

EMOTIONS and the FAMILY

RICHARD A. FABES EDITOR

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as *Marriage & Family Review*, Volume 34, Numbers 1/2/3/4 2002.



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CONTENTS

PART I: GENERAL FAMILY/MARRIAGE PROCESSES

Introduction	3
<i>Richard A. Fabes</i>	
<i>Carlos Valiente</i>	
<i>Stacie A. Leonard</i>	
A Family-Wide Model for the Role of Emotion in Family Functioning	13
<i>E. Mark Cummings</i>	
<i>Marcie C. Goeke-Morey</i>	
<i>Lauren M. Papp</i>	
A Meta-Analysis of Family Expressiveness and Children's Emotion Expressiveness and Understanding	35
<i>Amy G. Halberstadt</i>	
<i>Kimberly L. Eaton</i>	
"When My Mommy Was Angry, I Was Speechless": Children's Perceptions of Maternal Emotional Expressiveness Within the Context of Economic Hardship	63
<i>C. Cybele Raver</i>	
<i>Mary Spagnola</i>	
Psychosocial Moderators of Emotional Reactivity to Marital Arguments: Results from a Daily Diary Study	89
<i>David M. Almeida</i>	
<i>Katherine A. McGonagle</i>	
<i>Rodney C. Cate</i>	
<i>Ronald C. Kessler</i>	
<i>Elaine Wethington</i>	

Emotional and Relational Consequences of Coping in Stepfamilies	115
<i>Anita DeLongis</i>	
<i>Melady Preece</i>	

Affect Pattern Recognition: Using Discrete Hidden Markov Models to Discriminate Distressed from Nondistressed Couples	139
<i>William A. Griffin</i>	

The Role of Emotions in Marriage and Family Therapy: Past, Present, and Future	165
<i>Debra A. Madden-Derdich</i>	

PART II: DEVELOPMENTAL AND PARENT-CHILD PROCESSES

The Contribution of Older Siblings' Reactions to Emotions to Preschoolers' Emotional and Social Competence	183
<i>Katharine Strandberg Sawyer</i>	
<i>Susanne Denham</i>	
<i>Elizabeth DeMulder</i>	
<i>Kimberly Blair</i>	
<i>Sharon Auerbach-Major</i>	
<i>Jennifer Levitas</i>	

Children's Understanding of Emotion Communication in Families	213
<i>Carolyn Saarni</i>	
<i>Maureen Buckley</i>	

Maternal Sensitivity and Infant Emotional Reactivity: Concurrent and Longitudinal Relations	243
<i>Tracy L. Spinrad</i>	
<i>Cynthia A. Stifter</i>	

Children's Emotional Reactions to Stressful Parent-Child Interactions: The Link Between Emotion Regulation and Vagal Tone	265
<i>John Mordechai Gottman</i>	
<i>Lynn Fainsilber Katz</i>	

The Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES): Psychometric Properties and Relations with Children's Emotional Competence	285
<i>Richard A. Fabes</i>	
<i>Richard E. Poulin</i>	
<i>Nancy Eisenberg</i>	
<i>Debra A. Madden-Derdich</i>	
Parental Contributions to Preschoolers' Understanding of Emotion	311
<i>Susanne Denham</i>	
<i>Anita T. Kochanoff</i>	
Children's Emotional Regulation and Social Competence in Middle Childhood: The Role of Maternal and Paternal Interactive Style	345
<i>David J. McDowell</i>	
<i>Mina Kim</i>	
<i>Robin O'Neil</i>	
<i>Ross D. Parke</i>	
Index	367



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PART I:
*GENERAL FAMILY/
MARRIAGE PROCESSES*



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Introduction

Richard A. Fabes
Carlos Valiente
Stacie A. Leonard

PART I: GENERAL FAMILY/MARRIAGE PROCESSES

A family is a place where minds come in contact with one another. If these minds love one another the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden. But if these minds get out of harmony with one another it is like a storm that plays havoc with the garden.

—Buddha

In this quote from Buddha, the dynamic role that emotions play in family life is insinuated. “The family is the place where minds come in contact with one another” reflects the fact that the emotional lives of family members interact, influence, and confront one another. Sometimes these emotional interactions and confrontations are relatively calm and benign, sometimes they are filled with rapture and affection, and sometimes they are like a storm of anger, rage, fear, and anxiety that plays havoc with family harmony and relationships. Moreover, emotions are involved in almost every aspect of family development: from the beginnings of family formation (e.g., dating, courting, attraction, and marriage), to the transition to parenthood (e.g., pregnancy, birth, bonding, and attachment), parenting (e.g., socialization and discipline), as well as the dissolution of family relationships (e.g., divorce and

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death). Thus, in many ways, the fabric of family life is woven together by the complex interplay of the emotions of its members. As a result, behavior often is at its emotional peak at home. Families, therefore, provide a natural laboratory for the investigation of emotional experience and expression.

Given its centrality to everyday family life and family interaction, it is surprising that, with few exceptions (e.g., Blechman, 1990; Brody, 1999; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Halberstadt, 1991; Saarni, 1993), theoretical and empirical work focusing specifically on emotions and the family are relatively rare. The purpose of this volume is to highlight theory and research on the role that emotions play in family life and in the relationships among family members. Although contributors differ in regard to their specific focus on emotions, they are in agreement about the adaptive function of emotions. All contributors portray family members' interactions and competence as dependent on the way emotions are experienced and expressed within the family.

The papers in this volume reflect the dramatic change that has taken place in how we view emotions. Emotions no longer are viewed primarily as a function of *intrapsychic* processes, but now are viewed to have important *interpsychic* functions. Thus, emotions are considered to have social functions that help regulate, guide, and influence the actions, behaviors, and emotions of others (Saarni, Mumme, & Campos, 1998).

Frijda (1986) discussed the social functions of emotions and argued that one principle can be derived that covers the social functions of emotions: the principle of *relational activity*. Relational activity refers to actions that establish or modify a relationship between an individual and his or her environment. Emotional behaviors are considered to meet this definition and thus possess the functional significance associated with relational activity.

The conceptualization of emotions from a relational perspective has significant implications for our understanding of families and emotions—emotions have important functions that affect family interactions. To illustrate these qualities, we adapted Frijda's (1986) description of the qualities of different emotional states to include how these different emotions affect family interaction patterns (e.g., their relational activity in regard to family interactions—see Table 1). For example, the emotion of anger has a behavioral tendency that reflects attack and threat (e.g., agonistic). The effect of this tendency on the relationship between an individual and his or her family reflects an effort to establish control or dominance. Insult and derision also can be derived as consequences of

TABLE 1. Emotions and Their Relation to Family Interactions

Emotion	Behavioral Tendency	Relational Activity Associated with Family Interaction Patterns
Desire	Approach	Enhanced access and availability
Fear	Avoidance	Withdrawal or seeking protection
Happiness	Contact	Maintenance of interaction
Interest	Attending to	Recognizable orientation and awareness
Disgust	Avoidance	Rejection
Anger	Agonistic	Establishment of control or dominance
Anxiety	Inhibition	Increased caution and tension
Sadness	Deactivation	Acknowledgment of submissiveness and elicitation of concern

Adapted from Frijda, 1986.

the relational activity of anger. Thus, by this conceptualization, emotions are thought to organize and reorganize family interactions and patterns of family relationships.

It also is important to point out that family relationships and family developments affect the organization and reorganization of family members' emotional lives. Changes associated with childbirth, marriage, divorce, and death produce major emotional reorganizations in family members. In turn, these emotional reorganizations have the potential to affect the quality of subsequent family relationships and developments.

The articles in this collection reflect this new and dynamic view of emotions. Although they focus on different topics, they all acknowledge the interpersonal nature of emotions and their role in family life and family interactions. There are two parts to this volume. The papers in the first half focus on general family and marriage processes related to emotions and the family. The focus of the second half is concentrated more on developmental and parent-child processes. The distinction between these two is arbitrary and there is considerable overlap in the topics reflected in both parts.

Readers will be exposed to a wide variety of approaches to the study of emotions and family functioning. These differences reflect an important question in the study of emotion: namely, how do we best study

processes that are as internal and private as are emotions? Because emotions are inherently intrinsic qualities, measuring these qualities presents serious methodological challenges and problems. Added to this problem is the fact that emotional expressions can be controlled and manipulated. Thus, the overt qualities associated with the expression of emotion may or may not precisely reflect the true internal state. A family member may smile while being angry or exaggerate an expression of sadness without truly feeling as sad as they appear. In contrast, a family member may appear calm and unemotional but be seething with rage inside. These manipulations and deceptions of the expression of emotion are not limited to adults. Children quickly learn that they can get what they want by faking or exaggerating certain emotions (e.g., pretend crying or throwing a fake temper tantrum) and by the end of preschool, children learn to control certain emotional expressions that are inappropriate for their gender (Birnbaum & Chemelski, 1984; Brody, 1985).

If you want to know how someone is feeling, researchers generally have relied on asking people how they feel or felt. The advantages of using self-reports of emotion are obvious—they are easy to administer and can provide a relatively differentiated measure of emotion (Batson, 1987). The value of self-reports of emotion, however, rests on two assumptions: (1) that individuals know what they are feeling, and (2) that they will accurately tell us what they are feeling. Some individuals have difficulty identifying and reporting the emotions they are feeling. This is especially true for young children, but also can be true for adults. Emotions can be blends that are difficult to label (e.g., feeling both attraction and repulsion) and sometimes the context of the emotion makes it difficult to identify precisely what one is feeling. Even when individuals know what they are feeling, they may not want to communicate their true feelings. Thus, self-reports of emotions are susceptible to distortions due to social desirability, self-presentation, and demand characteristics of the situation.

In search for measures of emotion that are more accurate, sensitive, and more objective, researchers have turned to non-verbal measures of emotion. You will see this in several of the papers in this collection. Facial (Griffin, Part I), behavioral (Spinrad & Stifter, Part II), and physiological (Gottman & Katz, Part II) measures of emotion reflect the different ways that emotions may be measured. Even when self-reports are used, many different approaches are reflected, including daily diary reports (Almeida et al.; DeLongis & Preece; Cummings et al., Part I), questionnaires (Halberstadt & Eaton, Part I; Fabes et al., Part II), and story measures (Raver & Spagnola, Part I; Denham et al., Part II).

Moreover, the authors in this volume take different approaches to the specific aspect of family-emotion dynamics on which they concentrate. Some focus on the marital relationship (Almeida et al., Griffin, Part I), others focus on the parent-child relationship (e.g., McDowell et al., Part II), whereas others focus on sibling (Denham et al., Part II) or stepfamily relationships (DeLongis & Preece, Part I). Others focus on families as a whole (e.g., Saarni & Buckley, Part II). Even more impressive is the wide array of family contexts emphasized in the different papers—ranging from a focus on specific relationships within a family, to families in therapy (Madden-Derdich, Part I), to a more molar view of the impact of contextual influences on family emotionality (Raver & Spagnola, Part I). This last aspect is critical because we know little about how larger social forces (e.g., cultural and ethnic values) moderate and mediate the relation between emotions and family dynamics.

The articles presented in this volume go a long way toward addressing the complexities associated with understanding the role that emotions play in family functioning. Several directions are identified for new avenues of research, theory, measurement, and analysis. We hope that these articles spur more attention to study of emotions—both positive and negative—and family dynamics.

PART II: DEVELOPMENTAL AND PARENT/CHILD PROCESSES

When you're drawing up your list of life's miracles, you might place near the top the first moment your baby smiles at you . . . Today, she looked right at me. And she smiled. . . . Her toothless mouth opened, and she scrunched her face up and it really was a grin. . . . The sleepless nights, the worries, the crying—all of a sudden it was all worth it. . . . She is no longer just something we are nursing and carrying along—somewhere inside, part of her knows what's going on, and that part of her is telling us that she's with us.

—Bob Greene (1985, pp. 34-35)

In his journal of the early years of his daughter's life, reporter Bob Greene (Greene, 1985) dramatically depicts the important role that

emotions and emotional behaviors play in children's development and in influencing parent-child relationships. He notes the impact that his daughter's first smile had on him, washing away a lot of the concern, worry, and fatigue of early parenting and enhancing his commitment and enthusiasm for parenting and being a parent. More importantly, he reveals the implicit belief that emotions make us human and contribute significantly to the meaning of parent-child relationships. His daughter's smile was interpreted to mean that she was gaining awareness of her relationship to her family environment and that she was becoming more of an interactive partner in the parent-child relationship. Moreover, her smile meant that parenting no longer merely involved the daily caregiving activities of feeding, cleaning, and carrying, but that she was telling him that "she's with us"—becoming a member of the family and a more active contributor to family relationships.

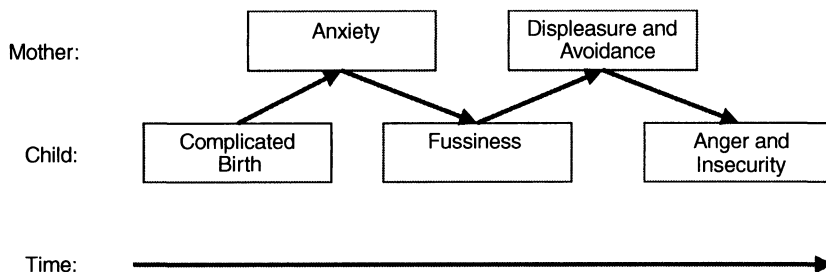
As noted in the Introduction of Part I of this volume, emotions are involved in almost every aspect of family development. Certainly, emotions are intimately involved in almost as many aspects of the parent-child relationship. Parents' emotions influence children's development and emotions (Halberstadt, 1991) and children's development and emotions influence parents' emotions and behavior (Dix, 1991).

These dynamics reflect the fact that emotions are transactional in nature—they reflect the interplay between the qualities individuals bring to their environments and the diversity of environments individuals experience (Sameroff, 1987). An example of the transactional nature of emotions and parent-child interactions is presented in Figure 1. As depicted in this figure, a complicated childbirth may make a mother anxious and nervous about her fragile newborn child. The mother's anxiety during the first months of the infant's life may cause her to be uncertain and inappropriate in her interactions with the infant. In response to such inconsistency, the infant may become fussy and difficult. This fussiness decreases the pleasure the mother obtains from the child and, as a result, she spends less time with her infant. One outcome of her withdrawal is that the child may develop feelings of anger, resentment, and insecurity. In this example, the outcome (the child's insecurity and anger) was not caused by the complicated birth nor by the mother's subsequent anxiety. The most direct cause is the mother's displeasure and avoidance in interacting with her child—but this conclusion would be a serious oversimplification of a complex sequence of emotion-related transactions that occurred over time. Clearly, there is a need for more research that is transactional and focuses on the bi-directional effects of parent-child emotionality.

For much of this century, a focal issue in the study of children's development has been the process of socialization (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Although attention has been paid to the effects and correlates of parental warmth and hostility on children's development (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), until recently, there has been considerably less attention paid with how family members' socialize each others' emotions and emotion-related behavior (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). The papers contained in this volume make a significant contribution to this relatively neglected area of family research and reflect the diversity of topics related to this area of inquiry. For example, the papers focus on a variety of emotion-related processes ranging from parental interactive styles (McDowell et al.) to parental responsiveness (Spinrad & Stifter) to how parents react to children's emotions (Fabes et al.). Moreover, these papers focus on various parent subsystems—ranging from the study of the impact of individual mothers and fathers to the study of the marital system (Cummings et al., Part I). Although most of the papers in this portion of the work focus on parent-child relationships, the Sawyer et al. paper focuses on another important family influence on emotional development—namely, the impact of siblings. This is important because interactions with siblings provide a context for a wider range of emotional experiences than do parent-child interactions and interactions with siblings have been found to be typified by greater emotional intensity than the exchanges that characterize other family interactions (Katz, Kramer, & Gottman, 1992). Thus, emotions and family interactions vary depending on the specific nature of the individual family members involved in the interactions.

The papers in Part II also vary in regard to the nature of emotion-related outcomes. Some papers focus more on emotional reactivity (Spinrad & Stifter), whereas others are more concerned with how this reactivity is regulated (McDowell et al.; Gottman & Katz). Some authors focus more on general emotional competence (McDowell et al.; Fabes et al.), whereas others focus more on specific elements of general emotional competence, such as understanding and communication of emotion (Denham & Kochanoff; Sawyer et al.; Saarni & Buckley). A bias in all of the research is that almost all of the papers focus on the influence of parents' behavior on child outcomes. One notable exception is the work of Fabes et al. who specifically developed a scale that measures parents' reactions to children's negative emotions—focusing on how children's negative emotions influence parental behaviors and emotional reactions. But even in our paper, the outcome for the study is how these parental responses influence children's emotion-related responding.

FIGURE 1. Transactional Depiction of the Relation of Emotions and Parent-Child Interactions.



Adapted from: Sameroff (1987).

Clearly, there is a need for greater study as to how children affect the organization and reorganization of parental (and sibling) emotions and behaviors (cf. Dix, 1991).

These papers also cover a wide, but not complete, age range of children's development. The study of children's emotions from infancy through middle-school is well represented. Absent from this is the study of the relations of family and emotions in adolescents—an area that needs more work devoted to it.

In the introduction to Part I, we noted some of the problems associated with measuring emotions, particularly in regard to self-reports of emotion. Most researchers who study emotions wish for better measures than we now have. The need for measures of emotion that are more accurate, sensitive, reliable, and objective is clear and breakthroughs in the study of emotion and families will require the use of new sources of evidence to supplement the popular measures currently used. In our view, the most likely area for a measurement breakthrough is the physiological domain. Although we can still learn a lot about emotions by asking people how they feel, the use of physiological measures appears to be the key to new developments in the measurement of emotion. The Gottman and Katz paper reflects this new potential. In addition to heart rate and its various indexes (e.g., mean heart rate, heart rate variability, vagal tone), emotion researchers also have turned to the use of other physiological measures such as: electrodermal activities (e.g., skin conductance; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Eisenbud, 1993), temperature (Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983), facial electromyograms (e.g., facial mus-

cle contractions; Wilson & Cantor, 1985), brain waves (Calkins, Fox, & Marshall, 1996), blood pressure (Prkachin, Williams-Avery, Zwaal, & Mills, 1999), and hormones such as cortisol (a stress-related hormone; Stansbury & Gunnar, 1994). Although rarely done, we believe that these measures can be used to examine physiological linkages and affective exchanges among family members (cf. Levenson & Gottman, 1983). Thus, the use of physiological measures to assess emotions among family members may provide new insights in the ways that emotions affect, and are affected by, the ways that family members relate to, interact with, and influence one another.

We wish to thank the authors for their willingness to contribute to this important book. Appreciation also goes to Gary Peterson and Sue Steinmetz, co-editors of *Marriage & Family Review*, for their advice and assistance in getting the papers to press. Finally, thanks goes to all those individuals who helped with the reading and reviewing of the papers. Their advice helped shape the quality of the work. Together, we hope this volume generates more interest in understanding better the relation between emotions and family life.

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A Family-Wide Model for the Role of Emotion in Family Functioning

E. Mark Cummings
Marcie C. Goeke-Morey
Lauren M. Papp

SUMMARY. A family-wide perspective is essential for comprehensive understanding of the influence of emotions on child and marital functioning. After reviewing a family systems perspective on emotions, a specific family-wide model (i.e., an emotional security hypothesis) is outlined. Exploratory analyses based on a new diary methodology are presented examining interconnections between emotions and behaviors among family members during marital conflict situations in the home. Results based on both mothers' and fathers' reports indicated that emotions and behaviors in the marital subsystem were linked to children's emotional and behavioral reactions in a manner consistent with an emotional security hypothesis. Implications for a family-wide model of emotion and directions for future research are discussed. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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A distinguished body of research has evolved indicating the significance of emotions to children's functioning and development (Denham, 1998; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Harris, 1989; Saarni, 1999). However, with a few notable exceptions (Cummings & Davies, 1996; Denham & Grout, 1992; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997), research and theory have only begun to advance the study of the role of emotions in child and family functioning from a family-wide perspective. A family-wide perspective is undoubtedly essential for a comprehensive understanding of the effects of emotions on child and family functioning. This paper is concerned with conceptual themes toward advancing a family-wide model of the role of emotions in child and family functioning. Given the centrality of methodology to the potential for new advances in understanding (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000), attention is also given to a new methodology being employed to study these questions and the ways in which the current investigation contributes to the understanding and study of these issues. Moreover, to illustrate directions for future research, exploratory analyses are presented that examine interconnections between emotions and behaviors among family members.

A FAMILY SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE ON EMOTIONS

Families are appropriately viewed as relational environments with systems qualities (Cox & Paley, 1997). Thus, a systems theory perspective may be usefully applied to outlining the complex patterns of mutual influence that characterize family functioning. Accordingly, such a perspective emphasizes viewing families as organized wholes, with the wholes having influences above and beyond those of its parts. For example, overall family emotional expressiveness may constitute a context for children's reaction to family emotion, beyond effects due to the emotional qualities of specific family subsystems (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992). Thus, a child whose family experiences indicate that highly emotional exchanges have benign outcomes in families may not be disturbed by emotionally-charged interactions (e.g., between parents and children or between husbands and wives), whereas a child from a family environment in which such exchanges often have negative outcomes may respond with distress. Thus, larger units within the family are pertinent to an understanding of emotion as influences within the family (triadic subsystems, for example, mother,

father and child as a relation unit, or the whole family system as a unit of contextual influence) (Cox & Paley, 1997).

At the same time, it also follows from systems theory that the family is appropriately seen as composed of multiple distinct subsystems, with each exercising influence on the others and on the whole. Accordingly, the actions and emotions of family members are necessarily interdependent, having a reciprocal and continuous influence on other family members, with each individual or dyadic unit inextricably embedded within the larger family system. Thus, a family systems model advocates against simple linear models of causality or the assumption that one can adequately understand family influences by focusing exclusively on certain individual subsystems (Emery, Fincham, & Cummings, 1992). For example, in order to fully understand child functioning, it is important to consider the emotions and actions of multiple family subsystems (e.g., parent-child, marital, siblings, and child) rather than simply the emotions and actions of a single family system (e.g., child or parent-child).

Applied to a family-wide model of emotions, systems theory predicts that the emotions and behaviors of each subsystem are related to the emotions and behaviors of other subsystems. Thus, it would be expected that the emotions of one marital partner would influence the emotions of the other in interaction. As another example, family systems may include mothers, fathers, and children, that is, triadic or even more complex systems, with interrelations thus expected between the emotions and behaviors of marital partners and children.

The research literature indicates that among the subsystems that merit particular consideration with regard to family influences are the individual as a subsystem, the marital subsystem, the parent-child subsystem, and the sibling subsystem (Cummings et al., 2000). However, these subsystems are not necessarily equal in the pattern of emotional influence on children and other family systems. Traditional research has emphasized the importance of the influence of emotions in the parent-child subsystem for children's own emotional functioning, frequently to the exclusion of the study of possible effects of other family subsystems. More recent research suggests that the emotional qualities of the marital (or other interadult) subsystem may actually have more pervasive implications for the quality of child, marital, parent-child, and sibling subsystems, as well as overall family functioning (Cowan & Cowan, 2001; Cummings, 1998; Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Graham, 2001). Accordingly, a central theme of this paper is the need for a family-wide perspective on emotions that goes beyond considering emotions in the

parent-child subsystem to considering relations between emotions and behaviors in the marital and child subsystems as well.

However, a limitation of traditional systems theory is that these notions are for the most part theoretically rather than empirically based. Moreover, many questions are left unanswered, based solely on the theoretical principles of systems theory, including the degree to which emotions in one subsystem affect emotions and behavior in the others, or the relative size of effects attributable to different subsystems. There are endless possibilities for patterns, levels, and directions of influence, with no basis for deciding amongst the alternatives based solely on systems theory. Thus, the contribution toward a family-wide model of emotions of systems theory is a general heuristic for outlining a family-wide model but it remains for family research to articulate the specific process models for the role of emotions in families.

FAMILY RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Marital conflict has proven to be a particularly significant category of emotional event in the family with regard to child, marital, and family functioning (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Emotionality in the marital subsystem, especially during interparental conflict, has been shown repeatedly to have direct effects on children's emotions and behaviors (e.g., Cummings, 1987), and indirect effects by influencing the quality of emotional communications in the parent-child subsystem (e.g., Jouriles & Farris, 1992). Furthermore, researchers using a number of different analogue paradigms have isolated the emotional qualities of interparental communications as influential in terms of children's emotions and behaviors (e.g., Shifflett-Simpson & Cummings, 1996). Moreover, family systems researchers (e.g., Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988) have suggested that the marital dyad is the most important and influential family relationship, and that when this relationship is distressed, family responsibilities and coping skills suffer (Gilbert, Christensen, & Margolin, 1984). Minimally, consideration of the marital relationship when studying child development is necessary for any complete account of socialization influences (Fincham, 1998).

Traditional correlational research has long indicated links between marital conflict and child adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990). More recent observational studies of the functioning of triadic family contexts involving marital conflict and children's functioning are informative regarding dynamic processes un-

derlying or mediating the effects between marital exchanges and children's responses in triadic contexts, particularly including the role of emotions. In one such study, Easterbrooks, Cummings, and Emde (1994) reported that toddlers showed more positive behaviors than distressed or mediating behaviors when their parents demonstrated harmonious or positive expressions during a marital problem-solving task. On the other hand, expressions of distress between the parents, although relatively uncommon in this context, were significantly related to children's distress.

In another recent study, Kitzmann (2000) reported that family processes involving mothers, fathers, and their 6- to 8-year-old sons, became disrupted after conflictual marital interactions compared to pleasant marital interactions. Lower levels of family cohesion as well as higher levels of unbalanced alliances were found following marital disagreements. In addition, fathers demonstrated significantly less support and engagement toward their sons following the conflictual discussion compared to the pleasant discussion.

Along similar lines, Davis, Hops, Alpert, and Sheeber (1998) suggested that a triadic family approach is more informative than the traditional dyadic perspective when investigating marital conflict's impact on adolescents' development. Using a sequential analysis procedure, this laboratory study found that conflictual mother-father interactions led to subsequent aggressive functioning during triadic family interactions for both boys and girls, suggesting that children model their parents' hostile or aggressive conflict strategies in their own interpersonal relationships. Moreover, adolescents' aggressive and dysphoric responses to interparental aggression sequences contributed to the prediction of their overall aggressive and depressive functioning when general marital satisfaction was included as a control variable.

An assumption of this study is that the meaning rather than the specific content of marital communications is particularly important when considering effects on both parents and children (Fincham, 1998). Given this assumption, the use of parental reports of their own, their partners' and their children's emotions may tell us more in important ways about current and past family functioning in the home than could be obtained from an outside observer in the laboratory. Consistent with this conceptual and methodological perspective, self-reports of emotional reactions and perceptions of others' emotional responses through procedures such as home diaries may provide a particularly valuable window into emotional processes.

An initial diary study used mothers' home reports to examine young children's reactions to naturally occurring marital anger and affection ex-

pressions and simulated emotion expressions (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). Findings suggested that marital conflict induced distress and anger in 10- to 20-month-old infants which was markedly different from their reaction to marital harmony. In a follow-up study, Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, and Radke-Yarrow (1984) found that children's reactions to expressions of anger and affection in the home changed over time. Six- to 7-year-old children overtly expressed their emotions (e.g., cry, yell, laugh) significantly less often during interparental anger situations than they did as toddlers, and they were much more likely to intervene in marital conflict situations, as evidenced by the significantly higher rate of mediation attempts (Cummings et al., 1984).

In a more recent diary study (O'Hearn, Margolin, & John, 1997), mothers and fathers completed daily reports of marital conflict that occurred in front of their child. Children from homes with physical marital conflict were more likely to evidence negative emotions (e.g., appear sad or frightened), become hostile (e.g., misbehave or appear angry), or attempt to control exposure to marital conflict (e.g., leave the room) than children from nonphysical conflict or low conflict families. In addition, children from either physical or nonphysical high conflict families were more likely to take sides during marital conflict episodes than children from low conflict homes.

These studies suggest that both in the laboratory and in the home, emotions and behaviors in one family subsystem influence emotions and behaviors in others. Theoretical as well as empirical directions are needed for further advances in the study of the role of emotions in families. In particular, given the vast number of possible interrelations and processes that are possible, theory is needed to delimit and define the function of emotions in interpersonal functioning in families, including marital relations and children, thereby providing a model and framework to guide systematic tests of the role of emotions in families. In the next section, we build upon past work (Cummings & Davies, 1996), and outline testable propositions toward a model regarding a proactive and active role of emotions in child and family functioning.

EMOTIONAL SECURITY HYPOTHESIS: A SPECIFIC FAMILY-WIDE MODEL OF EMOTIONS

The traditional view considers emotions to be feeling states as relatively passive correlates of more powerful or cognitive functions, but as

Barrett and Campos (1987) discuss, a paradigm shift is occurring. Theories are moving away from views that emotions are of secondary importance to a functional perspective emphasizing the personal meaningfulness and the functional importance of emotions. Moreover, traditional views hold that emotions primarily result from "intrapsychic" events and processes. Newer views of emotion, including the functionalist perspective, hold that emotions also result from "interpsychic" or "interpersonal" events and processes.

The functionalist perspective on emotions suggests that emotions serve an adaptive, organizational function for an individual. Campos, Campos, and Barrett (1989) define *emotions* as "processes of establishing, maintaining, or disrupting the relations between the person and the internal or external environment, when such relations are significant to the individual" (p. 395). Emotions are posited, in effect, to be integral to the internal monitoring system for the individual, appraising events, organizing experiences, and motivating and guiding behavior (Bretherton, Fritz, Zahn-Waxler, & Ridgeway, 1986).

Consistent with a functionalist perspective on emotions, Davies and Cummings (1994) suggest that children's emotional responses reflect their evaluation of the meaning that marital conflict has for their own well-being and the well-being of their families. This emotional security hypothesis is a process model that posits that emotions are integral to children's appraisals about situations (such as marital conflict), and organize and guide their behavior so as to maximize their sense of emotional security.

Cummings and Davies (1996) define emotional security as "... a set goal by which children regulate their own functioning in social contexts, thereby directing social, emotional, cognitive, and physiological reactions" (p. 126). Thus, for children, the primary goal of maintaining a sense of emotional security is what motivates them to act and react in the face of a family stressor such as marital conflict (Davies & Cummings, 1998). That is, children have a set goal of emotional security, a state at which they feel safe and secure about themselves and their families. When something upsetting occurs, such as witnessing destructive marital conflict, children are moved from that place of security. Children then react so as to reestablish their sense of emotional security.

Davies and Cummings (1994; Cummings & Davies, 1996) describe three interrelated processes by which emotional security impacts children's functioning. First, they suggest that children's sense of emotional security affects their ability to regulate their own emotional arousal, including their affective state, behavioral expressions, and physiological

reactions. Second, children's emotional security guides them to regulate their exposure to family stressors such as marital conflict by attempting to control their parents' behavior or emotion, or by removing themselves from the exposure. Third, emotional security affects children's cognitive appraisals of the internal representations they have about the nature of the relationships within their family. Together, these components of emotional security serve to mediate the effect of marital dysfunction on children's adjustment (Davies & Cummings, 1998).

Framed within a contextualistic perspective and consistent with a general systems model, children's sense of emotional security is seen as a function of the interaction between environment and individual factors (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Cummings & Davies, 1996). Thus, factors such as history of marital functioning, parent-child relationships, parental characteristics (such as depression), and individual differences in children (e.g., temperament), all influence emotional security.

Consistent with a functionalist perspective on emotion, Goeke-Morey (1999) has also suggested that children's emotional responses provide a basis for classifying parental marital conflict behaviors as constructive, destructive, or productive by serving as an index of their emotional security. Marital conflict behaviors that elicited more negativity than positivity in children, reflecting a reduction in emotional security, were classified as destructive. These included such behaviors as using physical aggression, making threats, yelling, withdrawing, or giving the cold shoulder. Behaviors that elicited more positivity than negativity in children, reflecting an increase in emotional security, were classified as constructive. These included such acts as holding hands, making a sincere joke, being supportive, apologizing, and compromising. Finally, behaviors that elicited equally low levels of negativity and positivity, reflecting a lack of difficulty from a security perspective, were classified as productive. These included such behaviors as calmly discussing the problem, suggesting solutions, or reaching a partial resolution, such as agreeing to disagree or giving in. Thus, children's emotional responding reflects their felt security in the face of various types of marital conflict; using the emotional criteria, three categories of conflict emerge: destructive, productive, and constructive.

A child's emotional security derives from interactions (present and past) between the individual and the functioning of the family as a whole (Cummings & Davies, 1996). Thus, pertinent to a family-wide model of the role of emotions in families, Cummings and Davies (1996) explicitly extended the emotional security hypothesis to include the possible influence of multiple family systems on children's emotional security. Thus, according to this model, sibling-sibling relations, child-

grandparent relations, and broader contextual elements of family functioning (e.g., emotional relationships with other individuals within and outside of the family) should each be considered potential influences on children's emotional security (see also Waters & Cummings, 2000).

Serving to emphasize the role of emotionality, recent empirical tests of the roles of the three components of emotional security in mediating relations between marital conflict and children's adjustment have produced the most consistent support for emotional regulation as a mediator of children's functioning due to marital conflict histories. For example, using a latent variable path analysis, Davies and Cummings (1998) examined whether the links between marital relations and 6- to 9-year-old children's adjustment were mediated by response processes indicative of emotional security. Analyses supported theoretical pathways whereby the interrelated components of emotional security mediated the relationship between marital dysfunction and children's adjustment. Emotional reactivity (e.g., vigilance, distress) and internal representations in the context of interparental relations were each identified as mediators of relations between marital conflict and child adjustment. However, emotional reactivity was related to both externalizing and internalizing symptoms, whereas internal representations of marital relations were only related to internalizing.

In summary, we have provided a general conceptual framework for a family-wide perspective on emotions from a systems perspective. Moreover, we have described a specific process model that emphasizes the function of emotions in organizing and directing children's reactions to family interactions (i.e., the emotional security hypothesis). We next consider an example of a future direction in research toward advancing the family-wide study of the role of emotions in family functioning. Consistent with these conceptions, we present ongoing research from our laboratory that addresses gaps in the current methodology and further explores interrelations between marital and child emotions and behaviors.

TOWARD A NEW DIARY METHODOLOGY

The current study is based on parental diary reports and expands upon previous investigations concerned with the question of examining marital conflict behaviors and children's responses in everyday contexts. A number of directions in parental diary development have been designed to improve this methodology, particularly with regard to the

role of emotions in family functioning. A key new direction is to more extensively train mothers and fathers to accurately describe what happens at home. A frequent limitation of investigations using diary methods in the past was that adults were not informed with regard to definitions of terms or tested with regard to their understanding of the categories for home reporting. Moreover, in response to the limitations of requiring parents to make dictated narrative records, the present diary report only requires parents to complete a brief checklist concerning marital and child responses during interparental interactions. Consequently, accessibility of this methodology is increased to a broader sampling of adults, including adults with relatively limited verbal skills. Finally, consistent with an emphasis on the role of emotions in guiding children's and parents' behavior that is posited here, reporting on the perceptions of father, mother, and child emotions across a range of emotions (positive, sad, mad, scared) is a focus of the diary report protocol. Thus, the current methodology is designed to increase the breadth, precision, and user-friendliness of the assessment of marital and child functioning by means of parental diary reports (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Dukewich, 2001).

The present methodology also provides an advance over previous diary methodologies by improving the conceptualization as well as measurement of interparental discord. Notably, children are affected by everyday differences of opinion between parents that are handled in a constructive or destructive manner (Cummings & Davies, 1994). While most research has narrowly focused on highly negative forms of marital conflict, inclusion of a broader range of everyday marital interactions around differences between the parents is likely to advance understanding of the role of marital relations in children's functioning. Accordingly, *couple conflict* in the present research is broadly defined as any major or minor interparental interaction that involves a difference of opinion, whether it is mostly negative or mostly positive. This encompassing definition of couple conflict is expected to provide a more complete picture of marital relations and children's experiences with marital interactions within families.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 55 families with at least one child between the ages of 4-11 (28 boys and 27 girls). Ninety-five percent of the

couples were married; 5% cohabitated. Forty-nine percent of couples (43% of mothers and 31% of fathers) reported that their marriages were disharmonious (indicated by a score of less than 100 on at least one of the spouse's Marital Adjustment Test; Locke & Wallace, 1959). Mothers' mean age was 33 years (range = 21-43) and fathers' mean age was 36 years (range = 24-44). In addition, 100% of mothers reported graduating high school and 42% graduating college or beyond; 100% of fathers reported graduating high school and 54% graduating college or beyond. Ninety percent of families were Caucasian, 4% African American, 4% biracial, and 2% Hispanic. Family annual income ranged from less than \$10,000 to more than \$80,000 per year with an average annual income of between \$25,000 and \$40,000. Families were recruited through newspaper advertisements and flyers distributed at daycare centers and community events and were paid \$60 to participate.

Materials

Marital Daily Record. The Marital Daily Record (MDR) is an instrument that parents completed independently at home to describe specific instances of marital conflict. Among other elements, couples reported their own emotions and behaviors experienced throughout a marital conflict interaction, as well as their perception of their partners' emotions and behaviors. The emotions assessed include positivity, anger, sadness, and fear. For the analyses discussed in this paper, anger, sadness, and fear were also summed to create a negativity composite. The behaviors include a variety of destructive (e.g., making threats), productive (e.g., discussing the problem calmly), and constructive (e.g., compromising) behaviors used both during and to end the conflict interaction. For these analyses, each endorsed behavior in a particular category was summed to create composites of destructive, productive, and constructive behaviors.

Child Response Record. Parents completed the Child Response Record (CRR) when their child was able to see or hear the interaction reported on the MDR. On the CRR, parents marked the degree to which they believed their child felt happy, angry, sad, and afraid throughout the marital conflict episode. Again, anger, sadness, and fear were summed to create a negativity composite. Parents also endorsed the behaviors used by their child, including a variety of mediational (e.g., helped out), extremely insecure (e.g., was aggressive), avoidant (e.g., avoided us), and secure behaviors (e.g., continued activity), which were summed to create composite scores.

Procedure

During the initial laboratory visit, parents were led through a standard training procedure for completing the MDR and CRR. They were taught to complete an MDR following any interparental discussions in which (a) some difference of opinion needed to be worked through, (b) the parents were upset with each other, *or* (c) both of the above. Parents were instructed to describe every conflict interaction that fit that description, whether or not the disagreement was resolved, and were asked to complete the MDR as soon as possible after the interaction ended.

Parents' received extensive training regarding each element of the MDR and the CRR. Terms and behavioral categories were described in detail, with definitions and examples provided for each. Parents received folders containing blank MDRs and detailed written instructions that reviewed the information parents learned during the training session. In addition, parents watched short video clips of adult actors simulating each behavior on the MDR. These video clips served both to give parents a visually presented example of the behaviors and to measure parents' ability to identify the behaviors on the MDR after receiving the training and before completing the measures at home. Mothers and fathers discussed misidentified behaviors with the research assistant until all behaviors were fully understood.

In addition, parents received practice completing the entire MDR during the training session. Mothers and fathers watched a videotape of actors simulating a series of relatively complex marital conflict situations, similar to those experienced by couples at home. The situations included a range of positive and negative behaviors and emotions, providing parents with examples of a broad range of constructive and destructive marital interactions. Parents completed the practice MDRs on their own, and then reviewed them with the research assistant, who answered questions and verified that all of the relevant sections were completed. Throughout the laboratory visit, parents were given ample opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of the forms. Mothers and fathers then left the lab and completed MDRs and CRRs independently at home regarding their everyday marital interactions over the span of 6 days.

Mothers and fathers returned for a second laboratory session several weeks later, bringing the MDRs and CRRs they had completed at home. During this visit, parents again watched the video clips of the behaviors included on the MDR and completed the behavior-matching task. In addition, mothers and fathers again completed MDRs for the more com-

plex, simulated conflict interactions between two adults represented as marital partners.

The procedure ensured that parents received considerable training on the definitions of the behaviors used and how and when to complete MDRs and CRRs at home. By obtaining records from both mothers and fathers, we gained the opportunity to consider the perspective of each member of the marital subsystem, rather than relying exclusively on the report of one spouse, traditionally the wife, as the definitive view. This allowed for consideration and comparison of both partners' perceptions of marital and family functioning in the home.

RESULTS

Exploratory analyses are presented pertaining to the role of mothers', fathers', and children's emotions and behaviors in dyadic and triadic marital conflict situations. Analyses are concerned with the relations between husbands' and wives' emotions in the context of everyday marital interactions and the emotions and behaviors of children who are present for these marital events. Consistent with the family-model for the role of emotions in families advanced here, it was expected that the emotions experienced or expressed by one member or dyad within the family would be related to emotions experienced or expressed by other members of the family (i.e., marital emotions would be related to children's emotions and behaviors). Moreover, given that emotions are posited here to play a central role in organizing and directing responses in family interactions, it was expected that interparental emotions would be even more closely related to children's emotional and behavioral responses than other categories of interparental behaviors (e.g., forms of conflict behaviors).

In the present study, over the span of 6 days, wives reported a total of 264 marital conflict episodes; children were present for 45.1%. Husbands reported a total of 204 marital conflict episodes; children were present for 38.7%. One hundred fifty-four of those conflicts were common between husbands and wives. It is interesting to speculate as to the cause of the discrepancy between husbands' and wives' reports. It could be that husbands and wives perceive marital interactions differently to the point that they do not always view the same instances as conflict. It is also possible that wives were simply more willing to report conflicts or are more diligent in the completion of the checklists than were husbands. Means and standard deviations for study indices are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Parents' Reports of Conflict Emotions and Behaviors

	Fathers' reports				Mothers' reports			
	Father		Mother		Father		Mother	
	MI ^a	CP ^b	MI ^a	CP ^b	MI ^c	CP ^d	MI ^c	CP ^d
<i>Emotions</i>								
Positivity	105.74 (78.01)	108.43 (85.12)	108.21 (74.36)	111.76 (82.02)	106.84 (82.61)	113.43 (81.05)	111.84 (80.89)	118.97 (84.39)
Negativity	140.14 (119.87)	153.71 (121.06)	160.19 (139.64)	155.37 (115.37)	129.06 (102.51)	132.13 (100.62)	184.77 (139.58)	186.77 (138.24)
Anger	71.39 (63.08)	86.23 (72.99)	86.99 (76.55)	94.57 (80.13)	81.50 (70.46)	84.93 (72.50)	96.21 (76.44)	98.98 (80.31)
Sadness	51.30 (71.56)	49.29 (67.80)	49.08 (64.37)	36.96 (45.95)	32.03 (46.78)	33.04 (46.06)	61.89 (72.46)	63.33 (73.77)
Fear	17.45 (22.25)	18.19 (20.91)	24.12 (29.60)	23.84 (26.16)	15.53 (24.60)	14.16 (18.25)	26.67 (34.38)	24.46 (29.26)
<i>Behaviors</i>								
Destructive	1.40 (1.26)	1.78 (1.37)	1.32 (1.30)	1.45 (1.49)	1.18 (1.25)	1.22 (1.24)	1.41 (1.31)	1.45 (1.27)
Productive	1.32 (.95)	1.30 (1.08)	1.13 (.88)	1.14 (.90)	1.24 (.92)	1.29 (.99)	1.23 (.89)	1.28 (.96)
Constructive	.90 (.95)	.85 (1.01)	.66 (.82)	.67 (.80)	.89 (1.01)	.88 (.98)	.70 (.87)	.66 (.72)

Note. MI = All marital interactions; CP = Marital interactions for which the child was present
Means: (standard deviations). ^an = 204; ^bn = 79; ^cn = 264; ^dn = 119.
Possible ranges: Individual Emotions: 0-290; Destructive: 0-7; Productive and Constructive: 0-5.

How Do Fathers' and Mothers' Emotions Relate to Children's Emotions and Concern During Marital Conflict?

Table 3 shows the intercorrelations between mothers' and fathers' reports of their emotions within the marital subsystem and their children's emotions and concerns. Both mothers and fathers reported that when parents expressed more anger, sadness, fear, and negative emotionality in marital conflict, children were more concerned. Moreover, children generally experienced more negative emotions and less positive emotions when their parents expressed negative emotions during marital conflict. Although mothers and fathers reported that neither their own

TABLE 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Parents' Reports of Children's Reactions to Marital Conflicts

	Fathers' reports ^a	Mothers' reports ^b
Concern	82.85 (70.64)	67.79 (61.47)
<i>Emotions</i>		
Positivity	145.04 (77.92)	161.68 (73.90)
Negativity	126.65 (215.72)	94.77 (99.88)
Anger	34.16 (64.75)	24.55 (32.08)
Sadness	50.05 (70.37)	42.53 (48.91)
Fear	42.43 (97.48)	27.70 (42.71)
<i>Behaviors</i>		
Extreme Insecurity	.28 (.68)	.36 (.79)
Mediation	1.08 (1.32)	1.03 (1.27)
Avoidance	.11 (.36)	.06 (.27)
Security	2.68 (.99)	2.65 (1.27)

Note. ^an = 79, ^bn = 119. Means: (standard deviations).
Possible ranges: Concern and Individual Emotions: 0-290;
Extreme Insecurity and Mediation: 0-5; Avoidance: 0-1; Security: 0-3.

nor their partners' positivity throughout marital conflict was related to children's level of concern or children's negative emotional responses, they each reported that their partners' positive emotionality was related to their children's positive emotionality.

How Do Fathers' and Mothers' Emotions Relate to Children's Behaviors?

Next we consider the relation between fathers' and mothers' emotions in marital conflict and children's mediating, avoiding, secure, and

TABLE 3. Correlations Between Parents' Emotions and Children's Emotions Throughout Marital Conflict Episodes

	C Concern	C Positivity	C Negativity	C Anger	C Sadness	C Fear
F Positivity	-.005 <i>.184</i>	.229* <i>.113</i>	-.073 <i>.135</i>	-.092 <i>.063</i>	-.090 <i>.099</i>	.002 <i>.185</i>
F Negativity	.363*** <i>.279*</i>	-.200* <i>-.352***</i>	.334*** <i>.402***</i>	.154 ^ <i>.307**</i>	.343*** <i>.513***</i>	.272** <i>.314**</i>
F Anger	.327***	-.221*	.261**	.153 ^	.253**	.206*
F Sadness	.231* <i>.117</i>	-.086 <i>-.242*</i>	.238** <i>.391***</i>	.065 <i>.322**</i>	.281** <i>.434***</i>	.186* <i>.337**</i>
F Fear	.117 <i>.254*</i>	-.005 <i>-.311**</i>	.199* <i>.554***</i>	.073 <i>.411***</i>	.178^ <i>.588***</i>	.208* <i>.527***</i>
M Positivity	.094 <i>.085</i>	.150 <i>.200 ^</i>	-.013 <i>-.078</i>	-.058 <i>-.091</i>	-.046 <i>-.113</i>	.066 <i>-.030</i>
M Negativity	.315*** <i>.192 ^</i>	-.084 <i>-.286*</i>	.366*** <i>.344**</i>	.167 ^ <i>.262*</i>	.456*** <i>.408***</i>	.208* <i>.293**</i>
M Anger	.131 <i>.139</i>	.045 <i>-.251*</i>	.163^ <i>.240*</i>	.157 ^ <i>.190 ^</i>	.243** <i>.277*</i>	-.016 <i>.206 ^</i>
M Sadness	.301*** <i>.074</i>	-.119 <i>-.158</i>	.327*** <i>.218 ^</i>	.115 <i>.178</i>	.447*** <i>.277*</i>	.166 ^ <i>.164</i>
M Fear	.371*** <i>.293**</i>	-.219* <i>-.215 ^</i>	.457*** <i>.399***</i>	.070 <i>.262*</i>	.358*** <i>.464***</i>	.607*** <i>.375***</i>

Note. Standard text reflects mother report (n = 119); text in italics reflects father report (n = 79).

F = Fathers' emotions; M = Mothers' emotions; C = Children's emotions.

^ $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

extremely insecure behaviors during marital conflict. Correlations based on the report of mothers and fathers are presented in Table 4.

Mothers reported that children engaged in extremely insecure behaviors (such as crying, freezing, misbehaving, yelling at parents, being aggressive) when fathers were angry or evidenced negative emotionality, but that mothers' emotion was not related to extremely insecure behaviors by the children. Mothers further reported that children's mediation (involvement in the parents' conflict through such acts as comforting,

TABLE 4. Correlations Between Parents' Emotions and Children's Behaviors Throughout Marital Conflict Episodes

	C Extreme Insecurity	C Mediation	C Avoidance	C Security
F Positivity	-.139 <i>.094</i>	-.094 <i>-.071</i>	.012 <i>-.082</i>	-.065 <i>-.052</i>
F Negativity	.186* <i>.030</i>	.276** <i>.302**</i>	.015 <i>.187 ^</i>	.048 <i>-.130</i>
F Anger	.254** <i>-.186 ^</i>	.270** <i>.227*</i>	.052 <i>.180</i>	.079 <i>-.180</i>
F Sadness	.039 <i>.203 ^</i>	.156 ^ <i>.197 ^</i>	-.037 <i>.106</i>	-.011 <i>-.034</i>
F Fear	-.086 <i>.166</i>	.055 <i>.318**</i>	-.029 <i>.114</i>	-.018 <i>-.016</i>
M Positivity	-.048 <i>.028</i>	-.036 <i>-.059</i>	.034 <i>-.189 ^</i>	-.091 <i>-.056</i>
M Negativity	.073 <i>-.007</i>	.220* <i>.174</i>	.201* <i>.020</i>	-.043 <i>-.010</i>
M Anger	-.061 <i>-.154</i>	.130 <i>.033</i>	.159 ^ <i>.012</i>	-.101 <i>.038</i>
M Sadness	.145 <i>.281*</i>	.225* <i>.143</i>	.169 ^ <i>-.030</i>	.038 <i>-.006</i>
M Fear	.147 <i>-.052</i>	.118 <i>.416***</i>	.087 <i>.105</i>	-.021 <i>-.151</i>

Note. Standard text reflects mother report ($n = 119$); text in italics reflects father report ($n = 79$).
F = Fathers' emotions; M = Mothers' emotions; C = Children's behaviors.

^ $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

helping out, taking sides) was related to mothers' and fathers' negative emotionality and sadness, and to fathers' anger. Mothers reported that their negative emotionality, anger, and sadness was related to children's avoidance, but that fathers' emotions were not. Finally, children's secure behaviors (such as continuing activity or watching) were not related to parents' emotions during conflict.

The fathers' perspective provided a similar story, although different in a few notable ways. Similar to mothers, fathers reported a significant relation between their anger and their children's extreme insecurity, but fathers also described that both mothers' and fathers' sadness was re-