



# Sticking to Deadlines: Quality Perceptions of Work Submitted Early, on Time, or Late



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## Summary

### Research Question

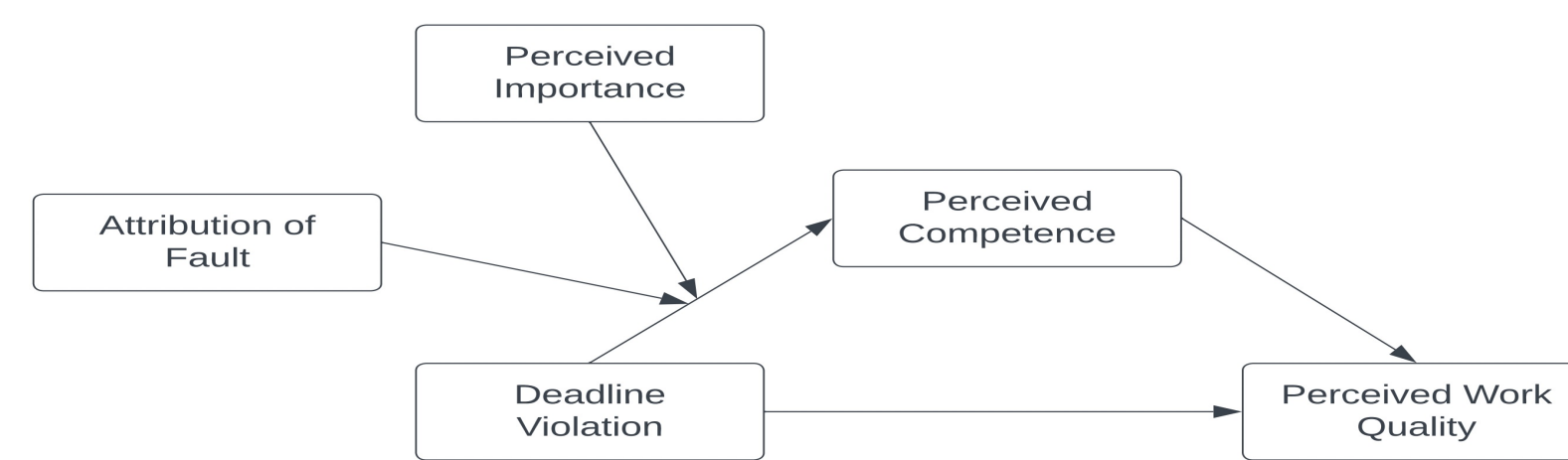
Does when you submit work relative to a deadline (e.g., early, just-on time, or late) influence how your work is evaluated?

### Motivation

- Previous literature has largely focused on the influences of setting deadlines on behaviour, with little research being done on the psychological effects of beating or blowing deadlines
- This is despite deadlines being often *blown* —76% of Kickstarter deadlines are blown by entrepreneurs (Meeker & Wu, 2022), and 45% of product launches are delayed (Gartner, 2019)
- The present examination aims to contribute to filling this gap by examining how violating deadlines can potentially bias the behaviour of evaluators

### Summary of Key Findings

- We show in *three domains* (work, school, and business) that **submitting work early yields no benefits** compared to submitting right-on-time and that **submitting work late, even as little as one hour late, can negatively influence evaluations of work quality** (studies 1-3)
- This effect is **moderated by the perceived importance of the deadline and the type of attribution** (i.e., external vs. internal) made for the lateness (study 4a-b)
- Finally, **this effect is mediated by the decline in perceived competence** of the submitter (studies 1-5)



## Methods

**Study 1** ( $N = 865$ ; Prolific): Participants rated the quality of a report (DV) submitted by an employee at 7 different time intervals (IV; between-subjects condition) ranging from 1 day early to 1 week late.

**Study 2 A-B** ( $N = 482$ ; Prolific): Participants imagined themselves as a teacher and marked a student's assignment (DV), framed as either a regular assignment (2A) or an exam submission (2B). The assignment was submitted either the morning of or late (IV; between-subjects condition).

**Study 3** ( $N = 472$ ; Prolific): Participants were told that they commissioned a flyer from a local business and that they received the flyer the morning of vs. late (IV; between-subjects condition). They then rated the quality of the product and repurchase intentions (DV).

**Study 4 A-B** ( $N = 1119$ ; Prolific): Building on the vignette in Study 1, we manipulated the perceived importance of the deadline (4A) and the fault of the employee for the lateness (4B) as additional IVs.

**Study 5** ( $N = 567$ ; Prolific): We asked participants to rate an employee's work whilst concurrently manipulating submission time and the participant's perceived competence of the employee by showing employee profiles with either high or low past performance reviews.

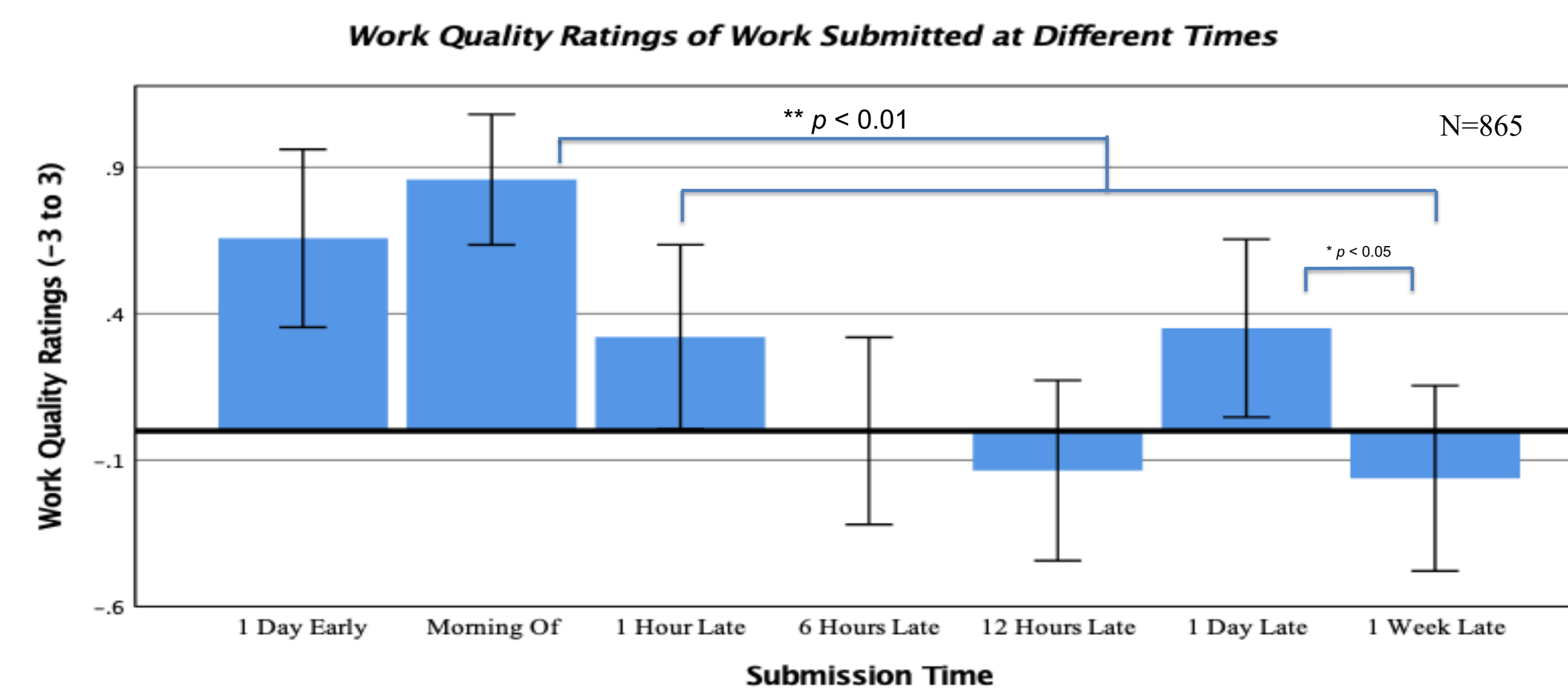
For access to All Materials and Pre-registrations:



## Studies (1-3): Testing Main Effect

### Study 1 (Work Domain)

On-time and early work rates *significantly higher* than all late work [ $F(6, 858) = 11.7, p < 0.001$ ]

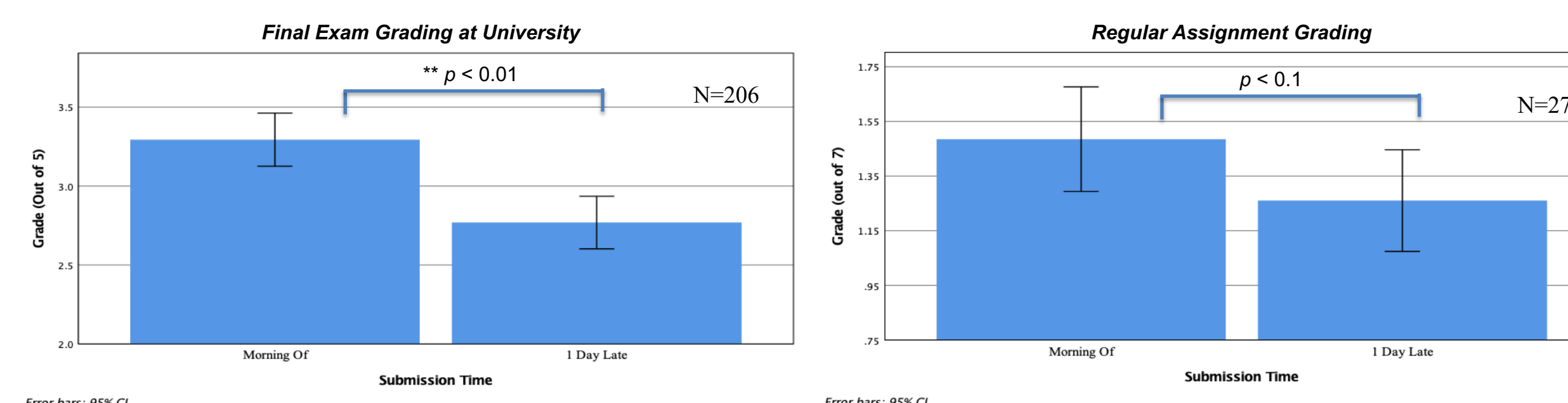


Error bars: 95% CI

A Hayes Model 4 analysis revealed that effects were fully mediated by declines in perceived competence: an omnibus test revealed direct effects of submission time on work quality to be only  $F(6,858) = 1.49, p = 0.178$ .

### Study 2 (School Domain)

On-time schoolwork was rated as significantly higher quality than late schoolwork, but the effect is stronger for more important assignments

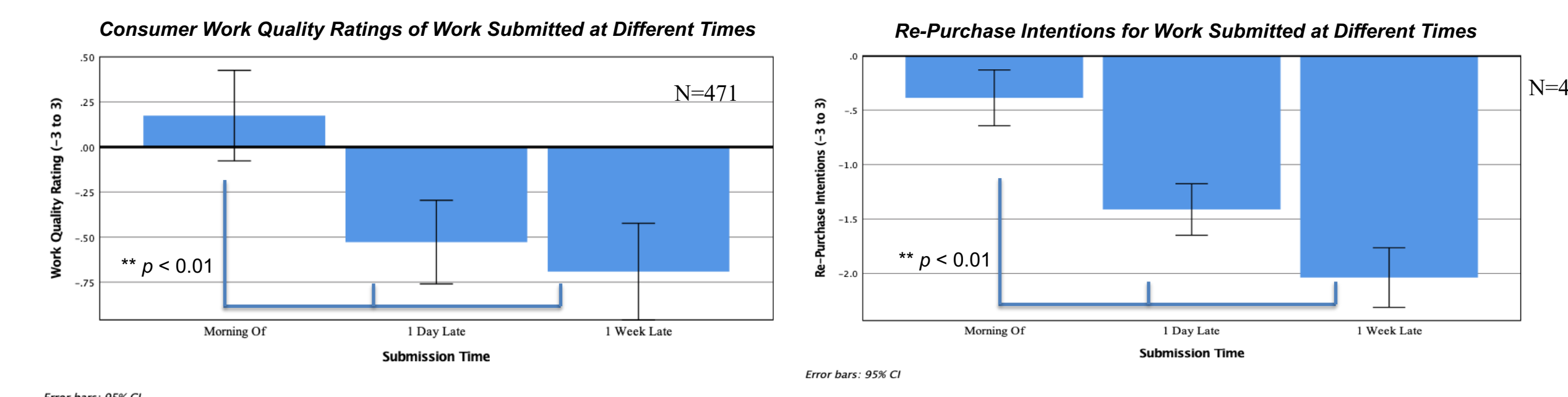


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### Study 3 (Business Domain)

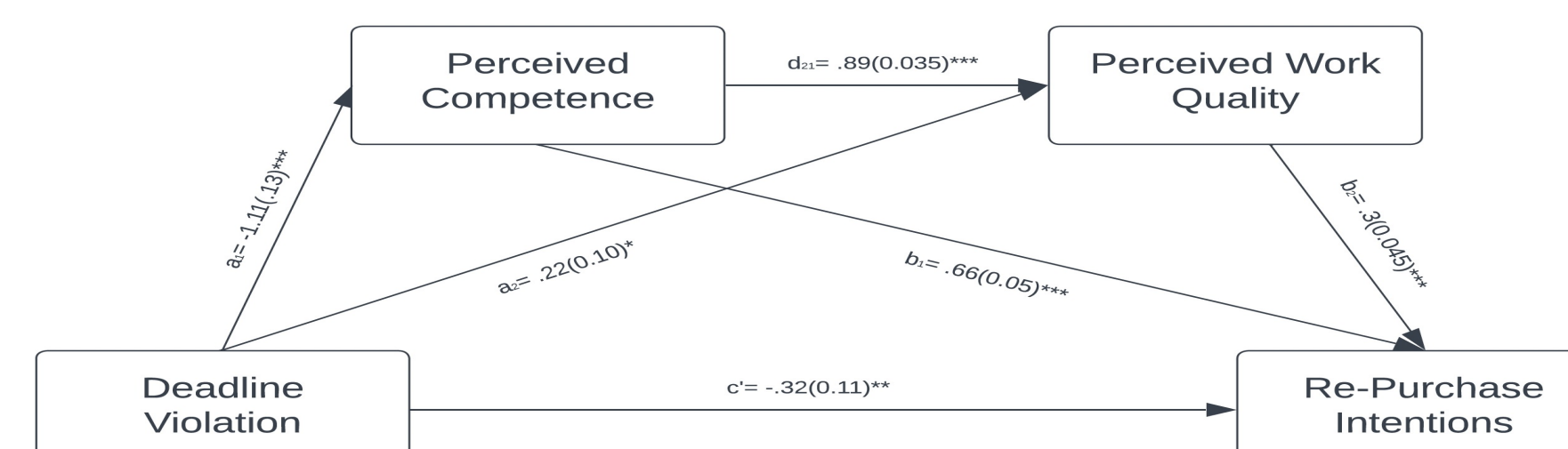
On-time work rated by recipients as significantly better  $F(2,470) = 12.66, p < 0.001$ , as well as higher re-purchase intentions  $F(2,470) = 38.8, p < 0.0001$



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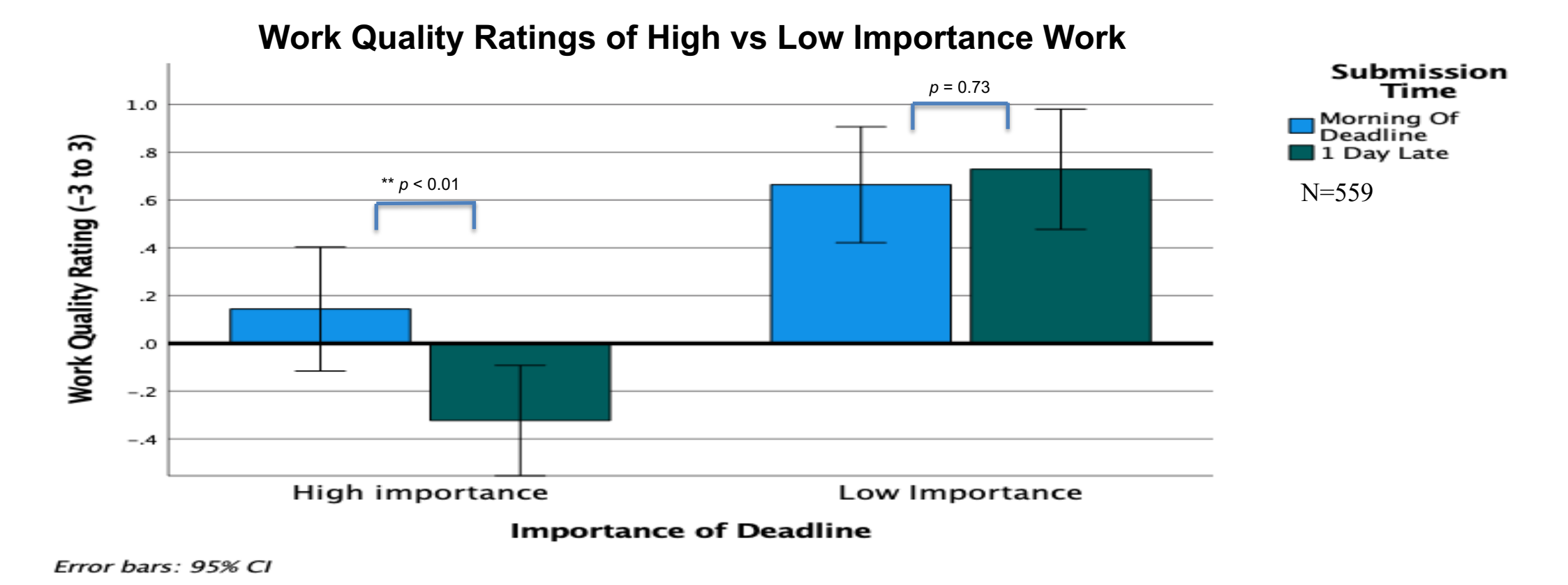
A Hayes Model 6 test of lateness -> perceived competence -> work quality -> re-purchase intentions revealed significant serial mediation effects:  $b = -0.30, CI[-0.43, -0.19]$



## Study 4A-B: Manipulating Moderating Variables

### Study 4A (A Deadline's Importance as a Moderator)

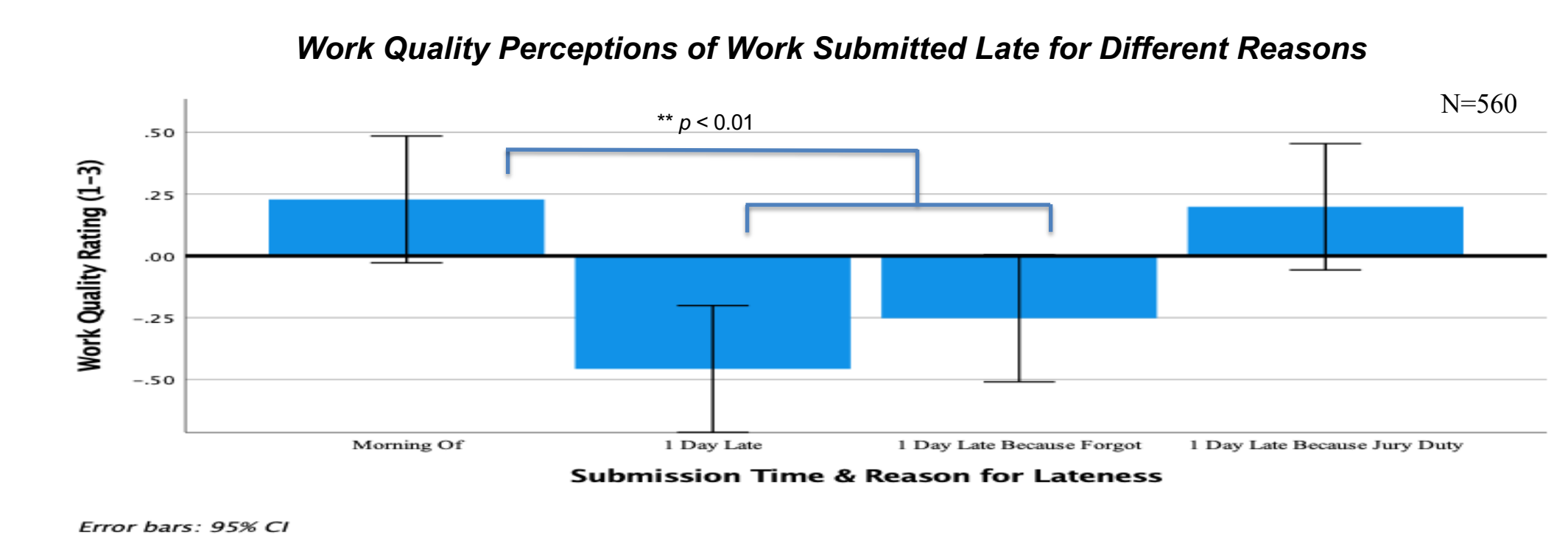
We found significant interaction effects for perceived importance and submission time  $F(3, 555) = 4.490, p = 0.035$ . As well, a Hayes Model 7 test provided moderated mediation evidence for perceived competence as a mediator  $b = 0.32, CI[-.512, -.128]$ .



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### Study 4B (Reason for Lateness as a Moderator)

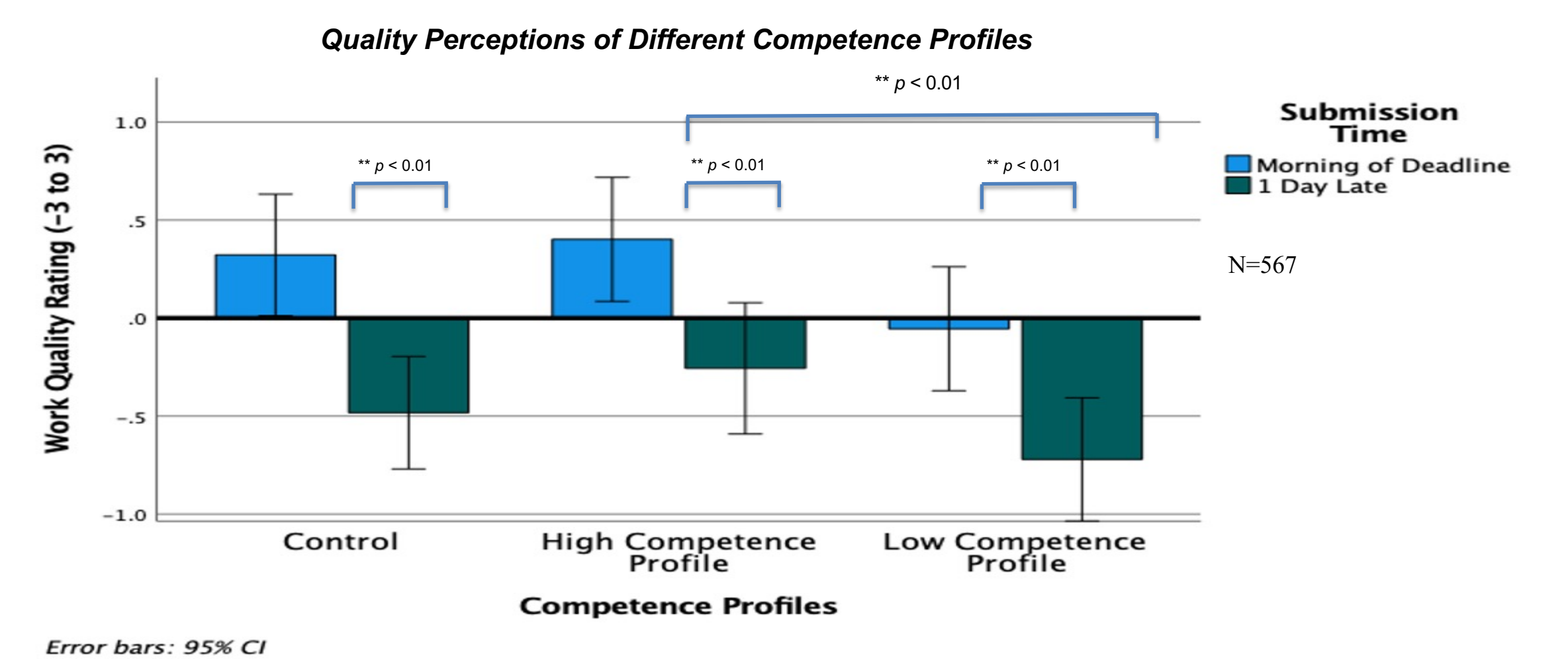
When reason for lateness is externally attributable, then the negative effect of lateness is *attenuated*



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## Study 5: Moderation of Process

We found a significant difference in perceived quality between our competence manipulation conditions,  $F(5, 561) = 4.18, p = 0.016$  and a higher mean difference between the high-competence on time profile and low-competence late profile ( $M_{diff} = 1.12$ ) than control ( $M_{diff} = .80$ ).



Error bars: 95% CI

## Conclusion & References

- Breaking deadlines can have negative implicit consequences, and so stakeholders (e.g., businesses) would be prudent to stick to deadlines unless there is a valid reason preventing them to do so
- The decline in perceived quality happens mostly during the first late day, and so if permissible, those who do breach deadlines might consider spending more time to produce higher quality work

### References

Gartner, (2019). *Gartner Survey Finds That 45% of Product Launches Are Delayed by at Least One Month*. Gartner. <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2019-09-09-gartner-survey-finds-that-45-percent-of-product-launches-are-delayed-by-at-least-one-month>

Meeker, A., & Wu, A. (2022, March 1). *More-Experienced Entrepreneurs Have Bigger Deadline Problems*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/03/more-experienced-entrepreneurs-have-bigger-deadline-problems>