



Subtle age discrimination experiences and their effects on workplace well-being

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ok boomer

"So, when's the big retirement?"

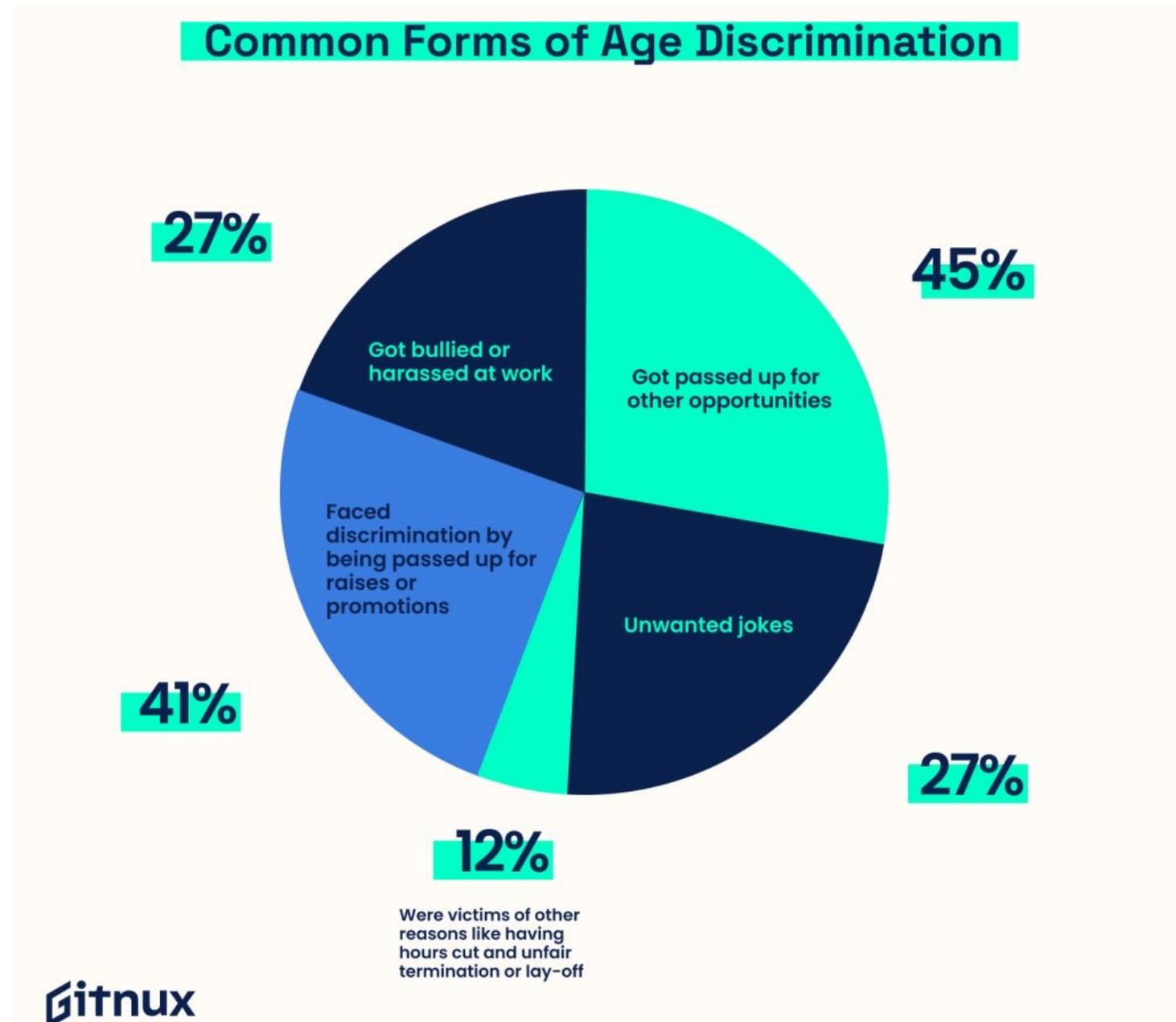
"Maybe we shouldn't give that project to John, he might have trouble learning the new technology."

"They're young at heart."

Subtle Discrimination

negative and ambivalent demeanor and/or treatment enacted toward social minorities based on their minority status membership that is not necessarily *conscious* and likely conveys *ambiguous intent*

Age Discrimination. treating an individual unfairly because of their age.



Subtle Discrimination

Unlike overt discrimination which involves “explicitly negative treatment” subtle discrimination tends to:

- be rather **ambiguous**
- have **less clear intent**
- be more **frequent**
- appear **less harmful**

It can take many forms from:

Incivility

Hostility

Microaggressions

Harassment

Nonverbal behaviors

Jokes & malicious remarks

Is subtle discrimination really that bad?

Meta-analysis that investigated the relationship between discrimination and workplace outcomes

| Primary predictor | Outcomes |
|-----------------------|--|
| Subtle discrimination | Career success & Job satisfaction |
| Overt discrimination | Job turnover Job performance Physical & mental health symptoms |

Without exception, *subtle discrimination was at least as harmful as blatant*, if not worse

- More frequently encountered → an accumulation of negative effects over time
- Increased time and effort ruminating over it → leading to depletion of cognitive and emotional resources

Depletion of self-regulation resources

According to resource-based theories of self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 1998; Johnson et al., 2018)

- Individuals have a finite amount of cognitive resources available for regulating their behavior
- these resources are depleted when people engage in activities that require self-control (i.e., certain social interactions)
- depletion of these resources may contribute to self-regulatory failures
- **Subtle discrimination experiences diminish self-regulatory resources** (Park et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2021)
- **Self-regulatory resource depletion has been linked to reduced psychological well-being** (Lanaj et al., 2014; Puranik et al., 2021)

Reduced Feelings of Belongingness

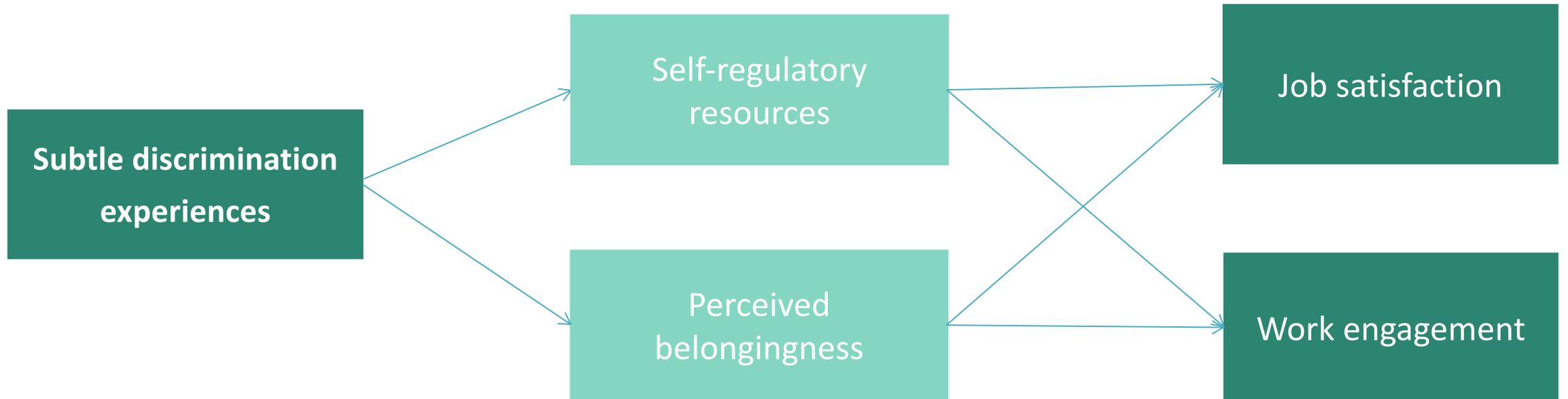
Self-regulation theory posits that individuals monitor their social environments and regulate interpersonal behaviors in ways that minimize potential for rejection

- Subtle discrimination experiences hinder feelings of belongingness (Schilpzand & Huang, 2018)
- Decreased belongingness has been negatively associated with reduced job satisfaction and positive affect (Ilies et al., 2018; Puranik et al., 2021)

Research Goal
**How does subtle age
discrimination affect
mature workers
well-being?**



Hypothesized Model



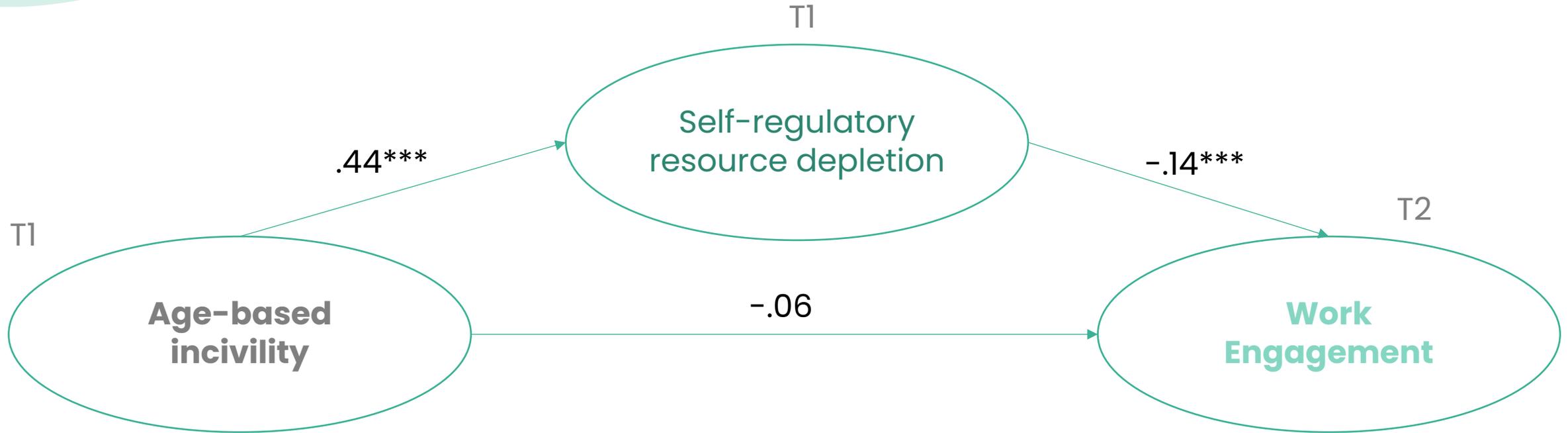
Study 1

Longitudinal study

2-waves survey

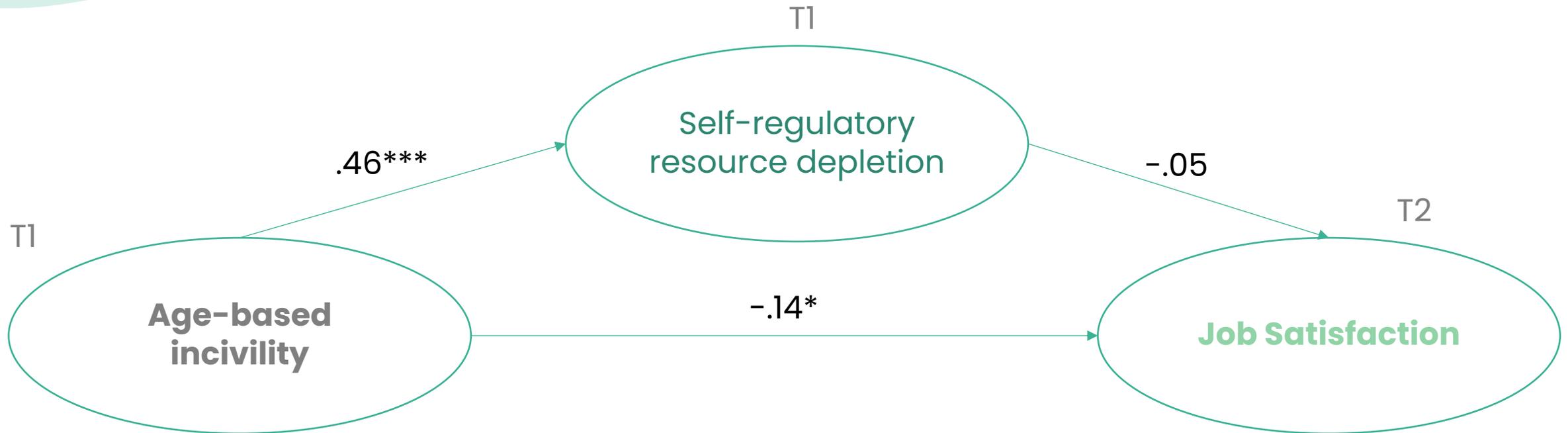
- N = 430 employees across several organizations in Australia
 - $M_{age}=50$ years (SD = 11), 55% female, 88% Caucasian, 26% have a bachelor's degree, tenure = 10 years (SD= 9)
- Measures
 - Subtle discrimination
 - Age-based Incivility (Cortina et al., 2013)
 - Workplace well-being
 - Job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2000)
 - Work engagement (UWES-9; Shaufeli et al., 2006)

Results



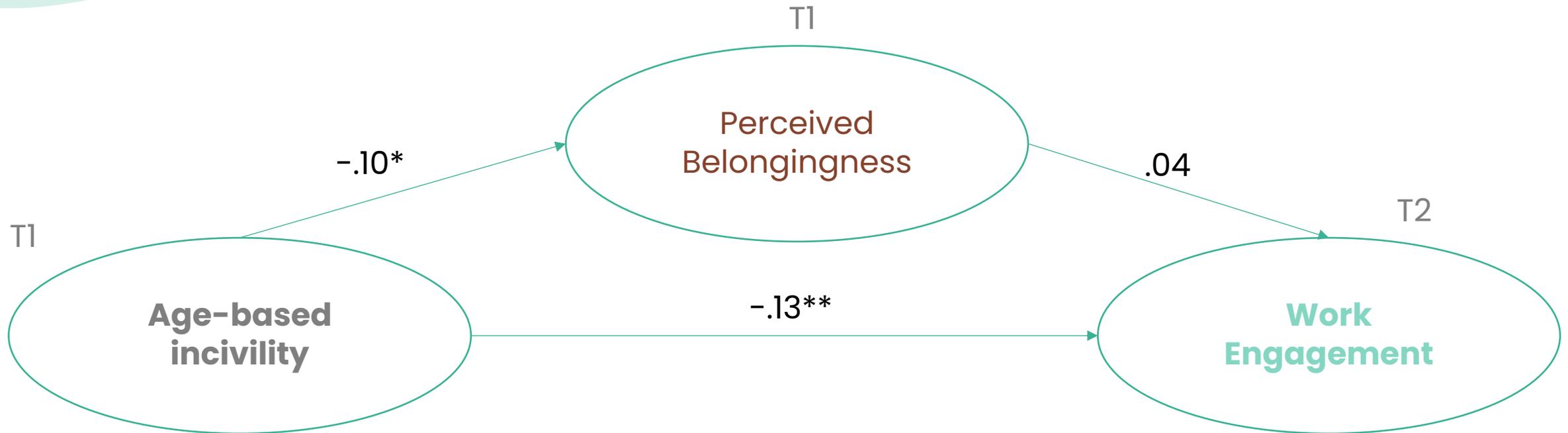
Indirect effect: $-.06$, 95% CI $[-.10, -.02]$ Total effect: $-.13$ 95% CI $[-.21, -.04]$

Results



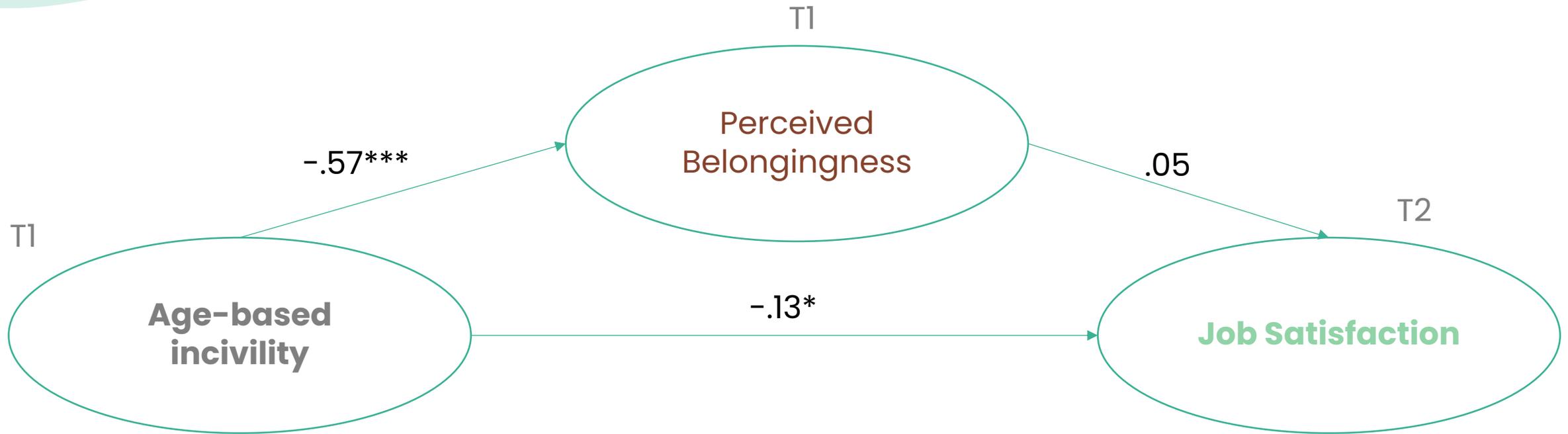
Indirect effect: $-.02$, 95% CI $[-.06, .01]$ Total effect: $-.16$ 95% CI $[-.26, -.06]$

Results



Indirect effect: $-.02$, 95% CI $[-.07, -.02]$ Total effect: $-.13$ 95% CI $[-.21, -.04]$

Results



Indirect effect: $-.03$, 95% CI $[-.09, .01]$ Total effect: $-.16$ 95% CI $[-.26, -.06]$

Study 2

Experience sampling methodology

- Compare within-person effects
- Daily surveys twice/day for 10 consecutive working days
- N = 149 US-based mature workers recruited on Prolific
 - $M_{\text{age}}=53.33$ years (SD = 6.1), 49% female, 85.9% Caucasian, 49.66% have a bachelor's degree, organizational tenure = 12.92 years (SD= 8.38), role experience = 19.86 years (SD=10.14)
- Measures
 - Baseline questionnaire: demographics, core-self evaluations, work related information (tenure, experience, team age diversity)
 - Lunch survey: age-based incivility, self-regulatory resource depletion, belongingness
 - End of the workday survey: job satisfaction & work engagement



Contributions

Age-based incivility is negatively related to work engagement & job satisfaction over time

Self-regulatory resource depletion and perceived belongingness explain the negative impact on work engagement, but not job satisfaction

As the workforce is aging, it is crucial to better understand the ramifications of age discrimination beyond the formal level

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Thank you



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