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Children's Patterns of Preserving Emotional Security in the Interparental Subsystem

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Guided by the emotional security hypothesis, this research identified (1) individual differences in children's strategies for preserving their emotional security in the interparental relationship, and (2) the psychosocial and family correlates of these individual differences. Study 1 assessed reactivity to parental conflict simulations among 56 school-age children, whereas Study 2 solicited child and mother reports of 170 young adolescents' reactions to actual marital conflict. Cluster analyses in both studies indicated that children fit three profiles: (1) secure children, who showed well-regulated concern and positive representations of interparental relationships; (2) insecure–preoccupied children, who evidenced heightened distress, involvement or avoidance, and negative representations of interparental relationships; and (3) insecure–dismissing children, who displayed overt signs of elevated distress, avoidance, and involvement and low levels of subjective distress, avoidance and intervention impulses, and negative internal representations. Results in both studies indicated that preoccupied and dismissing children experienced more interparental conflict than did secure children, and preoccupied children evidenced the highest levels of internalizing symptoms. Study 2 results indicated that dismissing children had the highest levels of externalizing symptoms and preoccupied and dismissing children reported more coping, family, and personality difficulties than did secure children.

INTRODUCTION

Children from homes characterized by high levels of parental conflict are at increased risk for developing psychological problems (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Although parenting difficulties accompanying interparental conflict may account for part of the vulnerability children experience (e.g., Harold, Fincham, Osborne, & Conger, 1997), substantial empirical evidence also supports the hypothesis that stress experienced by children exposed to aversive marital interactions is also a direct source of risk for children (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1994; Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994). In tackling the question of why children are directly affected by interparental conflict, the emotional security hypothesis seeks to understand children's coping within an organizational perspective (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995). A primary goal of this perspective is to decipher meaning and organization from complex behavioral patterns by examining behavior in relation to how successfully it services important human goals (Campos, Mumme, Kermoian, & Campos, 1994; Cummings, 1987; Thompson & Calkins, 1996). According to the emotional security hypothesis, preserving emotional security is a significant goal for children in the interparental relationship and is a primary process that mediates the direct effects of interparental conflict on children (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Thus, a child's goal of preserving emotional security is hypothesized to develop, in part, from exposure to destructive histories of parental conflict. Attempts to preserve emotional security in contexts of parental conflict motivates responding across three component processes, including (1) heightened emotional reactivity characterized by prolonged, dysregulated distress; (2) regulation of exposure to parental affect manifested by elevated involvement in and avoidance of conflict; and (3) hostile internal representations of the meaning that interparental difficulties have for the welfare of the self and family. The resulting insecurity, in turn, has been hypothesized to increase children's psychological problems (Davies & Cummings, 1994, 1998).

The emotional security hypothesis is a specific theoretical application of the functionalist perspective on human emotion (Cummings & Davies, 1996). According to the functionalist perspective, emotion regulation is understood relationally with an emphasis on understanding emotion in the context of goals and the dynamic relation between the person and environment (Campos et al., 1994; Thompson, 1994). Thus, the primary task of any derivative theory of this broader perspective consists of identifying the goals and contexts relevant to emotion regulation (Thompson, 1994). Attachment theory, with its emphasis on emotional security as a goal for children in the parent–child relationship, served as a guide in specifying that preserving security may be a salient goal in other family contexts including the interparental relationship.

Accordingly, the emotional security hypothesis accepts the assumption that the quality of parent–child relationships can enhance or undermine children's emotional security, which, in turn, affects children's adaptive functioning (Thompson, 2000). However, the emotional security hypothesis differs from attachment theory in positing that emotional security is experienced in distinct ways, depending on whether it occurs in the context of the parent–child or interparental relationship. In our theory, the interparental relationship does not simply serve as a context that affects the quality of the parent–child attachment system. Rather, children also develop their own specific sense of security in the context of the interparental relationships that is distinct from the effects of interparental relationships on parenting processes and parent–child attachment relationships. Thus, children may be insecure about the interparental relationship but secure in the parent–child attachment relationship or vice versa.

In the original account of the emotional security hypothesis (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1996; Davies & Cummings, 1998), theoretical emphasis was placed on the hypothesis that the indicators within and across the three component processes are interdependent (i.e., intercorrelated) in reflecting the common goal of preserving emotional security. However, our thesis is that searching for linear correspondence across the indicators of emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and internal representations cannot completely capture the multidimensional complexity of children's reactivity to interparental conflict. First, at a theoretical level, adherence to the organizational perspective demands a complementary appreciation of the diversity of strategies that children may use to attain emotional security (Cicchetti, Cummings, Marvin, & Greenberg, 1990). Thus, some children may display distress and avoidance as a means of preserving their emotional security during interparental conflicts, whereas other children may intervene in the service of the same goal. Second, although studies have documented significant interrelations between indicators of emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and hostile internal representations of interparental relationships (Davies & Cummings, 1998; Davies, Forman, Rasi, & Stevens, 2002; O'Brien, Bahadur, Gee, Balto, & Erber, 1997; O'Brien, Margolin, & John, 1995), the modest magnitude of the correlations suggests that each indicator of the component processes is a distinct part of the emotional security system. For example, Davies and Cummings (1998) found that the shared variance among the three component processes of security averaged 7% (mean $r = .27$), even after some indicators of security were dropped from the measurement model due to poor fit with the latent composite (Davies, 1995). The results of these studies raise further questions about whether variable-based, linear conceptualizations of security fully capture individual differences in how children express insecurity.

Future advances in understanding children's emotional security in the interparental subsystem may largely depend on capturing the diversity of strategies that different children use to preserve their emotional security. In spite of highlighting the possibility that children may regain emotional security in different ways, the emotional security hypothesis is vague in delineating (1) the nature of differences in the interplay between the component processes and the set goal of emotional security across individuals, (2) the possible origins and correlates of these differences in the interparental and larger family system, and (3) the adaptive and maladaptive value of the different configurations of emotional security for children's short-term and long-term functioning. Accordingly, the goal of this research was to outline and empirically test a pattern-based refinement of the emotional security hypothesis that highlights individual differences in how children preserve emotional security. We specifically proposed that the heterogeneity in the strategies that children use to attain emotional security in the interparental subsystem can be represented by four patterns: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and masking profiles. Each profile or pattern was further hypothesized to stem, in part, from experiential histories of interparental and family relationships and, in turn, set the stage for children's psychological adjustment.

Our reformulation placed emphasis on the bidirectional interplay between emotional security and the three component processes. Children from homes that are characterized by significant interparental discord are especially likely to be concerned about their own welfare and safety. Conflicts in these homes are likely to continue for long periods, result in greater family turmoil, and proliferate to disrupt parent–child and family relationships. Thus, repeated exposure to these destructive interparental relationships is thought to progressively lower thresholds for activating the goal of preserving emotional security. Lower thresholds of concerns about security, in turn, result in a natural tendency for children to exhibit sensitization across the three component processes (Cummings & Davies, 1996; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, & Gamble, 1993). That is, increasing difficulties in preserving emotional security, which partly result from destructive parental conflict, are thought to be manifested in progressively greater emotional reactivity, elevated regulation of exposure to parent affect, and hostile representations. Thus, the goal of

emotional security regulates or triggers the operation of the three component processes.

Elevated responding across the three component processes also serves as a biologically based, natural means for regulating and regaining emotional security. Distress, arousal, and vigilance associated with the emotional reactivity component prime children to possible threat in high-conflict homes and energize their physical and psychological resources so that they can efficiently cope with the threat and preserve their well-being. Serving another monitoring function in high-conflict homes, children's internal representations of the meaning that interparental events have for themselves and their families are theorized to provide an internal map or alarm for readily perceiving and proactively identifying subsequent interparental events that may pose a threat to their safety and well-being. As forms of regulating exposure to parent affect, corresponding fight (i.e., involvement) and flight (i.e., avoidance) responses may, in turn, permit children to direct resources toward reducing their exposure to threat and gaining some semblance of emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1998; Emery, 1989).

Within our pattern-based classification system, this global sensitization constitutes an insecure, preoccupied profile of preserving emotional security. In support of a preoccupied profile, previous findings indicate that indices of emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and internal representations tend to co-occur. Furthermore, sensitization across indices of emotional reactivity, internal representations, and regulation of exposure to parent affect have been shown to mediate associations between interparental conflict and children's psychological adjustment, especially in the development of internalizing symptoms (Davies & Cummings, 1998). Likewise, although children's specific expressions of preoccupation may differ across parent–child attachment relationships and interparental relationships, preoccupied patterns of preserving emotional security in the interparental relationship are posited to have organizational similarities with preoccupied attachment patterns. Thus, across multiple family relationships (i.e., parent–child attachment, and interparental relationships), heightened distress, ways of regulating close relationships, and negative appraisals may have similar functional values in regaining emotional security (Bartholomew, 1990; Colin, 1996). Guided by this research, we hypothesized that preoccupied children would experience more destructive parental conflict and psychological symptoms, especially in the form of internalizing symptomatology.

Although sensitization of preoccupied children may be a natural response to emotional security threats, some children may also try to actively preserve their sense of security by employing insecure "deactivating" strategies. That is, they may engage in rigid attempts to suppress the salience of component processes in the service of regaining some modicum of security. Attachment research indicates that some children with insecure attachment relationships may deactivate the attachment system and the accompanying distress by minimizing exposure to attachment issues and the value of attachment relationships in their lives (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Carlson & Sroufe, 1995; Kobak et al., 1993). This defensive strategy shares conceptual similarities with dismissive–avoidant patterns of attachment identified in childhood and adulthood (Bartholomew & Leonard, 1991; Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Colin, 1996). In reflecting a similar organizational strategy for attaining security in the interparental relationship, we proposed that some children exposed to destructive parental conflict would develop a dismissing, insecure pattern characterized by rigid, routinized attempts to suppress the subjective experiences of threat accompanying interparental conflict (e.g., aversive emotions and appraisals). When children perceive that the interparental problems are part of a broader, unsupportive family life, effortful attempts to alter their conscious experiences of threat in the family and disengage from family life may be the most effective means to temporarily tolerate the stress and regain a subjective sense of emotional security (Fuhrman & Holmbeck, 1995; Kobak et al., 1993).

Earlier research by Cummings and colleagues (Cummings, 1987; Cummings & El-Sheikh, 1991; El-Sheikh, Cummings, & Goetsch, 1989) provides clues to the existence of dismissing or "ambivalent" children who show similar patterns of stress and coping with interadult anger. In comparison with other groups of children, ambivalent children exhibited high levels of behavioral distress in response to adult anger while reporting low levels of subjective negativity and impulses to intervene in or avoid the anger. However, it is still unclear whether forms of disengagement in adverse family contexts are adaptive or maladaptive for children's psychosocial adjustment. Although disengagement from family adversity may protect children from developing some psychological difficulties by minimizing anxiety (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994; Fuhrman & Holmbeck, 1995), gaining security by suppressing subjective distress requires substantial physical and psychological energy that may limit the resources that can be allocated to other developmental goals (e.g., affiliation, autonomy, competence). Thus, according to some developmental accounts (Cole & Zahn-Waxler, 1992; Cummings & Davies, 1992), coping with insecurity by blunting subjective distress and devaluing

the significance of family relationships may eventually cohere into a broader pattern of emotional disengagement from social relationships, hostile views of the social world, and the development of externalizing problems (Finnegan, Hodges, & Perry, 1996).

Another strategy for deactivating parts of the emotional security system is reflected in a masking profile of insecurity. Masking children are hypothesized to experience high levels of subjective distress, negative representations, and impulses to regulate exposure to their parents' conflicts, but effortfully dissemble or inhibit overt expressions of their distress and involvement. Socialization models and research have indicated that children from atypical, adverse family contexts (e.g., maltreatment) may be especially likely to dissemble overt displays of distress (Cole et al., 1994; Shipman, Zeman, Penza, & Champion, 2000). In integrating this work with the emotional security hypothesis, we hypothesized that masking in the face of parental conflict may evolve from experiences with family adversity (e.g., violence, rejection) that signify an imminent threat to the child's well-being. Consistent with the fearful and defended strategies for coping with parent–child attachment relationships (Colin, 1996; Crittenden, 1992), dissembling in these contexts may help to preserve children's welfare by reducing the likelihood of becoming a target of family hostility. However, in the long run, attempts to mask overt signs of distress may increase children's vulnerability to psychological difficulties by constraining the flexible use of emotion in coping adaptively with future challenges (Cole et al., 1994).

The healthiest and most prevalent pattern of preserving emotional security is hypothesized to consist of children who show a secure profile of coping with parental conflict. In contrast to the insecure groups, secure children were hypothesized to witness minimal levels of destructive family conflict that are substantially outweighed by constructive ways of resolving marital conflict and managing negative affect. Experiencing constructive histories of parental conflict within a broader constellation of cohesive family relationships is posited to maximize children's confidence in their parents to repair, maintain, or improve family relationships when disputes arise in the interparental relationship. This confidence and trust ensures that the goal of emotional security and its component processes only become salient under the most threatening and dire of family circumstances. Thus, similar to response profiles of security in child and adult attachment relationships (e.g., Bartholomew, 1990; Colin, 1996), secure children are hypothesized to be more likely than are insecure children to exhibit positive representations of interparental relationships and well-regulated, flexible patterns of distress. Secure coping patterns are further postulated to promote psychological well-being. For example, positive appraisals of relationships and flexible, well-regulated use of emotions (e.g., concern and distress) may serve as prototypes for adjusting successfully to challenging tasks and forging harmonious interpersonal relationships (Thompson & Calkins, 1996).

In sum, our conceptualization of emotional security as a goal in a dynamic, nonlinear control system requires a broader focus on the higher order organization or profile of children's conflict reactivity across multiple dimensions of responding. For example, the meaning of children's self-reports of distress cannot be deciphered unless they are examined in relation to the larger constellation of children's responses across the three component processes. In the context of high levels of overt emotional reactivity and excessive regulation of exposure to parent affect, low levels of self-reported distress may reflect an insecure strategy of suppressing subjective threat (i.e., dismissing). Alternatively, if low subjective distress is manifested in the context of well-regulated concern and low levels of involvement and avoidance, it may be regarded as part of a pattern of secure coping. At a methodological level, classifying children into the higher order profiles of emotional security requires careful distinctions between overt and subjective expressions of insecurity that are best captured by multi-informant and multimethod designs. For example, reliance on a single method and informant (e.g., child report) may reveal that the child reports high levels of distress, but cannot distinguish between the preoccupied children who also overtly express this distress from the masking children who attempt to inhibit behavioral signs of distress. At an analytic level, this new formulation necessitates person- or pattern-based analyses to complement the predominant use of linear, variable-based models. In tackling these methodological issues, we utilized cluster analyses as a way of testing whether children could be classified into the four profiles of emotional security using multiple informants and methods. To provide a conservative test of the validity of the cluster profiles, we present results from two studies that vary in measurement technique, methodological design, and the developmental characteristics of the children.

STUDY 1

The first aim of Study 1 was to identify children's higher order profiles of emotional security in the interparental subsystem. Guided by our theoretical reformulation, we hypothesized that children could be classified into one of four profiles: secure, preoccupied,

dismissing, and masking. The second aim was to delineate relations among children's profiles of emotional security and their experiences with interparental conflict and psychological symptoms (i.e., internalizing and externalizing). Based on our reformulation, we hypothesized that the secure children would experience lower levels of psychological symptoms and destructive interparental conflict than would the insecure groups. Given the early stage of theoretical development in this area, only tentative hypotheses can be offered about the specificity of relations among different profiles of insecurity and forms of child symptomatology and interparental conflict. In accordance with theory and research (e.g., Davies & Cummings, 1998), we speculated that preoccupied and dismissing children would experience the highest levels of internalizing and externalizing symptoms, respectively. Likewise, our reformulation also suggested that specific insecure profiles may stem from somewhat distinct histories of exposure to interparental conflict. Thus, dismissing children were tentatively hypothesized to experience higher levels of unsupportive, detached (e.g., unresolved parental conflict) family relationships than were the other groups of children.

Because identifying patterns of emotional security requires the use of multiple methods and informants, this study utilized behavioral observations, child interviews, and parent questionnaires. Given that histories of marital discord are associated with parental use of more destructive conflict tactics in actual marital interactions, assessments of children's responses to naturalistic conflicts cannot disentangle the extent to which individual differences in children's reactivity to conflict are products of differences in exposure to proximal conflict characteristics of parental conflict or cumulative histories of interparental conflict. To better isolate the impact of distal parental conflict histories on children from the proximal effects of the immediate situation, measures of security were obtained from standardized stressful contexts in the laboratory, rather than highly variable, naturalistic contexts.

Method

Readers are referred to Davies and Cummings (1998) for methodological details of Study 1.

Participants

The data were drawn from a previous study focusing on variable-based analyses of parental conflict, children's security, and their psychological adjustment (see Davies & Cummings, 1998). Participants were fifty-six 6- to 9-year-old children (age: $M = 7.5$, $SD = 1.1$; 28 boys, 28 girls) and their mothers from maritally intact families. Maternal reports indicated that the families were primarily White (95%) and middle class (Hollingshead four factor index, $M = 52.1$, $SD = 11.4$; Hollingshead, 1975).

Procedure

Simulated conflict involving the mother. A simulated conflict took place between a female research assistant and the mother in a playroom. The research assistant entered the room and initiated a standardized, 1-min conflict in which she accused the mother of being late and failing to complete requested forms. The conflict was followed by a 3-min postconflict period when the research assistant was not present. Children's overt responses during and after the conflict were videotaped for coding.

Postconflict interview. After the simulated conflict, the interviewer conducted an interview with the children to assess their self-reported emotions and behavior impulses in response to the conflict.

Parental conflict story completion task. While the mother completed questionnaires in another room, children listened to a simulated verbal conflict between a man and a woman on audiotape after being instructed to imagine that the conflict was taking place between their parents. The story stem was designed to be brief, revolve around a trivial issue (i.e., taking the car to the mechanic), and contain mild anger expression. To assess their internal representations, children answered a set of interview questions about the consequences that interparental conflicts have for family functioning.

Measures

To provide a conservative test of the hypotheses, indicators of the component processes of emotional security were measured using different tasks (i.e., analog simulations), methods (i.e., observations and interviews), and sources (i.e., child) than those used to assess marital conflict and child functioning (i.e., maternal reports). When coding indices of emotional security, raters were blind to the children's family history, psychological adjustment, and responses in other domains of emotional security.

Marital conflict. Mothers completed questionnaires designed to assess three interparental conflict dimensions that were theorized to affect children's emotional security: intensity, child-related content, and resolution (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Intensity of interparental conflict was assessed by summing standardized scores from the O'Leary-Porter Scale (OPS;

Porter & O'Leary, 1980), the Escalation Scale of the Spousal Style of Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (SSCR-E; Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981), and the Physical Aggression Scale (six items) of the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS-P; Straus, 1979). The OPS, which consists of 10 items tapping children's exposure to intense forms of parental conflict, has demonstrated adequate test–retest reliability, internal consistency (α = .79 in the present sample), and evidence of concurrent validity (Porter & O'Leary, 1980). The seven-item SSCR-E assesses the escalation of hostility during the course and aftermath of interparental conflict, whereas the eight-item CTS-P assesses physically violent acts between the partners. Considerable empirical evidence supports the reliability and validity of the CTS-P (e.g., Straus, 1979) and the SSCR-E (Rands et al., 1981). Internal consistency coefficients were satisfactory for both the CTS-P (α = .79) and SSCR-E ($\alpha > .82$) in the present sample. Significant interrelations among the three measures provides support for the formation of a composite, mean $r(56) = .45$, $ps < .01$; α = .71.

The resolved conflict dimension was assessed using the Intimacy Scale from the SSCR (SSCR-I; Rands et al., 1981). The SSCR-I consists of five items that tap forms of interparental conflict resolution (e.g., "Afterward, I feel closer to him and more loving than before"). The scale has demonstrated adequate internal consistency (α = .80 in the present study) and convergent validity through theoretically meaningful relations with indices of marital adjustment (Rands et al., 1981).

The Child-Rearing Disagreements Scale (CRD; Jouriles et al., 1991) is a 21-item questionnaire designed to index the frequency of marital disagreements over child-related issues. The CRD has adequate internal consistency (α = .85 in the present sample) and the validity of the measure is supported by its moderate correlations with measures of marital discord and child behavior problems.

Child psychological maladjustment. Mothers completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991), a widely used, well-validated parent-report measure of child behavior problems. The CBCL was used to derive standardized scores for internalizing (e.g., depression/anxiety, social withdrawal) and externalizing (e.g., aggression, delinquency) symptoms. Reliability was adequate for the internalizing (α = .79) and externalizing (α = .86) symptoms scales.

Emotional reactivity. Behavioral expressions of emotion and subjective feelings in response to the simulated conflict involving the mother were assessed as indicators of emotional reactivity. Two judges independently rated distress and vigilance during the 4-min videotaped segment of the conflict and postconflict (Davies & Cummings, 1998). Ratings of distress, which specifically consisted of signs of anxiety, tension, fear, and sadness, were as follows: (1) none, (2) mild = the quality and expression of distress is minimal and within normal limits for witnessing conflict, (3) moderate = mild overreactions of distress that are eventually regulated with some success, and (4) intense = distress of a disturbing quality that cannot be adaptively regulated with any success. Ratings of vigilance, which reflected watchful attention and preoccupation to the possibility of danger accompanying conflict, were as follows: (1) none; (2) mild = elicits some attention and concern of an appropriate level, without substantially disrupting the children's functioning; (3) moderate = signs of vigilance are somewhat beyond normal but do not substantially disrupt the functioning across the observation period; and (4) intense = prolonged, intense preoccupation with the conflict, substantially disrupting activities throughout the observation period. Kappa coefficients, which indexed interobserver reliability for 64% of the sample, were .75 for distress and .79 for vigilance. Given the moderate links between vigilance and distress, $r(56) = .59$, $p < .001$, ratings were averaged together to form a composite of overt distress.

To assess subjective emotional reactivity, children responded to three questions in the postconflict interview, "Did you feel [mad, sad, scared] when the woman was talking to your mother?", with a "yes" or "no." Immediately after affirmative responses, children answered the question "How much would you feel that way?" by selecting one of five intensity alternatives from (1) "very little" to (5) "a whole lot." Consistent with earlier research (Cummings & Cummings, 1988), angry responses assessed subjective hostility, whereas sad and scared responses were summed into a composite of subjective distress.

Children's regulation of exposure to parent affect. Coders independently rated children's overt forms of regulating exposure to parent affect during the simulated conflict involving the mother. Ratings of avoidance consisted of (1) none; (2) mild = a clear, but brief and mild, attempt to avoid; (3) moderate = multiple and/or lengthy avoidance attempts that do not appear to reflect chronic preoccupation with the conflict; and (4) intense = a lengthy preoccupation to avoid conflict that may be reflected in frequent, intense, and/or multiple methods of avoidance that typically persist well after the conflict. Intervention, which was defined as direct involvement in the conflict or its consequences, was rated as follows: (1) none; (2) brief = one or two brief, superficial attempts to intervene that require little or no psychological investment or risk

on the child's part; (3) moderate = multiple, lengthy attempts to intervene that do not persist well after the conflict or require considerable psychological risk; and (4) intense = multiple persistent attempts to intervene that require a great deal of psychological investment and risk. Kappas, based on interobserver coding of 88% of the sample, were .93 for escape and .83 for intervention.

To assess impulses to intervene in the conflict, children responded to the question, "What did you want to do when the woman was talking to your mother?" Ratings of intervention impulses, based on the children's narratives, consisted of (1) none; (2) mild = a single, brief intervention impulse that did not reflect a great deal of forethought or psychological risk (e.g., "ask her why she was mad"); and (3) intense = multiple strategies of involvement or a single strategy that requires a great deal of forethought or potential psychological risk (e.g., "yell back at her," "tell her to get out the room and then ask my mom if she was all right"). The κ, based on interrater reliability coding of all 56 children, was good, .83.

Internal representations of interparental relationships. The structured interview questions following the PCSC task assessed the security of internal representations of parental relationships along three dimensions: (1) short-term emotional aftermath of the conflict ("What will happen next between them if they were your parents?"), (2) long-term quality of parental relationships ("What will happen between them later on?"), and (3) the impact of interparental relationships on parent–child relationships ("Think about how you said your parents act toward each other. Okay? Now, how would your parents feel about you?").

Each dimension of children's internal representations was rated along 5-point scales from the videotaped interview, with higher values indicating that interparental relationships pose a greater threat to children's security (Davies & Cummings, 1998). The rating guidelines for representations of short-term interparental relationships were as follows: (1) full resolution, (2) partial resolution, (3) neutral or ambivalent interactions, (4) mild hostility, and (5) escalating hostility. Representations of long-term interparental relationships were coded as follows: (1) intense warmth, (2) mild warmth, (3) neutral or ambivalent relationships, (4) mild discord, and (5) intense discord. Children's internal representations of the impact of the marital relationship on parent–child relationships, which specifically reflected the perceived impact of interparental relationships on parent–child relationships, were coded along the following continuum: (1) intense warmth, (2) mild warmth, (3) neutral, (4) mild negativity, and (5) intense negativity. Interobserver reliability for ratings of the 56 children were short-term marital relationships, κ = .79; long-term marital relationships, κ = .70; and parent–child relationships, κ = .88.

Results and Discussion

The generally weak to modest magnitude of interrelations among the nine emotional security indicators shown in Table 1 raises questions about the utility of forming a single composite of security, mean $r(56) = .10$. Therefore, the first part of the primary analyses present person-based results pertaining to the identification and description of children's profiles of emotional security in the interparental relationship; and the remaining sections examine the associations between emotional security profiles and children's experiences with interparental conflict and psychological maladjustment.

Cluster Analysis

Standardized scores of the nine emotional security variables were submitted to a cluster analysis to differentiate between groups of children who exhibited different profiles of emotional security in the interparental relationship. Ward's hierarchical agglomerative cluster method with squared Euclidian distance was selected for use on the basis of (1) general recommendations and widespread use among psychologists (Borgen & Barnett, 1987; Fals-Stewart, Schafer, & Birchler, 1993; Lorr, 1994); (2) its superior effective-

Table 1 Correlations among Emotional Security Indicators in Study 1

	Emotional Security Variables							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Overt distress (O)								
2. Subjective hostility (C)	.03							
3. Subjective distress (C)	−.03	.17						
4. Avoidance (O)	.49*	−.07	.23					
5. ntervention (O)	.39*	.02	.12	.59*				
6. Intervention impulses (C)	.02	.27*	.22	.01	−.04			
7. Short-term representations (C)	.07	.04	.01	.01	.01	−.21		
8. Long-term representations (C)	.16	.27*	−.14	−.04	.15	.08	.16	
9. Parent–child relationships (C)	.14	.09	.01	−.08	.04	.03	.13	.42*

Note: (C) = child-report measure; (O) = observational measure.
*$p < .05$.

ness in recovering the underlying structure of the clusters (Borgen & Barnett, 1987; Lorr, 1994; Skinner & Blashfield, 1982); (3) its ability to take into account level, shape, and scatter in identifying cluster profiles (Blashfield, 1980); and (4) the diversity of procedures or "stopping rules" available for determining the number of clusters (Borgen & Barnett, 1987; Milligan & Cooper, 1985). Ward's method is specifically designed to maximize within-group homogeneity by minimizing within-group error variance for all profile variables while it merges people into groups with each successive stage.

Because cluster analysis techniques do not yield definitive procedures for determining the number of clusters, our decision to accept the three-cluster solution was guided by multiple considerations, including (1) stopping rules (i.e., pseudo-T^2, dendogram; Fals-Stewart et al., 1993; Milligan & Cooper, 1985), (2) maximal differentiation of the clusters across the profile variables, (3) practical considerations of retaining sufficient cell sizes for analyses, and (4) the theoretical significance and parsimony of the cluster solution. The three-cluster solution outperformed alternative cluster solutions in most domains of evaluation. First, although the pseudo-T^2 index did not provide any basis for selecting the number of clusters (i.e., small value followed by a large value following a fusion at the next hierarchical level), the configuration of the dendogram (which is analogous to a scree plot in a factor analysis) provided some support for the three-cluster solution. Second, in comparing solutions composed of two through seven clusters, the three-cluster solution was effective in identifying clusters that were significantly different from each other on the profile variables. Third, solutions of five or more clusters resulted in insufficient cell sizes. Finally, from a theoretical perspective, the three-cluster solution yielded profiles that closely resembled the secure, preoccupied, and dismissing patterns of security proposed in our hypotheses.

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and statistical comparisons (analyses of variance [ANOVAs] and Tukey post hoc tests) of clusters on the nine profile variables. Although the first and largest cluster ($n = 30$; 54%) contained children who reported some impulses to become involved in the conflict, these children also exhibited relatively low levels of overt emotional distress, avoidance, and intervention and hostile internal representations. Accordingly, these children were labeled as secure because any concerns expressed appeared to be relatively mild, well-regulated, empathetically motivated, and embedded in larger context of security. Children in the second cluster ($n = 15$; 27%) exhibited relatively high levels of overt emotional reactivity and overt avoidance and intervention, while reporting low levels of subjective hostility, intervention impulses, and hostile representations of interparental relationships (i.e., long-term representations, conflict spillover). Because we interpreted this pattern of reactivity to reflect a style of defensively downplaying perceived or subjective threat, we labeled these children as dismissing. Children in the final cluster ($n = 11$; 20%) were considered to be

Table 2 Study 1: Raw Means, Standard Deviations, and Statistical Comparisons of the Three Profiles of Emotional Security on the Nine Defining Variables

	Emotional Security Patterns					
	Secure (S) ($n = 30$) *M* (*SD*)	Dismissing (D) ($n = 15$) *M* (*SD*)	Preoccupied (P) ($n = 11$) *M* (*SD*)	Range of Scores	*F*(2, 53)	Tukey
Emotional reactivity						
Overt distress (O)	2.53 (.74)	3.47 (.64)	3.27 (.72)	1–4	10.19**	P, D > S
Subjective hostility (C)	1.60 (1.90)	.73 (1.33)	2.91 (2.21)	0–5	4.45*	P > D
Subjective distress (C)	1.77 (2.25)	1.60 (2.23)	.73 (1.27)	0–7	1.00	—
Regulation of exposure to parent affect						
Avoidance (O)	2.10 (1.06)	3.60 (.51)	2.45 (1.29)	1–4	11.34**	D > S
Intervention (O)	1.33 (.61)	2.33 (1.23)	1.91 (1.22)	1–4	5.94**	D > S
Intervention impulses (C)	1.77 (.90)	1.07 (.26)	1.73 (.90)	1–3	4.27*	S > D; P > D$^+$
Internal representations of interparental relationships						
Short-term relationships (C)	2.37 (1.54)	4.00 (1.20)	4.00 (1.26)	1–5	9.38**	P, D > S
Long-term relationships (C)	1.53 (.73)	1.27 (.59)	4.36 (1.21)	1–5	57.66**	P > D, S
Parent–child relationships (C)	1.80 (1.24)	2.33 (1.23)	4.00 (1.18)	1–5	12.89**	P > D, S

Note: (C) = child-report measure; (O) = observational measure.
$^*p \le .05$; $^{**}p \le .005$; $^+p < .10$.

preoccupied in light of their high levels of overt and subjective emotional reactivity and insecure internal representations across all three dimensions. Thus, the cluster analysis failed to identify a masking group of children, but did support the existence of the three remaining profiles of security in our model (i.e., secure, dismissing, and preoccupied).

Because different clustering methods can yield vastly different clusters or artificially impose solutions to virtually any data set, replicating the cluster solution across different methods provides one method of testing the validity of the clusters (Blashfield, 1980; Fals-Stewart et al., 1993). To provide a conservative test of its stability, the three-cluster solution, which was derived from the hierarchical agglomerative method, was compared with a three-cluster solution generated from a nonhierarchical cluster method (*K*-means). Results indicated that there was considerable correspondence between the methods in assigning children to the three clusters. Classification agreement across the two methods was found for 49 of the 56 children (88%; $\kappa = .81$). Furthermore, high correlations between the mean profiles of emotional security variables for the clusters derived from Ward's and *K*-means algorithms (*r*s between .88 and 1.00) revealed that the shapes of the profiles from the two cluster methods were highly similar. Thus, the three-cluster solution appeared to be robust across methods of analysis.

Interparental Conflict and Child Adjustment Correlates of Patterns of Emotional Security

Variables indexing children's psychological adjustment (internalizing and externalizing symptoms) and experiential histories with interparental conflict (intensity, resolution, and content) were submitted as dependent variables to separate multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to examine whether they differed as a function of the three profiles of emotional security (independent variable: secure, dismissing, and preoccupied). Because preliminary analyses indicated that child gender and age failed to moderate relations between the variables and did not alter the results as a covariate in the models, gender and age were dropped from the models for the sake of parsimony. Both MANOVAs revealed significant associations between emotional security patterns and children's experiences with interparental conflict, $F(6, 102) = 2.62$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .13$, and psychological maladjustment, $F(4, 104) = 3.48$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$.

Results of the follow-up univariate ANOVAs and Tukey post hoc tests are presented in Table 3. Analysis of the relations between profiles of emotional security and interparental conflict provided partial support for our hypotheses. Secure children exhibited high levels of exposure to constructive forms of interparental conflict (i.e., resolution) and low levels of exposure to destructive conflict (i.e., intense, child related). By the same token, preoccupied children witnessed the highest levels of destructive interparental conflict (i.e., intense, child related), especially relative to secure children. Finally, dismissing children experienced significantly lower levels of interparental conflict resolution than did secure children.

The relations between the emotional security profiles and child adjustment also partly supported our hypotheses. Preoccupied children scored higher than did secure children on internalizing symptoms. Moreover, as hypothesized, dismissing children exhibited the highest levels of externalizing symptoms; however, this difference was not significant.

STUDY 2

Study 2 sought to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 in several ways. First, the methodological

Table 3 Relation of Children's Profiles of Emotional Security to their Psychological Maladjustment and Experiential Histories with Dimensions of Interparental Conflict

	Emotional Security Patterns						
	Secure (S) *M* (*SD*)	Dismissing (D) *M* (*SD*)	Preoccupied (P) *M* (*SD*)	Range of Scores	*F*(2, 53)	η^2	Tukey
Interparental conflict history							
Intensity	−.71 (1.94)	.36 (2.94)	1.45 (2.17)	−3.5–8.4	3.83*	.13	P > S
Resolution	18.40 (2.63)	15.67 (3.62)	16.09 (2.55)	10.0–25.0	5.42**	.17	S > D
Child-related	33.57 (8.97)	33.80 (7.93)	40.55 (8.23)	24.0–66.0	2.87$^+$	.10	P > S$^+$
Child maladjustment							
Internalizing symptoms	48.17 (8.96)	49.47 (9.13)	56.64 (8.29)	33.0–70.0	3.73*	.12	P > S
Externalizing symptoms	47.37 (6.24)	51.67 (9.55)	47.64 (10.40)	30.0–67.0	1.49	.05	—

*$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .005$; $^+p < .07$.

design was systematically varied to conservatively test the generalizability of the three emotional security profiles identified in Study 1. Although the experimental control characterizing laboratory simulations of parental conflict increases the internal validity of the design, it also limits the ecological validity of the findings (Cummings, 1995). Thus, to examine whether the findings of Study 1 generalize to naturalistic contexts of parental conflict, Study 2 solicited child and observer (i.e., mother) reports of children's reactions to actual interparental conflicts.

Second, we attempted to test the developmental specificity and generalizability of the findings of Study 1 by recruiting a sample of early adolescents (10–15 years old). Little is known about adolescents' reactivity to interparental conflict, but there are strong bases for hypothesizing that destructive conflict between parents poses a threat to their emotional security. Even though early adolescents have reported experiencing lower levels of distress, perceived threat, and perceived coping difficulties than do younger children (Covell & Abramovitch, 1987; Cummings & Davies, 1994; Grych, 1998), these potential sources of resilience may be offset by increasing vulnerability in other response domains. For example, as children progress through early adolescence, empirical evidence suggests that they become more sensitive to wider and more subtle expressions of interparental difficulties, better able to decipher the deleterious implications destructive interparental conflict has for the family and themselves, and are increasingly disposed to mediate parental conflicts (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996). Guided by the results of Study 1, we expected that this study would yield secure, dismissing, and preoccupied styles of emotional security in the parental relationship. However, given that children become more skilled and aware of the value of masking overt expressions of distress and reactivity during childhood and preadolescence, we also hypothesized that adolescence would be a prime period for identifying a masking style of insecurity (Denham, 1998; Harris, 1989; Saarni, 1984).

Third, although researchers have repeatedly called for research that integrates the study of children's security in the interparental relationship in the broader network of family system (e.g., parenting, child personality, and coping), this conceptual emphasis on "contextualizing" emotional security has rarely been examined in empirical research. Although interparental relationship histories are thought to play a prominent role in influencing children's security, the emotional security hypothesis also proposes that family and child attributes may also affect children's success in preserving security (Cummings & Davies, 1995; Davies & Cummings, 1994). As a first step in examining this issue, the analysis of the correlates of the emotional security profiles was expanded to capture multiple informant reports (i.e., mother, child, and teacher) of the quality of functioning in the family system (e.g., parenting, family cohesion, and maternal depressive symptoms) and a wider array of children's intrapersonal attributes (e.g., coping and personality variables to complement assessments of symptoms).

Consistent with our earlier hypotheses and results, we predicted that children with insecure profiles would experience greater interparental conflict, family difficulties, maladaptive coping, personality difficulties, and psychological symptomatology than would secure children. We also expected some specificity in relations between the profiles of insecurity and patterns of family and child functioning. First, dismissing strategies were postulated to stem, in part, from interparental conflicts that are part of a larger system of unsupportive and dysphoric family relationships (e.g., unresolved conflict, low family cohesion, and parent depression). These underlying dismissing strategies were further expected to breed negative views of the social world, excessive concern for the self (i.e., unmitigated agency), family disengagement, and conduct problems (e.g., substance use).

Second, although it is predicted that preoccupied styles partly result from histories of exposure to interparental conflict, we also expected that family processes signifying enmeshed parent–child relationships (i.e., parental psychological control), blurred or weak boundaries between marital and parent–child subsystems (i.e., child-related conflicts between parents), and family cohesiveness (i.e., interparental relationshipship satisfaction and family cohesion) would further fuel children's preoccupation by drawing them more deeply into family difficulties. Consistent with hypotheses from Study 1, we further hypothesized that masking styles were especially likely to develop when interparental or family hostility posed a direct threat to the well-being of the child (e.g., interparental aggression and parental psychological control; see, e.g., Shipman et al., 2000). Finally, preoccupied and masking children, by virtue of their greater sensitivity to subjective feelings of insecurity, were hypothesized to be at risk for developing ruminating styles of coping with family difficulties (e.g., family worries), internalizing symptoms, and excessive concern for the well-being of others to the detriment of self-development (i.e., unmitigated communion).

Method

Participants

Participants included 170 sixth- through eighth-grade students (92 girls, 78 boys) and their mothers from a public middle school in a working- and middle-class suburb bordering a northeastern metropolitan area. The participation rate among dyads of primary caregivers and children was 23%. Families were included in the present study if (1) both the mother and child reported on the same interparental dyad on measures of interparental relationships and child reactivity to parental conflict, and (2) mothers maintained regular contact with the father figure. Participating children were relatively evenly divided across grade: 56 sixth graders, 57 seventh graders, and 57 eighth graders. Children ranged in age from 10 to 15 (M = 12.21 years, SD = .98). Demographic data reflected the primarily White, middle-class nature of the sample. Median family income exceeded $40,000 per year and the average number of years of completed education was 14.0 years for mothers (SD = 2.25) and fathers (SD = 2.63). The majority of mothers were married or living with the father (87.7%), followed by small proportions of divorced (8.2%) or separated (4.1%) mothers. A large proportion of the children were White (92.1%), followed by small percentages of African Americans (3.7%), Native Americans (3.0%), and Hispanics (1.2%).

Procedure

Mailing lists with the addresses of students were provided to the first author after receiving the approval from the school administrators to conduct the study. Primary caregivers, who indicated an interest in participating in the study by returning a postcard in the mail, were sent survey forms on family and child functioning to complete and return in a postage-free envelope. Children who elected to participate completed their surveys in their classrooms under the guidance of a trained experimenter.

To evaluate the predictive validity of the cluster solutions, data were collected from a smaller sample (n = 43) of the child survey participants who participated in an analog conflict task during a visit to the university laboratory approximately 6 months after the survey assessments. This subsample of children appeared to be representative of the larger sample. Preliminary analyses revealed that significant differences between the subsample of children who participated in the laboratory simulations and the remaining children on sociodemographic (e.g., marital status, ethnicity, and gender) and the primary study variables (e.g., family relationships, emotional security, child personality and adjustment, and cluster group assignment) were below what would be expected by chance. Each child listened to four audiotaped conflicts between an adult male and female after being instructed to imagine that the conflicts were taking place between their parents. The vignettes, which were designed to depict destructive dimensions of conflict, consisted of two moderately hostile, unresolved conflicts, and two conflicts that were characterized by escalating intense hostility. Each pair of conflicts varied systematically by topic, with one vignette depicting a disagreement over an adult issue (i.e., participation in social activities and arranging to have the car repaired) and the other depicting a child-related disagreement (i.e., permitting child to stay overnight at a friend's house and arranging to pick up child from a school activity). After each vignette, children responded to a series of questions designed to assess emotional security.

Measures

Security in the Interparental Subsystem. Children's reactivity across the three component processes of emotional security was assessed by child reports on the Security in the Interparental Subsystem Scale (SIS; Davies, Forum, et al., 2002) and mother reports on an adapted measure of the Home Data Questionnaire–Adult Version (HDQ; Garcia O'Hearn, Margolin, & John, 1997). The SIS yields eight scales that are designed to tap children's reactivity to conflict. Emotional reactivity was measured by three scales: (1) Emotional Arousal: frequent, multiple forms of distress (four items, e.g., "When my parents argue, I feel scared"; α = .75); (2) Emotional Dysregulation: prolonged, dysregulated expressions of emotional distress (five items, e.g., "After my parents argue, it ruins my whole day"; α = .81); and (3) Behavioral Dysregulation: elevated behavioral arousal and lack of self-control (three items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, I yell at, or say unkind things to, people in my family"; α = .66). The regulation of exposure to parent affect scales included: (1) Involvement: characterized by emotional and behavioral involvement in parental conflicts (six items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, I try to comfort one or both of them"; α = .70); and (2) Avoidance: characterized by attempts to escape or avoid interparental conflict or its adverse aftermath (seven items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, I feel like staying as far away from them as possible"; α = .76). Internal representations of interparental relationships were indexed by three scales: (1) Destructive Family Representations, reflecting appraisals of the deleterious consequences that interparental

conflict has for the welfare of the family (four items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, I wonder if they will divorce or separate"; $\alpha = .87$); (2) Conflict Spillover, reflecting children's expectancies that conflicts will spill over to affect their well-being and relationships with parents (four items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, I feel like they are upset at me"; $\alpha = .78$); and (3) Constructive Family Representations, reflecting appraisals of conflict as benign or constructive for the family (four items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, I know they can work out their differences"; $\alpha = .82$). The SIS has adequate test–retest reliability and support for its validity has been demonstrated (Davies et al., 2002).

The validity of the original HDQ is supported by its theoretically meaningful relations with children's exposure to destructive parental conflict (Garcia O'Hearn et al., 1997). The HDQ was revised in this study by asking parents to rate how well each item describes their children's reactions to interparental arguments over the past year on a 5-point scale (1 = "Not at all like him/her" to 5 = "A whole lot like him/her") rather than the original format of having parents indicate the presence or absence of an item each day that a conflict occurred. We also developed additional items for the purpose of forming multi-indicator scales of security that were theoretically similar to the SIS scales. The three scales used in this study were as follows: (1) Overt Distress: assessed overt emotional distress and dysregulation (five items, e.g., "appears frightened"; $\alpha = .79$), (2) Behavioral Avoidance: indexed avoidance of conflict (two items, e.g., "tries to get away from us"; interitem $r(170) = .35$), and (3) Behavioral Involvement: measured overt involvement in conflicts (six items, e.g., "tries to comfort one or both of us"; $\alpha = .68$).

Interparental conflict. Children reported on their exposure to destructive conflict by completing the Intensity, Resolution, and Content subscales of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). The subscales and their definitions are as follows: (1) the Intensity Scale: children's exposure to verbally and physically aggressive conflicts (seven items, e.g., "When my parents have an argument, they yell a lot"; $\alpha = .85$), (2) the Resolution Scale: children's exposure to unresolved conflict between their parents (six items, e.g., "Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other"; $\alpha = .87$), and (3) the Content Scale: the degree to which children are exposed to disagreements centering on child-related issues (four items, e.g., "My parents' arguments are usually about something I did"; $\alpha = .84$). The CPIC has established psychometric properties (Grych et al., 1992).

To further assess the level of interparental conflict in the home, mothers completed a comparable set of scales from the Conflict and Problem-Solving Scales (CPS; Kerig, 1996). The Verbal Aggression (16 items, e.g., "Raise voice, yell, shout"; $\alpha = .88$), Physical Aggression (14 items, e.g., "Push, pull, shove, grab partner"; $\alpha = .80$), Resolution (13 items, "We feel closer to each other than before the fight"; $\alpha = .89$), and Child Involvement (abbreviated version of 8 items, e.g., "Involve the child in our argument"; $\alpha = .87$) Scales were selected to correspond to the CPIC dimensions of intensity, resolution, and content. The Verbal and Physical Aggression Scales were combined a priori to form an Intensity Scale that paralleled the CPIC Intensity Scale, $r(170) = .57$, $p < .001$. The Resolution Scale was reverse scored so that higher scores reflected poorer resolution. Reliability and validity of the CPS are well-established (Kerig, 1996).

Child symptomatology. Children and mothers completed the Anxious/Depressed, Withdrawn, Delinquent Behavior, and Aggressive Behavior Scales from parallel forms of the Youth Self-Report (YSR) and CBCL (Achenbach, 1991). Anxious/Depressed and Withdrawn Scales were summed into an internalizing symptoms measure, whereas the Delinquency and Aggression Scales were summed into an externalizing symptoms measure. The CBCL and YSR scales have demonstrated internal reliability ($\alpha \geq .88$ for all scales in the present sample), test–retest reliability, and validity.

Substance use, which was another indicator of externalizing symptoms, was measured by a four-item scale developed by Wills and colleagues (Wills & Cleary, 1996; Wills, McNamara, Vaccaro, & Hirky, 1996). Three items tapped the frequency of cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use over the past 6 months (1 = "Never" to 6 = "Usually use every day"); the final item assessed the frequency of heavy drinking over the past 6 months (1 = "None" to 4 = "Happened more than twice"). Internal consistency for this sample was sufficient ($\alpha = .82$) and previous research supports its validity (Wills et al., 1996).

Teachers also reported on children's internalizing ($\alpha \geq .81$) and externalizing ($\alpha \geq .90$) symptoms by completing 10 items derived from the Teacher Report Form (TRF), an instrument designed to parallel the YSR and CBCL (Achenbach, 1991). The TRF data, which were included if teachers reported knowing the child for at least 4 weeks, were available for a sample of 135 children (79% of the sample).

Child personality and coping. Children completed six measures of personality and coping. To assess unmitigated communion, or dispositions toward overinvolvement in the lives of others to the neglect of interest in

the self, we used an adapted version of the Unmitigated Communion Scale (UCS; Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). Seven UCS items, which were originally developed for adults, were modified through modest vocabulary changes to be consistent with the developmental level of early adolescents (e.g., "I often find myself getting too involved in others' problems"). A modified version of the Unmitigated Agency Scale from the Extended Version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (UAS; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979) was used to assess the trait of unmitigated agency or the socially undesirable tendency to focus on the self at the expense of involvement with others. Modification of the UAS, which was originally developed for use with adults, consisted of wording changes designed to increase the comprehensibility of items for early adolescents (e.g., "I look out for myself first"). The modified UAS and UCS evidenced adequate reliability in the present sample (αs = .69 and .76, respectively) and good test–retest reliability over a 2-week period, $r(90) = .74$ and .69, respectively.

Children's coping and appraisals in the context of family challenges and the larger world were assessed by the Family Sense of Coherence Scale (FSOCS; Forman, 1999) and the Negative World View Scale from the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ-NWV; Rohner, 1990). The FSOCS yields three scales: (1) Family Worries: children's worries about the future of the family and its consequences for their well-being (eight items, e.g., "I feel like something could go very wrong in my family at any time"; $\alpha = .87$); (2) Family Investment: children's tendencies to view and utilize the family as a source of support even in times of adversity (seven items, e.g., "It's worth caring about family members, even when things go wrong"; $\alpha = .85$), and (3) Family Disengagement: children's impulses to emotionally and behaviorally disengage from the family, particularly under adverse circumstances (six items, e.g., "When I have disagreements with family members, it's not worth trying to understand their point of view"; $\alpha = .83$). The FSOCS scales demonstrated good test–retest reliability coefficients, $r(84) > .77$ for all scales over a 2-week period, and support for the validity of the scales is evidenced by its relations to family adversity and children's psychological problems (Forman, 1999). The PAQ-NWV scale assesses global evaluations of the world as a hostile, threatening place (e.g., "I see the world as a dangerous place"). The scale has good reliability ($\alpha = .86$) and its validity is supported by correlations with related self-appraisals and interpersonal representations (Rohner, 1990).

Characteristics of family context and parenting. Family context and parenting variables were gathered from mothers and children. Maternal reports on the Family Cohesion Scale of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales–III (FACES-III; Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985) provided a measure of the emotional climate at the family level. The 10-item Family Cohesion Scale of the FACES-III, which is designed to assess family closeness and support (e.g., "Family members feel very close to each other"), evidenced adequate reliability in this sample ($\alpha > .84$) and previous empirical support for its validity (Olsen et al., 1985).

Mothers also completed the Center for Epidemiology Studies of Depression (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) instrument and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) to respectively assess maternal depressive symptoms and romantic relationship satisfaction. The 20-item CES-D is a widely used, psychometrically sound, self-report measure designed to assess depressive symptoms in the general population, with an emphasis on capturing depressed mood (e.g., "I felt depressed"; $\alpha = .91$ in the present sample). The RAS, a seven-item Likert scale measure, is a reliable ($\alpha = .95$ in this sample) index of spousal or partner satisfaction (e.g., "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?"). The validity of the RAS is reflected in its strong relations with lengthier relationship satisfaction measures (Hendrick, 1988).

Maternal and child reports on abbreviated versions of the 20-item Acceptance Scale of the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ; Rohner, 1990) were used to assess parental acceptance. Children completed 10 items from the Child-PARQ Acceptance Scale to assess both mother and father acceptance (e.g., "My mother [father] talks to me in a warm and loving way"). Given the high correlation between mother and father acceptance, $r(170) = .77$, the two measures were summed into a single measure of parental acceptance ($\alpha = .95$). Eight items from the Parent-PARQ Acceptance Scale assessed mother reports of her and her partner's acceptance. Maternal reports of mother and father acceptance were summed to form a composite of parental acceptance that was comparable with the Child-PARQ ($\alpha = .87$). The original PARQ Scale has good psychometric properties (Rohner, 1990).

As a final measure of childrearing experiences, children completed the Psychological Control Scale–Youth Self-Report (PCS-YSR; Barber, 1996). The eight Likert-type scale items on the PCS-YSR assess parent psychological control or, more specifically, control strategies that negatively manipulate, discount, and limit children's psychological and emotional experiences (e.g., "My mother [father] brings up my past mistakes when he or she criticizes me"). Children's

reports of mother and father psychological control on the PCS-YSR were combined into a more parsimonious composite in light of their high correlation, $r(170) = .72$. Reliability of the resulting composite was adequate ($\alpha = .88$) and evidence for validity of the PCS-YSR is well documented in previous research (e.g., Barber, 1996).

Children's reactions to standardized simulations of parental conflict. Children's responses across the four audiotaped simulations of destructive interparental conflict were designed to capture the three component processes of emotional security. First, emotional reactivity was assessed by having children rate how "angry," "sad," "worried," and "ashamed" they would feel if they witnessed the four parental disagreements. The four items, which were rated on a 6-point continuum (0 = "not at all" to 5 = "a whole lot"), were summed across the four vignettes to form a single index of emotional reactivity (16 items; $\alpha = .94$). Second, regulation of exposure to parent affect was assessed through children's endorsement of avoidance of and involvement in simulated conflicts. For each of the four vignettes, three questions were each designed to assess children's impulses to avoid (e.g., "get away from them"; $\alpha = .93$) and become involved in the conflicts (e.g., "try to solve the problem for them"; $\alpha = .91$). Children responded to the questions by using the same response alternative as the emotional reactivity questions. Third, questions tapping children's internal representations of the destructiveness of interparental conflict were designed to assess (1) conflict spillover, or expectations that parental negativity would spill over to affect parent–child relationships (three items for each subsystem, e.g., "After they talked like that, how much would you expect that your mom [dad] would be upset with you?"), and (2) destructive family representations, or appraisals of destructive family sequelae of conflict (four items, e.g., "After they talked like that, how much would you worry that they might separate or divorce?"). Because the mother–child spillover and father–child spillover measures were strongly correlated, $r(43) = .79$, the measures were combined to form a composite of conflict spillover representations. Reliability for measures of conflict spillover (24 items; $\alpha = .95$) and destructive family representations (16 items; $\alpha = .97$) was excellent.

The final set of analog questions were designed to assess children's endorsement of goals that are relevant to preserving emotional security in the face of interparental conflict. Within the emotional security hypothesis, signs of activation of the emotional security system are reflected in motives to allocate greater psychological and physical resources toward regulating emotions and protecting the self from potential danger. Thus, to assess the salience of the goal of preserving emotional security, questions centered on the extent to which children endorsed "Make myself feel better," "Protect myself from being hurt," and "Make sure they didn't get upset at me," along 5-point continuum ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The composite measure of emotional security, which consisted of the sum of the three items across the four vignettes, demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

Results and Discussion

Table 4 shows that the correlations among the 11 indicators of emotional security were modest to

Table 4 Correlations among Emotional Security Indicators in Study 2

	Emotional Security Variables									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Emotional arousal (C)										
2. Emotional dysregulation (C)	.73*									
3. Behavioral dysregulation (C)	.19*	.20*								
4. Overt distress (P)	.22*	.31*	.15*							
5. Involvement (C)	.46*	.38*	.14	.19*						
6. Avoidance (C)	.50*	.59*	.16*	.12	.46*					
7. Behavioral involvement (P)	.11	.11	.01	.40*	.22*	.04				
8. Behavioral avoidance (P)	.08	.03	−.03	.39*	.06	.12	.13			
9. Constructive family representations (C)	−.12	−.17*	−.23*	−.10	.16*	−.01	−.03	−.02		
10. Destructive family representations (C)	.54*	.62*	.25*	.37*	.36*	.39*	.13	.03	−.36*	
11. Conflict spillover (C)	.50*	.59*	.37*	.26*	.35*	.49*	.15*	.06	−.20*	.55*

Note: (C) = child-report measure; (P) = parent-report measure.
* $p \leq .05$.

moderate in magnitude, mean $r(170) = .25$. Consistent with Study 1, these findings raise questions about the utility of forming a single, linear composite of security. Thus, to assess the viability of a pattern-based analysis of emotional security, the analysis plan is organized into three parts: (1) identification and description of children's profiles of security in the interparental relationship; (2) examination of predictive associations between cluster profiles and children's reactivity to simulated interparental conflicts 6 months later; and (3) delineation of relations between security profiles and interparental conflict, child psychological symptoms, child personality and coping, and family and parenting factors.

Identification and Description of Emotional Security Profiles

Consistent with Study 1, standardized scores of the eight child report and three mother report measures of emotional security were submitted to a hierarchical agglomerative cluster model using Ward's method with squared Euclidian distance. The three-cluster solution was selected because it outperformed the other cluster solutions across virtually every evaluative domain outlined in Study 1. First, the three-cluster solution was effective in identifying clusters that were significantly different from each other on all the profile variables. Second, inspection of the dendogram and identification of the local reduction in the pseudo-T^2 indices across the cluster solutions (i.e., pseudo-T^2 value increased by 8.4 in moving from the three- to two-cluster solution) supported the three-cluster solution. Third, solutions of four or more clusters resulted in small cell sizes ($n \leq 13$) and accompanying reductions in statistical power. Fourth, the three-cluster solution resembled the cluster solution of Study 1 while retaining a high level of parsimony.

Means, standard deviations, and statistical comparisons (ANOVAs followed by Tukey post hoc tests) of clusters on the 11 profile variables are shown in Table 5. The "secure" cluster, which comprised the largest group of children ($n = 82$; 48%), exhibited low levels of emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and hostile internal representations of interparental relationships. "Dismissing" children in the second cluster ($n = 41$; 24%) reported experiencing relatively modest signs of insecurity along dimensions of emotional regulation and arousal, avoidance and involvement, and hostile internal representations. With the exception of their high rates of behavioral dysregulation and low levels of constructive family representations, these children's scores along emotional security dimensions more closely resembled those of the secure children than those of the preoccupied children. By the same token, their mothers reported that they exhibited high levels of overt emotionality, avoidance, and involvement in the context

Table 5 Study 2: Raw Means, Standard Deviations, and Statistical Comparisons of the Three Profiles of Emotional Security on the 11 Defining Variables

	Emotional Security Patterns					
	Secure (S) ($n = 82$) *M* (*SD*)	Dismissing (D) ($n = 41$) *M* (*SD*)	Preoccupied (P) ($n = 47$) *M* (*SD*)	Range of Scores	*F*(2, 167)	Tukey
Emotional reactivity						
Emotional arousal (C)	6.23 (1.99)	7.38 (2.41)	10.78 (2.46)	4–16	62.90**	P > D > S
Emotional dysregulation (C)	6.47 (1.85)	7.27 (1.99)	12.57 (3.39)	5–20	101.82**	P > D, S
Behavioral dysregulation (C)	3.22 (.50)	5.20 (2.30)	4.02 (1.39)	3–12	27.89**	D > P > S
Overt distress (P)	7.00 (2.05)	9.17 (4.06)	9.66 (4.36)	5–25	11.42**	P, D > S
Regulation of exposure to parent affect						
Involvement (C)	11.91 (3.11)	13.59 (3.98)	16.00 (3.32)	6–23	21.83**	P > D > S
Avoidance (C)	14.66 (4.04)	14.39 (4.41)	20.38 (3.19)	7–27	37.46**	P > D, S
Behavioral involvement (P)	12.13 (4.23)	15.02 (4.53)	13.66 (3.76)	6–26	6.83**	D > S
Behavioral avoidance (P)	4.20 (2.10)	4.99 (2.00)	5.30 (1.84)	2–10	5.10*	P > S; D > S$^+$
Internal representations of interparental relationships						
Constructive family representations (C)	14.55 (2.12)	10.71 (3.92)	13.72 (2.72)	4–16	25.91**	S > P, D
Destructive family representations (C)	4.76 (1.54)	7.11 (2.98)	9.42 (3.48)	4–16	50.02**	P > D > S
Conflict spillover (C)	4.67 (1.27)	6.28 (2.06)	9.06 (2.92)	4–16	69.55**	P > D > S

Note: (C) = child-report measure; (P) = parent-report measure.
*$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .005$; $^+p < .10$.

of interparental conflicts. Conversely, the "preoccupied" group of children (n = 47; 28%) exhibited significant signs of insecurity across the three component processes of emotional security and type of informant (i.e., mother and child report). Comparisons of the present cluster solution with the three-cluster solution generated from a nonhierarchical method (*K*-means) supported the stability of the cluster solution across different methods: (1) good classification agreement across the two cluster methods in assigning children to the clusters (84%, κ = .74), and (2) strong correlations among the mean profiles of the security variables generated by the two methods (rs $\geq$ .92 for each of the three groups).

Predictive Validity of the Cluster Profiles: Links with Reactivity to Conflict Simulations

The predictive validity of the cluster profiles was tested by examining linkages between cluster profiles and children's reports of reactivity to interparental conflict simulations 6 months later (n = 43). Because preoccupied children exhibited elevated signs of insecurity across the subjective response domains, we hypothesized that preoccupied children would report greater insecurity than would secure and dismissing children in the analog task. Furthermore, the theoretical assumption that dismissing children suppress subjective signs of insecurity led to the prediction that their responses would more closely resemble secure children than preoccupied children. A one-way (between-subjects factor: cluster groups) ANOVA was conducted for each of the six conflict simulation measures. Significant ANOVAs were followed up by Tukey post hoc tests. Consistent with hypotheses, the results in Table 6 indicate that preoccupied children reported significantly higher levels of insecurity than did the secure children across five response domains (i.e., emotional reactivity, avoidance, involvement, destructive family representations, and security goals), and the dismissing children across three response domains (emotional reactivity, avoidance, and destructive family representations). Dismissing and secure children's responses were not significantly different from each other.

Primary Analyses Plan

Preliminary analyses indicated that child gender and age failed to moderate the relationship between patterns of emotional security and interparental conflict, child psychological symptoms, family context and parenting practices, and child personality and coping characteristics. Therefore, gender and age were dropped from consideration in the primary analyses to maximize parsimony, statistical power, and the generalizability of the findings. To examine whether family and child characteristics differed as a function of children's profiles of emotional security, a one-way (between-subjects factor: emotional security patterns) MANOVA was conducted for each set of conceptually related dependent variables: (1) interparental conflict (six variables), (2) child symptomatology (five variables), (3) child personality and coping (six

Table 6 Study 2: Prospective Relations Between Emotional Security Profiles and Children's Subjective Reactivity to Simulated Interparental Conflict 6 Months Later

	Emotional Security Patterns					
	Secure (S) (n = 20) *M* (*SD*)	Dismissing (D) (n = 12) *M* (*SD*)	Preoccupied (P) (n = 11) *M* (*SD*)	Range of Scores	F(2, 40)	Tukey
Emotional reactivity						
Emotional reactivity	16.60 (14.64)	21.50 (12.63)	43.55 (12.16)	0–64	14.62**	P > D, S
Regulation of exposure to parent affect						
Involvement	24.80 (10.78)	33.08 (16.09)	36.09 (10.63)	4–60	3.44*	P > S
Avoidance	19.05 (10.25)	24.25 (17.16)	37.55 (12.49)	0–59	7.19**	P > D, S
Internal representations of interparental relationships						
Destructive family representations	14.35 (16.12)	17.08 (15.23)	38.91 (18.45)	0–71	8.43**	P > D, S
Conflict spillover	6.90 (10.52)	13.58 (13.45)	16.09 (14.48)	0–38	2.26	—
Goals relevant to preserving emotional security						
Emotional security	32.70 (8.71)	39.33 (8.00)	42.09 (5.49)	19–52	5.88**	P > S

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .005$.

variables), and (4) characteristics of family context and coping (six variables). Significant MANOVAs were followed up with univariate ANOVAs and Tukey post hoc tests to delineate the locus of the effect. Due to missing data, teacher reports of internalizing and externalizing symptoms were excluded from the MANOVA model for child symptomatology and instead submitted to separate one-way (between-subjects factor: emotional security patterns) ANOVAs.

Interparental conflict. A MANOVA revealed that interparental conflict history differed as a function of children's security patterns, $F(12, 324) = 6.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$. As shown in the top of Table 7, the univariate ANOVAs and post hoc tests indicated that preoccupied and dismissing children generally exhibited more intense and child-related conflicts between their parents. This pattern of results was consistent across type of informant (child versus mother). Dismissing children were especially prone to experiencing histories of unresolved parental conflicts, although the locus of the differences between preoccupied children and the other groups varied somewhat across informant.

Child symptomatology. The results of the second MANOVA indicated that emotional security patterns predicted children's psychological symptoms, $F(10, 326) = 8.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$. As shown in the bottom of Table 7, the emotional security patterns were robustly related to children's externalizing symptoms. Follow-up tests indicated that dismissing children exhibited significantly more substance use and parent- and child-reported externalizing symptoms than did secure and preoccupied children. Consistent with this pattern, follow-up tests of the significant ANOVA for teacher reports of externalizing symptoms, $F(2, 130) = 3.20$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$, indicated that dismissing children exhibited greater externalizing symptoms than did secure children. Follow-up analyses testing associations between emotional security and internalizing symptoms indicated that preoccupied children reported more internalizing symptoms than did the dismissing and secure children. Comparable ANOVAs for parent and teacher reports of internalizing symptoms were not significant.

Child personality and coping. The MANOVA for the set of child personality and coping variables was significant, $F(12, 324) = 7.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. Results of the follow-up tests shown in Table 8 revealed that dismissing and preoccupied children reported greater personality and coping difficulties than did secure children. Relative to secure children, dismissing children reported significantly lower levels of family investment and higher levels of unmitigated agency, hostile world views, and family worries and disengagement. Moreover, preoccupied children reported more unmitigated communion, hostile world views, and family worries and disengagement than did secure children. Personality and coping profiles of the two insecure groups also differed, with preoccupied children exhibiting greater unmitigated communion and family investment than did dismissing children.

Table 7 Study 2: Relation of Children's Profiles of Emotional Security to their Psychological Maladjustment and Histories of Interparental Conflict

	Emotional Security Patterns						
	Secure (S) *M* (*SD*)	Dismissing (D) *M* (*SD*)	Preoccupied (P) *M* (*SD*)	Range of Scores	$F(2, 167)$[a]	η^2	Tukey
Interparental conflict history							
Intense (C)	9.89 (2.66)	13.41 (3.70)	12.49 (3.35)	7–21	20.85**	.20	P, D > S
Intense (P)	24.50 (9.22)	30.60 (10.92)	29.59 (9.88)	8–58	6.91**	.08	P, D > S
Child related (C)	4.44 (1.02)	6.01 (2.31)	5.38 (1.87)	4–12	13.42**	.14	P, D > S
Child related (P)	8.79 (4.78)	11.84 (5.91)	11.79 (5.03)	0–29	7.33**	.08	P, D > S
Unresolved (C)	7.09 (1.83)	10.14 (3.14)	8.77 (2.66)	6–18	22.69**	.21	D > P > S
Unresolved (P)	16.58 (11.24)	26.91 (15.94)	20.91 (15.41)	0–64	7.85**	.09	D > S
Child symptomatology							
Internalizing (C)	7.45 (6.16)	10.14 (6.79)	13.93 (7.07)	0–31	14.57**	.15	P > D, S
Internalizing (P)	5.86 (5.13)	8.23 (6.51)	7.31 (6.32)	0–30	2.41	.03	—
Internalizing (T)	1.21 (1.49)	2.03 (2.39)	1.15 (2.02)	0–9	2.36	.04	—
Externalizing (C)	8.57 (6.27)	17.62 (10.54)	12.22 (6.85)	0–44	19.25**	.19	D > P > S
Externalizing (P)	6.91 (5.13)	12.54 (9.98)	7.43 (5.92)	0–41	10.03**	.11	D > P, S
Externalizing (T)	.18 (.91)	1.00 (2.38)	.59 (1.36)	0–10	3.20*	.05	D > S
Substance use (C)	4.89 (1.96)	6.71 (3.49)	4.86 (1.19)	4–18	10.09**	.11	D > P, S

Note: (C) = child-report measure; (P) = parent-report measure; (T) = teacher-report measure.
[a] *df* (2, 132) for teacher reports.
* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .005$.

Table 8 Study 2: Relation of Children's Profiles of Emotional Security to Personality, Coping, and Family and Childrearing Experiences

	Emotional Security Patterns						
	Secure (S) *M* (*SD*)	Dismissing (D) *M* (*SD*)	Preoccupied (P) *M* (*SD*)	Range of Scores	*F*(2, 167)	η^2	Tukey
Child personality and coping							
Unmitigated Communion Scale (C)	17.30 (4.32)	18.69 (4.53)	21.59 (3.98)	7-35	15.79**	.16	P > D, S
Unmitigated Agency Scale (C)	13.20 (4.04)	16.05 (4.76)	14.62 (3.97)	7-29	6.50**	.07	D > S
Negative World View Scale (C)	11.77 (4.45)	15.77 (5.25)	14.40 (4.76)	6-28	11.03**	.12	P, D > S
Family Worries (C)	17.38 (5.60)	22.36 (6.50)	25.12 (5.36)	8-40	29.15**	.26	P, D > S
Family Disengagement (C)	11.21 (4.12)	16.00 (5.34)	14.78 (5.32)	6-30	16.58**	.17	P, D > S
Family Investment (C)	29.39 (4.52)	24.88 (5.76)	27.87 (4.96)	10-35	11.30**	.12	S, P > D
Characteristics of family context and parenting							
Maternal depression (P)	8.56 (7.90)	13.05 (10.59)	9.66 (11.16)	20-64	3.04*	.04	D > S
Family cohesion (P)	42.00 (4.67)	38.85 (5.51)	39.98 (5.50)	27-50	5.79**	.07	S > D
Partner satisfaction (P)	29.91 (5.27)	24.78 (7.98)	28.47 (5.40)	8-35	9.81**	.11	S, P > D
Parent psychological control (C)	23.35 (7.40)	26.65 (8.29)	28.81 (8.92)	16-64	7.26**	.08	P > S
Parental acceptance (C)	69.00 (13.71)	64.67 (13.29)	63.08 (15.70)	20-80	2.97*	.03	S > P
Parental Acceptance (P)	31.55 (5.42)	29.11 (5.62)	28.96 (6.11)	16-37	4.22*	.05	S > P

Note: (C) = child-report measure; (P) = parent-report measure.
*$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .005$.

Characteristics of family context and parenting. A MANOVA indicated that children in the three emotional security groups also differed on family context and parenting variables, $F(12, 324) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Results of the follow-up tests, which are presented in the bottom half of Table 8, revealed that mothers of dismissing children reported more depressive symptoms and lower family cohesion and interpartner relationship satisfaction than did mothers of secure children. Although preoccupied children were statistically indistinguishable from secure and dismissing groups on measures of maternal depressive symptoms and family cohesion, mothers of dismissing children reported greater partner dissatisfaction than did mothers of preoccupied children. In contrast, parenting difficulties were highest for preoccupied children. Preoccupied children specifically perceived less parental acceptance and greater parental psychological control than did secure children. Similarly, mothers of preoccupied children reported significantly lower levels of parental acceptance than did mothers of secure children.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The findings of these two exploratory, person-based studies provide empirical corroboration for conceptualizing emotional security as a dynamic, nonlinear goal-corrected system. Although some discrepancies in specific characteristics of the profiles and correlates of emotional security were observed across the two studies, the cluster analyses in both studies supported the hypothesis that children can be meaningfully classified into secure, dismissing, and preoccupied patterns of preserving emotional security in the interparental subsystem. In addition to delineating possible differences between preoccupied and dismissing children in their family experiences and psychosocial adaptation, the findings showed that children in these insecure groups experienced greater family and psychological adjustment difficulties than did the secure children. Replicability in identifying the emotional security patterns and their family and child functioning correlates was especially striking in light of the variation in measures, methodological designs, research site, and sample characteristics across the studies.

The cluster analyses were designed to address two main questions: What higher order patterns of behavior can be identified, and how should they be interpreted in relation to children's success in efficiently preserving their emotional security? Comprising the largest group of children in both studies (about half of the sample), findings from both studies indicated that the secure children exhibited mild, well-regulated reactions to witnessing interparental conflict that were characterized by low levels of emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and hostile representations of interparental relationships. Thus, the results collectively suggest that these children are able to efficiently preserve their security in the face of parental conflict.

Preoccupied children, who comprised about one

quarter of the children in each study, exhibited high levels of overt and covert emotional reactivity, impulses to avoid or intervene in the conflicts, and hostile representations of the interparental relationships. Interpreted within the emotional security hypothesis, this organization of responding may reflect difficulties with insecurity in two different parts of the goal-corrected system. First, high levels of emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and hostile internal representations may signify that preoccupied children have relatively low thresholds for experiencing emotional insecurity. Second, if the goal of preserving emotional security regulates, and is regulated by, the three component processes as our theory suggests, then it should no longer be necessary for children to channel resources toward emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure to parent affect, and internal representations as they attain a comfortable level of security. However, the intensity and chronicity of preoccupied children's distress responses suggests that the component processes, which may have originally been adaptive in preparing children to cope with threat, are no longer effective in regaining emotional security.

The advantages of taking a person-based approach to assessing children's emotional security are perhaps best illustrated by the response patterns of dismissing children. Consistent with the preoccupied profile, both studies revealed that dismissing children displayed overt signs of elevated distress, avoidance, and involvement in response to parental conflicts. However, their subjective reports of emotional reactivity, impulses to regulate exposure to parent affect, and internal representations more closely resembled those of secure children than those of preoccupied children. Because this lack of correspondence between observer and child reports of children's reactivity to interparental conflict is often treated as noise or error variance in variable-based, linear conceptualizations of security, we believe that such designs cannot effectively capture specific strategies of suppressing indicators of insecurity. The lack of correspondence between observer and child reports of children's reactivity to interparental conflict is often treated by variable-based designs as noise or error variance. Although this lack of correspondence may be attributable, in part, to error and limitations in measurement, our thesis is that a considerable portion of the unique variance also reflects meaningful patterns of behavior and strategies for preserving their emotional security. Specifically, in an effort to gain some degree of felt security in the face of parental conflict, we believe that dismissing children are engaging in a normative form of dissociation characterized by the blunting of overwhelming subjective distress (Cole et al., 1994).

Confidence in our hypothesis that the profiles of reactivity to conflict reflect distinct, theoretically meaningful strategies for preserving emotional security in the interparental relationship is bolstered by observed profile differences in family and child functioning. Relative to the two insecure groups of children, secure children in both studies experienced more benign histories of interparental conflict and fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Study 2 further suggested that the secure children experienced supportive and cohesive family relationships and fewer personality and coping difficulties in family and social relationships. In the context of our reformulation, profiles of security are specifically theorized to reflect children's confidence in their parents to effectively manage their own disagreements and stems from their experiences with witnessing constructive, well-managed conflict between parents (e.g., conflict resolution) in a warm, supportive, family context (Davies & Cummings, 1998). For these children, preserving emotional security is rarely a prominent concern in children's hierarchy of developmental goals. Thus, secure children's adjustment may be facilitated by well-regulated and flexible use of emotions, coping strategies, and appraisals of social relationships and the larger reserves of psychological and biological resources that they have to devote to developmental goals.

Preoccupied and dismissing children shared some similar sources of family adversity and psychosocial vulnerability. In support of the hypothesis that high levels of parental conflict undermine children's security, children in both insecure groups experienced higher levels of destructive interparental conflict than did secure children. As bystanders of repeated discord between parents and its negative ramifications for family life, insecure children may increasingly regard family and interpersonal relationships as sources of personal threat that require vigilant monitoring and prompt use of coping strategies to preserve well-being at the first signs of interpersonal difficulties (Davies et al., 2002). Supporting this prediction, insecure children were more likely than were secure children to endorse worrying and disengagement during times of family stress, and appraisals of the world as a hostile place.

Our reformulation also stresses that qualitatively different patterns of insecurity in the interparental subsystem may develop from distinct family dynamics. Lending further support to the sensitization hypothesis, the elevated levels of destructive interparental conflict in the lives of preoccupied children suggest that the excessive involvement, worry, and rumination of these children may be a product, in

part, of repeated exposure to destructive conflict between parents. In adopting a family-systems perspective on emotional security (Coyne, Downey, & Boergers, 1992), we further hypothesized that the process of sensitization may be amplified or maintained by other family processes that serve to emotionally pull and coax children into interparental difficulties. Consistent with this hypothesis, preoccupied children experienced high levels of parental psychological control and childrearing disagreements. Psychologically controlling parents who use discipline strategies that manipulate the parent–child emotional relationship may intensify preoccupied strategies for coping with interparental conflict by constraining children's autonomy, compromising their perceived personal efficacy, and heightening their feelings of guilt and dependency in the family (Barber, 1996). Likewise, the heightened shame, self-blame, and worries about becoming involved in parental disputes that accompany exposure to childrearing disagreements may further foster preoccupation in the interparental subsystem (Grych, 1998; Grych & Fincham, 1993). Finally, the findings of the present research indicating that preoccupied children actually experienced relatively high levels of interparental conflict resolution and spousal relationship satisfaction may, at first glance, seem counterintuitive. However, signs of family cohesiveness in the context of interparental hostility may increase the value that children place on family relationships and, in the process, share a similar function of drawing children into interparental problems.

Dismissing strategies for regaining emotional security were posited to develop when exposure to destructive interparental conflict occurred in the context of unsupportive, dysphoric, and disengaged family relationships. In support of this hypothesis, the results of both studies indicated that dismissing children experienced elevated levels of destructive interparental conflict that were especially likely to be manifested in parental difficulties resolving disputes. Study 2 further revealed that the homes of dismissing children were characterized by the highest levels of maternal depressive symptoms, poor family cohesion, and spousal relationship dissatisfaction. Thus, although dismissing children may experience a similar sensitization process in which they become increasingly reactive to interparental conflict, our theoretically guided (but speculative) interpretation is that they alter aspects of the goal-corrected system of emotional security in a way that maximizes their sense of security in the larger family context. When interparental conflict and relationships are part of a broader pattern of disengaged family relationships, children may view the family as a source of stress rather than support and, as a result, suppress their subjective threat as a way of regaining some felt security.

Our hypothesis that dismissing and preoccupied children would exhibit some distinct patterns of adjustment and symptomatology received partial support. Excessive worrying, vigilance, and rumination about family stressors that characterize preoccupied children were specifically expected to lay the foundation for negative self-perceptions and internalizing symptoms. In contrast, dismissing children's tendencies to minimize the importance of interparental relationships were hypothesized to culminate in negative views of the social world, violation of moral and conventional rules (e.g., aggression and substance use), and family disengagement (Cummings & Davies, 1992; Finnegan et al., 1996; Kobak et al., 1993). Partly supporting the hypotheses, preoccupied children were at greater risk for internalizing symptoms and unmitigated communion. Conversely, dismissing children displayed greater conduct problems across multiple dimensions (e.g., externalizing symptoms and substance use) and informants (e.g., mother and child).

Comparability among our three profiles of security and the organization of child–parent attachment patterns also raises the possibility that children may utilize similar strategies for preserving security in the interparental and parent–child relationships. Thus, secure, dismissing, and preoccupied profiles of security in the interparental relationship broadly resemble the higher order organization of behaviors, affect, and appraisals of secure, dismissing, and preoccupied attachment patterns in parent–child and adult relationships (Colin, 1996; Kobak et al., 1993). However, although indicators of insecurity may share some similarities in form and function across parent–child and interparental relationships (e.g., avoidance may reduce the salience of a stressor in the parent–child or interparental relationship), the emotional security hypothesis maintains that the goal-corrected system of emotional security and its component processes are distinct from parent–child attachment patterns in their meaning and functional significance. For example, although avoidance of proximity and interaction with parents in separation–reunion paradigms of attachment are hallmarks of avoidant attachment patterns (Colin, 1996), the emotional security hypothesis posits that these same reactivity patterns during bouts of interparental difficulties may signify security and confidence in the parents' abilities to maintain family harmony. Recent empirical evidence further suggests that indicators of insecurity in interparental and parent–child relationships appear to have distinct family and psychosocial correlates. For example, interparental conflict was the most robust predictor of children's

insecurity in the interparental relationship, even after specifying the effects of parenting difficulties and parent–child relationship insecurity (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, in press). Further supporting this interpretation, the Study 2 results indicate that the effect sizes of parent and child reports of interparental conflict in predicting the security patterns were consistently larger than comparable effect sizes for the parenting variables, personality traits, and psychological symptoms. Thus, although we cannot definitively rule out the possibility that the present security profiles reflect another method of assessing attachment security or child temperament, the findings suggest that preserving security in the interparental relationship is distinct from these relational and intrapersonal attributes.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, there are several limitations and caveats that merit discussion. First, contrary to our hypotheses, the cluster analyses failed to identify a group of masking children. However, it would be premature at this early stage of research to conclude that children do not exhibit masking patterns. Earlier research has identified affect inhibition as a common reaction pattern of children exposed to threatening interpersonal events such as parental abuse and interadult anger (Cummings, 1987; El-Sheikh et al., 1989; Shipman et al., 2000).

Second, considerable caution should be taken in generalizing the findings beyond the relatively small samples of predominantly White, middle-class children and mothers in these studies. The strategies that children use to preserve their emotional security may vary across different cultural and socialization contexts (e.g., Cole & Tamang, 1998) and in larger samples. For example, various models in developmental psychopathology have stressed that children facing severe family adversity (e.g., abuse) may be especially likely to mask their distress in an effort to reduce their salience as targets of family hostility (Shipman et al., 2000). Thus, other patterns of coping, including masking, may be more readily evident in larger and at-risk samples.

Third, methodological characteristics of the studies limit the interpretation of the results. Cross-sectional designs, although appropriate for this early stage of research, cannot address the possibility that predictive relations are attributable to child effects on parents or third variables (e.g., stressful events). Disentangling the directionality of these interrelations will require prospective designs in future research. In addition, there may be multiple, plausible interpretations of the meaning of the cluster profiles. For example, dismissing children's failure to acknowledge subjective threat may partly result from neuropsychological difficulties that impair emotion regulation skills or reflect broader styles of coping with stress (Cummings & El-Sheikh, 1991). Error variance may also contribute, in part, to discrepancies between overt and subjective reactivity, although error variance would likely increase methodological "noise" and dilute the magnitude of the findings.

Consistent with variable-based models, the dismissing children in Study 2 might also be interpreted to be a moderately distressed group that falls between the two extremes defined by secure (i.e., low-distress) and preoccupied (i.e., high-distress) children. However, closer examination of the data suggests that linear hypotheses do not fully explain the findings. The dismissing children exhibited levels of overt distress, involvement, and avoidance that were comparable with the preoccupied children, while more closely resembling secure children along most subjective indices of security. Furthermore, linear conceptualizations of security posit that higher levels of distress in response to conflict should be linked with correspondingly greater family adversity and child maladjustment, yet Study 2 findings indicated that dismissing children evidenced levels of family and psychological problems that were similar to, if not greater than, those of preoccupied children.

Fourth, by advancing a person-based reformulation of emotional security, we are not advocating the elimination of variable-based approaches. Like any method, linear assessments in variable-based analyses may not fully capture all aspects of the emotional security construct. However, linear assessments of security hold advantages over person-based approaches for many research applications. For example, variable-based analyses tend to maximize statistical power and parsimony while also affording precision in examining specificity in pathways among family characteristics, specific indicators of insecurity, and patterns of adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies & Cummings, 1998; Owen & Cox, 1997). Thus, person- and variable-based approaches are best regarded as complementary models that are each useful in advancing family models of security (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996).

Despite these caveats, the present findings lay the groundwork for the study of pathways among interparental conflict and family characteristics, children's patterns of preserving emotional security in the interparental relationship, and child adjustment. The degree of correspondence in identifying secure, dismissing, and preoccupied patterns of preserving emotional security was remarkable across studies that differed widely in assessment, methodological design, stimuli, and sample characteristics. Lending

further support to our reformulation of the emotional security hypothesis, the findings from the studies suggested that three patterns of emotional security were associated with theoretically meaningful patterns of child adjustment and interparental and family functioning.

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