

Introduction

- Although early theories of socialization had portrayed children as passive recipients of parental influence, later theories recognized that children could play an active role in the socialization process (Bell, 1968; Lytton, 1990). In particular, children could be active agents in a negative sense, by opposing and resisting the parent.
- More recent perspectives (Kochanska et al., 2015; Maccoby, 1992) proposed that children can also be active agents in a positive sense, such that they can enthusiastically accept and embrace parental influence by adopting a willing, cooperative stance toward the parent.
- This new approach has been informed and fueled by Bowlby’s (1969/1982) attachment theory. The original construct of attachment as a biobehavioral system providing infants with confidence in protection from threat and stress has been expanded to encompass the role of security in promoting children’s future willingness to embrace the caregiver’s socialization rules and values.
- That broader conceptualization of security implies that attachment organization in infancy may have long-term consequences for the parent-child future socialization process. Children who develop secure attachments to their caregivers are likely to adopt a willing stance toward their caregivers; compared to insecure children, they may be more receptive to and willing to comply with the caregivers’ demands and more likely to internalize the caregivers’ rules and values.
- To test this model, we assessed children’s attachments to their mothers and fathers at toddler age (16 months) and we examined their willing stance toward parental requests in three paradigms at preschool age (4.5 years). Those paradigms were as follows.
- Toy cleanups: During parent-child control interactions, the child followed parental request to clean up toys.
- Following the parent’s departure, the child was left alone to complete the cleanup task.
- At a later point, the child was alone in a room with distracting toys and asked to follow parental request to perform a boring sorting task.

Method

Participants

- 200 two-parent families from Iowa with typically developing infants volunteered for a longitudinal study.
 - Education:** High school or less (14.5% of mothers, 24% of fathers); college degree (46.5% of mothers, 43.5% of fathers); postgraduate education (39% of mothers, 32.5% of fathers).
 - Income:** Mean household income was \$85,000 (*SD* = \$44,530, range = \$4,000 to \$320,000).
 - Race:** White: 88.5% of both mothers and fathers. In 20% of families, at least one parent was not White.

Measures

Children’s attachment security, 16 months old.

- At 16 months, each mother-child dyad (*N* = 193, 93 girls) and each father-child dyad (*N* = 186, 90 girls) participated in a 2–2.5-hour carefully scripted laboratory session.
- Children’s attachment organization was assessed in the Strange Situation Paradigm (SSP; Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969), the gold standard for measuring security. SSP allows for classifying the child as secure or as representing one of the three insecure categories (avoidant, resistant, and disorganized). In this study, we combined the three insecure categories; thus, children were classified as secure (137 with mothers, 125 with fathers) or insecure (55 with mothers, 61 with fathers).
- Two professional attachment coders were blind to all other information about the participants when assessing children’s attachment security (one coder coded a given child with one parent only).

Child willingness to follow the parent’s requests, 52 months old (all measures were obtained for the mother-child and father-child dyads).

Committed compliance in toy cleanup during control interactions with the parent (10 min).

- The child’s committed compliance was defined as wholehearted, enthusiastic, eager, self-regulated behavior of picking up the toys, without the need for the parent to remind the child or to issue directives (Kochanska et al., 1995, 1997) and coded for every 30-sec segment.

Method (Continued)

Internalized compliance in cleanup alone (5 min).

- The child’s internalized compliance while alone was defined as active compliance with the parent’s instructions in his or her absence (continuing to clean up the toys), coded for each 10-sec segment.

Internalized compliance while alone with distractions (8 min).

- The child’s internalized compliance while alone was again defined as active compliance with the parent’s instructions in his or her absence (performing a boring sorting task in the presence of distracting toys), coded for each 5-sec segment. All descriptive data are in Table 1.

Results

Strange Situation Paradigm.



Table 1.

Descriptive Data for All Constructs.

Construct	Mother – Child Dyads				Father – Child Dyads				<i>P</i> - Level
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>N</i>	
Committed Compliance in Toy Cleanup with the Parent	7.72	5.85	0 – 20	156	7.78	5.37	0 – 20	147	n.s.
Internalized Compliance in Cleanup Alone	.34	.31	0.00 – 1.00	154	.28	.31	0.00 – 1.00	144	.025
Internalized Compliance While Alone with Distractions	.46	.24	0.00 – 0.95	155	.48	.21	0.00 – 0.92	145	n.s.

Note. *P*-Level represents, for each measure, the statistical significance of the difference between the child’s score with the mother and the same score with the father.

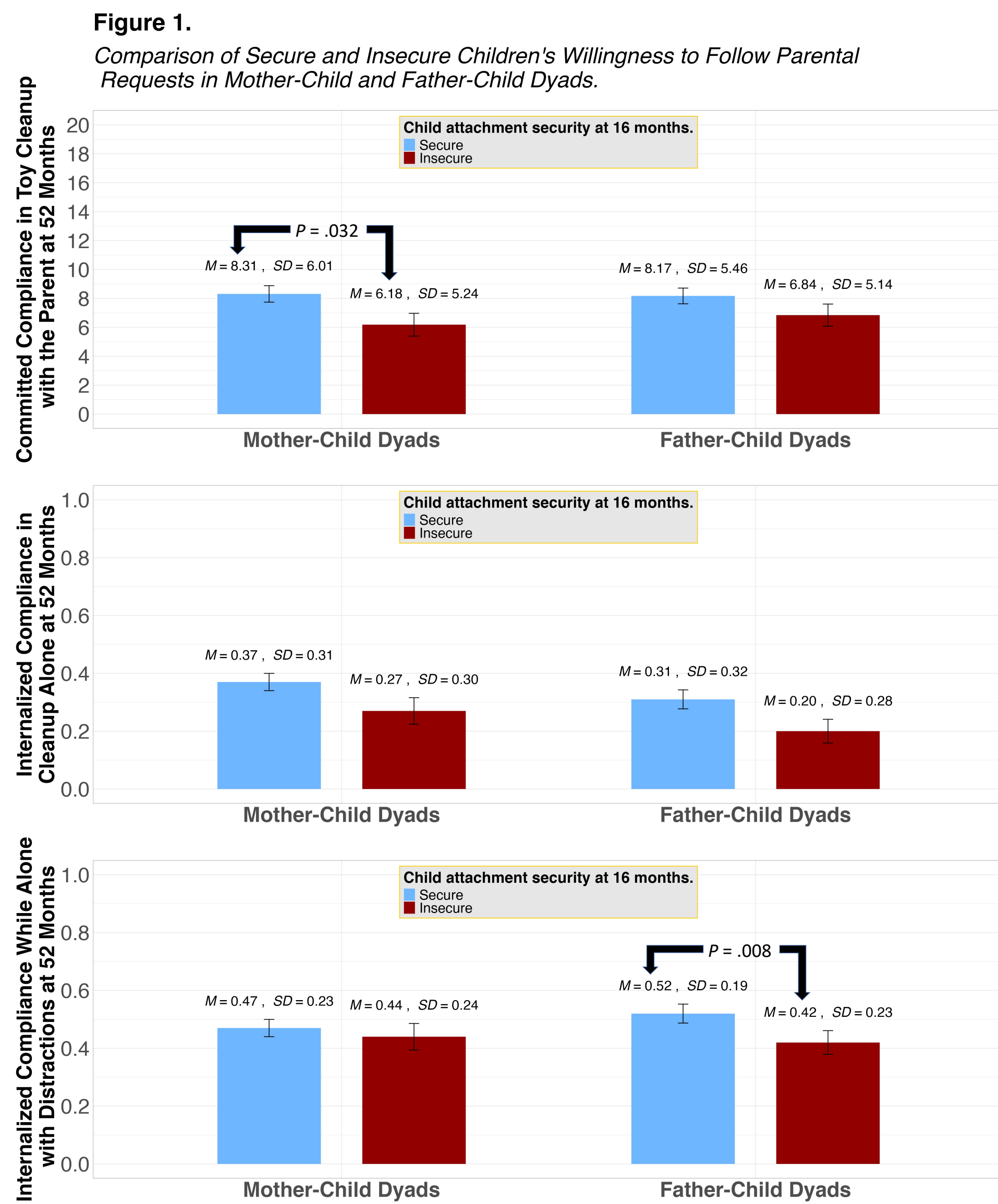
Overview of Analyses

Inter-correlations among all constructs.

- All three measures of children’s willingness to follow parental requests were significantly correlated across the mother- and father-child relationships.
- Children’s committed compliance in toy cleanup (with the parent) and internalized compliance in toy cleanup alone were significantly correlated within both mother- and father-child relationships.

Comparisons of secure and insecure children’s willingness to follow parental requests.

- For mother-child and father-child dyads, we conducted ANOVAs with child security status with the given parent (secure vs. insecure) and child gender as the independent variables, and the measures of committed compliance with the given parent in toy cleanup, internalized compliance without the given parent in cleanup alone, and internalized compliance with the given parent’s request while alone with distractions as the dependent variables (see Figure 1).



Results (Continued)

Mother-child dyads.

Committed compliance in toy cleanup.

- ANOVA produced a main effect of child attachment security with the mother, $F(1, 148) = 4.68, p = .032$, and a main effect of child gender, $F(1, 148) = 7.19, p = .008$. Specifically, secure children had higher scores on committed compliance with the mother than insecure children. In addition, girls had higher scores than boys.

Internalized compliance in cleanup alone.

- ANOVA did not produce a main effect of child attachment security with the mother, $F(1, 148) = 3.28, ns$, or of child gender, $F(1, 148) = 1.77, ns$.

Internalized compliance while alone with distractions.

- ANOVA did not produce a main effect of child attachment security with the mother, $F(1, 148) < 1$, or of child gender, $F(1, 148) < 1$.

Father-child dyads.

Committed compliance in toy cleanup.

- ANOVA did not produce a main effect of child attachment security with the father, $F(1, 139) = 1.99, ns$, or of child gender, $F(1, 139) = 1.69, ns$.

Internalized compliance in cleanup alone.

- ANOVA did not produce a main effect of child attachment security with the father, $F(1, 139) = 3.70, ns$, or of child gender, $F(1, 139) < 1$.

Internalized compliance while alone with distractions.

- ANOVA produced a main effect of child attachment security with the father, $F(1, 139) = 7.29, p = .008$, in which secure children had higher scores on internalized compliance while alone with distractions than insecure children.

Discussion

- As expected, the study produced evidence supporting our hypothesis that children who had been secure as young toddlers would be more willing to follow parental requests at preschool age than those who had been insecure. However, the findings differed for mother- and father-child dyads and across the outcome measures.
- In mother-child dyads, secure children were significantly more willing to cooperate enthusiastically with their mothers than insecure children in the interactive toy cleanup, but there were no differences attributable to security in the two paradigms assessing internalization, when children were alone.
- In father-child dyads, secure children were significantly more willing to follow their fathers’ request and engage in the boring task while alone and distracted by attractive toys (internalization), but not in the interactive toy cleanup or cleanup alone.
- Although interest in potential differences in mother-child and father-child attachment and their developmental implications has been rapidly growing, still very little is known about this question (perhaps due to the scarcity of studies that have included both parents). Consequently, although our findings are valuable, as they add to this growing literature, they are challenging to explain.
- In this study, we combined children in the insecure categories into one group and compared them with secure children. Future research should examine more nuanced differences among all four groups. Such analyses may shed further light on links between children’s early attachment and future willingness to cooperate with their mothers and fathers in a broad variety of tasks (An et al., 2021).
- Limitations of this research include the nature of this low-risk community sample. The parents were mostly White (although recall that 20% families were not “White Alone”), the children were typically developing and mostly cooperative with their parents, and parent-child relationships were generally harmonious. Including more diverse and higher-risk families in future studies (e.g., families struggling with chaos or poverty, single parents, parents and children with elevated levels of psychopathology) would be beneficial and informative.

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