

Interparental Conflict and Children's Externalizing Problems: The Protective Role of Effortful Control

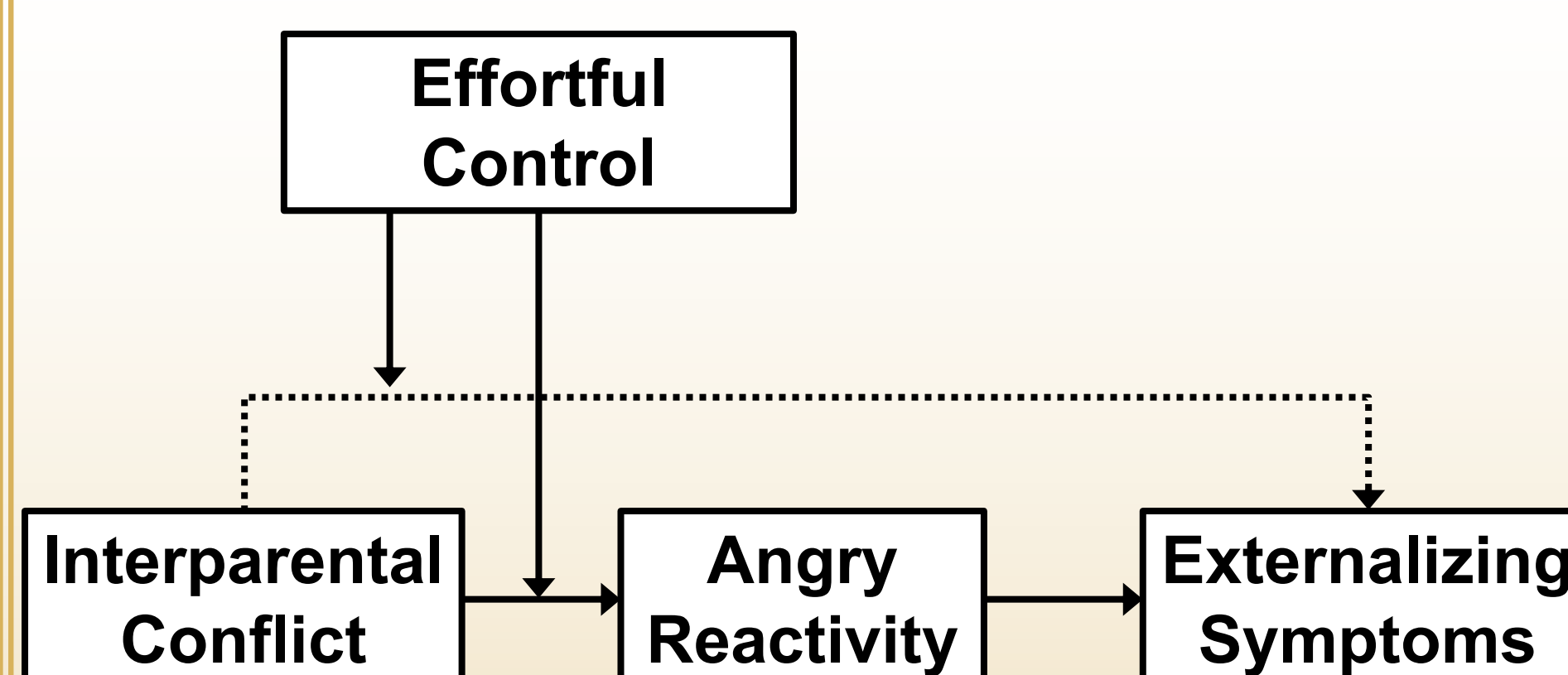
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INTRODUCTION

- Interparental conflict is consistently associated with externalizing problems (Buehler et al., 1997)
- Effect sizes are only modest to moderate (Buehler et al., 1997)
- Effortful control may weaken associations between interparental conflict and externalizing problems
- Effortful control promotes strategies to manage reflexive, intense negative emotions (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002)
- Unclear how or why effortful control moderates contexts of interparental conflict

HYPOTHESES

- High effortful control weakens associations between interparental conflict and externalizing problems
- Effortful control decreases vulnerability to externalizing problems by reducing angry reactivity to interparental conflict



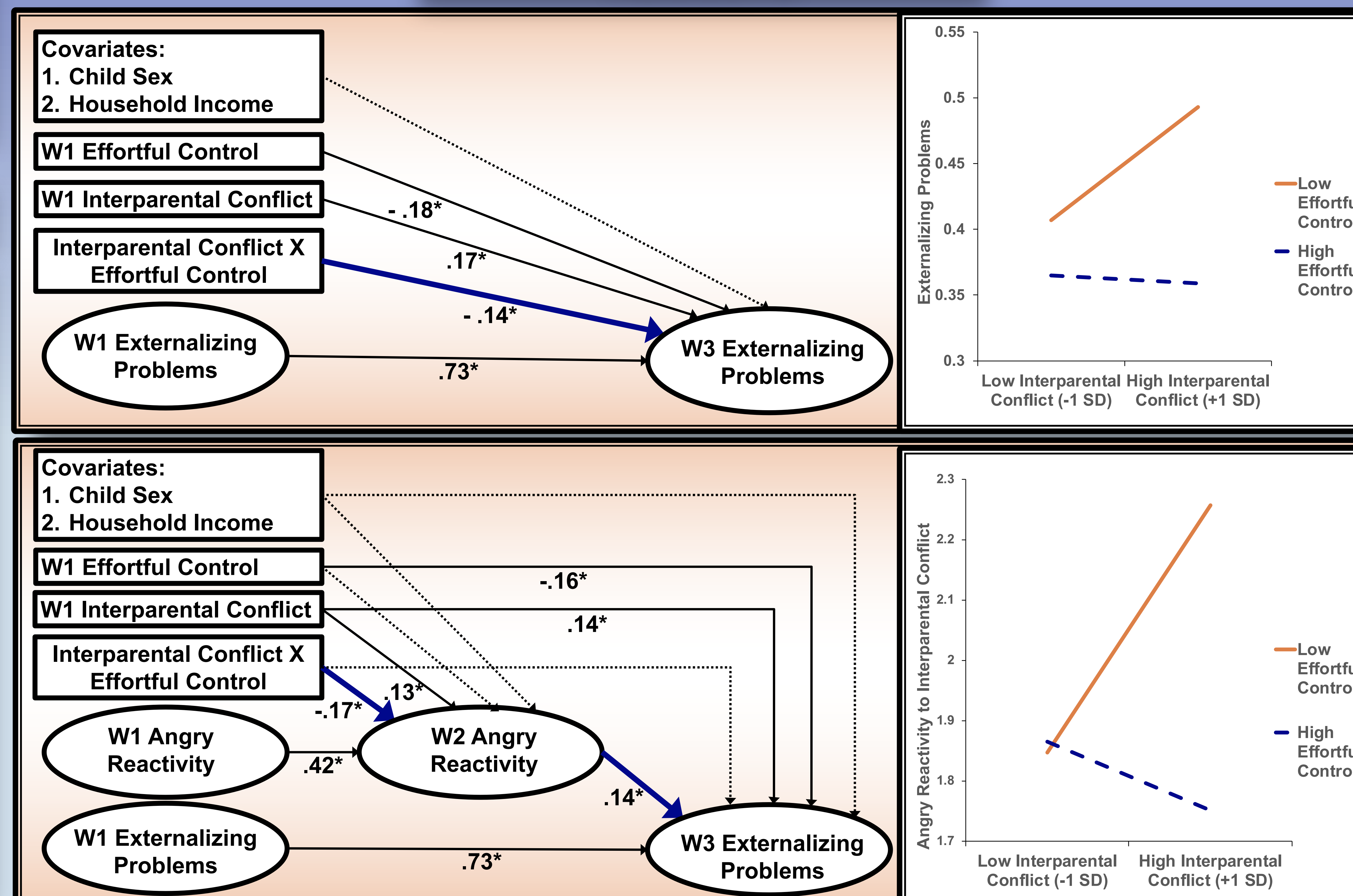
METHOD

Participants

- 243 children and their families
 - 56% girls
 - 44% boys
 - M age at W1 = 4.6 years
 - Ethnicity/Race
 - 48% African-American
 - 43% White
 - 9% Multi-racial or Other
 - 16% Latino
 - Socio-economic Status
 - Median income: \$36,000
 - 69% received public assistance
 - Median parental education: High school diploma or equivalent
- Data collected at three annual time points

Construct	Method	Reporter	Waves	Measures Description	Reliability
Interparental Conflict	Observation	Trained Coder	1	Interparental problem solving task assessing destructive parental conflict tactics.	Interrater reliability = .61 and .86 (M = .79)
Effortful Control	Observation	Trained Coder	1	Children's ability to suppress a prepotent response and voluntarily enact a subdominant response: 1) Peg Tapping task 2) Black Boxes task 3) Gift Delay task 4) CCQ Conscientiousness scale	Interrater reliability = .94; α = .81
Angry Reactivity to Interparental Conflict	Semi-structured Interview	Trained Coder	1 & 2	Children's emotional and behavioral responses to interparental conflict: 1) Tally of angry and controlling behaviors 2) Molar ratings of children's hostile reactivity 3) Molar ratings of children's dominant patterns of responding	Interrater reliability = .79 - .93
Externalizing Problems	Survey	Maternal, Paternal, and Teacher Report	1 & 3	Child oppositional defiant, conduct problem, hostile, relationally aggressive, and ADHD behaviors.	α s = .87 - .91

RESULTS



CONCLUSIONS

- Effortful control protected children from high conflict homes from developing externalizing problems by decreasing angry responses to interparental conflict
- Moderation findings are consistent with protective-stabilizing effects (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)
- According to social learning theory, effortful control may disrupt:
 - vicarious learning processes preventing the disinhibition of behavior
 - negative reinforcement contingencies that intensify anger (Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001)
- Consistent with emotion contagion processes, effortful control may suppress "mimicking" anger (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007)
- Effortful control as a protective factor and predictor:
 - Self-regulatory interventions may disrupt the cascade of risk associated with interparental conflict (Liew, 2012)

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