is three years younger and they all live together as a family. At the age of four, the boy was assessed by his preschool teacher using the Preschool Behavior Questionnaire (Hagekull & Bohlin, 1996). He was described as being socially competent, competent with his peers, and there were no areas of concern. At fifteen years of age, his teacher assessed him with the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (Svedin & Priebe, 2008). He was described as having good social competence, with peers and overall, and there were no areas of concern. Both



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parents scored a high positive on the Swedish-designed questionnaire «Family Climate» at nine months, seven years, and fifteen years (Hansson, 1989).

### Aim

The aim of the family case presentation in this article is to describe micro-variables in family interaction through one case from early infancy up to fifteen years of age. The focus is especially on variables that form social competence.

### Questions

The two questions in this article are

- Do patterns early in the life of a family, such as being included, persist over time?
- How can co-parenting affect the synchronization and engagement in the family?

### Results

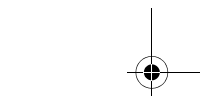
#### Alex and his family – an example of how interference turns to inclusion

*At three months*

2+1 Father-with-Child

Father starts to play but Alex is still looking at mother, with whom he had just been interacting. Father says with an attuned voice: «Yes, mother is there.» By giving words to the boy's attention towards mother, father includes mother while at the same moment telling Alex that he will now be the active parent. He takes over this role by leaning towards Alex. Then he continues by saying in a warm fatherly tone: «Am I going to play with you now?» Alex looks at father and breaks into a smile. Father continues by saying: «Are you sitting there thinking?»

Alex becomes active by making a «hmm» sound and kicking his legs. Father responds by repeating Alex's «hmm» and nodding. They go back and forth a few times, engaged and synchronized in their turn-taking. Father continues talking and Alex joins in with responses, resulting in continued turn-taking. At one point, father bows his head and laughs at what he just said, and Alex tunes in with mirrored affect. Then they look at each other and share a smile. However, the father's laugh is somewhat high-pitched, and Alex pulls back and looks surprised. Father notices Alex's response and repairs by talking, touching and again inviting Alex to enter a dialogue. It takes some time for Alex to join





in again. Mother, as observer, mirrors their positive affect in her face, but does not interrupt father's repair.

The transition to the next phase of the LTP is accomplished in a threesome activity. Father starts by saying: «Do you want to speak with mother?» and Alex smiles. Seeing that and affirming Alex, he turns to mother and asks if she would like to speak to Alex, to which her reply is «Yes». Father not only initiates the transition, but also nonverbally and verbally includes both mother and Alex.

#### 2+1 Mother-with-Child

Mother starts by leaning towards Alex and positioning the baby's chair towards her. In a motherly and markedly intense voice, she says: «Hello, hello, are you there, my little prince?» Alex shows with his body that he wants to be picked up by his mother, and she affirms this indication using a warm positive voice saying: «Yes, I see you want to come up but we have already had our sit-up training today.» She looks at Alex and he returns her glance. After a little while the father says in a fairly loud voice: «Oh, have you been helping Alex practice sitting up?» Alex continues to look at his mother while she turns to father to answer briefly. After another half minute, the father laughs loudly and again repeats what mother said about sit-up training. The mother moves her face closer to Alex and says in a warm tone: «Your daddy is not going to speak with me because I am going to speak with *you!*» Alex is still looking at mother and saying «hmm,» with mother nodding and repeating the «hmm.» Father briefly falls out of his role as a third observer party. He makes himself more than only present by addressing himself to mother. In an inclusive manner, mother helps father to stick to his role by telling Alex that it is he and mother who are supposed to interact now. Father leans back in his chair with a smile. After a while, mother invites father into the next phase of the play.

#### 1+1+1 Mother-Father-Child

The triadic interaction has an engaged atmosphere with exchanges of gaze, but it is hard for them to come to a synchronized interaction. There is no exclusion, but they do not build on each other's turns and thus the communication does not flow around in sync among all three. The transition to phase four, mother-father conversation, is initiated by mother.





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### 2+1 Mother-with-Father

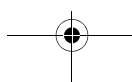
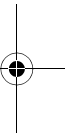
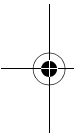
In part four, mother and father talk in an engaged manner, and Alex is calm but also engages in the parents' conversation by looking towards them. He is able to be in his role and included, turning towards the parents to share their joy.

#### *At nine months*

At nine months, the engagement among the three partners continues to be observed, and everyone is included in all the four parts of the LTP situation. Alex is older and able to look with more focus at both parents and alternate between them. In part three, where they interact all together and play with a few selected toys, mother starts singing a song, whereby Alex joins with vocal and affect responses. At the same time, father tries to introduce a toy, but mother nicely rejects that. Father, instead of excluding himself and withdrawing, understands her intention, and includes himself by taking Alex's hand and joining in the singing. Alex shares the joy he experiences through gaze and facial expression. At this age, the triad is synchronized in all parts of the LTP.

#### *At eighteen months*

Parts one and two are engaged and synchronized with everybody included in their roles. There is long and positive turn-taking, and everybody is included. In part three, when the three of them interact and play together, cooperation between parents is more difficult, resulting in a low score in synchronization as a triad. Mother, together with Alex, focuses on a doll saying: «Isn't she cute? Do you want to say hello to her?» Alex responds with interest and vocalizes positively. Mother then says: «Yes you do like her, don't you?» She smiles and her tone is positive. Alex also smiles, first at the doll and then at mother. He looks into her face and they share a smile. In the middle of this sequence, father introduces a pre-selected toy. He says to Alex: «Alex, have you seen this box? Look, you can put these blocks in the holes.» His voice is inviting and positive and he is smiling. Alex looks at the toy and then at father with a neutral expression but takes a block from father and puts it in the box. In an affirming tone, father says: «Yes, good job, you know how to do it!» Alex has a happy face and continues picking up blocks and putting them in the box. Mother waits quietly a little while before again referring to the doll, at which point Alex shifts focus to that. They work in two different dyads, with Alex staying engaged with both parents while continuing with his play. However, the contributions from the parents are not interlaced, nor do they build on each other.





Alex manages well to interact with both, but little space is left for his own contributions. The atmosphere is warm, which we can verify by looking at affect in the faces and listening to the tone of the voices. Everybody seems to feel included and engaged. In part four, when he is in the observer role, Alex plays happily by himself, but still looks included.

#### *At four years*

Interactions in parts one and two are synchronized and engaged, and everyone is included. The turn-taking is longer and shows positive shared affect in the father-son dyad, and mother also shares these moments with an engaged face. In part three, they are able to share the focus on Alex's playing with the dollhouse and they engage in interaction about what is going on for a little while. Then mother and father introduce different toys, but Alex wants to continue with the dollhouse. Mother and father choose to contribute in different ways to the story that Alex is telling while arranging the dolls and furniture in the dollhouse. Alex continues to play in part four, while the parents are talking with each other. He sometimes looks at them and then returns to his play.

#### *At fifteen years*

Alex and his parents come to perform the LTP task of making a story about the parents' plans to spend a weekend away and leave their son at home alone. The mother starts being the active parent and says: «Wow, this is a big thing for you, Alex, to stay at home alone.» Alex looks at mother, smiles and says: «It's going to be fun. I'm old enough to do that.» Then he adds: «May I ask a friend to come over?» Mother looks at Alex with a smile and responds: «Yes, that's a good idea. But don't stay up all night!» Again Alex smiles and says: «Okay, but I think we'll watch a film.» They share laughter and comments. Mother affirms Alex's initiatives but is also active herself. The interaction is only partly synchronized, but everybody is included and engaged in the different roles. Father shares the interaction with a positive facial affect.

The transition is made to father by mother, who invites father both nonverbally and verbally so that everybody is included. Father says: «I think you'll have a really good time at home! You'll have a chance to do lots of fun stuff like playing your guitar where and when you want. And you can play your music as loud as you want!» Alex listens to father and shares a smile with him, at which point father invites Alex with the question: «So what will you eat when we are away?» Alex looks at father, gives the question a think and then



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answers: «Pizza?» Father laughs and says: «Yes that's a good idea. Now's your chance to feast on pizza.» In the father-son interaction, there is again beautiful temporal synchrony with joy and laughter; also, mother looks engaged in her third party observer role. Father initiates the transition, verbally and nonverbally.

In part three, all of them interact, but they are not synchronized. For example, mother starts by saying: «I do not want you to write on Facebook that you are alone.» Ignoring his wife's comment to their son, father says to her: «It will be really romantic to stay at a hotel.» Alex, however, responds to mother, saying: «Why is that a problem?» Thus, the contributions do not interlace in a synchronized triadic mode. Instead, there are initiatives, such as the example, by one of them that are not followed up with turn-taking, such that would have been scored if father had responded to mother's comment. Analyzing their faces, we see positive emotional affects. All through their play-story they exchange eye-contact, sometimes with a quick glance, and sometimes by staying in a shared moment. The tone of voice is positive most of the time, and otherwise neutral and at no point negative. This could be understood as showing that all of them have a feeling of «threesomeness», of being included.

In part four, when mother and father are going to talk, they start the conversation by mother smiling at her husband and saying: «Oh we're going for a romantic weekend, are we?» The husband responds, also with a positive tone of voice and a smile on his face: «Yes, I think that would be a great idea.» After another minute of talking between mother and father, Alex leans his face toward his father, puts his hand over his mouth and whispers something. Mother looks at the two of them and says in a positive tone, just like she did to her husband at three months: «It's not time for the two of you to speak now. It's time for me and father.» Mother helps to put everybody in their roles two plus one, by vocalizing about who are going to be the active partners. All three family members are back in their roles, still with positive affect on their faces and with the feeling of being included. Once again, she has put them back on track.

Over time, the synchronization is highest in the father-child dyad, less good in the mother-child dyad, and lowest in the threesome. Alex develops good dialogues in dyads with both mother and father and in the triad, but they are not well synchronized. All are included and there is no exclusion, but there are interferences by the father at young ages and by Alex at the age of fifteen. However, these interferences are dealt with in a warm way by mother and the family climate can retain its inclusive and engaged nature.



## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore communication patterns such as inclusion, engagement, and synchronization in one family over time in the LTP. The results show how they all are included and engaged. In the co-parenting reflected in the LTP, they support each other's position even when father at three months and son at fifteen years step out of the third party role. Interestingly, in both situations, mother is the one who helps put them back in their roles, but in a tender way, so that they still feel included. As mentioned earlier, in studies by Klitzing, it was shown that the father's inner representation of «being three» was important for the interaction in the triad (Bürgin & Klitzing, 1995). Here it is mother's «being three» that becomes important.

Alliance versus coalition in the family system is the base for synchronization and inclusion. How the parents carry the idea of being 2 plus 1 or 2 against 1 in their inner world greatly affects family interaction. When mother in part four helps her son by telling him that «It's time for me and father» to talk, she is not excluding Alex, which could easily have happened if she had allied with father only. In problematic families, the parents undermine or fail to support each other, and these exclusions take the form of problematic alliances as well as interferences or withdrawal (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2007; Frascarolo, Favez, Carneiro & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2004; McHale & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 1999).

In the threesome, the infant is «embedded» in the parents' relationship and we can observe threesome intersubjectivity (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2004) to be an important variable in the case presented. In dyadic interaction, reparation is important for mutual coordination (Tronick, 1989). The child learns that the expression of feelings is a shared task in the family's interaction. In constructive triadic interaction, the child also experiences that this WE can help ME to be included.

The detailed study of the case chosen illustrates how the microelements in family communication operate over time. This is in line with what Daniel Stern (1985) discusses as the importance of «micro moments of now,» meaning that these moments might live for only a few seconds but still contain the individual's experience of the past, the present moment in relation to others, and inner representations of the future.

One of the important findings in this illustrated case study is how one member can be included even though not having kept to their role. This highlights the importance to investigate the triadic setting as a unique different context to



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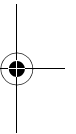
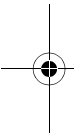
that more often studied parent-child relationship and assess it to family functioning and child development. The importance of co-parenting is consistent with other findings that points to the co-parental relationship as a more proximal component of the parent-child relationship than the marital relationship (Feinburg, 2002). With the micro-analyses it appears that infants can navigate subtle social signals within a complex, multiperson social system and detect changes in the co-parental alliance and adjust their behavior (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Favez, Lavanchy, de Noni & Frascarolo, 2005). The longitudinal part of this study is quite unique and brings new knowledge to this field.

However, as it is a small sample with only twenty Swedish families, the results are limited and there should be new studies with larger samples.

We could also look upon the method with critical eyes as it follows a design where micro-variables that were already chosen by the researcher are in focus. The clinical experience is part of the pre-understanding and has influenced the chosen variables. The «objective» perspective has not been possible to adopt, and the pre-understanding might interfere with possible other findings.

### Clinical Implications

Using video as a tool in semi-structured situations in the whole family system helps us to understand in which subsystem to intervene (Fivaz-Depeursinge et al., 2004). With video feedback we can, for example, focus on inclusion, engagement and synchronization, and intervene to change dysfunctional patterns in the family interaction for the better. Co-parenting can also be difficult because of temperamental characteristics of the child, such as with less responsive children (McHale et al., 2004; Mchale & Rotman, 2007). Video feedback can be helpful to see the child's signals and emotions. The video review helps parents to observe the child without being involved in the interaction and at the same time allows many new emotional doors to be opened for them. The parents' sensitivity to the child, their mental representations of the child and their relationship can form «the port of entry» for change (Stern, 1985). Slow motion and still pictures are powerful and help parents to be receptive to their own emotions. During the review, the parents have a chance to share their observations of the child's signals and emotions, along with their own emotions and thoughts, and talk about all of these matters with the therapist. Sharing between the parents is of great importance and helps them grow in their co-parenting. The method is therapeutic and educational, using pictures to guide parents in what can be helpful to the infant or child.



Family interactive focus is especially important in the society of today, when many symptoms and problems of children are often viewed as solely individual characteristics, rather than as the results of dysfunctional and recurrent family interaction patterns. Such patterns can be a focus for intervention by the therapist in cooperation with the family, if he or she knows what to observe. The parents and the family as a whole have to be looked upon as a resource in changing the patterns of interaction in a way that favors constructive child development. Interaction in a family can best be understood from a circular perspective, in which we never know where the difficulties start, but we do know that together we can break into the circle and make changes.

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