

# Insecure Attachment as a Mediator in the Association Between Childhood Emotional Maltreatment and Romantic Satisfaction: The Role of Maltreatment Polyvictimization



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## BACKGROUND

- **Childhood emotional maltreatment (CEM)** refers to instances of harm inflicted on a child by a caregiver's indifference, rejection, threats, excessive criticism or restrictions (Youth Protection Act, 1984).
- Previous research has documented a negative association between CEM and romantic relationship satisfaction. Researchers have proposed insecure romantic attachment may play a role (Cao et al., 2022; Riggs, 2010).
- Exploring this link in **emerging adults (EA)** is important as it is a developmentally sensitive period where people begin **serious romantic relationships** (Arnett, 2014).

## AIMS

(1) Examine **anxious and avoidant romantic attachment** as mediators in the association between **CEM and romantic satisfaction**, and (2) explore the differences in these associations in the following groups:

- **CEM-only:** EA with no maltreatment history and those with a history of CEM only.
- **CM-Mixed:** EA with a history of 1 or more forms of maltreatment (e.g., sexual, physical), in addition to or without a history of CEM.

To better **understand the effects of other forms of maltreatment on this association**.

## METHODS

**Participants:** 273 partnered EA, aged 18 to 25 years old from across Canada.

### Measures

1. **CEM, Sexual and Physical Abuse:** Early Trauma Inventory Self-Report-Short Form (ETISR-SF)
2. **Neglect:** ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool-Retrospective Version (ICAST-R)
3. **Childhood Exposure to IPV:** 3 items adapted from Conflict Tactics Scales-2 (CTS-2)
4. **Romantic Attachment:** Experiences Close Relationships (ECR-12)
5. **Romantic Relationship Satisfaction:** Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-4)

1 (Bremner, 2009); 2 (Dunne et al., 2009); 4 (Lafontaine et al., 2015); 5 (Sabourin et al., 2005); Straus et al., 1996)

## RESULTS

**Parallel mediation and multigroup analysis** were conducted in Mplus using the MLR estimator, controlling for the effect of material deprivation and age.

1. Mediation with **Complete sample**
  - **Significant mediation through avoidance only**
  - $a_1b_1 = -0.11$
2. Multigroup mediation analysis with **CEM-only group**
  - No significant mediation
3. Multigroup mediation analysis with **CM-mixed group**
  - **Significant mediation through avoidance only**
  - $a_2b_2 = -0.10$

Multigroup analysis revealed significant differences in regression coefficients ( $X^2$  diff. = 53.07; critical value = 12.59).

## CONCLUSION

- Findings support **insecure romantic attachment as a mediator** in the association between CEM and romantic satisfaction, and suggests that **avoidant attachment may be a particularly important contributor** among EA (Riggs et al., 2011).
- **CEM may be more strongly related to anxious attachment**, however, anxious attachment does not appear to negatively influence EA romantic relationship satisfaction (Molero et al., 2016; Limke et al., 2010).
- Romantic attachment, especially avoidant, appears to **mediate the association between CEM and romantic satisfaction in EAs only when CEM is paired with other forms of maltreatment**, underscoring the importance of considering **polyvictimization** in research and practice.

## REFERENCES AND MORE INFORMATION

References available upon request: [sophie.beaudette@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:sophie.beaudette@mail.mcgill.ca)  
 For information about ongoing research visit: <https://react-lab.com>

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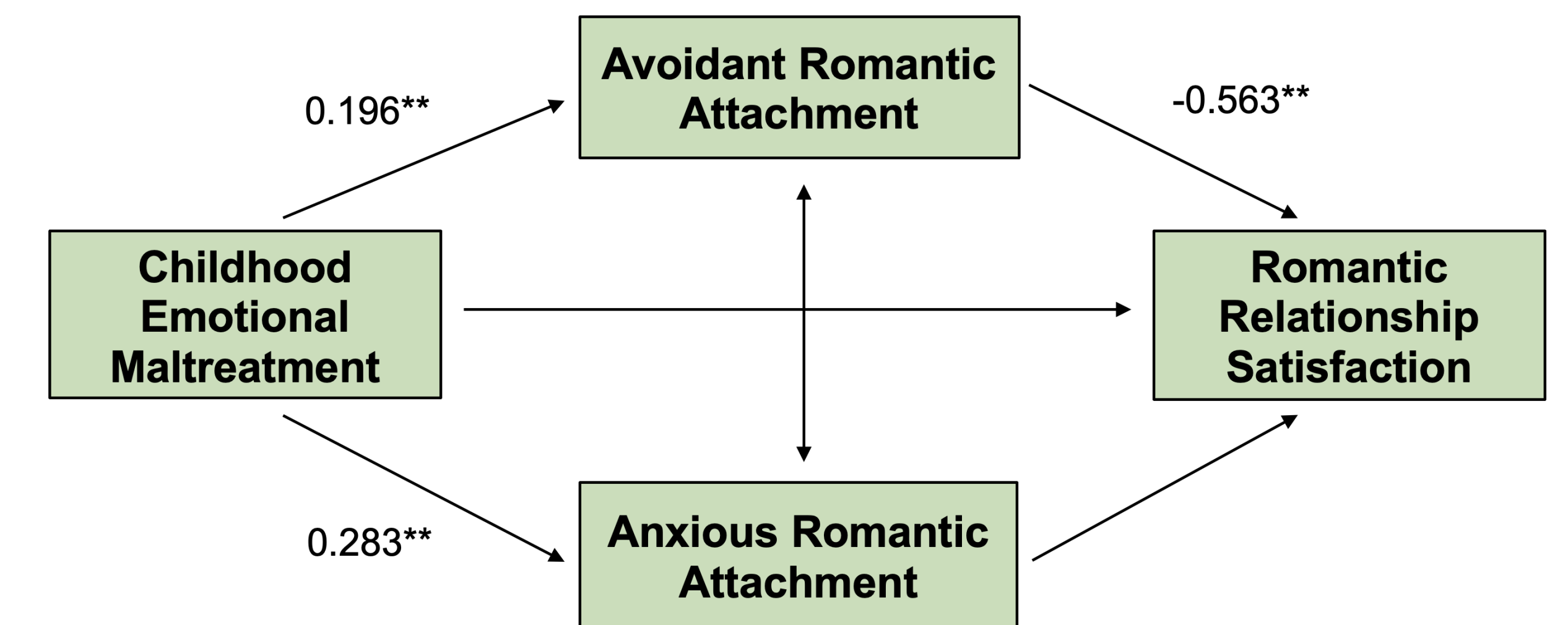
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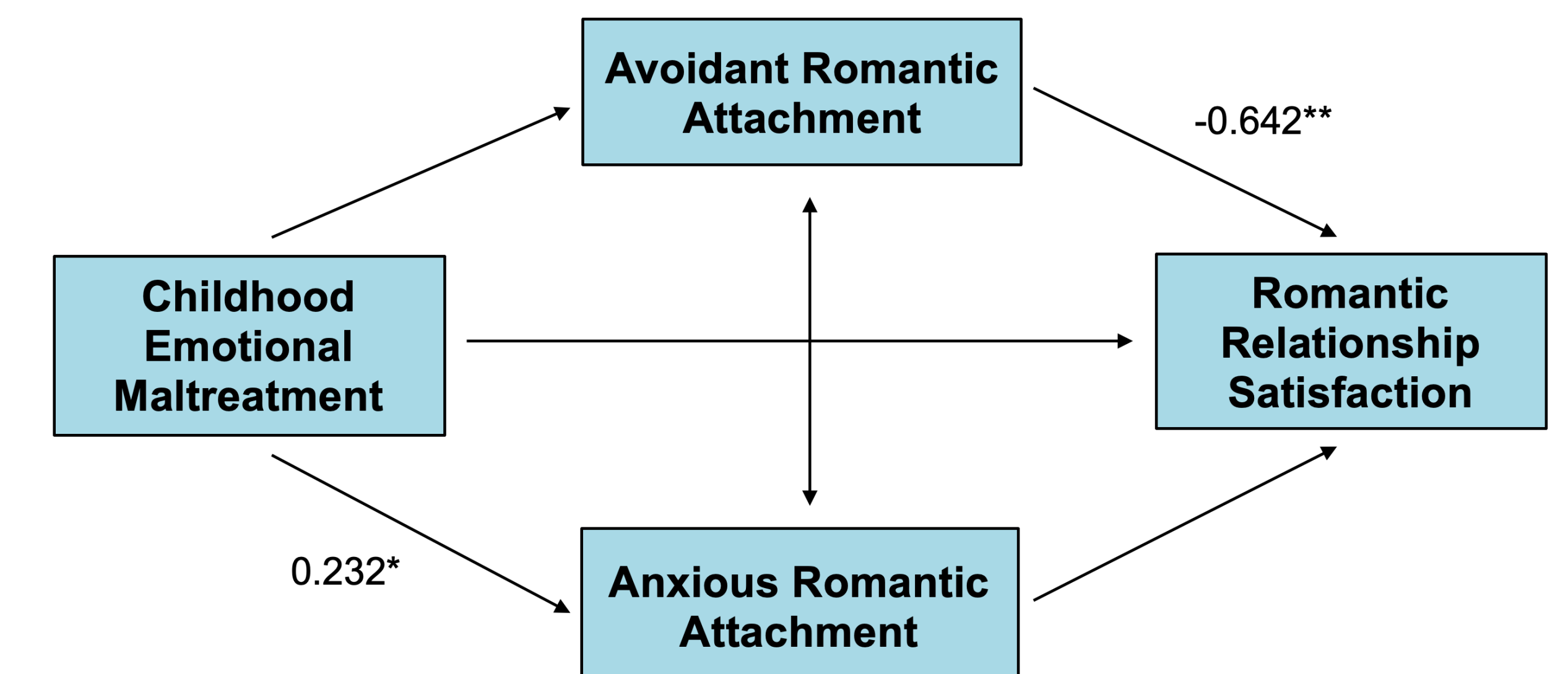
Figure 1. Mediation Model in **Complete Sample** ( $n = 273$ )



$R^2 = 37.8\%$

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.001$

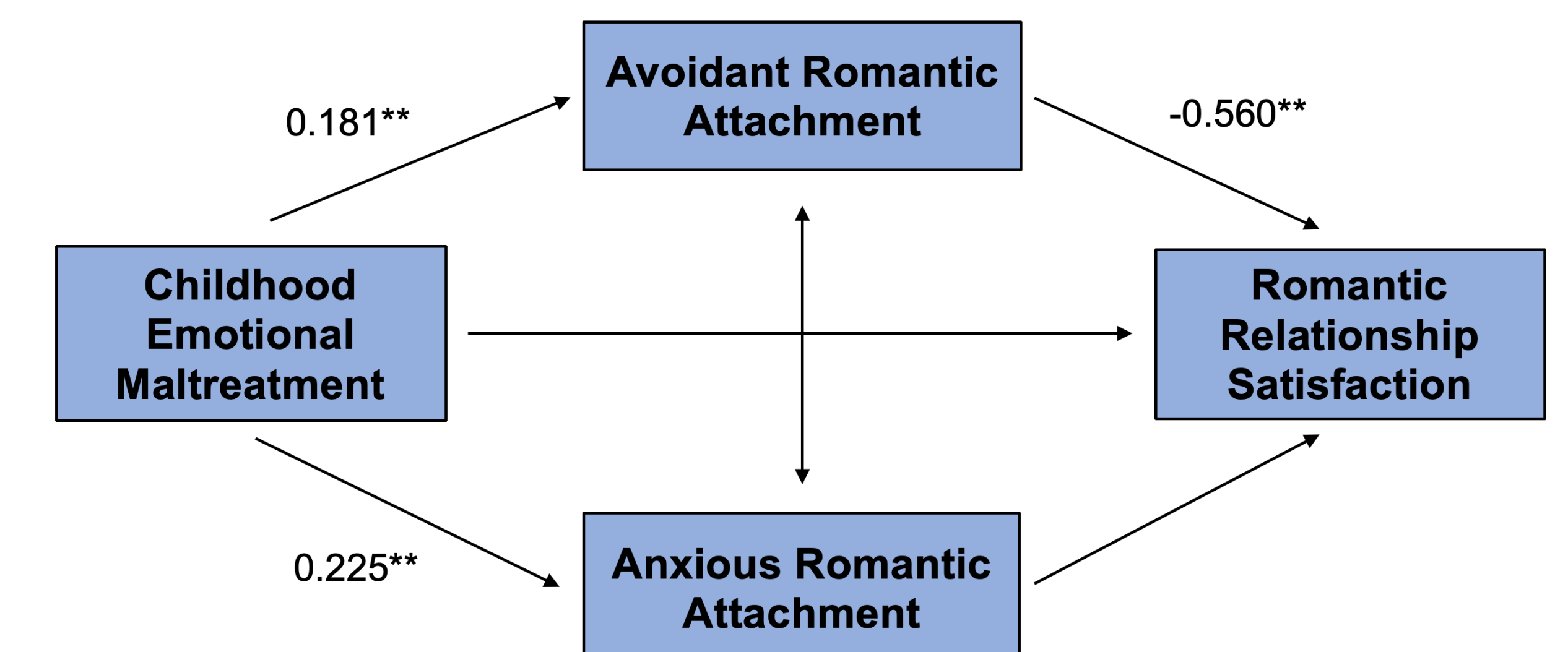
Figure 2. Multigroup Mediation Model in **CEM-Only Group** ( $n = 66$ )



$R^2 = 41.6\%$

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.001$

Figure 3. Multigroup Mediation Model in **CM-Mixed Group** ( $n = 207$ )



$R^2 = 37.4\%$

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.001$