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The theory of planned behaviour, self-identity, and moral disengagement: What predicts sustainability at work?

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Explaining & predicting sustainability at work

- theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)
  - travel choice (Bamberg et al., 2003)
  - waste separation / recycling, energy saving (Steinheider et al., 1999)
- self-identity (Stryker, 1987) & role fulfilment
  - calls for an inclusion in the TPB (Sparks, 2000)
  - evidence for utility in predicting household waste recycling (e.g. Nigbur et al., 2010; Terry et al., 1999)
- moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990)
  - involvement in sustainability (Bandura, 2007)?

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Green Impact at CCCU

- Green Impact scheme
  - promotion of various sustainability behaviours across campus (recycling, energy saving, …)
  - "environmental champions" for each team (see Hopper & Nielsen, 1991)
  - questionnaire on predictors of sustainable action (followed up after conclusion of the scheme, but not used for data analysis because of poor response)

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Green Impact study: Method

- online questionnaire, *N* = 130 (phase 2 not reported)
- measures on recycling, energy saving, water saving, transport
- attitude (4 items, α = .45!)
  - "Recycling materials is the right thing to do."
- subjective norm (4 items, α = .82)
  - "People important to me would agree that water should be conserved."
- self-efficacy / perceived control (4 items, α = .52!)
  - "Taking a short shower rather than a long one is easy."
- self-identity (4 items, α = .73)
  - "I consider myself an energy-saver."
- intention (4 items, α = .65)
  - "I will recycle at work wherever possible in the future."

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Green Impact study: Method

- moral disengagement sub-scales
- moral justification (5 items, α = .69)
  - "Concern for environmental issues is being exploited by the university as a way to make money."
- exonerative comparison (3 items, α = .87)
  - "Driving to work is less of an issue when one thinks about how many people take flights to exotic destinations."
- displacement of responsibility (5 items, α = .60)
  - "It's not an individual's fault if they don't look for a recycling bin during busy periods."
- diffusion of responsibility (3 items after 1 deletion, α = .58)
  - "If no one in the workplace recycles, one cannot be blamed for not recycling."

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Green Impact study: Method

- moral disengagement sub-scales
- denial of consequences (3 items, α = .77)
  - "A short car ride hardly affects the environment."
- attribution of blame (3 items, α = .40!)
  - "It is understandable that people would refuse to change their behaviour, since their behaviour has been reinforced by society."
- additional moral construct (Woods et al., 2010)
- religious metaphor (5 items, α = .86)
  - "Nowadays people who are not 'green' are treated like sinners."

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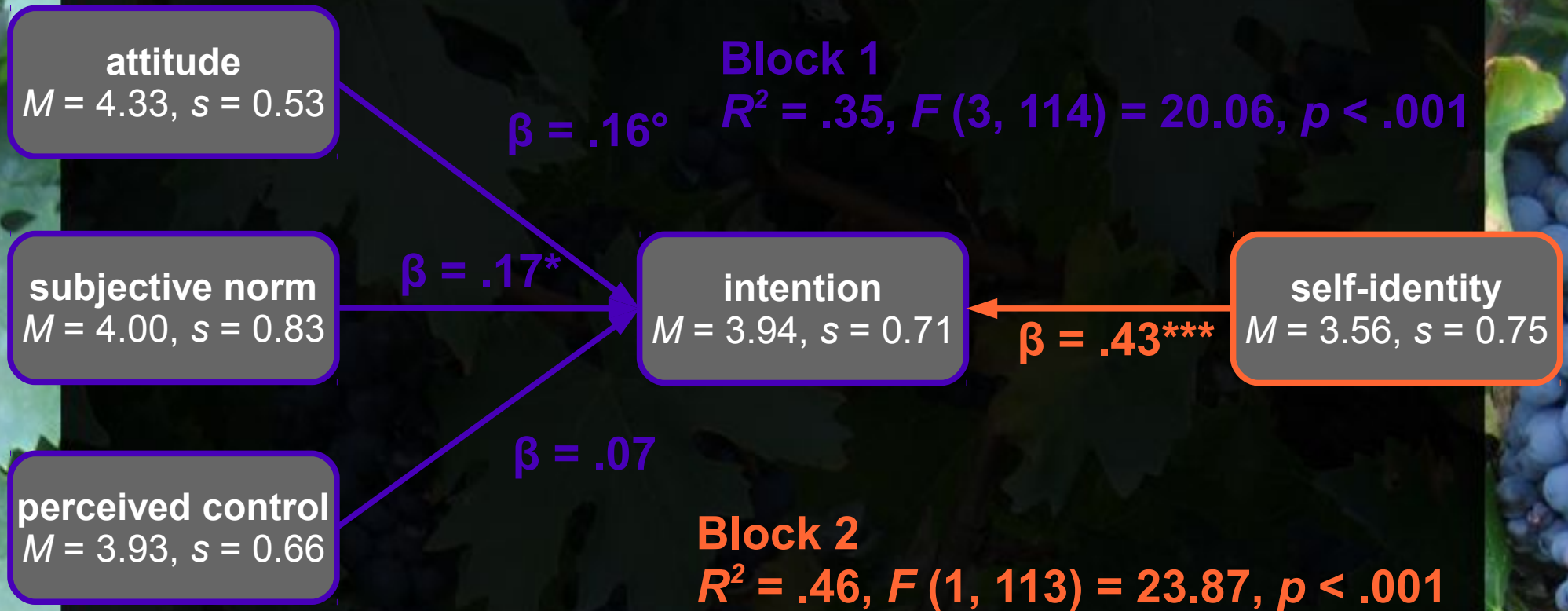
Results: Overall



- subjective norm & self-identity substantially predict intention
- specificity of measurement issue: individual behaviours?

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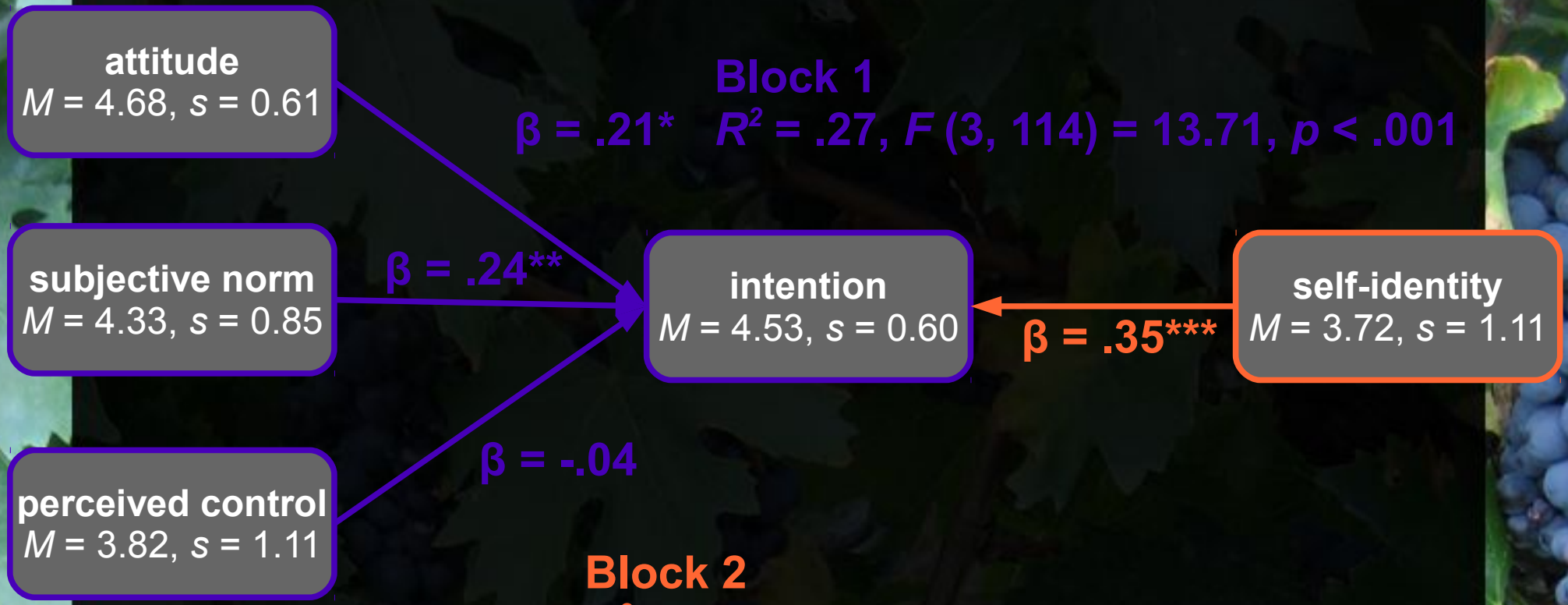
Results: Recycling



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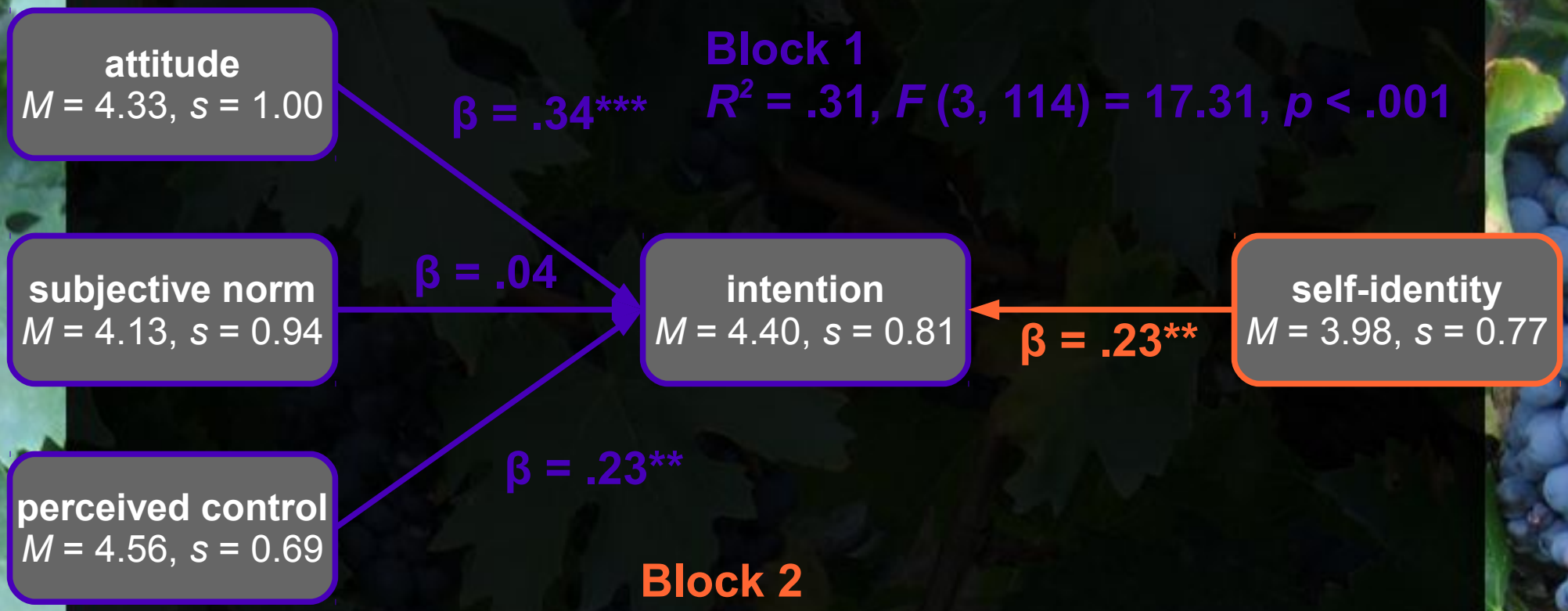
Results: Energy saving



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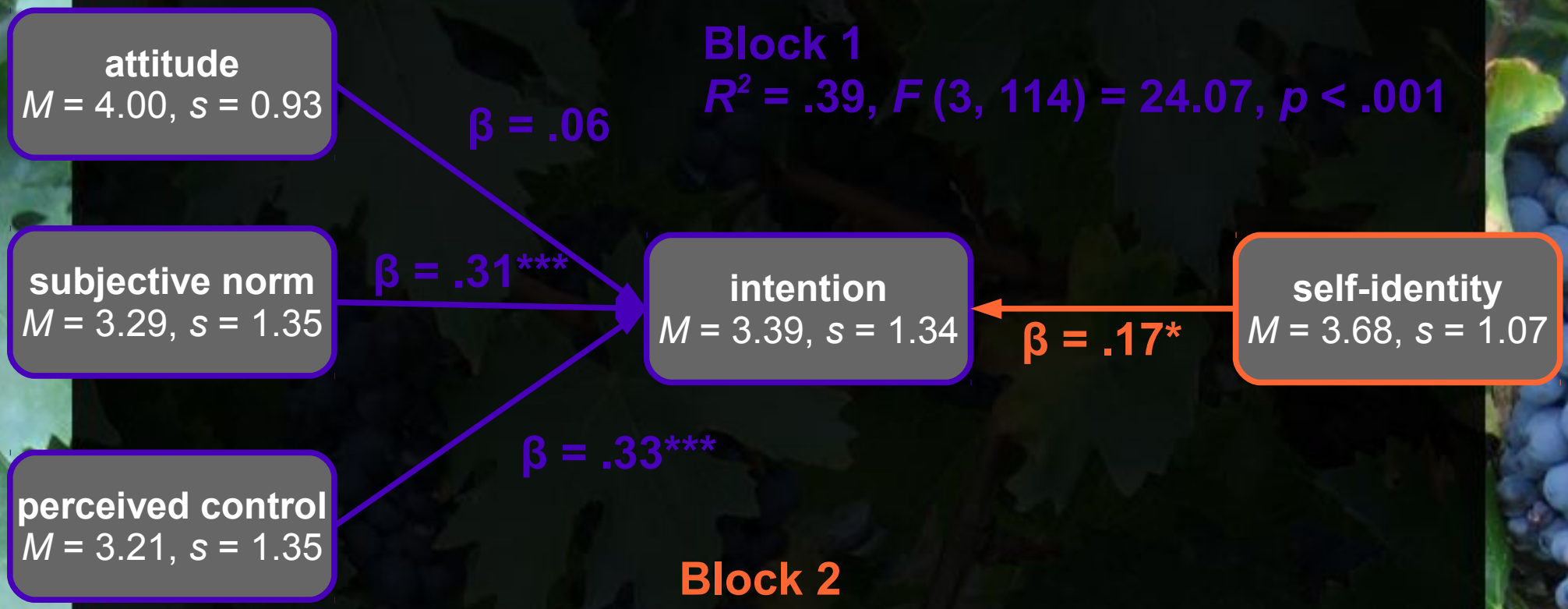
Results: Transport



Block 1
$R^2 = .39$, $F\,(3, 114) = 24.07$, $p < .001$

Block 2
$R^2 = .41$, $F\,(1, 113) = 4.36$, $p < .05$

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Results: Moral disengagement

- clearly related to sustainability intentions, but reliability & validity issues with our measures …

denial of consequences
M = 2.36, *s* = 0.87, *r* = *-.48****

moral justification
M = 2.65, *s* = 0.77, *r* = -.52***

exonerative comparison
M = 1.93, *s* = 0.99, *r* = -.47***

religious metaphor
M = 2.67, *s* = 0.93, *r* = -.42***

intention
M = 3.94, *s* = 0.71

displacement
M = 3.11, *s* = 0.65, *r* = -.37***

diffusion
M = 2.47, *s* = 0.81, *r* = -.28**

blame
M = 2.88, *s* = 0.76, *r* = -.16

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Extra: A different take on moral disengagement

- problems with our measures
  - poor internal reliability esp. for blame sub-scale
  - some multicollinearity & face validity problems (e.g. displacement or diffusion of responsibility?)
  - different levels of specificity may engender poor fit with TPB
- alternative approach: treating disengagement as a single construct using items that specifically concern the behaviour in question ($\alpha_{recycling} = .67$, $\alpha_{energy} = .57$, $\alpha_{transport} = .64$)

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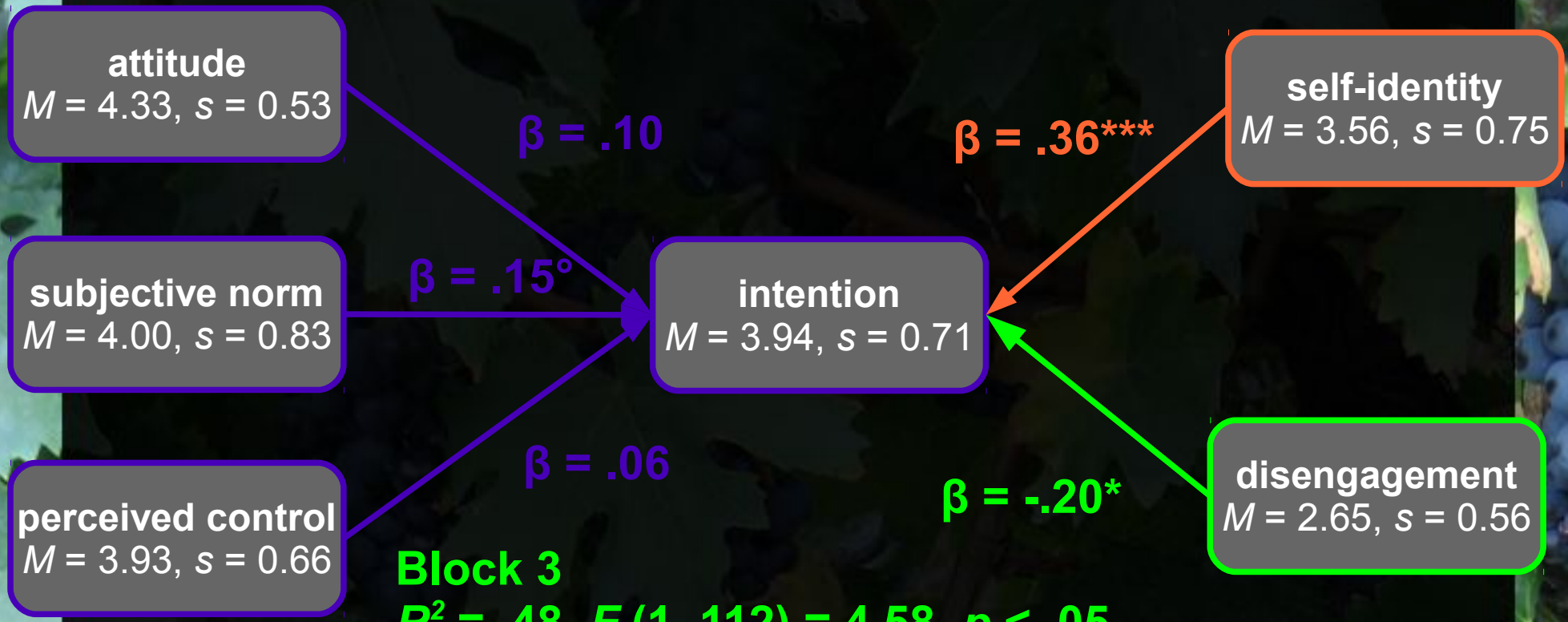
Results: Overall



Block 3

R^2 = .48, F (1, 112) = 4.58, p < .05

- TPB predictors rendered non-significant

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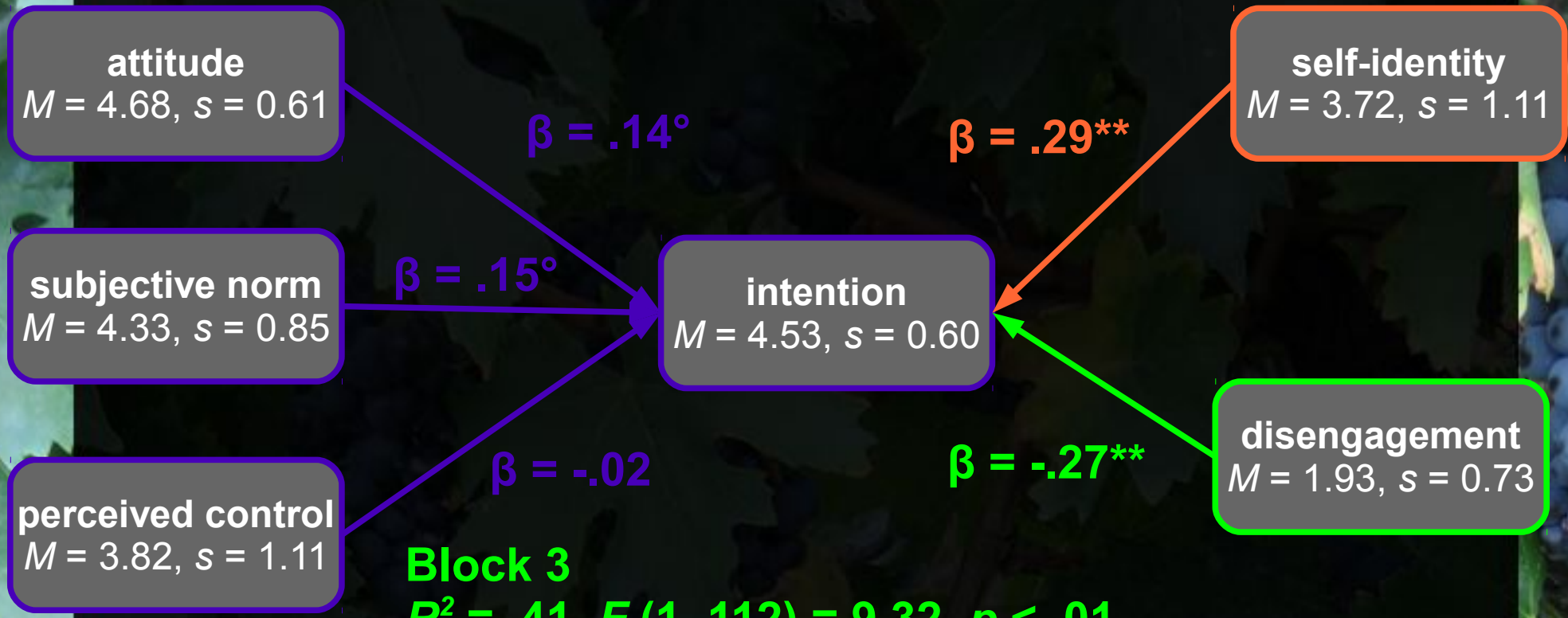
Results: Recycling



Block 3

R^2 = .41, F (1, 112) = 9.32, p < .01

- TPB predictors rendered non-significant

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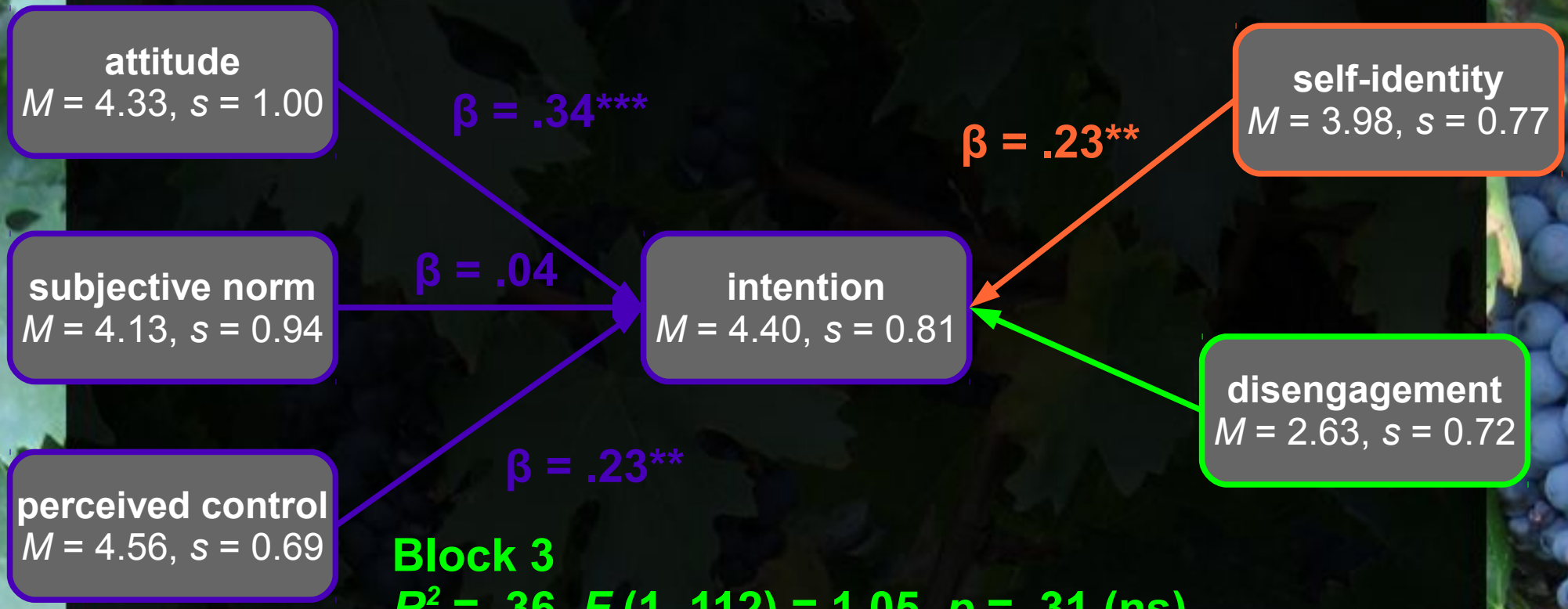
Results: Energy saving



Block 3

R^2 = .36, F (1, 112) = 1.05, p = .31 (ns)

- no added predictive utility; but note poor α

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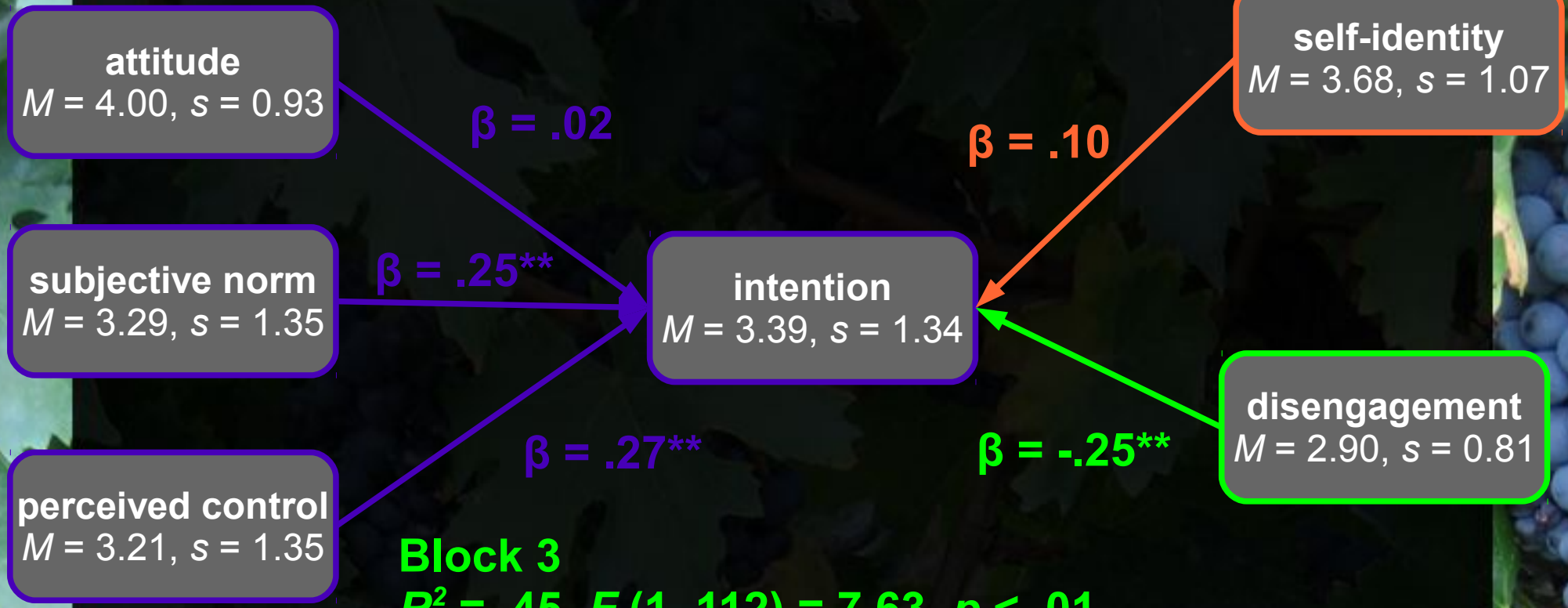
Results: Transport



Block 3

R^2 = .45, F (1, 112) = 7.63, p < .01

- self-identity rendered non-significant

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Conclusions

- support for the TPB in predicting workplace sustainability action
  - note different predictors for different behaviours (see Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010, on catalyst effects)
  - but potential reliability / validity issues due to single-item measures
- consistent support for utility of self-identity
- moral disengagement from sustainability
  - clear evidence of utility, but maybe not within the TPB
  - practical aspect: ease of re-engagement?

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