

# Moment-to-Moment Emotion Dynamics during Mother-Adolescent Conflicts and their Associations with Internalizing Problems



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## BACKGROUND

- Conflict interactions are more common between parents and adolescents than at earlier ages.
- Conflict interactions can be a mechanism of change in the parent-adolescent relationship as adolescents gain autonomy within the family.
- How emotions unfold during interactions between parents and children is related to the psychological adjustment of both individuals. It can also shape psychosocial adjustment in the long term.<sup>1</sup>
- **METHOD**
- 198 mother-adolescent dyads from Ontario, Canada participated.
- At Time 1 (2018), mother-adolescent dyads were video recorded during a four-minute conflict discussion in a laboratory.
- The SPAFF5 coding system to code moment-to-moment emotional expressions<sup>2</sup>

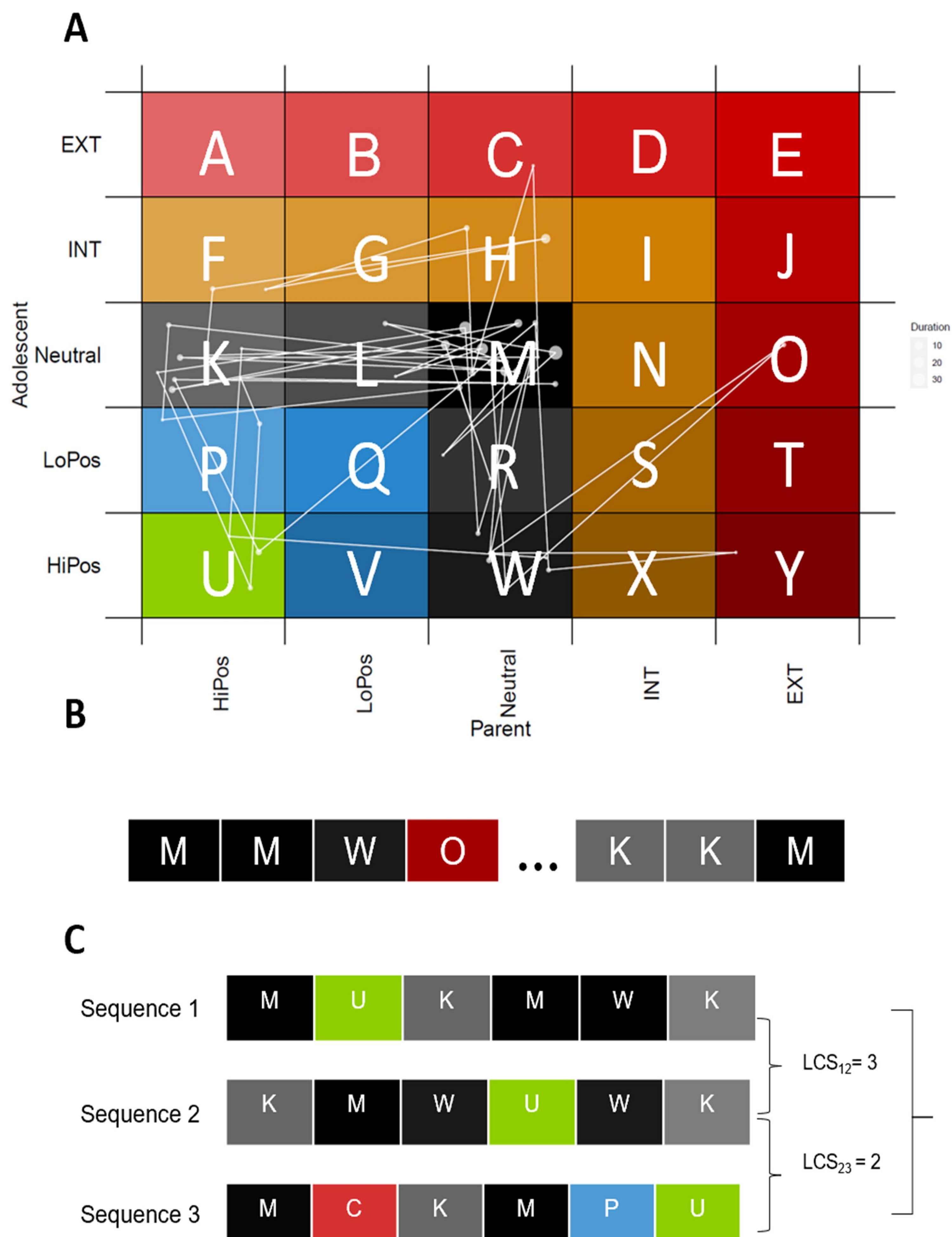
## METHOD (Continued)

- At both Time 1 (2018) and Time 2 (2019), mothers and adolescents self-reported anxious and depressive symptoms.
- Grid sequence analysis to examine the dyadic behavioral patterns in mother-adolescent conflict interactions
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test whether these behavioral patterns predict concurrent and longitudinal internalizing problems one year later

## RESULTS

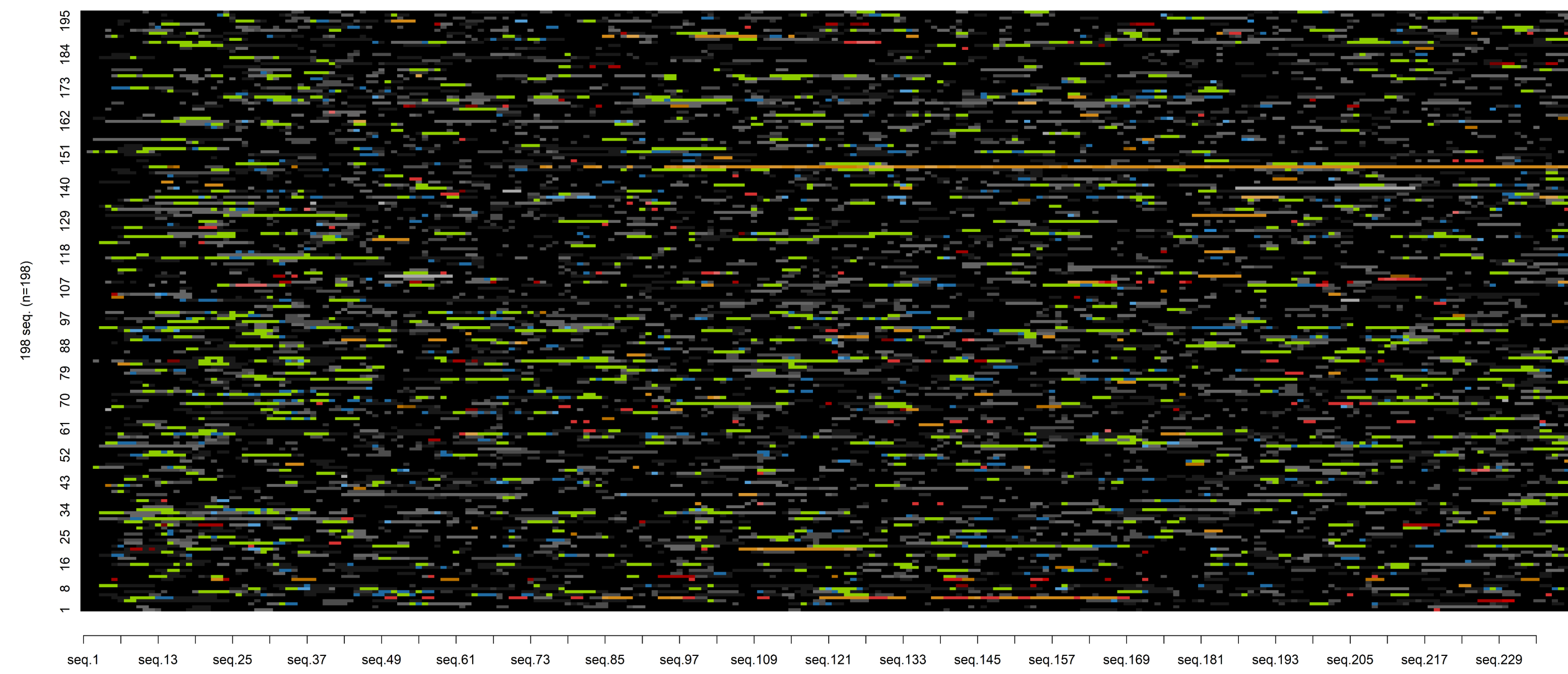
- After conducting the grid sequence analysis, and calculating the sequence distances, the most discriminating subsequences described the two primary dimensions of interdyad differences:
  - Dimension 1: Mutual high positive affect up-regulation
  - Dimension 2: Asynchronous positive and child externalizing affect

Figure 1. Grid Sequence Analysis



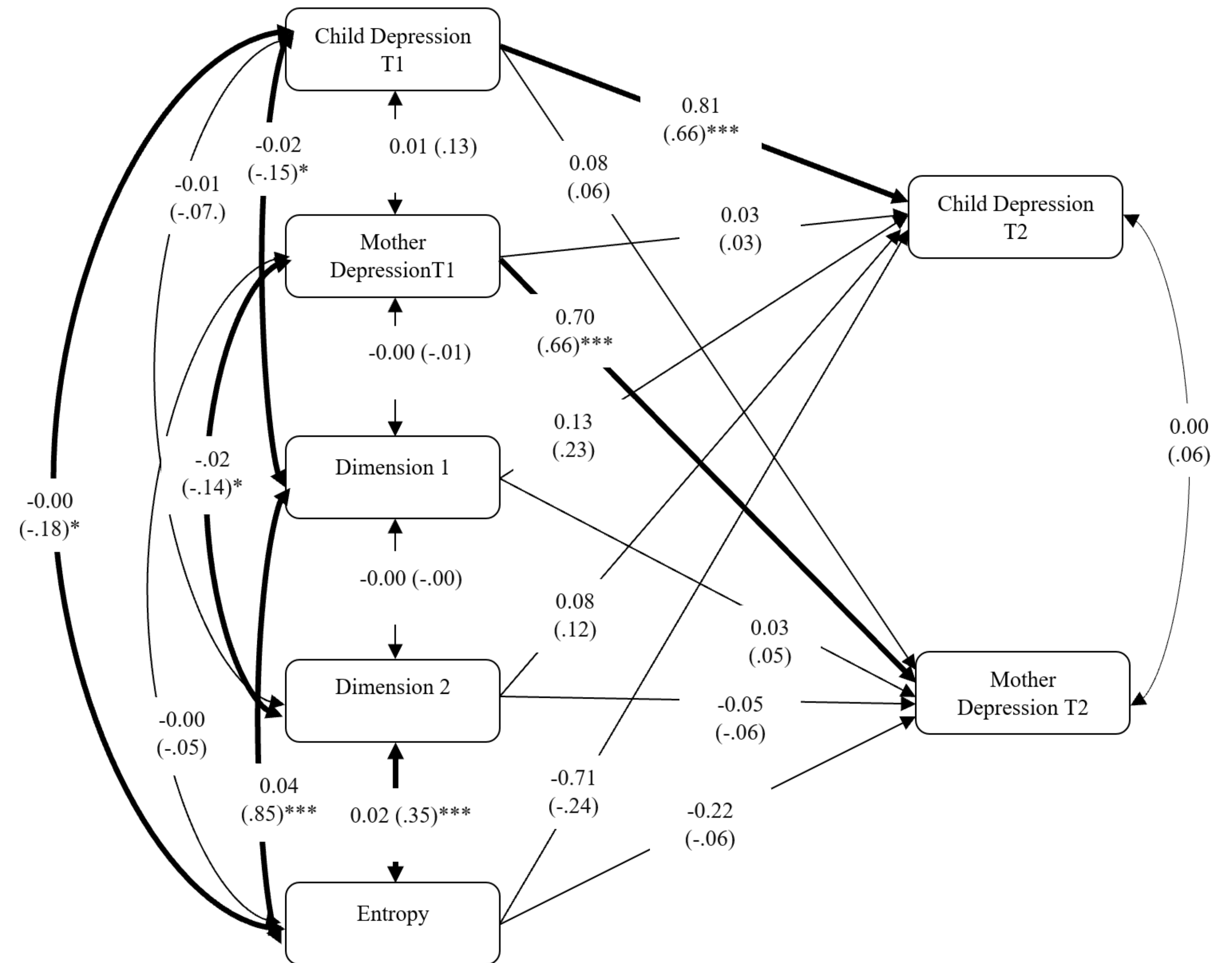
Note. **A.** Illustration of State Space Grid for one mother-adolescent dyad. Int = Internalizing behaviors. Ext = Externalizing behaviors. **B.** Time series dyadic emotional expression for one mother-adolescent dyad. **C.** The calculation of the length of the longest common subsequence is used in calculating the dissimilarity among three hypothetical dyads' sequences.

Figure 2. Adolescent-Mother Dyadic Emotional Expression States



Note. Each line represents a dyad.

Figure 3. Depression Model



Note. Standardized estimates are indicated in parentheses. Bold arrows indicate the significant paths.

## RESULTS (Continued)

- The dimensions (behavioral patterns) were not associated with adolescent or mother anxiety either concurrently or longitudinally.
- The mutual high positive affect up-regulation pattern (Dimension 1) was related to adolescent depression concurrently and negatively (Figure 3).
- Asynchronous positive and child externalizing affect (Dimension 2) was related to maternal depression concurrently and negatively (Figure 3).

## DISCUSSION

- Moment-to-moment interactions between mothers and adolescents can be building blocks for psychological well-being.
- Targeting interaction patterns between mothers and adolescents might be helpful to improve their mental health.

## STRENGTHS

- Intensive observational data with longitudinal outcome data
- A state-of-art methodology (i.e., grid sequence analysis)

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample consisted of mostly white and middle-SES families.
- Interactions with biological mothers and not other primary caregivers were assessed.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Interactions with fathers should be examined.
- Shorter time intervals between emotion dynamics and mental health outcomes should be tested to figure out at what time scale momentary patterns are most strongly related to developmental outcomes.

## References

1. Lougheed, J. P., Brinberg, M., Ram, N., & Hollenstein, T. (2020). Emotion socialization as a dynamic process across emotion contexts. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(3), 553–565. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000801>
2. Lougheed, J. P., & Hollenstein, T. (2014). Specific affect coding system manual: 5-code version. *Unpublished Manual*.

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