

Attachment insecurities and perfectionism as correlates of partners' couple satisfaction and parental alliance following the birth of a child

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1. Abstract

The birth of a child brings many changes for the couple that can affect the couple satisfaction and parental alliance. Attachment insecurities and perfectionism can be useful to understand why certain couples fare better than others. This study explores the associations between attachment insecurities, perfectionism, couple satisfaction and parental alliance. In a cross-sectional study, both partners of 55 heterosexual French-Canadian couples with a child aged between 6 and 24 months completed an online questionnaire on Survey Monkey. They were asked about their couple satisfaction, parental alliance, attachment insecurities (anxiety, avoidance) and perfectionism (adaptive, maladaptive). Dyadic path analyses revealed that both partners' avoidance of intimacy are negatively related to their own couple satisfaction and parental alliance. Adaptive perfectionism is positively related to couple satisfaction and parental alliance among both partners. Maladaptive perfectionism is related to one's lower couple satisfaction (women only) and parental alliance. This study highlights the important role of attachment insecurities in the context of the arrival of a child. Furthermore, increased research is needed on perfectionism in the postnatal context and on the couple adjustment to the newborn, regardless of the rank of the child in the family. The results suggest that each partner's vulnerabilities (i.e., attachment, perfectionism) need to be considered in the preparation and adjustment to the arrival of a new child in the family. Interventions could target attachment behaviors and perfectionism to help partners reach a balanced and healthy couple and parental life.

2. Theoretical background

BIRTH OF A CHILD

- Increased conflicts
- Identity and role changes
- Possible decrease in couple satisfaction (Doss et al., 2017)

PARENTAL AND COUPLE ADAPTATION

COUPLE SATISFACTION

- Degree to which each member of the couple is satisfied with their relationship (Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006)

PARENTAL ALLIANCE

- Perception of collaboration with the child's other parent (Bouchard, 2014)

EXPLANATORY FACTOR 1 : ATTACHMENT INSECURITIES

- Anxiety** : Chronic fear of being abandoned based on a negative view of the self
- Avoidance** : Discomfort with emotional proximity based on a negative view of others as unreliable and fear of being vulnerable.

EXPLANATORY FACTOR 2 : PERFECTIONISM

- Adaptive** : High goals, satisfaction and sense of accomplishment when reaching them.
- Maladaptive** : Unrealistic goals with little room for mistake, constant fear of disappointment.
- Innovative factor in the study of parental and couple adaptation.

3. Objective

The aim of this study is to explore two factors that can contribute to parental and couple adaptation for both partners at the birth of a child: romantic attachment and perfectionism.

HYPOTHESES

- ↑ Attachment insecurities of M and W : ↓ **own** couple satisfaction.
- ↑ Attachment insecurities of M and W : ↓ **partner's** couple satisfaction.
- ↑ Attachment insecurities of M and W : ↓ **own** perception of the parental alliance.
- ↑ Attachment insecurities of W : ↓ parental alliance of M.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Explore whether the perfectionism of each partner is related to his/her couple satisfaction and his/her parental alliance.
- Explore whether the perfectionism of an individual is related to the couple satisfaction and the parental alliance of the other partner.

4. Methods

PARTICIPANTS

- N = 55 heterosexual couples (W: 19 - 33 yrs; M: 21 - 41 yrs)
- Marital status: married (36.4%), common-law partner (63.6%)
- Child's rank: 1st (50.91%), 2nd (25.45%), 3th and more (23.64%)

PROCEDURE

- 3 waves of recruitment (2012, 2014, 2018)
- Inclusion criteria : Cohabitant adult heterosexual couples; biological parents of the younger child aged between 6 and 24 months.
- Analyses: Path analyses based on Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM)
 - Actor effect : effect on oneself
 - Partner effect : effect on the partner

INSTRUMENTS

Online questionnaires (all in French) :

- Experiences in Close Relationships* (ECR) (Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003)
 - 36 items (Anxiety W: $\alpha = .86$; M: $\alpha = .89$; Avoidance W: $\alpha = .89$; M: $\alpha = .85$)
- Perfectionism Questionnaire- Revised* (PQ-R) (Langlois et al., 2010)
 - 20 items (Adaptive: $\alpha = .80$; Maladaptive: $\alpha = .94$)
- Dyadic Adjustment Scale – short form* (DAS-4) (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005)
 - 4 items ($\alpha = .84$)
- Parental Alliance Inventory* (PAI) (Gagné, 2009)
 - 20 items ($\alpha = .97$)

6. Discussion

ATTACHMENT INSECURITIES

Results are consistent with the literature (Kohn, Rholes, Simpson, McLeish, & Wilson, 2012; Luz, George, Vieux, & Spitz, 2017).

- Strong role of avoidance: Negative perception of conflicts, difficulty in trusting and being vulnerable exacerbated in perinatal context. M less invested in the relationship → frustration in W.
- Anxiety in W: Constant requests for support perceived as critics and blames by M → dissatisfaction in M.

PERFECTIONISM

Innovative results in the perinatal context. Consistent with results in other contexts (Snell, Overbey, & Brewer, 2005).

- Adaptive: Minimal dose of rigor is required. Demonstrates willingness to do well. Too weak → lack of rigor, negligence.
- Maladaptive: Unreachable standards for self and partner → couple dissatisfaction (W and M) and low parental alliance (W).

IMPLICATIONS

- Research: Increased understanding of factors contributing to couple and parental adjustment.
- Clinical: Practitioners are invited to consider both perfectionism and attachment insecurities in their work with parents.

STRENGTHS

- Rigorous dyadic analysis.
- Two-dimensional conception of attachment and perfectionism.
- Good psychometric properties of the instruments used.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURES DIRECTIONS

- Limited representability
- Self-reported questionnaires only
- To do next: Testing more complex models based on a longitudinal study

5. Results

FIGURE 1: ATTACHMENT INSECURITIES AND COUPLE SATISFACTION

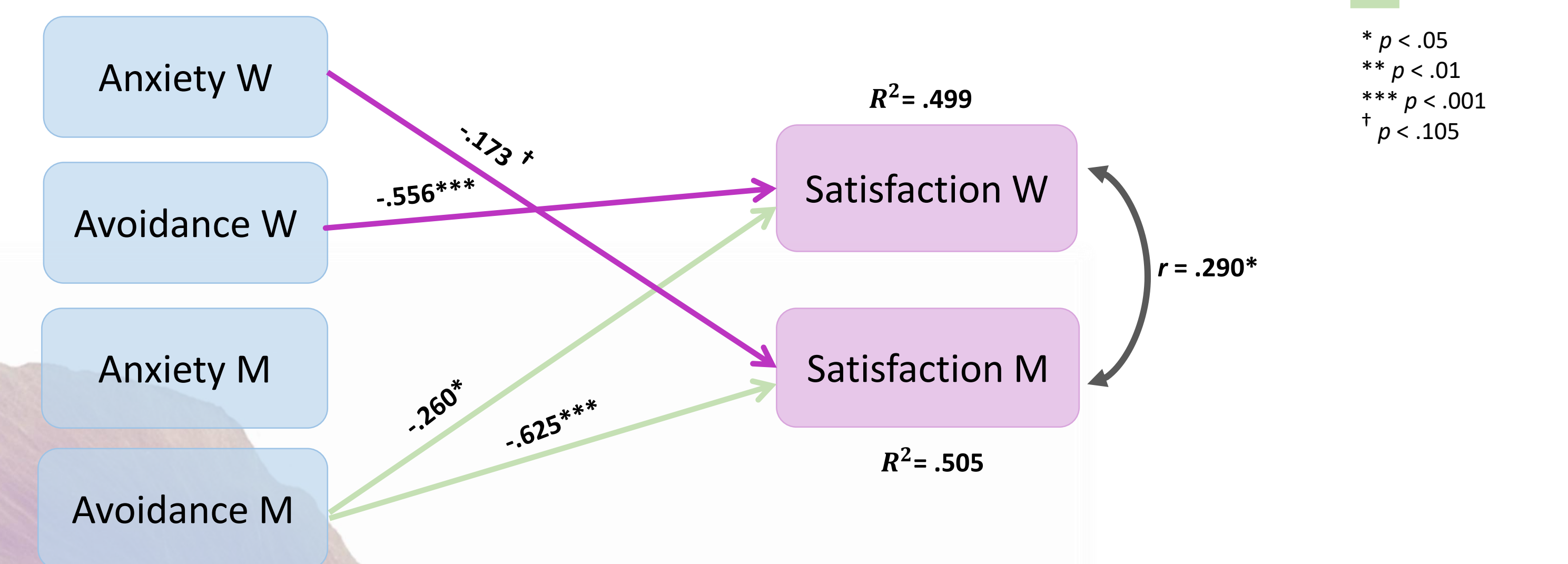


FIGURE 2: ATTACHMENT INSECURITIES AND PARENTAL ALLIANCE

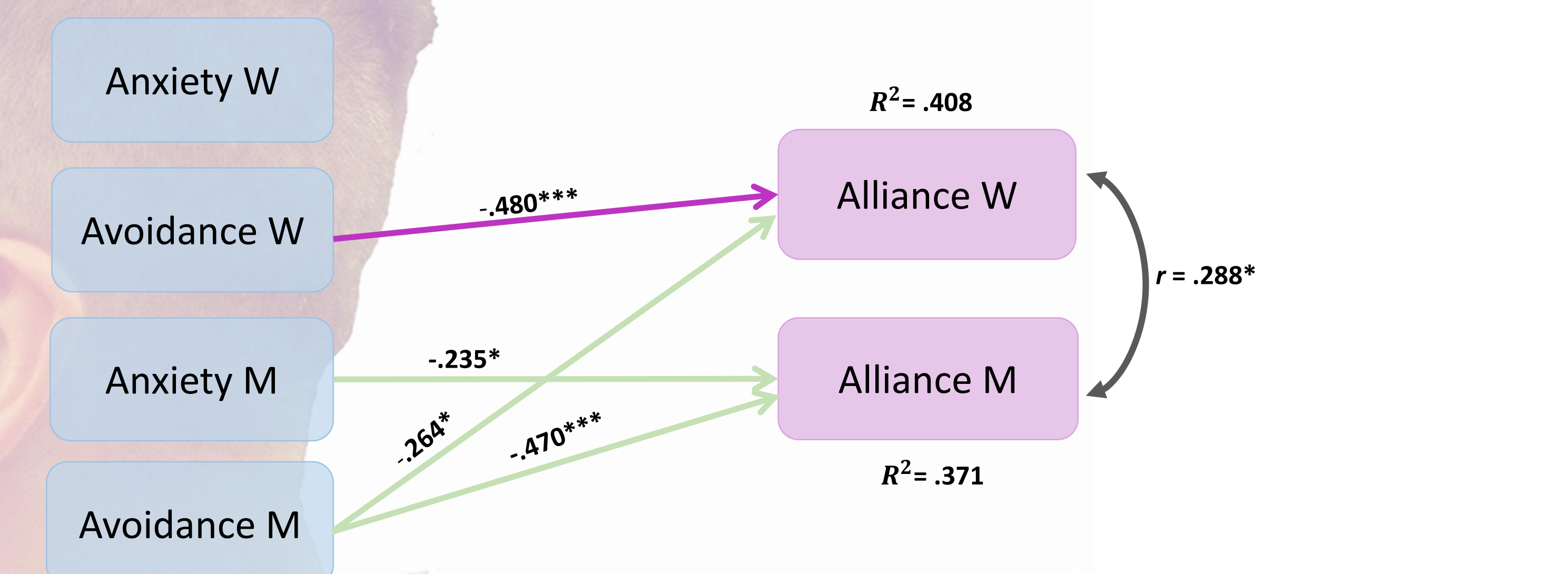


FIGURE 3: PERFECTIONISM AND COUPLE SATISFACTION

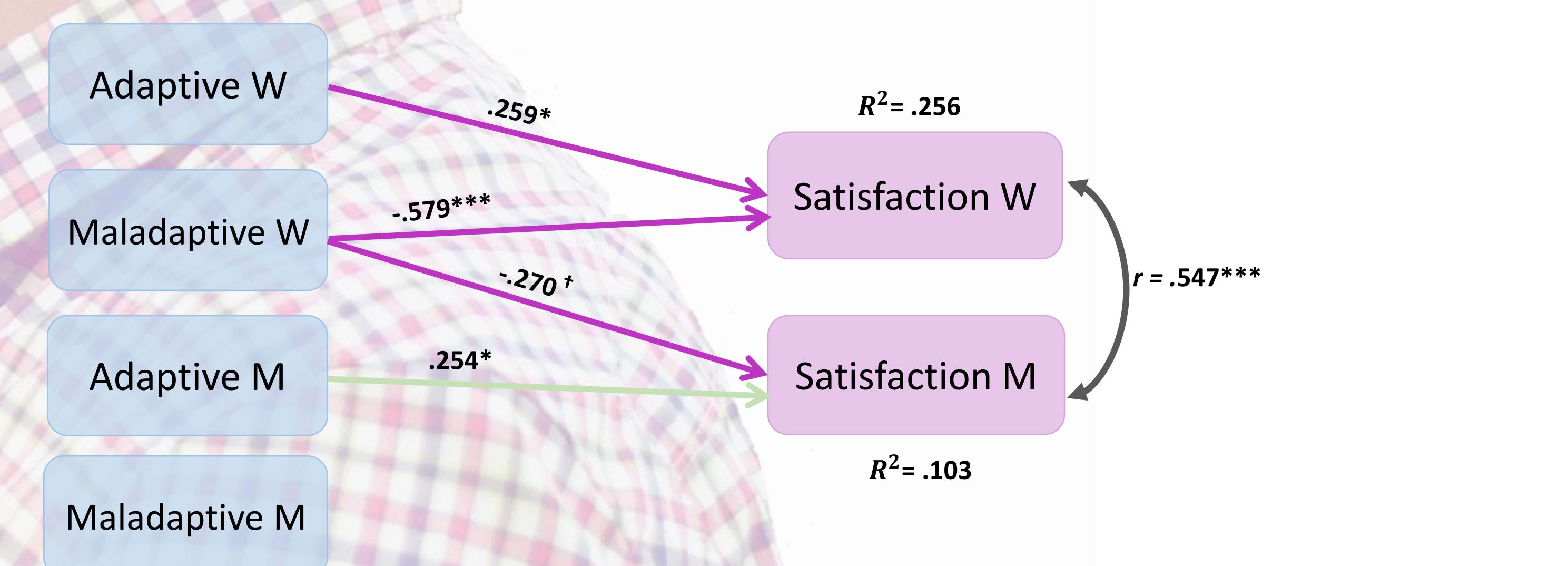


FIGURE 4: PERFECTIONISM AND PARENTAL ALLIANCE

