

## **Communication within the Triadic Context: Intercultural Prospects<sup>1</sup>**

L. Brooks Hill & John M. McGrath<sup>2</sup>  
Trinity University

Dyadic or two-person interpersonal communication is a major focus in the literature about human communication. What happens to patterns of dyadic communication when you add a third person? While this subject is largely ignored in the communication literature, social scientists in the helping professions have considered the triad or three-person interaction extensively with serious implications and potential for the study of communication behavior. This paper provides an overview of the literature about triadic interaction and discusses the implications of the available literature for future studies of triadic communication. Based on these observations, the paper will finally project the potential variations into the intercultural context and suggest some comparative research projects that members of IAICS might valuably pursue.

The study of communication is often approached in terms of different contexts, such as interpersonal, small group, organizational, or intercultural communication (Hill & Dixon, 2006). Among the elements that change in the description of contexts are the number of members, the nature of feedback involved, the formality of interaction, and the tactics used to adapt effectively. "Of all these variables, size probably has the biggest effect, since a change in size leads to all other changes" (Trenholm & Jensen, 2000, p. 25; also see Simmel, 1902). Extensive research has been done within several contexts, and this work has allowed for the development of productive theories and models. Curiously, very little communication research has addressed the theoretical potential of the three-party context or triadic communication. What little is available looks primarily at applications in therapeutic or health care situations, as opposed to focusing on the broader implications of triadic relationships. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to review trends in the research about triadic interaction and to suggest some directions for future research, especially drawing upon the vantage point of intercultural communication.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prominent sociologist Georg Simmel argued that the three-person association may be the central or foundational unit for considering society and the socialization processes. The two-person context, or dyad, presupposes greater individualization than larger groups because a majority is impossible. The mere addition of a third person allows for a majority and shifts the emphasis from the individual to the collective (Simmel, 1950). The many translations and interpretations of Simmel before Wolf's excellent rendition in 1950 may have obscured the potential of his work on the triad. Whatever the cause, this part of Simmel's work did not receive widespread attention until after Wolf's contribution.

In the 1950s Mills (1953, 1954) and Caplow (1956, 1959) focussed Simmel's position as they developed a much more empirical approach with emphasis on how coalitions form in the three-party context. Caplow's 1968 synthesis strongly influenced the vast literature about

triads that emerged throughout the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s. Except for widespread use in family and health-related situations, as well as applications of game theory, by the 1980s interest in triadic research had begun to decline. To understand these developments and how we have gotten to where we now seem to be requires us to revisit some of the early positions and trace the problems associated with their study.

Simmel's original work began in the late nineteenth century and addressed so many fundamental issues about the emergent study of sociology that his work is widely dispersed and translated throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Simmel, 1950). Those of us who study intercultural communication may know of his work primarily through his treatment of the stranger as expanded by Wood (1934) and Schuetz (1944); for further development of these implications see *Communicating with Strangers* by Gudykunst & Kim (1984). Simmel's work on the triad filtered into communication study more generally through the work of Caplow and the scholars that he influenced. Simmel initially examined the role of a third-party influence on dyadic relations and did not address the triad as it has developed in much of the subsequent literature. He distinguished between three different roles the intruding third party could play: mediator, *tertius gaudens*, and oppressor (Simmel, 1950, p. 145). Established relationships and communication patterns in dyads change once the third party enters the scene, depending upon the role the third party plays. Simmel suggested how conflict between two people could shift power to or otherwise benefit the third person (*tertius gaudens*), and how two people already together would tend to see a third person as an intruder and disturber of solidarity. Perhaps his most significant idea was that the three-person associations constitute the foundation of society insofar as they reveal emergent power relations and permit a majority to develop. Simmel was more concerned with the potential of a third party on possible relationships than on the formation of coalitions, and he projected these possibilities into a wide variety of political and philosophical contexts. His original work may actually have more implications for triadic communication study than the vast literature about coalition development by his more quantitatively oriented followers (Woodward, 1996).

Research about Simmel's three-party associations intensified after World War II and the new translation by Wolff in 1950. During the interim years approaches to sociological theory had moved more toward a quantitative approach, in contrast to the more qualitative approach of Simmel. This later research recognized his valuable insights but diverged into more measurable treatments, focusing on the development and operation of coalitions within groups of three people. For example, this work showed that an added third person could make an existing dyad stronger by giving the two a common enemy or outsider to oppose (Mills, 1953; Vinacke & Arkoff, 1957). Caplow (1968) solidified a primary trend in triadic research by declaring that under *most* circumstances triads have a tendency to "divide into a coalition of two members against the third" (p. 2). He argued that the transaction at any point in time in a triad is composed of a primary dyad plus one, and the relations that make up a triad are: AB, BC, and AC. Thus, the triad "is the only group with an equal number of members and relationships" (p. 2). Involving a kind of social geometry, "the appearance of particular coalitions can be predicted with considerable accuracy if the relative power of the three members be known" (p. 2). Given the predominant social science perspective at this time, the potential for predictability was very attractive.

In any given triad, it may be difficult to predict which two members will form a coalition against the third, considering the many nuances of a particular situation. However, if the relative power of each participant is identified, several authors including Caplow have elaborated the possibility of up to eight basic types of triads (Caplow, 1956, 1959; Gamson, 1961; Vinacke & Arkoff, 1957). These types are:

$A=B=C$	$A>B \text{ \& } B=C \text{ \& } A<(B+C)$
$A<B \text{ \& } B=C$	$A>(B+C) \text{ \& } B=C$
$A>B>C \text{ \& } A<(B+C)$	$A>B>C \text{ \& } A>(B+C)$
$A>B>C \text{ \& } A=(B+C)$	$A=(B+C) \text{ \& } B=C$

Although characteristics of the situation may still come into play in real life triads, inequities in the distribution of power can help predict coalition formation between participants who could be labeled from “most influential” to “least influential.” Thus several of the formulations above indicate individual positions of greater or lesser influence in the triad. In organizational studies the expected power distribution could be expressed in terms of one’s status or position in the organization. For example, consider a triad consisting of a company president and two vice presidents. The president has power over the two vice presidents, both of whom have equal power but when combined could match the president’s power, expressed as  $A=(B+C) \text{ \& } B=C$ . The most likely coalition in this triad would be the two vice presidents against the president, since any other combination would not advantage the participants in terms of power. Moreover, this balancing of power that occurs in various triadic combinations illustrates the social activity and alignments that are the building blocks of any society (Caplow, 1968; also see Freilich, 1964; Strodtbeck, 1954).

Early triadic research was off to a promising start with a number of pleas for the importance of this line of inquiry, such as the one offered by Mills in 1954:

Continued research on a structural pattern like a ‘coalition’ will increase our understanding of the dynamics of a triad, and should also amount to a forward step in our thinking about social science theory. In a small group there exists a large share of the complex interplay between personality, group structure, and sub-culture that is problematical in current theory formation. The contribution small group research makes depends upon our ability to bring these complexities under control. When the structural forces in a three person group are understood, the question of interplay between them and a set of personalities may be investigated in a systematic manner. (p. 657)

Whereas Simmel is by and large credited with initiating triadic research, Mills and Caplow redirected the discussion and hoped further research would lead to a more line of complete structural definition and understanding of the three-person context.

Except for Freilich’s application of triadic concepts into the treatment of kinship and other complex social systems (1964), the 1960’s and 70’s focused so tightly on coalition studies that they added little theory regarding the development of the triad. Coalition theorists such as Caplow and Mills were referenced in a myriad of journals and texts relating triads to sociological and psychological situations. The basic understanding of triadic interaction

continued, however, to build upon the foundation of coalition and alliance. Other authors began rewriting Caplow's initial theory of coalition and projected several directions for application. While no significant new discoveries emerged, the translation of this thought into economics expanded their applications into the negotiation situation. In 1961 Gamson published an essay entitled *A Theory of Coalition Formation* showing that game theory is ineffective in examining true coalitions; he based his position on Caplow and others contributing to coalition theory at the time. Chertkoff published *A Revision of Caplow's Theory* in 1967, and his reformulation of Caplow added the variable of relational significance among the parties involved. Walker further reconsidered Caplow's theories in 1973, attempting to predict new behaviors in triads. In 1974, Morrison published a reformulation of Caplow's theories in the *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, which proved to be a criticism of pieces of Caplow's ideas while retaining his basic premises. These later revisions of Caplow's work provide increased potential for the study of communication in the relationships.

After Caplow and his followers, triadic theories became scattered across disciplines. Studies emerged throughout the social sciences, particularly in the mid 1970's after Caplow's *Two Against One* (1968). For approximately twenty years numerous micro studies focused on specific behavioral patterns. For example, in 1972 Wahba published in the *Journal of Social Psychology* a paper entitled "Coalition formation under conditions of uncertainty," in which he tried to test the predictability of one of Caplow's theories in risk-taking situations (1972a). In the early 1970s Laing and Morrison (1973) and Friend, Laing, and Morrison (1974) utilized Caplow's theories in game situations to test the validity of current predictive triadic models. Another 1975 study tested the idea that the two weaker members of a coalition were more likely to form a coalition against the stronger member in what is called a "revolutionary coalition" (Messe, Vallacher, & Phillips). Many other studies examined variations on these specific strains of thought: Consider Bonacich, 1979; Burhans, 1973; Chavez & Kimbrough, 2004; Chertkoff, 1966; Kahan & Rapoport, 1984; Kelly & Arrowood, 1960; Komorita, 1979; Miller, 1980; Morrison, 1974; Nichols, 1977; Riedl & Vyrastekova, 2003; Simpson & Punwani, 1975; Van Beest, Van Dijk, De Dreu, & Wilke, 2005; Vinacke & Arkoff, 1957; Wahba, 1972b. With few exceptions (Freilich, 1964; Hall, 1989; Strodtbeck, 1954), the broader theoretical concerns of Georg Simmel were compromised in specific studies that were designed to apply triadic ideas in various situations.

After 1980 coalition ideas were more likely to be used as a means for studying other behaviors. These studies included research in group decision making, family studies, geriatrics, and conflict resolution. Research on triadic family units has been an especially active area. Many have investigated the concept of triadic relationships in family and couples therapy (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Bryant, 2006; Hardesty & Katovich, 1986; Lamb, 1981; Myers, 1997). Other studies specifically investigated how the introduction of a child affected a couple (Deal, Hagan, Bass, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1999; Dumas, 1990; Fivaz & Corboz, 1999). Several studies over the past two decades have investigated problem solving behaviors in many different situations (Dalton, 2005; Fivaz, Frascarolo, & Corboz, 1996; Karns, 1989; Maury, Fivaz, de Roten, Bydlowski, & Stern, 1996; Molseed, 1990). Some studies even specifically targeted children to investigate friendship behaviors in groups of three (Lansford & Parker, 1999). Perhaps one of the most promising sets of therapeutic studies considers the doctor-patient interaction as influenced by various third parties (Baker,

1996; Ishikawa, Roten, Yamazaki, & Takayama, 2005; Tates & Meeuwesen, 2000, 2001; Tates, Meeuwesen, Bensing, & Elbers, 2002;).

Toward the end of the 1990s another trend in triadic studies emerged. In 1973 Guerin, Jr., and Fogarty, two psychiatrists from a medical perspective, founded the Center for Family Learning in Rye Brook, New York. Over the next twenty five years they developed an approach that used relationship triangles as a primary vehicle for treating mental health problems of their patients. With the assistance of two social scientists, Fay and Kautto, who trained at the Center, they published in 1999 a book that explained this triadic orientation (Guerin, Jr., Fogarty, Fay, & Kautto). *Working with Relationship Triangles: The One Two Three of Psychotherapy* provides a thorough discussion of their conceptual framework, its justification, and its implementation in therapeutic situations.

The references cited throughout their book indicate little connection with the extensive literature in the social sciences, especially no references to Simmel, Caplow, or Mills, and with very few references to the psychological and sociological studies of counseling efforts. While this may reflect an inherent bias against the soft sciences in favor of a harder science approach, we suspect that their practice, which has extended over thirty years, was in some ways influenced by triadic studies outside of their medical domain. While we can only speculate about the relation of this work to the other literature, we have found very interesting their integration of triadic ideas into this approach and how they have essentially rediscovered some of Simmel's original ideas.

While these four authors acknowledge the relevance of individual and dyadic variables in psychiatric treatment, they pinpoint the most important problems among their patients within the triangle of their relations. While the mental health problem may have its origin in the individual or in dyadic relationships, the triangles provide evidence of the problems and give therapists a better handle for grasping and controlling them. In the presentation of their approach they emphasize relationships between the patient and other members of the triangle. As they illustrate the relational difficulties, they surface multiple communication concerns. Some are treated more explicitly than others as communication phenomena, but however treated they certainly reinforce the idea that communication is a *sine qua non* of the social order and a concomitant of all interpersonal relations.

Reexamination of their approach from a communication perspective could provide a promising point of view for triadic communication theory. Fleshing out this position with insights from nearly a century of social science research in this area and testing the results in different cultural contexts could result in a very useful paradigm. We believe that these psychiatrists may have "rediscovered the wheel," but in doing so they have created a valuable renewal of the seminal position of Georg Simmel. For example, they insist that therapists not think of relations within the triangles as fixed lines—much in the vein of game theorists—but rather consider the connections as rubber bands with flexibility and elasticity that lead to variable relations among triadic members. This metaphorical twist reinforces the relevance of flexible communication tactics and strategies reflective of realistic adaptations in relational development.

Much of the triad literature has communication implications. Game theorists specifically investigate group decision-making patterns in triads, focusing more on decision-making behavior than the uniqueness of communication patterns in a group of three. Several of these studies attempted to formulate micro theories predicting coalition formation (Friend, Laing, &

Morrison, 1974; Laing & Morrison, 1973; Miller, 1980; Nichols, 1977) and dealing indirectly with communication tactics. Other studies have examined coalition formation involving elderly patients in various triads (Baker, 1996; Bethea, 1998; Greene, Majerovitz, Adelman, & Rizzo, 1994; Ishikawa, Roter, Yamazaki, & Takayama, 2005; Sparks & Hill, 2005). In the nineties several other studies looked at third-party influence in resolving conflict. Specifically these studies investigated the mediating influence of a third party on a dyad (Allert, 1997; Floyd & Morr, 2003; McGillicuddy, Welton, & Pruitt, 1987). In the early twenty-first century we have seen little advancement of the theoretical implications of these widespread works that have instead applied ideas about triadic communication.

Despite the extensive implications for communication study, specific triadic communication studies are scarce. Perhaps the first study to examine the communication aspects of coalition formation in triads appeared in 1975 (Buchli & Pearce). Heavily influenced by Caplow and Gamson, Buchli and Pearce created an iterated matrix game, paralleling the prisoners' dilemma game, to study how communication impacts the formation and termination of coalitions. In the final paragraph of their article, Buchli and Pearce identify several communication questions that might guide future studies:

. . . subsequent studies of communication and coalition should supplement observations of message-making behaviors with procedures designed to determine what meanings various persons have. For example, each player's understanding of the significance of being excluded from or included in a coalition should be determined. Is exclusion seen as a personal rejection or as a necessary and justifiable strategy within the context of the game? Do persons communicate differently depending on their interpretation of significance of coalescing? What is the implication of having a coalition partner defect? What communicative behaviors occur when a person receives what he interprets as a fraudulent offer of a coalition strategy? What meanings do people attach to another's refusal to accept their call? By combining an exploration of people's meanings with an observation of their behaviors, a better understanding of communication as it relates to coalition may be achieved. (1975, p. 220)

With greater emphasis on the communication strategies and tactics, these questions could be readily extended beyond coalition formation to address other aspects of triadic interaction.

Even though studies of triadic communication are scarce, we located two very suggestive prospects. Beyond the early experiment by Buchli and Pearce, Wilmot is one of the few in the speech communication field to recognize the impact sociologists such as Simmel, Caplow, and Mills could have on our field, demonstrating how sociological triadic theories relate to communication. In his book *Dyadic Communication* (1987), Wilmot restated Thibaut and Kelly (1959, p. 205) with his definition of a triad as a "social system composed of three people transacting face to face" (p. 22). Once a third party enters a dyad, he added, the actual communication behaviors between the sender and receiver change to accommodate the third party. He recognized that an individual person cannot exist without ever interacting with another person. The same concept applies to dyads; they cannot exist without a third party interaction and influence. In regards to relationships, Wilmot notes that ". . . our friendships with others are affected by their other relationships. . . . Since, as [Parks and others] argued,

‘relationships do not spring from a social void,’ we would expect the overall constellation of relationships to affect the romantic dyad” (1987, p. 34). In this fashion, triads are central to the communication process, namely because they will always exist. Anytime there is a dyad, each party brings to it his or her own network of associations. Consistent with the triangular approach of the Center for Family Learning (Guerin, Fogarty, Fay, & Kautto, 1999), dyadic relationships cannot exist apart from these extended networks. When two people begin dating, for example, they are still connected to their family and other friends. These other people will inevitably create a triad by interacting with the dyad. According to Wilmot’s position, it is impossible for any interpersonal relationship to exist apart from external influences. We might add to his list of external influences, the implicit presence of the “other.” This assures the existence of triadic interactions, necessitating further study of these unique patterns as they specifically relate to communication theory.

In 1996 Woodward offered another suggestive alternative about triads for communication scholarship. One of the fascinating aspects of this study is its neglect of the more traditional social science literature in this area. He returns to the original concepts of Simmel and traces their evolution in relation to work in semiotics, symbolic interaction and more philosophical conceptions of how the situation, the person and their material world interact. The implications of this line of thought are rich, but are at this time primarily thought provoking and speculative. The integration of this cultural studies perspective could enrich our understanding of the participatory and transactional nature of the relationship between members of the triad. One especially attractive feature of Woodward’s position is the implicitly invited combination of a distinctively humanistic philosophical perspective with the more traditional social scientific orientation.

In the field of communication itself the term “small group” was not always a catch phrase. In fact, the term small group “appeared in the *Psychological Abstracts* for the first time in 1950, under the indexed work of Bales and Deutsch. . . . A sound analysis of group process is gradually emerging from the mass of research” (Bormann, 1990, p. 17). The same trend that applied to small group research in the sixties applies to the development of triadic communication today. Communication adopted the small group context into its field; so too must it adopt the somewhat neglected but extremely significant context of triadic communication. Perhaps it best fits within the area of small group studies, but the distinctiveness of the triad makes it extremely important to differentiate its uniqueness. Unfortunately, the evolution of small group communication research reflects little concern for triads, as the magical number of members for traditional small group study is five to seven.

Following in step with other contexts, studies in triadic communication should be explored to examine the specific nature of communication patterns among three people in a variety of situations, similar to the topics of interpersonal studies. For example, chapters in interpersonal texts examine the relationship between family members, professionals, and couples. They categorize the studies of interpersonal communication in such a way that overarching patterns and themes emerge and well-supported general theories are extrapolated. Areas of competency, methods to improve communication habits between two people, and other variables are discussed specifically in relation to interpersonal relationships. Such should be the case with triads. As Guerin, Fogarty, Fay, and Kautto (1999) observe, dyads are unstable and the triangular relations often provide insight to the reasons for this instability. More research is necessary to examine these triadic relations in all sorts of situations to help

us understand better the interpersonal relationships, on the one hand, and their transitional assistance with understanding small group behavior, on the other hand. General trends regarding communication patterns will likely be discovered once a plethora of micro studies, all done with a common central focus, are gathered together to develop general theories regarding triadic patterns so that it can emerge as its own context in communication study. To achieve this goal will require us to refine our focus and ask different questions about the nature and functioning of triads.

The central idea and most significant finding in the early and subsequent research on the triad is that of the *alliance* and how the flexible adaptation of alliances impacts the outcomes of the interpersonal relations. One fruitful avenue of communication research is to explore the influence that an alliance with a third person has on an important dyadic relationship, such as with a close friend or romantic partner. For example, who is the “other” person who will most likely influence the romantic dyad—another close friend or a parent? Can personal circumstance or demographic information such as stage in life, family type or parental marital status be linked with who would be included in an influential triad? If we know that a third person will influence a romantic relationship, first it is important to identify who to include in the triad. When we combine these face-to-face patterns with internet complications, we open yet another vast area of communication possibilities (Zhou & Zhang, 2006).

When a potentially influential triad is identified, we can then explore the communicative nature of the triad, including the strength of the relationship with “the other” and potential for various alliances. Our professional application of balance theory triangles in persuasion study may suggest another prospect for triadic communication study (White, 1977). In a pilot study that we are projecting here, we examine college-age close friendships and romantic relationships, primarily because we have the greatest access to these subjects. Based on our review of the literature, we argue that triadic communication can serve an explanatory function in those relationships. By identifying personal characteristics such as family background we have the potential to predict who will complete an influential triad and to anticipate alliances that will likely play an integral role in the relationship development. The initial survey instrument for this study is included here as an Appendix. While our work may emphasize gender, generational, religious, and ethnic variations within our national culture, we encourage the expansion of this work to many other cultural situations. Collectively, we might develop a taxonomy of communication tactics and strategies for different cultural and sub-cultural relations.

Particularly when considering our premise that personal circumstance may predict likely triads in friendships and romantic relationships, this line of research has significant potential in the intercultural context. For example, in cultures where families help guide mate selection, influential triads and alliances may be even more apparent. We also can add to our understanding of the decision dynamics in mixed-culture relationships and guide the expectations of international students who may wonder about the outside influences on their relationships. Another possibility is reflected in a study by Field (1998) where third-party intervention in language socialization suggests some cultural variability worth pursuing. Code switching to accommodate linguistic deficiencies reveals triadic adjustments daily all over the world. Intergenerational issues emerge in Tomlin’s treatment of grandparents’ influence on grandchildren (1998). Cultural variations may ultimately help us clarify some of the factors



that influence the formation of alliances and how they are formed, vary, and impact on subsequent interactions.

This paper is truly a thought piece in process. What follows represents an early stage of our work. Soon, we hope to frame research projects to investigate romantic and friendship communication patterns as impacted by third parties. As we attempted to create an approach for this research, we have increasingly realized why more has not been done along the lines we are recommending. Trying to create research designs is problematic. We are convinced that the application of these designs in varied cultures will flag the peculiarities of this context and expand our thinking beyond current understanding. What we have come to know is the critical aspect of communication strategies and tactics in defining the triadic relation and aiding the development of a theoretical structure. As many social psychologists discovered in small group research over several decades, communication is a defining variable, or more likely a set of variables, indispensable in theorizing about small group behavior. We agree with their discovery and urge our colleagues throughout IAICS to pursue the line of triadic research in varied cultures to piece together the framework that may lead to even more insightful applications of third-party features for the improvement of the human condition.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies, Harbin, China (PRC), June 21, 2007. The original project began as an effort to establish faculty-student research teams, and the authors wish to express their appreciation for contributions of Trinity University students Robert Dulaney, Alicia Mein, and Monica Odel.

<sup>2</sup> Both authors are in the Speech Communication Program of the Department of Speech and Drama, Trinity University. Hill (Ph.D., University of Illinois, 1968) is Professor and Chair, and McGrath (Ph.D., University of Kansas, 1991) is an Associate Professor.

#### References

- Allert, T. (1997). Two to three: Sociological comments on the love relationship: II. *System Familie: Forschung und Therapie*, 10, 31-43.
- Baker, P. S. (1996). Discourse analysis of elderly medical encounters. (Doctoral dissertation. University of Alabama, Birmingham, 1996). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57, 3685.
- Baxter, L. A., Braithwaite, D. O., & Bryant, L. E. (2006). Types of communication triads perceived by young-adult stepchildren in established stepfamilies. *Communication Studies*, 57, 381-400.
- Bethea, M. E. S. (1998). The communicative impact of an older adult parent on the adult child/spouse long-term marital relationship. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.
- Bonacich, P. (1979). A single measure for point and interval predictions of coalition theories. *Behavioral Science*, 24, 85-93.
- Bormann, E. G. (1990). *Small group communication: Theory & practice* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Edina, MN: Burgess.

- Buchli, R. D., & Pearce, B. (1975). Coalition and Communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*, 213-221.
- Burhans, D.T., Jr. (1973). Coalition game research: A reexamination. *The American Journal of Sociology, 79*, 389-408.
- Caplow, T. (1956). A theory of coalitions in the triad. *American Sociological Review, 21*, 489-493.
- Caplow, T. (1959). Further development of a theory of coalitions in the triad. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 488-493.
- Caplow, T. (1968). *Two against one: Coalitions in triads*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Chavez, A. K., & Kimbrough, S. O. (2004). A model of human behavior in coalition formation games. *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Cognitive Modeling* (pp. 70-75). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.
- Chertkoff, J. M. (1966). The effect of probability of future success on coalition formation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 2*, 265-277.
- Chertkoff, J. M. (1967). A revision of Caplow's coalition theory. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 3*, 172-177.
- Dalton, J. (2005). Client-caregiver-nurse coalition formation in decision-making situations during home visits. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 52*, 291-299.
- Deal, J. E., Hagan, M. S., Bass, B., Hetherington, E. M., & Clingempeel, G. (1999). Marital interaction in dyadic and triadic contexts: Continuities and discontinuities. *Family Process, 38*, 105-115.
- Dumas, M. A. S. (1990). A phenomenological investigation of the meaning of "Being Jealous" as experienced in fathers following the birth of their first child. (Doctoral dissertation. Adelphi University, 1990). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 51*, 2816.
- Field, M. C. (1998). Maintenance of indigenous ways of speaking despite language shift: Language socialization in a Navajo preschool. (Doctoral dissertation. University of California, Santa Barbara, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 59*, 2472.
- Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., Frascarolo, F., & Corboz-Warnery, A. (1996). Assessing the triadic alliance between fathers, mothers, and infants at play. In J. P. McHale & P. A. Cowan (Eds.), *Understanding how family-level dynamics affect children's development: Studies in two-parent families* (pp. 27-44). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., & Corboz-Warnery, A. (1999). *The primary triangle: A developmental systems view of mothers, fathers, and infants*. New York, NY: Basicbooks.
- Floyd, K., & Morr, M. C. (2003). Human affection exchange: VII. Affectionate communication in the sibling/spouse/sibling-in-law triad. *Communication Quarterly, 51*, 247-262.
- Freilich, M. (1964). The natural triad in kinship and complex systems. *American Sociological Review, 29*, 529-540.
- Friend, K. E., Laing, J. D., & Morrison, R. J. (1974). Bargaining processes and coalition outcomes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 1*, 222-224.

- Gamson, W. A. (1961). A theory of coalition formation. *American Sociological Review*, 26, 373-382.
- Greene, M. G., Majerovitz, R. D., Adelman, R. D., & Rizzo, C. (1994). The effects of the presence of a third person on the physician-older patient medical interview. *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*, 42, 413-419.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1984). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication*. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.
- Guerin, P. J., Jr., Fogarty, T. F., Fay, L. F., & Kautto, J. G. (1999). *Working with relationship triangles: The one two three of psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Hall, C. M. (1989). Triadic analysis: A conceptual tool for clinical sociologists. *Clinical Sociology Review*, 7, 97-110.
- Hardesty, M. J., & Katovich, M. A. (1986). Two triadic interaction contexts of socialization. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction: The Iowa School*, 2(Supp. b), 269-294.
- Hill, L. B., & Dixon, L. D. (2006). The intercultural communication context: Preparation for international public relations. In M. G. Parkinson & D. Ekachai (Eds.), *International and intercultural public relations: A campaign case approach* (pp. 66-71). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ishikawa, H., Roter, D. L., Yamazaki, Y., & Takayama, T. (2005). Physician-elderly patient-companion communication and roles of companions in Japanese geriatric encounters. *Social Science Medicine*, 60, 2307-2320.
- Kahan, J. P., & Rapoport, A. (1984). *Theories of coalition formation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Karns, J. A. T. (1989). Mother-twin interaction in early infancy. (Doctoral dissertation. Purdue University, 1989). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 50, 5346.
- Kelly, H. H., & Arrowood, A. J. (1960). Coalitions in the triad: Critique and experiment. *Sociometry*, 23, 231-244.
- Komorita, S. S. (1979). An equal excess model of coalition formation. *Behavioral Science*, 24, 369-381.
- Laing, J. D., & Morrison, R. J. (1973). Coalitions and payoffs in three-person sequential games: Initial tests of two formal models. *The Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, 3, 3-25.
- Lamb, T. A. (1981). Nonverbal and paraverbal control in dyads and triads: Sex or power differences. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44, 49-53.
- Lansford, J. E., & Parker, J. G. (1999). Children's interactions in triads: Behavioral profiles and effects of gender and patterns of friendships among members. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 80-93.
- Maury, M., Fivaz-Depeursinge, E., de Roten, Y., Bydlowski, M., & Stern, D. (1996). Visible and invisible interactions between a consultant, a mother and her child. *Psychiatrie de l'Enfant*, 39, 207-249.
- McGillicuddy, N., Welton, G., & Pruitt, D. (1987). Third-party intervention: A field experiment comparing three different models. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 104-112.
- Messe, L. A., Vallacher, R. R., & Phillips, J. L. (1975). Equity and the formation of revolutionary and conservative coalitions in triads. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 1141-1146.

- Miller, C. (1980). Effects of payoffs and resources in coalition formation: A test of three theories. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 43, 154-164.
- Mills, T. M. (1953). Power relations in three-person groups. *American Sociological Review*, 18, 351-357.
- Mills, T. M. (1954). Coalition patterns in three-person groups. *American Sociological Review*, 19, 657-667.
- Molseed, M. J. (1990). Structuring processes in same-sex and mixed-sex triads. (Doctoral dissertation. University of Iowa, 1990). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 51, 4296.
- Morrison, R. (1974). Caplow's model: A reformulation. *The Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, 3, 215-230.
- Myers, J. L. (1997). The context of communication development: The role of talk between the father, mother and child. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Denver, 1997). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 58, 4124.
- Nichols, A. L. (1977). Coalitions and learning: Applications to a simple game in the triad. *Behavioral Science*, 22, 391-402.
- Riedl, A., & Vyrastekova. (2003). Responder behavior in three-person ultimatum game experiments. (Working paper, 2003). Center for Research in Experimental Economics and Political Decision Making, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Schuetz, A. (1944). The stranger. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49, 499-507.
- Simmel, G. (1902). The number of members as determining the sociological form of the group. *American Journal of Sociology*, 8, 1-46.
- Simmel, G. (1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (K. H. Wolff, Trans. & Ed.). New York, NY: Free Press. (Original work published 1908)
- Simpson, D. B., & Punwani, P. A. (1975). The effect of risk and pressure on coalition behavior in a triadic situation. *Behavioral Science*, 20, 174-178.
- Sparks, L., & Hill, L. B. (2005). Personal relationships across the lifespan: A suggestive perspective from communication theory. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 14, 158-171.
- Strodtbeck, F. L. (1954). Family as a three-person group. *American Sociological Review*, 19, 23-29.
- Tates, K., & Meeuwesen, L. (2000). 'Let mum have her say': Turntaking in doctor-parent-child communication. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 40, 151-162.
- Tates, K., & Meeuwesen, L. (2001). Doctor-parent-child communication. A (re) view of the literature. *Social Science and Medicine*, 52, 839-851.
- Tates, K., Meeuwesen, L., Bensing, J., & Elbers, E. (2002). Joking or decision-making? Affective and instrumental behaviour in doctor-parent-child communication. *Psychology and Health*, 17, 281-295.
- Thibaut, J., & Kelley, H. (1959). *The Social Psychology of Groups*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Tomlin, A. M. (1998). *Grandparents influence on grandchildren*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Trenholm, S., & Jensen, A. (2000). *Interpersonal Communication* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Van Beest, I., Van Dijk, E., De Dreu, C. K. W., & Wilke, H. A. M. (2005). Do-no-harm in coalition formation: Why losses inhibit exclusion and promote fairness cognitions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 41, 609-617.

- Vinacke, W. E., & Arkoff, A. (1957). Experimental study of coalitions in the triad. *American Sociological Review*, 22, 406-415.
- Wahba, M. A. (1972a). Coalition formation under conditions of uncertainty. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 88, 43-54.
- Wahba, M. A. (1972b). An expectancy model of coalition formations. *Psychonomic Reports*, 30, 671-677.
- Walker, M. B. (1973). Caplow's theory of coalitions in the triad reconsidered. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, 409-412.
- White, C. J. M. (1977). A limitation of balance theory: The effects of identification with a member of the triad. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 7, 111-116.
- Wilmot, W. W. (1987). *Dyadic communication* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Random House.
- Wood, M. M. (1934). *The stranger: A study in social relationships*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Woodward, W. (1996). Triadic communication as transactional participation. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13, 155-174.
- Zhou, L., & Zhang, D. (2006). A comparison of deception behavior and triadic group decision making in synchronous computer-mediated communication. *Small Group Research*, 37, 140-164.

## APPENDIX

### Research Design Suggestions for Triadic Communication Study.

The following survey consists of three parts: The first part requests some demographic information and some other personal information that may correlate with the primary concerns in the other two parts of the survey. Part II addresses the influence of third persons on close friend relationships, and, in a parallel fashion, Part III considers such third-person influence on romantic relationships. None of the questions have a "right" or "wrong" answer. We are simply trying to describe the variety of ways a third person can influence the communication behavior of a primary dyad or interpersonal relationship. The first stage of the pilot study will utilize this survey in face-to-face interviews so that researchers can help explain some of the terminology and the nature of third-person influence.

### PART I: Prerequisite Information

#### Demographics

Gender:	Female _____	Male _____
Age:	_____	Occupation: _____
Year in School:	First Year ____ Sophomore ____	Junior ____ Senior ____
Marital Status:	Single ____ Married ____ Other (specify) _____	
Ethnicity:	(Specify your self identification) _____	
Religious Affiliation:	(Specify your self identification) _____	

## Personal Relationships

## Perceived Family Type:

Closed 1                      2                      Random 3                      4                      Open 5

## Parental Marital Status:

Two Parent \_\_\_\_\_ Separated \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_

Perceived Stability: (Circle your response on the following continuum.)

Stable 1                      2                      Mixed 3                      4                      Unstable 5

Multiple Marriages: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## Close Friend Relationships:

Estimated Total Number of Close Friends \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Close Friends on Campus \_\_\_\_\_

## Romantic Relationships:

Number of Prior Romantic Relationships \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

## Significant Influences on Relationships: (Mark each with yes or no.)

Parents \_\_\_\_\_ Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_

Another Close Friend \_\_\_\_\_ Romantic Partner \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please identify by category): \_\_\_\_\_

**PART II:** Third-Person Influence on Close Friend Relationships

Scenario: Think of a person who is not related to you and whom you would consider to be one of your closest friends. Focus your attention on this relationship as you respond to the following questions.

1. My close friend is: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

2. Rank the influence of the following persons on the relationship with your friend:

Another Close Friend \_\_\_\_\_

A Parent \_\_\_\_\_

A Romantic Partner \_\_\_\_\_

A Sibling \_\_\_\_\_

3. Nature of the third-person influence on the relationship with your friend:

Communication Satisfaction

Communicative Competent Behavior

Quality of Dyadic Relationship Before Third-Person Involvement

## Adjustments of Dyadic Relationship During Third-Person Involvement

## Quality of Dyadic Relationship After Third-Person Involvement

4. How is the third-person influence manifest in your communication behavior during third-person involvement?

5. How does the third-person involvement impact on coalitions in decision making about the following areas?

Selection of a movie

Selection of a restaurant

Joining your friend for Spring Break

6. How does the communication behavior with your close friend alter after involvement with the third person?

**PART III: Third-Person Influence on a Romantic Relationship**

Exclusion: If you have never been involved in a romantic relationship, do not continue. Please turn in this survey at this time. If you are currently in a romantic relationship or have been involved in such a relationship in the recent past, please continue.

1. My romantic partner is: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

2. Rank the influence of the following persons on your romantic relationship:

A Close Friend \_\_\_\_\_

A Parent \_\_\_\_\_

A Sibling \_\_\_\_\_

3. Nature of the third-person influence on the relationship with your romantic partner:

Communication Satisfaction

Communicative Competent Behavior

Quality of Dyadic Relationship Before Third-Person Involvement

Adjustments of Dyadic Relationship During Third-Person Involvement

### Quality of Dyadic Relationship After Third-Person Involvement

4. How is the third-person influence manifest in your communication behavior during third-person involvement?
5. How does the third-person involvement impact on coalitions in decision making about the following areas?
  - Selection of a movie
  - Selection of a restaurant
  - Joining romantic partner for Spring Break
  - Marriage
6. How does the communication behavior with your romantic partner alter after involvement with the third person?