



A Strengths-based Application of the Spillover Hypothesis: Constructive Interparental Conflict, Parenting, and Children's Cognitive Development

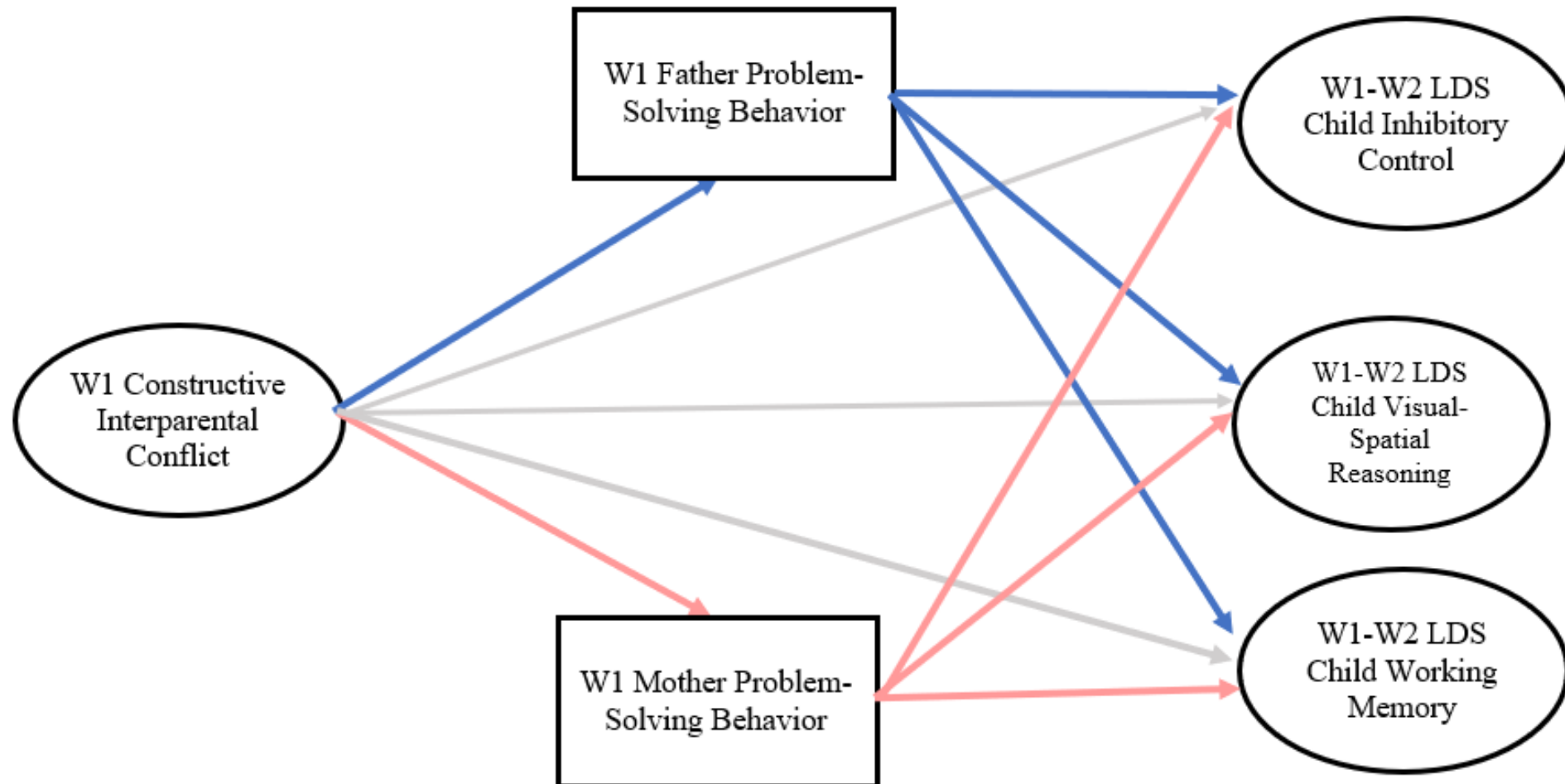
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Study Rationale

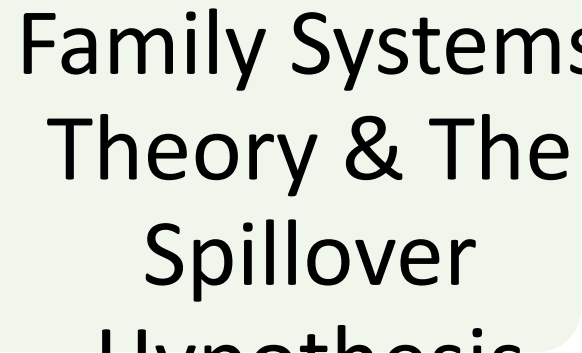
- *Destructive* interparental conflict → deficits in parenting and child functioning
- However, *constructive* interparental conflict, which involves problem-solving, active listening, and support provision during conflict, is linked to positive outcomes.
- No study has examined how *constructive* conflict might impact children's cognitive development
- **Therefore, the current study tested a spillover model of the effects of constructive conflict on parenting and children's cognitive development**

Research Question: Do maternal or paternal supportive-problem solving behaviors mediate associations between constructive interparental conflict and children's cognitive development?

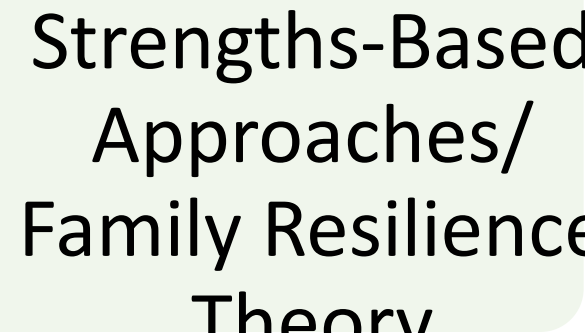




Overview: Key Theories



Family Systems
Theory & The
Spillover
Hypothesis

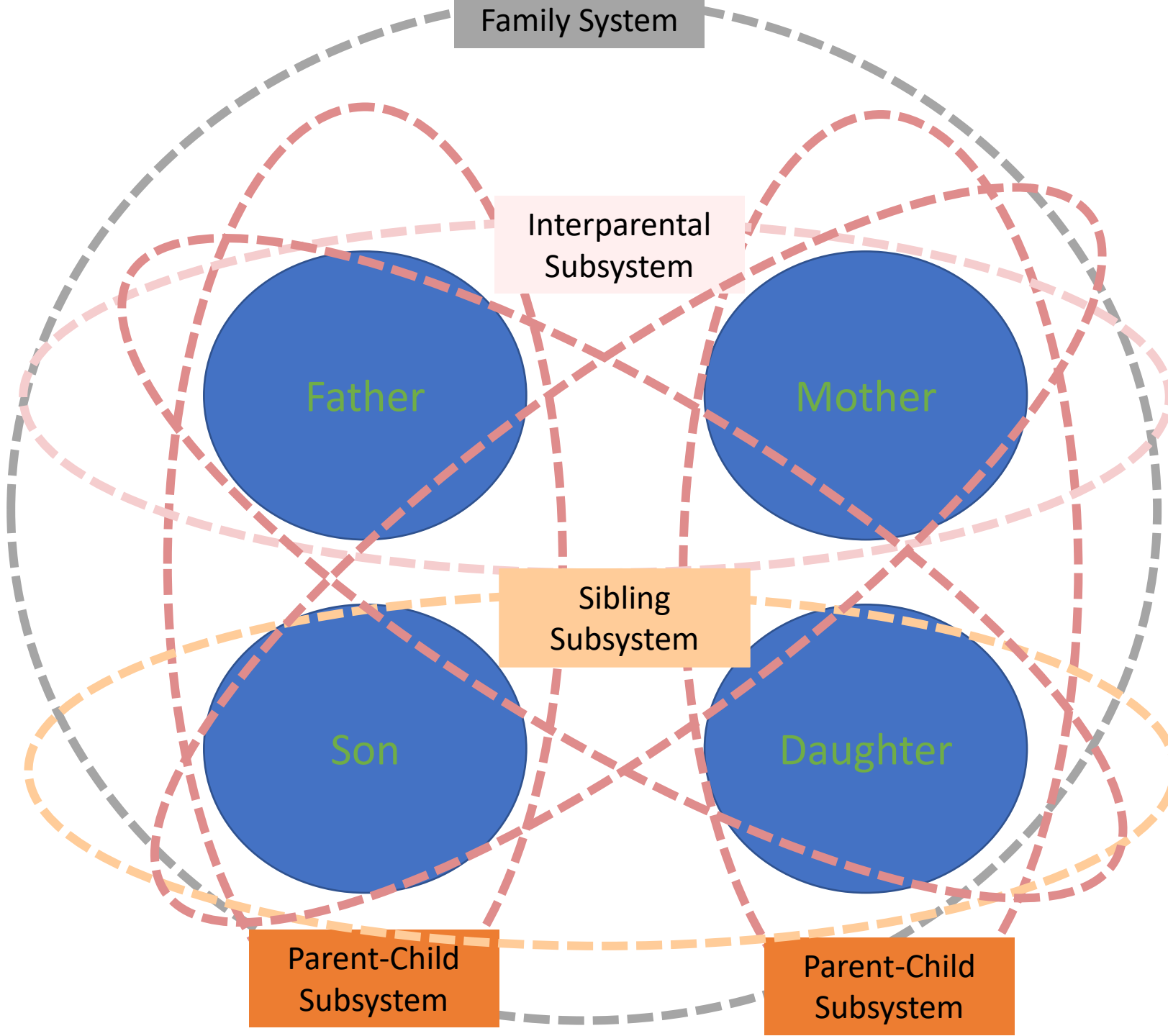


Strengths-Based
Approaches/
Family Resilience
Theory



Domain-
Specific
Approaches

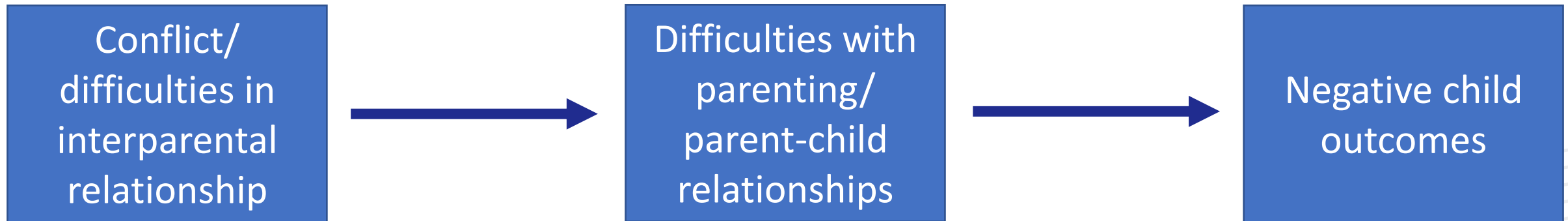
Family Systems Theory



Family unit as a complex social system in which members interact to influence each other's behavior

The Spillover Hypothesis

Affect/behaviors transfer or “spill over” from one relationship to another within a family system



FAMILY RESILIENCE THEORY



- More recent (Hadfield & Ungar, 2018; Walsh, 2016) extension of Family Systems Theory
- Use principles of FST to identify *strengths and protective factors* in contexts of stress
- Complements broader resilience frameworks (e.g., Masten & Monn, 2015)

DOMAIN-SPECIFIC APPROACHES

- Grusec & Davidov, 2010: domain approaches argue for greater specificity with respect to parenting contexts
- Emphasis on function

Domain	Parent-Child Relationship	Parent Behavior	Mechanism of Socialization	Child outcomes
<i>Protection</i>	Provider-recipient of protection	Alleviate child's distress	Confidence in parental protection	Greater empathy, trust, and effective coping under stress
<i>Reciprocity</i>	Exchange/equality	Comply with child's reasonable requests and influence attempts	Innate tendency to reciprocate	Receptive compliance and cooperation
<i>Control</i>	Hierarchical	Use discipline best suited to parental goal	Acquired self-control or responding to heterocontrol	Obedience based on internalization or external pressures
<i>Guided-Learning</i>	Teacher-student	Match teaching to child's changing level of understanding	Guided learning and scaffolding child competences	Acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge and skills
<i>Group Participation</i>	Joint members of a social group	Enable child to observe and participate in cultural practices	Form sense of social identity	Sense of belonging, readiness to adopt group norms

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Participants: Project FLIGHT



- 231 mothers, fathers, and their 3-year-old child
- 2.5-hour laboratory visits at W1 and W2
- Sample demographics
 - Child Race
 - 21.6% Black or African American
 - 55.4% White
 - 1.7% Asian
 - 21.2% multiracial or other
 - Child Ethnicity
 - 17.9% Latine/Hispanic



Measures: Constructive Conflict (W1)

- Observed Constructive Conflict:
 - “Problem-Solving and Communication” and “Support” behavioral codes during discussion task
 - ICCs: .64-.86
- Self-Reported Constructive Conflict
 - Cooperation subscale of the *Conflict and Problem-Solving Scales*
 - Ex: “try to find a solution that meets both needs equally”

Measures: Parent Supportive Problem-Solving (W1)

Observational Codes:

- Planning/Organization
- Engagement/Maintaining

ICCs:

.64-.91 across mothers and fathers



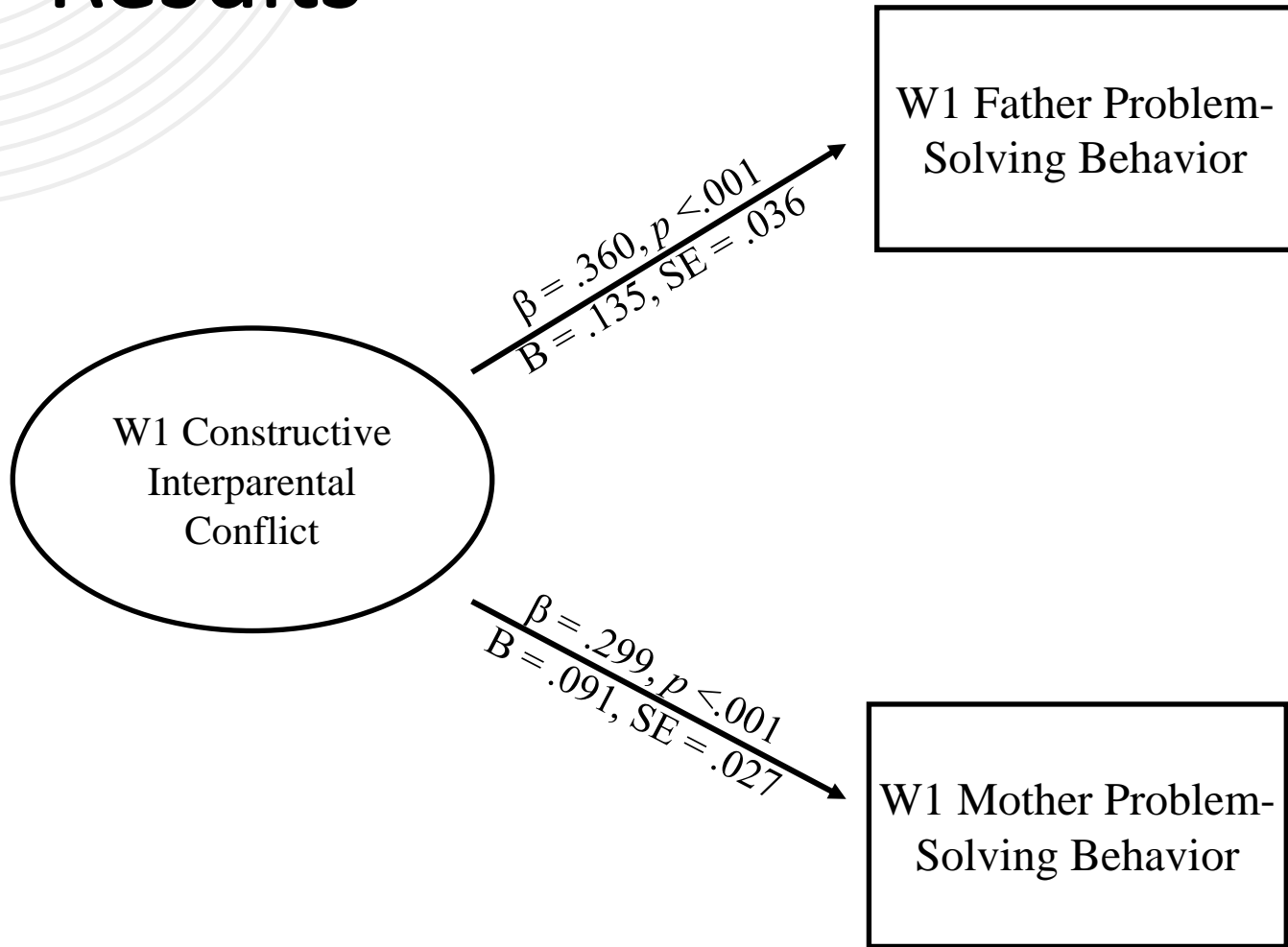
*faces blurred to protect participant identities

(Suor et al., 2019)

Measures: Child Cognitive Outcomes (W1 & W2)

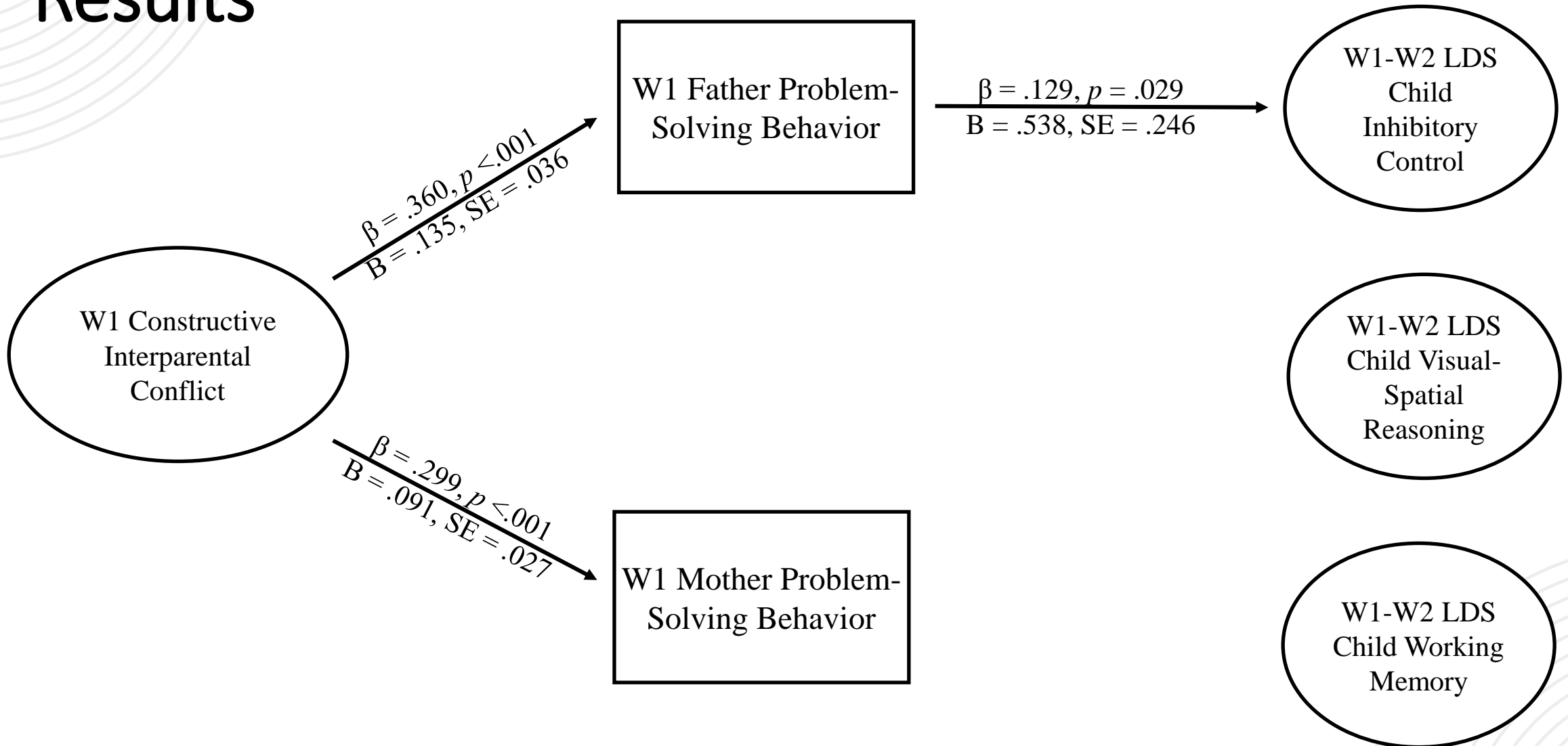
- Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, Fourth Edition
 - The **Block Design subtest** assesses children's *visual-spatial reasoning* abilities by asking them re-create images and structures.
 - The **Picture Memory subtest** assesses *working memory* through asking children to recall images that are no longer perceptually present
- The **Day/Night Task** is a developmentally appropriate, modified Stroop task assessing *inhibitory control*.

Results



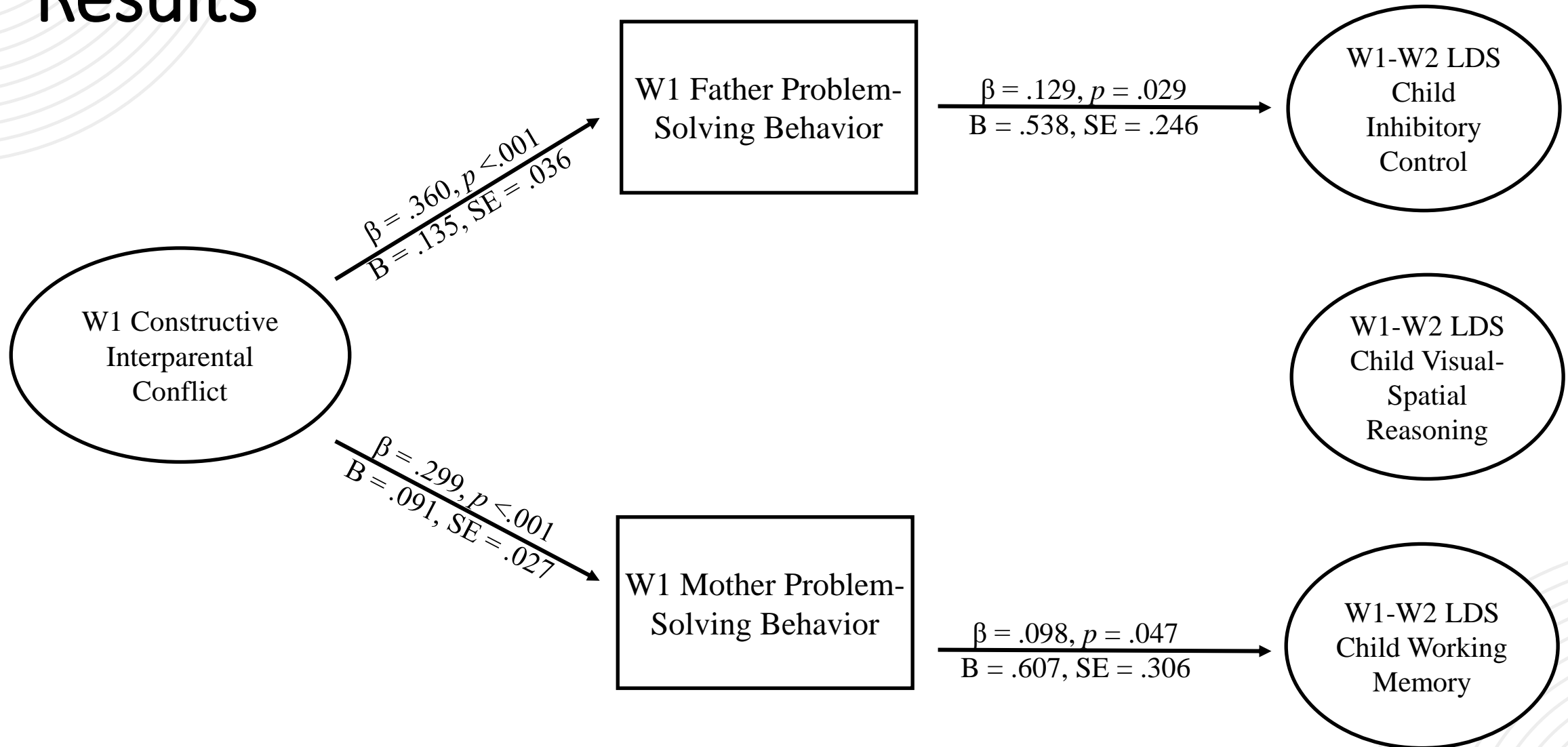
*LDS = latent difference score; only significant paths displayed

Results

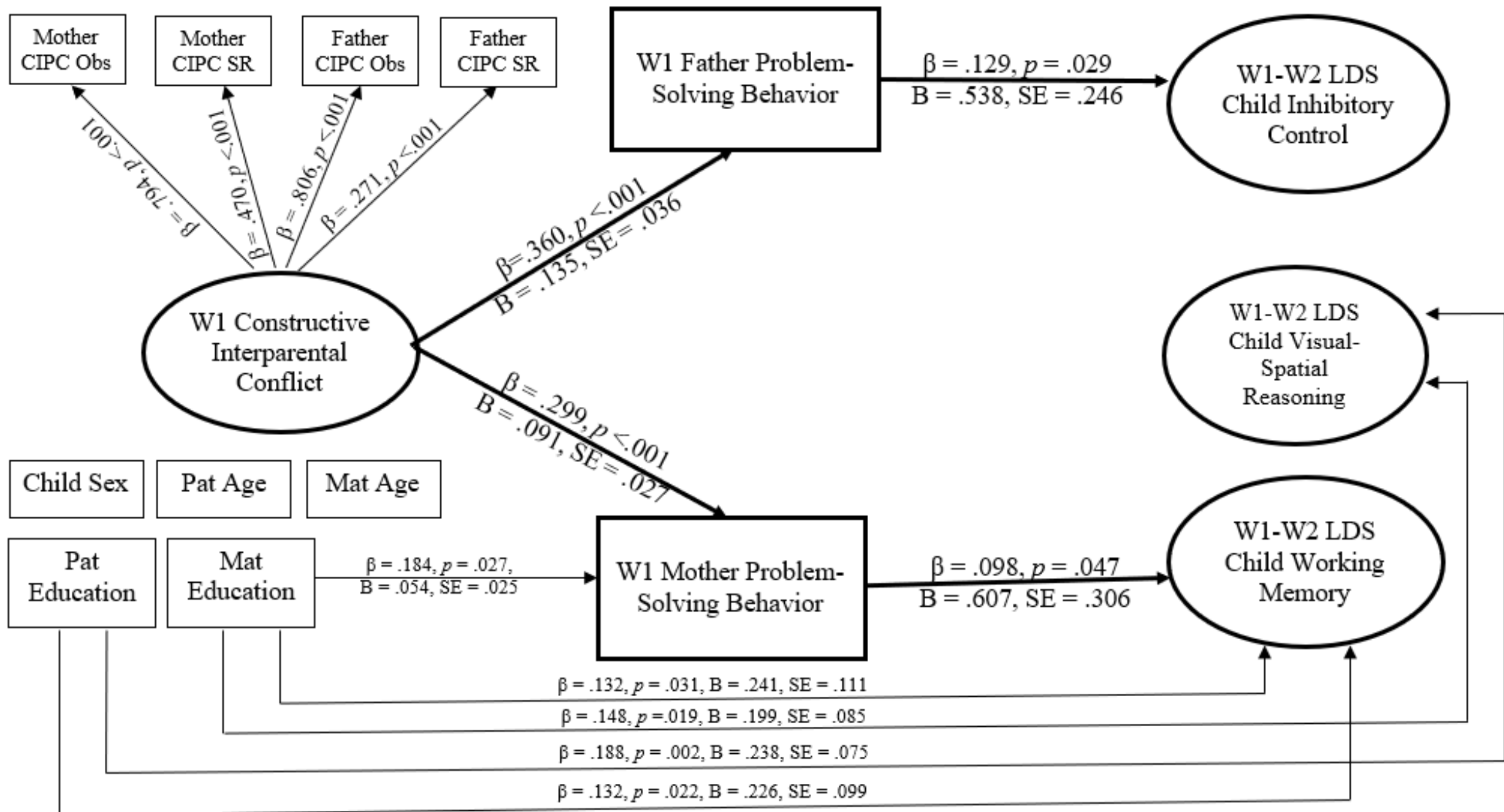


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Results



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Summary

- Overall conclusion: In line with Family Resilience Theory, spillover cascades stemming from constructive interparental conflict can have positive implications for parenting and children's cognitive development.
- There was also specificity in outcomes:
 - Paternal problem-solving supports inhibitory control
 - Maternal problem-solving supports working memory
 - Visual-spatial reasoning is not impacted by constructive conflict or parenting

Implications

- Fostering constructive conflict in couples may have broader benefits for the family system
- Constructive interparental conflict has implications for children's cognitive development, especially working memory and inhibitory control
- These developmental cascades are *specific* in nature (e.g., transmitted via parent problem-solving, not more general parenting behaviors such as sensitivity)

Future Directions

01

Expand outcomes we examine in relation to constructive conflict

02

Conduct translational intervention research that may foster constructive conflict in couples

03

Apply Family Resilience Theory/ Strengths-Based Approaches to future interparental conflict research

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THANK YOU

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