

## Family Triangulation Experiences of Turkish Young Women

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore Turkish young women' family triangulation experiences. The phenomenological research design of the qualitative tradition was utilized. The sample of the study comprised 10 Turkish young women who were selected through convenience sampling. During the data collection, semi-structured interviews were preferred. Data analysis were also conducted via content analysis. Participants reported *insufficient problem/conflict solving ability* of their parents. Holding a parental role, defending the one parent as participants perceive he/she is weak, and feeling caught in the middle were the factors in relation to *mediating pattern*. The theme refers to the triangulation pattern that offspring is closer to either of parents than they are to each other. A number of participants described the children and fathers in their own families as *scapegoats* means a pulled out or outsider position in a triangular relationship. *Coalitions* were one of the most frequently reported theme and mainly indicated taking sides or alliances between three (offspring and parents). Triangulated children expressed anger, emotionally distant and disappointment toward their parents as they play a mediating role during the conflicts. Only one participant was able to act without dragging into conflicts and maintained a *balanced position* of triangulation. Moreover, all findings of the current study were briefly discussed in the context of the *value of children* theme as it is the fact that material/economic expectations of parents sharply decrease, and emotional expectations increase from children in Turkish culture.

**Keywords:** family triangulation, young women, family dynamics, intergenerational relationships

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## Introduction

The concept of triangling basically refers to an involvement process of a third part (i.e. offspring, mother, father, grandparents, friends, therapists, neighbor, fantasized relationship, pets) in the relationship of two others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) and received a notable attention by the early proponents of family system theories. The concept was termed with slightly different contents of definition such as ‘perverse triangle’ in Strategic Therapy (Haley, 1967); ‘rigid triads’ in Structural Therapy (Minuchin, 1974); and ‘interlocking triangles’ in Intergenerational Family Therapy (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Nevertheless, among the family therapy practices, the approach maintained a central influence especially in North America (Brown, 1999), and ‘triangling’ was one central concept to Bowen theory used in clinical work.

The term of ‘triangle’ was preferred by Bowen (1978) to emphasize the emotional process in family system. The simplest definition of a triangle is the “. . . smallest stable emotional unit” in human relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p.134). Even though the term refers to a coalition-typed relationship form of three-persons, Bowen (1978) described several configurations of the process. For instance, in an anxious family system, one configuration depicted the two close members in a triangle are inside and one involves from outside. Because, “the *inside*, or *togetherness* positions are preferred when anxiety is low within the emotional unit of the family, and when anxiety is high the *outside* position is preferred” (Titelman, 2008, p.21). Another configuration is interlocking triangles refers to the shifting of triangles to the expanded multigenerational and multiple nuclear family emotional systems, when the primary triangles were not able to be kept the anxiety within. Primary and secondary triangles are the configurations as parts of larger interlocking triangles; while primary triangles include only parents and offspring, secondary triangles include non-members of primary triangles (i.e. grandparents, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts)(Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

According to Bowen (1978), the most salient function of a triangle is keeping a dyadic relationship stable. During time of nodal events (i.e. marriage, birth, leaving, death, health), expanding the stress or tension to the third-party -generally, least differentiated significant others- decreases the anxiety which are mostly left unsettled. Families that are relatively higher in differentiation, triangles are less common. Children are usually least differentiated within family system and triangulated in a marital conflict to reduce the tension. However, being triangulated reversely may increase children’s anxiety level (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Bell, Bell and Nakata (2001) configured triangles in four categories: The first is the ‘balanced’ form and refers to relatively distant and an equal pattern between three. Such a pattern means individuals in a dyadic relationship take their own responsibility of relationship without inclusion of a third part, and indicate a healthy manner. The second is the ‘mediator’ form, the feeling of being caught between parents is prominent because offspring is closer to either the father or the

mother than they are to each other. The third is the 'cross-generational coalition' form refers to taking sides or alliances between three and feeling emotionally distant against one parent. Contrary to first three forms, in the 'scapegoating', offspring is pulled out. Parents prefer to focus on the specific behaviors, characteristics or aspects of the offspring rather than focusing on the anxiety in their own relationship.

Literature related to family triangulation is mainly quantitative and empirical evidence indicate that concepts such as anxiety, depression and self are the common constructs in association to the triangles. Triangular patterns become more visible and anxiety more intense, chronic or vice versa (Bowen, 1978). Empirical literature revealed inconsistent findings in regard to effects of family triangulation. Beside the studies assume that family triangulation was not related to anxiety (Benson, Larson, Wilson & Demo, 1993) and career decision (Larson & Wilson, 1998); some research provide findings in regard to predictive power of the construct such as depression, anxiety, self-esteem, socioemotional development risk factors, internalizing behaviors, and intergenerational relationships (Buehler, Franck & Cook, 2009; Fosco & Grych, 2010; Franck & Buehler, 2007; Jacobvitz & Bush, 1996).

Family triangulation is a well-understood construct in the Western cultures. It is considered as one of the dysfunctional patterns within the family systems (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) and a threat to individualism or differentiation of self (DoS). The construct of DoS (Bowen, 1978) refers to a concurrence ability or healthy functionality of individuals to maintain personal autonomy/individualism and (intergenerational) intimacy in close relationships. Bowen (1978) proposes that DoS is a universal concept and family systems with members of low level DoS are more prone to produce dysfunctional relationship patterns such as triangulation. Notwithstanding, family triangulation is a newly emerging concept for the most non-western cultures. Cross-cultural studies in investigation of the construct are very limited. In one of the few examples, Chan (2013) found that the construct is applicable to Chinese families since mother-son attachment predicted the father-son conflict and also there was an existence of unspoken conflict between father-mother conflict. Similarly, in a cross-cultural study, Bell, Bell and Nakata (2001) compared Japan and US samples results indicated that triangulated daughters in both cultures had a low level self-differentiation. Even though the construct provides salient theoretical approaches, quantitative findings do not produce consistent results in several contextual domains. On the other hand, how it is manifested in Turkish cultural context is still not recognized. Manifestation of family socialization processes prominently differentiate from western culture as Turkish culture holds both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). Contrary to individualistic perspective, Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) assumed the intergenerational hierarchy is not a handicap for personal authority or individualism in Turkish culture. However, Chung and Gale (2009) assumed that cultural differences (i.e. individualism-collectivism) can be misleading when considering the familial factors in a dualistic

manner rather than a continuum perspective. Thus, no matter which cultural background is considered, DoS characteristics can hold some common characteristics between theory and practice (Chung & Gale, 2009). The motivation underlying the purpose of the study was to understand in line with the Bowen's assertion that DoS -central concept of Bowenian approach- is universal. More specifically, we focused in this study on a remarkable synchrony between Bowenian construct of family triangulation and the ways that triangulation patterns emerge in Turkish cultural context in line with Bowenian approach asserts the universality. Hence, in this current study we examine how the construct manifest and provide an in-depth understanding in Turkey. Expanding the literature in the light of current research may contribute on the cultural considerations of the construct as well. The current study investigated to answer what the family triangulation patterns that Turkish young women' used to experience are.

## Method

### Design of the Research

To deeply define and portray experiences of Turkish young women of family triangulation, phenomenological design as a qualitative research methodology was used. Phenomenological design is used when a phenomenon is recognized but needs to be examined in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The phenomenon in the current study was family triangulation. Research process was discussed with the main concepts of phenomenological design. These main concepts are lived experiences, intentionality, epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and co-researchers (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015).

**Lived experience.** Lived experiences in phenomenological research are significant for the beginning and termination of the research (Creswell, 2007). Researcher(s) and participants should have experience with the phenomenon. Both researches had some family triangulation issues in their lives. Also, one of the researcher's interests are working as a therapist with family triangulation issues and research with the same topic. Thus, both researchers had several experiences about the family triangulation.

**Intentionality.** In the phenomenological method, intentionality emphasizes the conscious actions in deciding the research topic. Moreover, the topic of the current study is a conscious choice of the research refers to the fundamental characteristics of the phenomenology. Intentionality has two dimensions, *Noema* and *Noesis*. While *Noema* is an experience that reflects perceptions, emotions, thoughts, memories, and judgments about the topic; *Noesis* is the act of experience such as, feeling, thinking, remembering or judging (Çilesiz, 2011). For this reason, the concepts of *Noema* and *Noesis* will be examined in line with the family triangulation phenomenon.

**Epoché.** Epoché mean is to stay away from presupposition or judgments about the phenomena. In this process, the interview questions were asked to the participants to develop a new perspective by avoiding the possible presupposition and judgements of the researchers. Since the researchers wanted to keep their presupposition or judgments out of the research, the analysis process was started by excluding the information and assumptions already asserted by the researchers.

**Phenomenological reduction.** In order to define the phenomenon, the researchers must remove irrelevant components that are not directly about phenomenon. During phenomenological reduction, overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are removed by the researchers. In this research, it refers to the transcribing process of the voice recordings into text. At this point, in order to define the case, expressions that are not related to the subject, repetitive or difficult sentences are removed and unnecessary data was cleaned.

**Imaginative variation.** It is the process of approaching the phenomenon from different perspectives by using the power of creativity. Imaginative variation depends on researchers' imagination. Asking questions about phenomena and finding possible meaning about the phenomenon is the main purpose of this process. At this stage of the current study, analysis conducted and themes were emerged. This process had continued until the meaning of the family triangulation was achieved in young Turkish women.

**Co-researchers.** Participants are not actively a part of analysis in phenomenological research. Since the perceptions and experiences of the participants lead to the formation of the study, the researchers call them co-researchers and share the information or themes achieved with the participants. Therefore, the categories and themes obtained in the study were shared with a number of volunteer participants in the study.

### **Participants**

To define and portray Turkish participants' experiences of family triangulation, researchers interviewed with 10 young women. The reason for choosing female participants is that gender is an important variable in the literature and daughters are more triangulated compared with boys (Eme & Danielak, 1995; Etkin, Koss & Davies, 2014; Vuchinich, Emery & Cassidy, 1988). Although having son over daughter in Turkish families used to be traditionally preferable (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007), this preference have changed toward having daughter over son in order to psychological value of children (i.e. companionship, sense of accomplishment) in urban middle class Turkish families (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). Therefore, we assumed that focusing on daughters' experiences is more valuable and reflective since "... daughters had greater expressive and instrumental role than sons." (Ataca, 2009, p.122) in Turkish families. Daughters were considered as companions for mothers either they are young or older (Ataca, Kağıtçıbaşı & Diri, 2005). Therefore, age or marital status were not included as participation criterions in the current study, we asked participants to consider past and present family

triangulation experiences. Convenience sampling model was used to choose participants. All participants had middle socioeconomic status, lived in Ankara and voluntarily participated in the research. Participants' ages ranged from 25-30 and all of them have at least a bachelor's degree or existing graduate students. 5 participants were married, and 5 were single.

### **Instruments**

As a data collection tool, interview questions were prepared by the researchers based on the literature to define triangulation patterns. Opinions of other experts' opinions from the counseling psychology field were taken about interview questions. Then, a pilot interview was conducted and questions were revised. The final version of the data collection tool which had 8 semi-structured questions was determined. Questions on the interview form were about Turkish young women's attitudes and feelings toward tension and conflict between their parents; the potential reasons where the parents complain each other to their children, and the potential reasons where family members sometimes feel emotionally distant to each other etc.

### **Procedures**

After the planning of the study, researchers announced the study through e-mail or acquaintances. Candidate participants were asked verbally whether they would like to participate in the study or not, and written consent was obtained if they agree to participate. Researchers set a time, date and place for the interview with interested and voluntary participants. Participants were given the right, not to answer the question they feel uncomfortable and the right to leave the interview at any time. After receiving informed consent of participants, 20-30 minutes voice-recording interviews were conducted. Researchers had no information on participants' nuclear and extended family structures before the interviews. Participants were expected to be able to define the structure and relationship dynamics within their families. All the information was gathered through interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

The study based on content analysis of transcribed voice-recorded interviews. First, transcription papers were coded by researchers and transcripts were controlled with field notes. All data were examined sentence by sentence, codes were placed in important points, clustered, and themes emerged. In qualitative research, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability should be satisfied through several strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). For trustworthiness, experts in the counseling psychology field were taken about preparing interview questions, a pilot interview was conducted, questions were revised and in-depth semi-structured interview questions were determined, the data interpreted with the participants, sufficient time spent with participants for interview, researchers follow the key elements of epoché to avoid making personal judgments to detailed transcriptions and analysis. Interpretation of categories from researcher to researcher or

assessing categories in different times are another condition of trustworthiness. Thus, different parts of the data set were sent to 3 experts in the field and they were asked to analyze it two different times. The analyses of the researchers and the analyses obtained from the experts were compared and it was concluded that the content analyses made by the researchers were appropriate.

## **Results**

As a result of the data analysis of the semi-structured interview questions directed to the participants, seven themes emerged. These themes are problem/conflict solving ability among parents, mediator role of children during parents' conflict; family members with problems (identified person), coalitions, emotional reactivity, the value of children to parents, and acting without dragging into conflicts

### **Problem/Conflict Solving Ability Among Parents**

The results revealed that most parents have problem solving problems in their marital relationships. Problem/conflict solving problems was perceived to be directly connected to the communication and anger management skills. Moreover, participants considered the parents' attitudes towards each other as being compliant, reactive, discreet, accusive, and emotionally distant. In their opinion, parents were not able to express feelings and prefer to avoid taking responsibility of marital problems, as one of the participants expressed that:

“they don't handle the conflict, they just clash, it's annoying, instead talking, they prefer to initiate conflict and all fighting, shouting, violence, crash and vandalism tag along behind, quite irritating. They may probably avoid the solution of the problem, I mean they may find somehow more difficult even try to solve own problems or the reason would be the side taking if one believes that he/she is right, and who complains would be trying to justify oneself.” (P-2)

### **Mediator Role of Children During Parents' Conflict**

A number of participants, in a similar manner, played a mediator role as parents' approach to the problem was not constructive with poor conflict management skills. The mediating roles were perceived and expressed in different forms. Few felt obliged to be involved in line with parents' expectations in the problems. They maintained a third part role and try to calm the anxiety that arose within the family context. A few others were also played a 'mediator' role but no expectation they felt about parents nevertheless involved in the conflicts conscientiously, as participants said that:

“I feel sad when I see my mother sad and I actually involved in trying both her and myself to unburden of sadness.” (P-5)

“After marriage now it was naturally decreased (expectation) but I intensively used to feel as we live together. I mean there were some problems and we were expected to be solved. Actually we (me and other siblings) were expected to contribute to the parental conflicts so I felt an emotional pressure to get involved in.” (P-2)

The common point was that children’ effort to maintain the balance between parents and to stay closer to parents than they are one to another. Mediator role participants experienced were mainly related to three sub-themes: *holding a parental role, feeling caught in the middle, defending the one parent as they perceive he/she is weak and downtrodden.*

**Holding a parental role.** It was understood that the need to warn parents (e.g. talk and advise to each parent separately about the parents’ problems), maintaining a catalyzer position (e.g. with the involvement of the child parents become more able to manage the conflict), maintaining a sedative or peacemaking position (e.g. children try to calm parents and ease to regulate emotions) were the factors more associated with holding a parental role. A number of participants experience role conflict in the cross generational relationships as parents expect support and emotional fulfillment from children rather than his/her spouse. Participants stated such an expectation and indicate role-reversal between children and parents.

“I think I have a mission to calm things down when my parents have conflicts. I become nervous at first, then, gradually become calmer and talk to dad and mom to calm both down. During the intense conflicts, I left home with my sister many times because I did not want her to witness the conflicts. Later, I usually take on the responsibility calming things down and yes I certainly used to talk both sides.” (P-4)

“Probably, they want to compensate the emotional intimacy with us as they failed to provide each other, I believe that everyone has emotional needs and when they are not able to meet these needs from his/her spouse, they may prefer to be met these needs from children during conflicts. I intensively feel it in my mother especially after I left home.” (P-5)

**Defending the one parent as they perceive he/she is weak and downtrodden.** Participants’ practices during the conflicts emerged in a similar manner. For example, some participants take place in a conflict between mother and father because they justify mother’s vulnerable position and felt obliged to interfere in decreasing tension. They were drawn into the conflict between father and mother:

“my attitude is usually to stand by the one that I find right and listen to him/her. Because one was clearly right and the other was not. So, I was on my mom’s side

because I thought that she was the right side. I think I have a mission to calm things down.” (P-4)

“I remembered, I was on my mother’s side, I even intervened. Here is an example. There was a fight going on in the home. I put my mother to bedroom to prevent possible violence towards my mother, leaned against the door, my father broke the glass, glass fell down on me.” (P-10)

**Feeling caught in the middle.** Feeling caught experiences were found as focusing on emotional part of mediating role, as indicated above. It seems that whether participants were expected to be involved in conflicts or not, they felt obliged to take action against the tension parents hold. Participants were examples that clearly asserted the feeling:

“Sometimes, I have nothing to do, because when one of them is right, I’m confused to defend him/her, for instance, when father is right and mom not, I become suspicious to defend my father, because my mom would be sad or reverse, I felt caught in the middle at such times.” (P-5)

“If you ask me who is right and who is not, I’m not sure indeed, I have a deep feeling of caught in the middle.” (P-9)

“As a result of one of the usual conflicts, my father demoralized and went to our summer cottage. It was the first time he left the house and did not come for a few days. That time my mother was so sad. I called my father and he was so sad too. I felt caught in the middle.” (P-2)

### **Family members with problems**

The results revealed that troubled family members are generally identified by the emphasis on children's problems, as participants stated. Interestingly, children were not only family members to focus on the personal problems. Fathers were reported by three participants as identified person with lack of problem-solving abilities such as crisis management, communication and functionality, as participants said that:

“my older brother, he was the family member that constantly scared us in that period of time. He was the main topic of the family meetings. He was not happy with work, he was planning to quit and wanted to live in a village keeping two cows, and wanted to be in a world of his own. So, he was coming new life plans each and every day: quitting work, starting a patisserie, keeping a cow. He was constantly saying that I’m going to die or suicide, I’m not going to marry, I don’t want to see my father etc. We were afraid that he might hurt himself or get depressed.” (P-1)

“my older brother felt pushed out (due to alcohol problems). My younger brother is domestic, he is so smart, everything was asked to him, even my father would never do anything without his opinion. My younger brother actually is a good man. But the older one probably felt resentful because almost the whole family followed younger’s advices than older brother when a decision was used to be made. Every family has a shrewd one and a madman, he was always regarded as the madman of the family. (P-6)

“we are two sisters, and my father is known as the third child of the family. More or less, each family member experienced how to stand on his/her own feet or mature enough. However, we both still manage my father’s crisis situations.” (P-3)

“I thought my father (his alcohol problems), causes the problems. Because the problems impressed my mom negatively, my older sisters prefer to take mom’s side as they find my father problematic all.” (P-2)

### **Coalitions**

One of the most frequent forms of relationship patterns in participants’ families are coalitions. The coalition patterns emerge in two forms (Bell, Bell & Nakata, 2001). First form can be defined as the mother and children are pulled in and father pulled out in a triangular relationship. Reversely, second form indicates father-children are pulled in and mother pulled out. Results indicated that in the current study participants mainly reported the first form of the coalition. To illustrate, here is an example of both forms within a family:

“I feel closer to my father because I can tell all kind of my problems to him. My mom also listens to me but in a more subjective manner, father is more objective and I tell him even when I have private issues. My sister is emotionally closer to my mom. There is such a division or parceling between parents and children.” (P-9)

Additionally, content analysis demonstrated that participants mainly experienced coalition patterns with side taking through parents’ effort to win over children, get a supporter or confidant, and complaining about the spouse to children, as P7 asserted below. Children keeps positions such as “shoulder to cry on”, “wailing wall” or “emotional supporter to parents”:

“mothers cannot tell something to their spouse. I think, something special (topic) that should be shared with only her spouse (father), but mom can share it to others or her children just because of getting (emotional) support.” (P-7)

### **The value of children to parents**

Based on the family dynamics, cross generational relationship patterns addressed the value of children and emerged in two sub-themes: *expectations from children* and *sex role stereotypes*.

**Expectations from children.** The most distinct expectation about the children is that he/she provides an emotional support with being more intimate, confidant, catalyzer, wailing wall, complaining, and a shoulder to cry on. These overlapping codes were emerged in the mediator role of the children theme as well. However, in accordance with the changing value of children in Turkey (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007), these codes are more widely refers to an emotional support rather than a mediating position that children provide for parents.

“My mom believes that daughters should be confidant to mothers. She always said that, I gave birth to you, so, if I’m not going to tell you about my problem, to whom I do. I raise you for such days.” (P-1)

**Sex role stereotypes.** Moreover, sex role stereotypes indicated that daughters were predominantly regarded as confidants and boys were the figures that mothers dedicated themselves. On the other hand, the pattern of being ‘mother's son and father's daughter’ within family dynamics was pointed out during the interviews, as one of the participants indicated that:

“We usually do this in the family like, I was on my father's side and my brother was on my mother’s side. We are like father's daughter and mother’s son. But it is not the same in the conflicts. In the conflicts we follow a different path, maybe it comes from the subconscious that I usually take my mother's side. My brother is standing at the same distance from both, and positions change.” (P-5)

### **Emotional Reactivity**

Considering the family dynamics, it was seen that several emotional and behavioral responses to the patterns mentioned above were emerged among participants. Anger, despair, emotional pressure, distant, desensitization, ignoring, fear of parental loss, withdrawal, and moving away from home were the responses to the involvement in parental conflicts that frequently observed during the content analysis. In this regard, participants expressed that:

“There are times I feel bad, if I don't fully understand who's right or who's wrong. If I understand, I'm next to the victim and I’m very angry at the other side and it hurts my relationship with that parent. The problem is their own, but sometimes I couldn’t see the truth and feel strange from that parent. For example, there are times I felt strange to my father. Now, I wish I didn't give those reactions but when I was with the victim, I got a little distant to the other side.” (P-4)

“when my mother told me something about my father (some special matters) I always used to say to my mother not to talk behind his back with me because I do not want to get away from him” (P-7)

“I was feeling helpless there because you can't do anything.” (P-10)

However, the most salient and intense emotional response was the *emotional cutoff* among family members. It seemed that emotional contacts were damaged because of unresolved emotional issues among family members. The examples of emotional cut-off were frequently more observed in cross-generational relationships. Here, one participant stated an example between father and son:

“(my father) tells a lot to my brother’s face that ‘don’t complain, your life is not a life to complain.’ My brother also offensive toward my father. ‘I was a soldier just because of you, I didn't actually want to be a soldier, you let your two daughters to go to college but didn't let me because of college expenses’. His accusation and my father's jealousy (I think) opened the gap between them. I think they are experiencing something like emotional distance because they never speak (to each other).” (P-1)

#### **Acting without dragging into conflicts**

Contrary to the above-mentioned mediating role patterns of children in conflicts, results indicated that a number of participants maintained a balanced position. It refers to parents’ ability to manage the disagreements or tension without not including the children as a third part, as one of the participants conveys her experiences:

“I live with my parents and now I understand better that they can respect each other even though they have different perspectives on events, so having disagreements does not mean that they do not love each other, they leave or distribute the family, so I leave them to their own resources without getting involved, taking side, calming down or attempting to overcome the problem, I developed an attitude that I am more acquiescent and aware, even when I have suggestions to the problems it is because of accelerating the resolution process rather than prove who is right and who is not.” (P-3)

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to understand the family triangulation patterns that Turkish young women’ used to experience and describe common characteristics between Bowenian theory and Turkish cultural background. We initially concluded based on the main themes, Bowenian construct and Turkish cultural background have commonalities and findings might provide insightful explanations for family therapists in Turkey. In relation to triangulation, the emerging main themes were: problem/conflict solving ability among parents, mediator role of children, coalitions, family members

with problems, emotional reactivity, acting without dragging into conflicts, and the value of children to parents.

One distinct theme related to relationship patterns in families was the problem/conflict solving ability among parents. Except one interviewee, all women defined their parents as poor problem solvers. Rather than applying functional conflict management skills, they used to be compliant, reactive, discreet, accusive, and emotionally distant against each other. In fact, these problems are common among Turkish family members. In line with communication skills, for instance, Turkish family members found themselves insufficient mostly in anger management and conflict management (Gür & Kurt, 2011). If it is assumed that divorce itself is a salient indicator of conflict management skills between couples, TÜİK (2018) statistics indicated that 10.9% increase in divorce rates compared to 2017 can support insufficient problem solving abilities among Turkish married couples. Moreover, a number of interviewees identified the underlying reason as avoiding to take their own responsibility of marital problems. Such a pattern among a couple relationship serves as a spark of another dysfunctional problem: children who are usually least differentiated within family system become more prone to be triangled. Once the children were dragged into the conflicts, triangulation patterns become more visible in the family system, as interviewees constantly defined. For instance, feeling caught in the middle was one of the salient sub-themes emerged. The feeling caught in the middle was also emphasized in Turkish literature as an emotional reactance to parental conflict (Sağkal & Türnüklü, 2017). However, we recognized some other themes such as holding a parental role in relation to mediator pattern. Children used to warn, talk, advise, calm and provide emotional support to the parents. However, when defending the weak side, it seems participants had difficulty to maintain the equally distant position between parents, because of emotional reactivity. Although participants would fail to keep a balanced position while they defend one's vulnerable position, we considered that the underlying intention is maintaining the parents' relationship stable. These all patterns that were mentioned so far can be best understood in Bowenian concepts of emotional fusion (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), because when interpersonal boundaries between family members are poor and not well-defined, family members become more prone to share the same an emotional response to the circumstances (i.e. crisis, conflicts) within the family system. This is the opposite counterpart of DoS, because family members are not allowed toward emotional autonomy. For instance, in the cases that participants commonly share, they felt obliged to involve in conflicts whether there was a demand from them. They felt obliged to respond the tension between parents, defuse and mediate the relationship. If participants chose not to intervene they would probably felt more emotional pressure and regret. Theoretically, within a differentiated family system, parents would be handling their conflicts constructively, expressing emotional issues clearly, members' demand of DoS were welcomed as Kerr and Bowen (1988) define, "The more differentiated a self, the more a person can be an individual while in emotional contact with the group" (p. 94.). However,

signal of this well differentiated and balanced triangular relationship pattern were only emerged in one participants' response in relation to parents' problem solving abilities in the current study.

The findings further demonstrated that coalitions pattern mostly occur between mothers and children with side taking through mothers' effort to win over children, get a supporter or confidant, and complaining about the spouse to children. Although the studies are very limited, we found consistent findings in Turkish literature indicated that during parental conflicts children are prompt to take sides (Sağkal & Türnüklü, 2017). However, mothers were also more prone to being a side of the conflicts within families. A number of participants criticized the fathers to be insensible and apathetic when conflicts arise between children and mothers. In this pattern, while fathers can be positioned as 'outsider', children keep positions of "shoulder to cry on", "wailing wall" or "emotional supporter to parents". Such an attempt of mothers may have been derived from the family triangulation as a lack of DoS within family system. As children became a part of the triangular relationships, it seems a father-children conflict inevitably may have also produced. This is not a strange form in other cultures as well, Chan (2009) emphasized a similar pattern in Chinese families where the father-son conflict arises from an alienation of son and mother. Of course, this is not only the case for father-son conflict, similarly, a father-daughter conflict would take place: "... An example would be a client who was struggling to understand her negativity towards her father. When questioning included her mother's role in these emotions, the client began to see that her view of her father was influenced by her position in a triangle. As her mother's ally in this triangle, she viewed her father as the inadequate husband who left her mother feeling needy." (Brown, 1999). We clearly found this form in P-1's case that a distinct conflict (i.e. blaming, jealousy) and emotionally distant relationship between father and son has been resulted with mother's self-commitment (i.e. constant strive to make him happy and satisfy needs) to the son. Vuchinich, Emery and Cassidy (1988) also found that mothers and daughters are sides of triangulations more frequently compared with fathers and sons in the US. However, fathers are culturally more prone to be outsider in family relationships since urban Turkish youth hold stronger emotional bond with mothers than fathers (Hortaçsu, Gençöz & Oral, 1995; Sunar, 2002). In line with triangulation patterns in Turkish families, it seems that fathers' 'outsider' position become more obvious with another theme of the study: family members with problems. The theme theoretically associated to the scapegoat (Bell, Bell & Nakata, 2001) pattern where parents concentrate on the problems in children, traits or choices rather than the anxiety on their marital issues. Similarly, the concept of identified patient (Satir, 2016) points out a parental dysfunctionality or the definition of a family member who most suffer from the marital relationship. In the current study, fathers were also defined as identified patients as a number of participants complained and criticized their father with being 'madman of the family', lack of 'communication skills' and 'crisis management'.

Furthermore, we recognized as through the content analysis that participants pay emotional prices for the involvement of triangulations. These prices refer to the emotional reactivity in the

Bowenian approach and emerged in the current study with feelings of anger, despair, emotional pressure, distant, desensitization, ignoring, fear of parental loss, withdrawal and most distinctly emotional cutoff. Beyond understanding the emotional reactions of participants, this finding is important because individuals with higher levels of emotional reactivity -an indicator of low level of DoS- become more prone to higher levels of psychological symptoms (Bartle-Haring & Probst, 2004). This finding was also consistent with Turkish literature indicated that during the parental conflicts/arguments children feel sadness, fear, anxiety, anger etc. (Sağkal & Türnüklü, 2017). We concluded that the emotional cutoff was most risk-bearing factor emerged in the study. Because, as far as the estrangement or distance from one or both parents might provide the individuals an emotional alleviation or recovery from an undifferentiated relationship, long-term outcomes become more destructive as well. Individuals might feel lack of significant relationships and their benefits (i.e. physical, emotional, economical support) in their life-span, but not their own significant-others whom they were estranged (Agliaş, 2018), they were probably suffering from the lack of a differentiated relationship itself.

In sum, we thought that findings reflect psychocultural factors and especially the last theme (children value to parents) should be considered and discussed with an indigenous approach. For instance, Chan (2009) indicated that due to cultural background “Western triangulation focuses on a level of differentiation among family members to become a healthy family. In a Chinese family, differentiation is against the harmony value in Chinese culture. A social worker working with Chinese family needs to be critical when applying the concept of differentiation.” (p. 51). In Turkish culture, however, Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca (2005) provide an important perspective and understanding in regard to Kağıtçıbaşı’s family change model comprising the topic of children value. According to the study, while psychological value of the children sharply increased with the economic and educational improvements in Turkey, utilitarian/economic value of children (i.e. labor force, old-age security) dramatically decrease. Therefore, it can be concluded that most parents’ expectations from children demand emotional support rather than economical. As we review the sub-themes of the children value to parents, it can be easily recognized that expectations from children were intensely accumulated on the emotional needs of parents. In terms of sex roles, daughters specifically seem to be family members who play an expressive role during the family triangulation patterns, especially for mothers. However, this conclusion should be considered cautiously since the current study reflects only daughters’ experiences and perceptions.

Only one participant (P-3) was out of these undifferentiated patterns reflected the acting without dragging into conflicts theme. Her parents were able to manage disagreements, and no expectation or attempt to include the children as a third part reported where the pattern were defined as ‘balanced’ triangulation (Bell, Bell & Nakata, 2001).

This qualitative study is designed to provide an understanding of family triangulation patterns in Turkish cultural context and the results are limited with middle class and mainly well-educated gender of females. Further studies can be repeated with other levels of socio-economic status, education levels and males' experiences. Although the current study offers several implications for family therapists in Turkey, the study is limited to the perceptions and experiences of family triangulation. On the other hand, Turkish women' self-reported interview data might be supported with other data sources such as interviews with other family members (i.e. mother, father, siblings) to reveal the patterns in relation to construct more clearly.

In sum, participants' experiences of family triangulation seem reflective and informative based on the Bowenian approach. However, when the family therapists in Turkey consider the applicability the construct in theory and practice, indigenous factors should not be overlooked since Turkish cultural background consists both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). The construct may need further refinements or adjustments since the findings of the current study reflective and share commonalities with the theory.

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