Reimagining Recruitment Research

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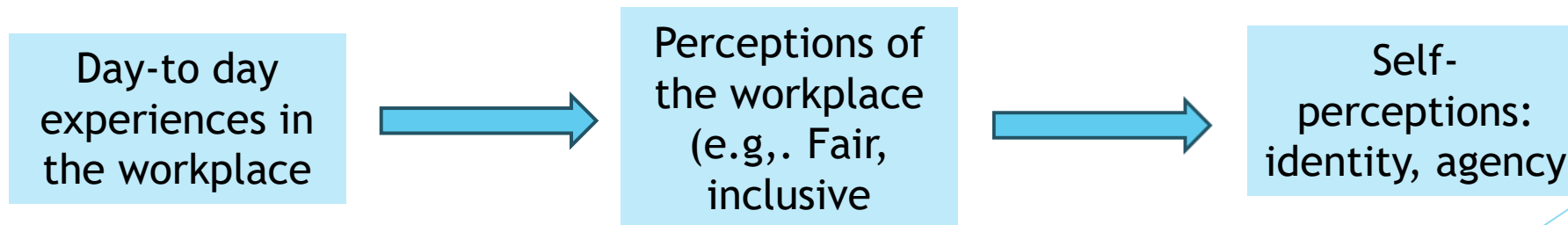
The research program comprised 4 studies:

1. **A national survey conducted with ECR and senior academics, examining STEM academic employment-related values, beliefs, and experiences.**

2. Interviews conducted with ECR and senior academics, examining STEM academic employment-related values, beliefs, and experiences.

3. Cross-sectional surveys conducted in the UK and USA examining stereotypes of STEM fields, gender, and class, and whether and how these overlap.

4. A systematic scoping review of evaluated interventions designed to address diversity and inclusion in STEM academia.

Explaining Differences in Decisions to Stay (or Leave)

Social Identity Approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1978; Turner et al., 1987)

➢ Social identity as contextual and dynamic – need to locate explanations in people's experiences

➢ Contingency on *recognition* by prototypical group members (e.g., senior academics / institutional authorities)

➢ Social identity (e.g., as STEM academic) associated with belonging and more (authenticity and agency; mutual influence and trust; giving and receiving help; idiosyncrasy credit)

Day-to day experiences in the workplace → Perceptions of the workplace (e.g,. Fair, inclusive → Self-perceptions: identity, agency

Study 1: What predicts the likelihood of staying?

Valid Sample Size = 732 recruited from 40 STEM departments across UK)

OUTCOME VARIABLE: Expectation to be in academia in 5 years

Demographic Variables

(PhD-Student, Post-Doc, Fellow, Lecturer) Career Stage

(Cis-Woman vs Cis-Man) Gender

(Fixed-term vs Open Ended) Contract

(Non-White vs White) Ethnicity

(Non-Heterosexual vs Heterosexual) Sexual Orientation

(No Higher Education vs Higher Education) Parental Education

(No Disability vs Disability) Disability Status

Reported Experiences

Received Opportunities (*Being enabled to obtain academic achievements*)

Bullying and Harassment (*Experienced or witnessed*)

Workplace Perceptions

Diversity and Inclusivity (*A collaborative environment accepting of everyone*)

Voice Confidence (*Being able to speak up about ideas and criticisms*)

Procedural Fairness (*Rewards and opportunities are being given out fairly*)

Perceptions about the Self

Identifying as an Academic (*Feeling like a typical academic*)

External Validation (*Expertise and value recognised by other academics*)

Feeling authentic (*Group membership recognised and safe to be one's self*)

Confidence to Succeed (*Believing that one can succeed in academia*)
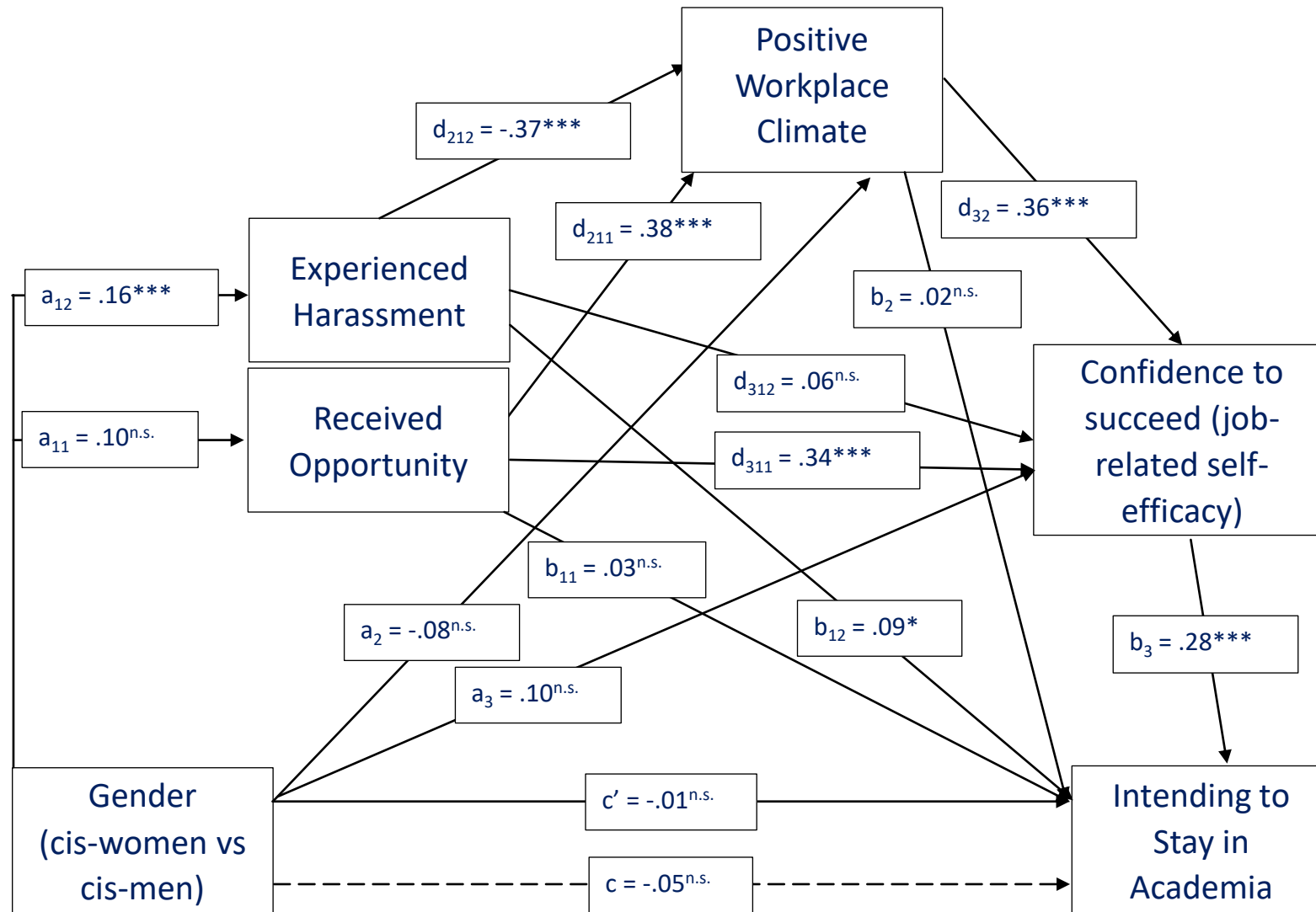
Note. $^{t}p < .1$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

What is the experience of harassment and how is it understood?

➤ 219 of 374 who had experienced or witnessed harassment responded to open question. Most were early career (73%) female (53%)

➤ Reflective thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning in the data

➤ Reported range of severity (micro-aggressions through to assault).

➤ Three themes: 1. Harassment as identity (mis)recognition and denial; 2. Wider processes of (in)validation; 3. Complaints and power dynamics.

Harassment as identity denial and (mis)recognition

1. Minority identities invoked in ways that question competence:

One supervisor stated that I was not smart enough, was a girl and was not strong enough to get the research done (ECR F).

I've been called a pleb or plebian [] based on the area of the country I come from and the fact that I went to a state comprehensive school. People routinely interrupt me in the middle of sentences to repeat a word I've said in a thicker accent, mimicking me (ECR F).

I am a Christian []. I often hear my worldview described by STEM academics as being a coping mechanism or something for simple minded people who can't think for themselves (ECR M).

Wider processes of (in)validation

2. Harassment embedded in wider relationships:

This has been in front of and with witnesses, all who stood there or actually became like that towards me (ECR F).

I had a lot of conversations with colleagues many of the men didn't think it was a big deal until I pointed out what they would think if their wives got sent anonymously a book of penis's (ECR F).

I was told when discussing discrimination based on gender that that's "just the way it is." All by senior female faculty (ECR N-B).

Complaints and power dynamics

3. Victims are atomised whilst perpetrators are embedded in powerful networks

I had no other 'proof' and no one would witness the occurrence as they were either supervisor's personal friends/in his cohort of buddies or they were too worried about negative repercussions from him. (ECR F)

In all cases, due   to the power dynamic (usual Professor-level staff made the comments) between myself at the time and those making the comments and the precarious nature of postdoctoral contracts I did not feel safe or protected enough to comment without affecting my own career (TA M).

It is worth noting that in all the above instances, I have also been subject to inappropriate comments by the people lower in the pipeline (TA F).

The problem with

▶ **The leaky pipeline metaphor** – individuals are just dropping out deflects attention from how people are pushed.

▶ **The deficit model** – the problem is in them (minority individuals and groups) and not in structures and interactions with majority group members

▶ **Unconscious bias** – the problem is a deficit in knowledge / understanding which directs attention away from how bias is targeted and motivated exercise in social power.

Implications for intervention

1. Address structural factors that make bullying more likely and more difficult to address – insecurity, competition, power.

2. Challenge discourses and practices that narrowly define the boundaries and content of STEM academic identity.

3. Ensure all members of a community perceive alignment between the purported values of the organisation and how it responds to violations.

4. Formal processes of remedy that recognise the dynamics created by status differences:

   1. Remove the onus of complaint from isolated, low status individuals.

   2. Recognise how perpetrators are embedded in networks of support both within and without the university.

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