

Frequency, severity, and evolution of split family alliances: How observable are they?

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Split alliances (within-family differences in the emotional bond with the therapist) were studied in 19 U.S. and 21 Spanish families using the System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances (SOFTA; Friedlander, Escudero, & Heatherington, 2006). Examining individual family members' scores on the corresponding self-report and observational Emotional Connection to the Therapist SOFTA scales, the authors identified mild, moderate, and severe split alliances. In both samples, self-reported splits occurred frequently and with almost all of the therapists. Although clients' observed interactions with the therapist often mirrored their self-reports, family members' perceptions of the therapeutic bond were generally more discrepant than their behavior suggested. The majority of families that dropped out had a moderately or severely split alliance in at least one session.