

# Moment-to-moment Emotion Dynamics during Triadic Family Conflicts and Their Associations with Internalizing Problems and Marital Satisfaction



**AUTHORS:**  
**Gizem Keskin**  
 Jessica P. Lougheed  
 Shun Ting Yung  
 Alexandra Main



## BACKGROUND

- The literature mostly focuses on the mothers' role in the development of children; however, fathers also have a unique role in child development.
- Moment-to-moment interactions can be the building blocks for long-term adjustment.<sup>1</sup>
- How emotions unfold during interactions between parents (both mothers and fathers) and children can be related to the psychological adjustment of family members as well as relationship characteristics between partners.
- METHOD**
- Mother-father-adolescent triads (N = 51) were recorded during a conflict discussion.
- Their emotional expressions were coded using the Specific Affect Coding System.<sup>2</sup>
- We used grid sequence analysis to examine differences among families regarding the behavioral patterns of triadic interactions.

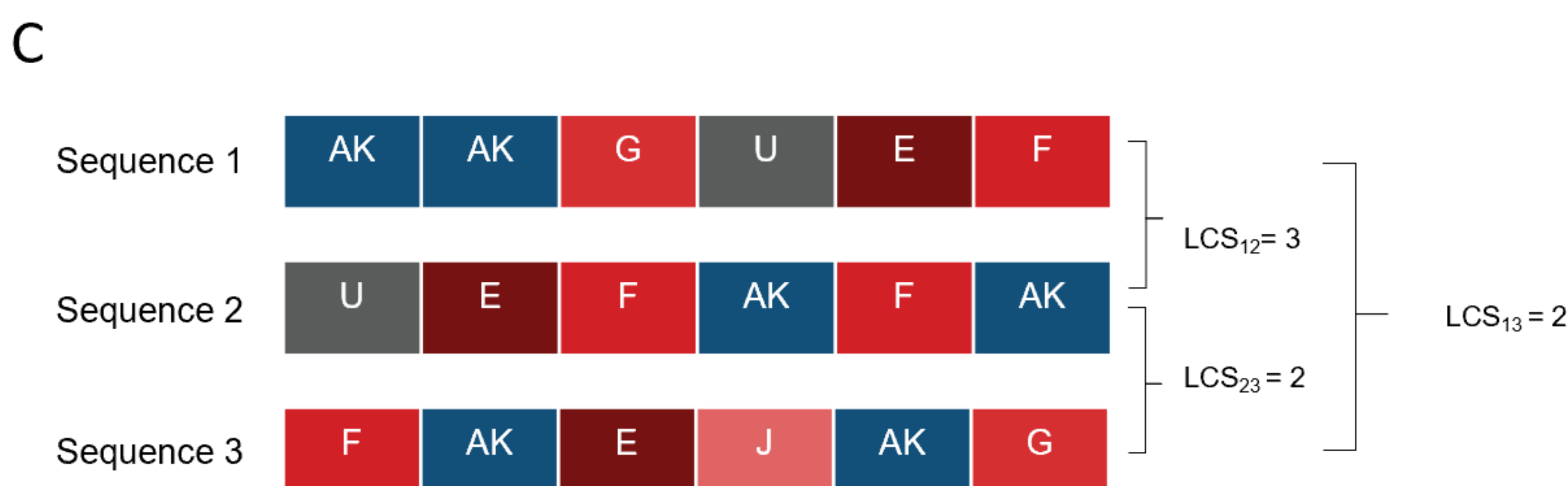
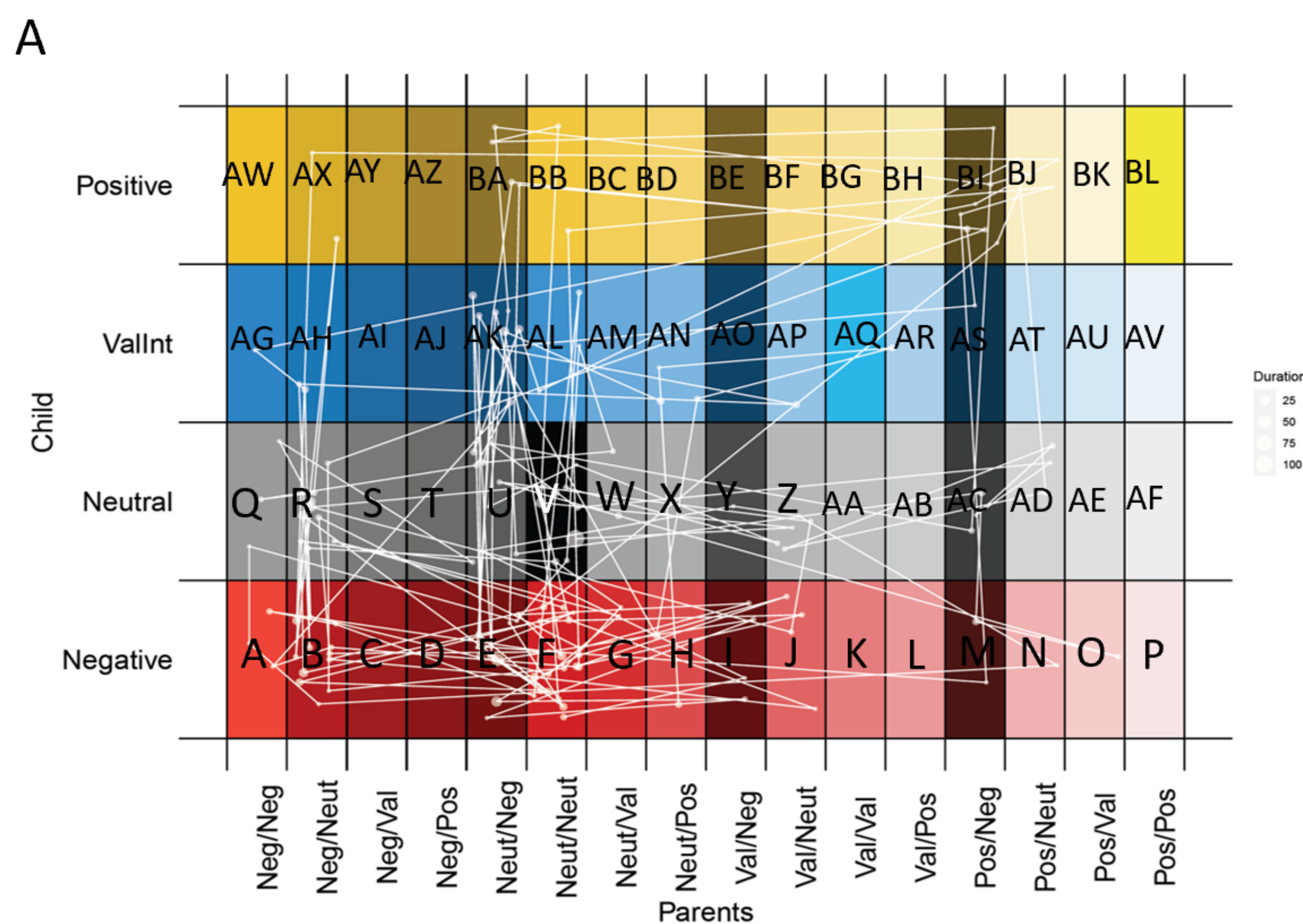
## METHOD (Continued)

- Mothers, fathers, and adolescents reported their anxiety and depression, and mothers and fathers reported marital satisfaction.
- We ran bivariate correlations between triadic behavioral patterns, anxiety, depression, and marital satisfaction.

## RESULTS

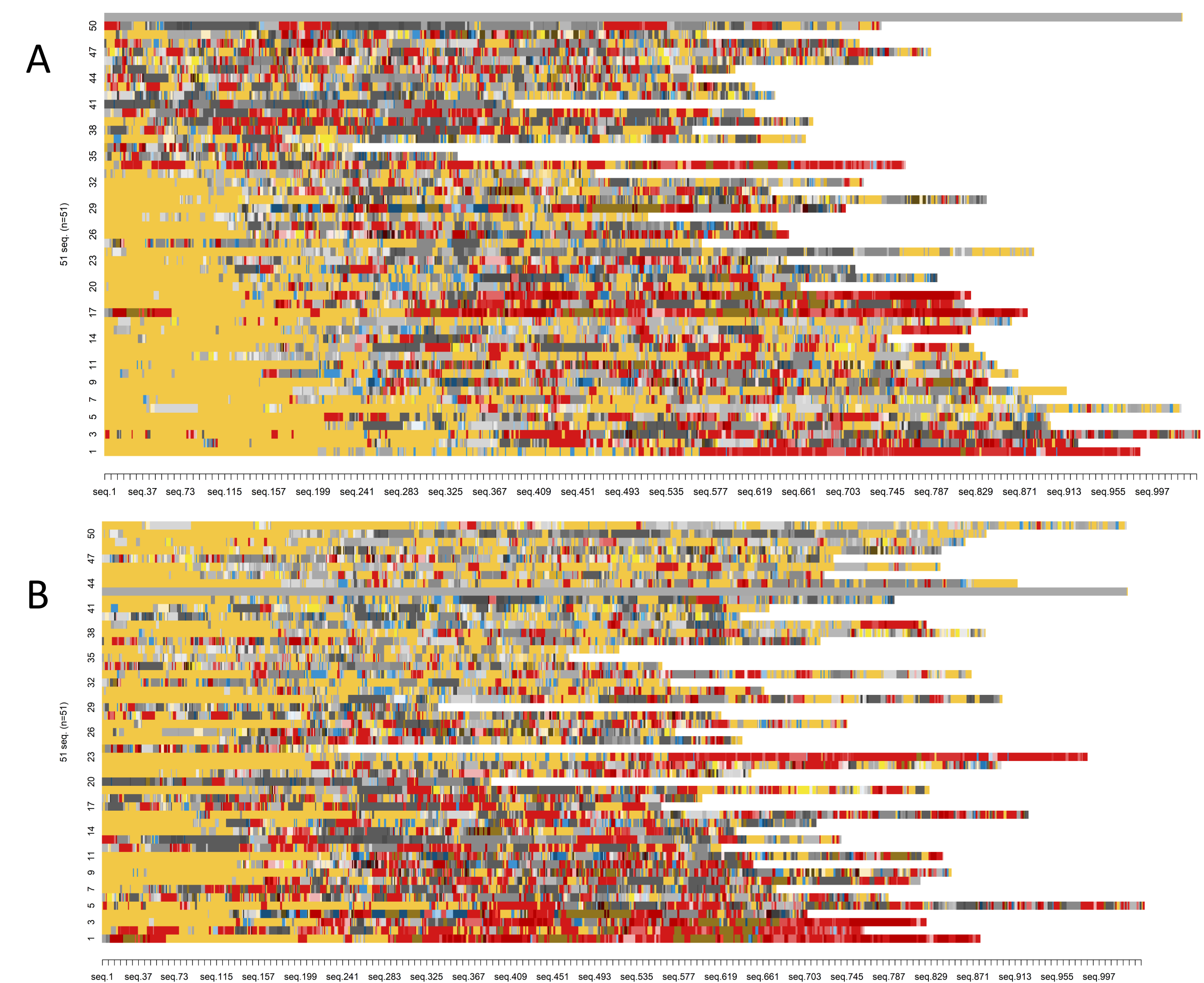
- After conducting the grid sequence analysis, and calculating the sequence distances, we calculated the most discriminating subsequences that described the two primary dimensions of intertriad differences (Figure 2):
- Dimension 1: Parents are neutral, and the child is switching between emotional states
- Dimension 2: Mutual positive affect up-regulation between mothers and adolescents (i.e., a maternal positive emotional expression followed by an adolescent positive emotional expression and vice versa)

Figure 1. Grid Sequence Analysis



**Note.** **A.** Illustration of State Space Grid for one mother-adolescent-father triad. ValInt = Validation/Interest. The emotional states of parents are indicated as Mother/Father. **B.** Time series dyadic emotional expression for one mother-adolescent-father triad. **C.** The calculation of the length of the longest common subsequence is used in calculating the dissimilarity among three hypothetical triads' sequences.

Figure 2. Triadic Interactions in Temporal Order



**Note.** Each line represents a triad. **A.** Sorted by Dimension 1. **B.** Sorted by Dimension 2.

Table 1. Bivariate Correlations among Dimensions, Internalizing Problems, and Marital Satisfaction

Variable	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
Maternal Depression	-.01	.00
Paternal Depression	.02	.20
Adolescent Depression	-.07	.43**
Maternal Anxiety	-.17	.21
Paternal Anxiety	.06	.23
Adolescent Anxiety	.09	.12
Maternal Marital Satisfaction	-.13	.38**
Paternal Marital Satisfaction	.08	.19

**Note.**  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$ .

## RESULTS (Continued)

- Dimension 1 (parents neutral and child switching between emotional states) was not related to any variables of interest (Table 1).
- Dimension 2 (mutual positive affect up-regulation between mothers and adolescents) was related to both adolescent depression and maternal marital satisfaction positively (Table 1)

## DISCUSSION

- Marital satisfaction and adolescent mental health are related to how families interact with each other during conflicts.
- Emotion socialization is a dynamic process that can explain the long-term characteristics of family members.

## STRENGTHS

- Intensive observational data were used.
- Grid sequence analysis was applied to triadic data (i.e., mother-adolescent-father) for the first time.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study does not reflect the diversity of families.
- The sample size was relatively small.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Future studies should reflect the diversity of families to make the results more generalizable.
- More studies are needed to demonstrate the utility of grid sequence analysis in triadic interactions.

## Acknowledgments

Carolyn Cowan  
 Philip A. Cowan

## References

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Contact:



[gizem.keskin@ubc.ca](mailto:gizem.keskin@ubc.ca)



@Gizem\_Keskin\_



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
 Psychology  
 Irving K. Barber Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
 Okanagan Campus