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# The Effects of Counselor Characteristics on Within-Session Processes and Outcomes in a Brief Motivational Intervention for Heavy Drinking

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# Background

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- Little is known about how brief motivational interviewing works
- Which counselor characteristics are most effective in triggering behavior changes?
- Which within-intervention behaviors are most effective in triggering behavior changes?

# Background

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- Previous studies consistently show important differences in efficacy across counselors
- However, evidence from research specifically designed to show the influence of counselors on BMI efficacy is lacking

# Aims

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- Better understanding the mechanisms of alcohol BMI
- by investigating the influence of counselor characteristics on
  - within-session processes and
  - alcohol use outcomes

# Methods

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- Army recruitment is mandatory for males at age 20 in Switzerland (highly representative)
- Random selection of eligible participants
- Heavy drinking screening (AUDIT-C 4+)
- 18 counselors (performing 12 BMIs each) selected to maximize differences in several of their characteristics, i.e. background and training, clinical and motivational interviewing (MI) experience.
- 3-month follow-up (N=179, 83.3%)

# Methods

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- Links between
    - counselors' individual characteristics,
    - counselors within-session behaviors
      - frequency of MI-consistent and
      - frequency of MI-inconsistent behaviors  
measured using the Motivational Interviewing Skill Code 2.1  
(Miller et al., 2008)
    - alcohol use outcomes at 3-month follow-up
- tested using regression analyses

# Results – Characteristics to outcome (1)

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Clinician gender  
(women=2, men=1)

Clinician age  
(years)

Background  
(Physicians=2,  
Psychologists=1)

No significant  
associations

Drinking days per  
week  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

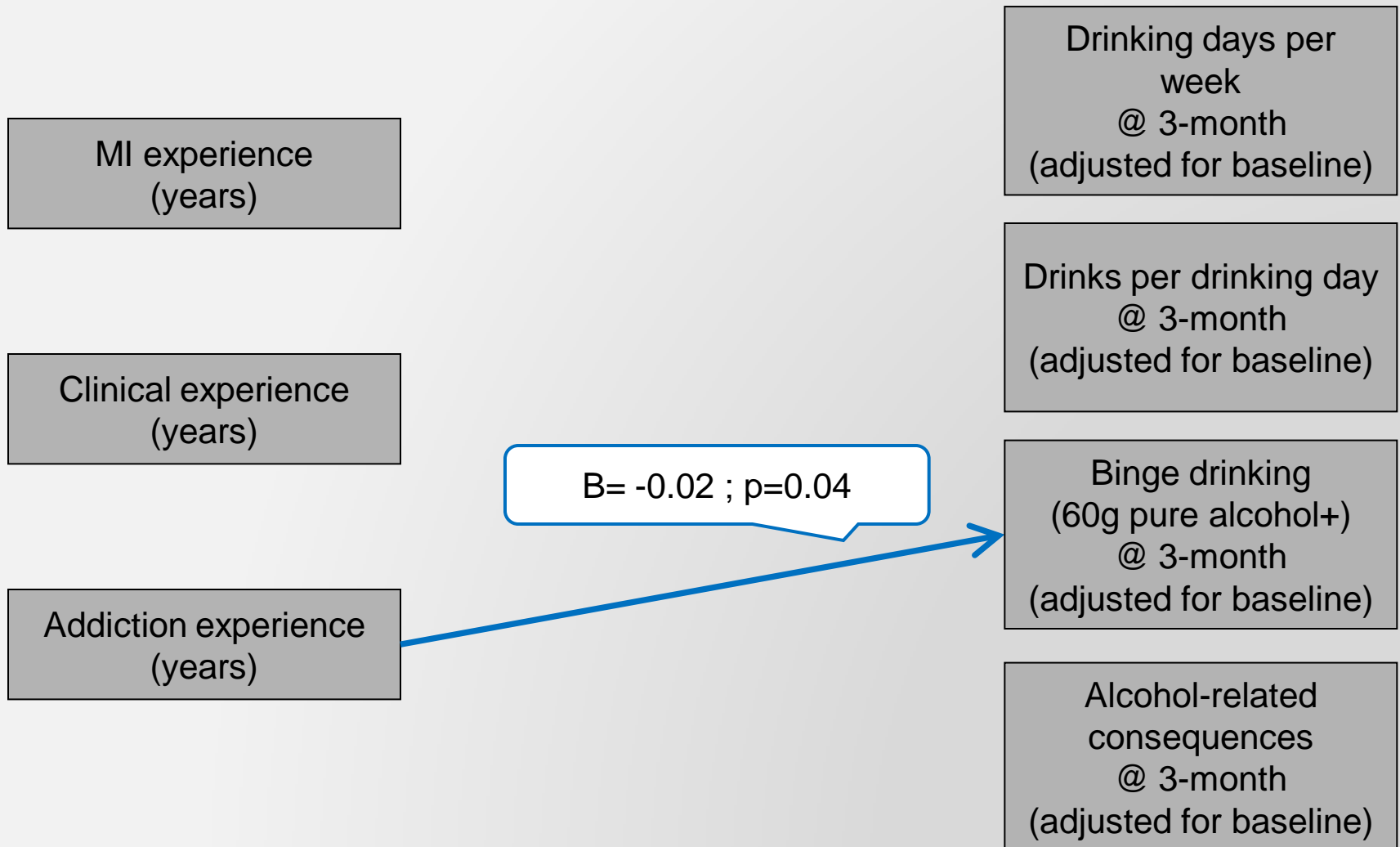
Drinks per drinking day  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

Binge drinking  
(60g pure alcohol+)  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

Alcohol-related  
consequences  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

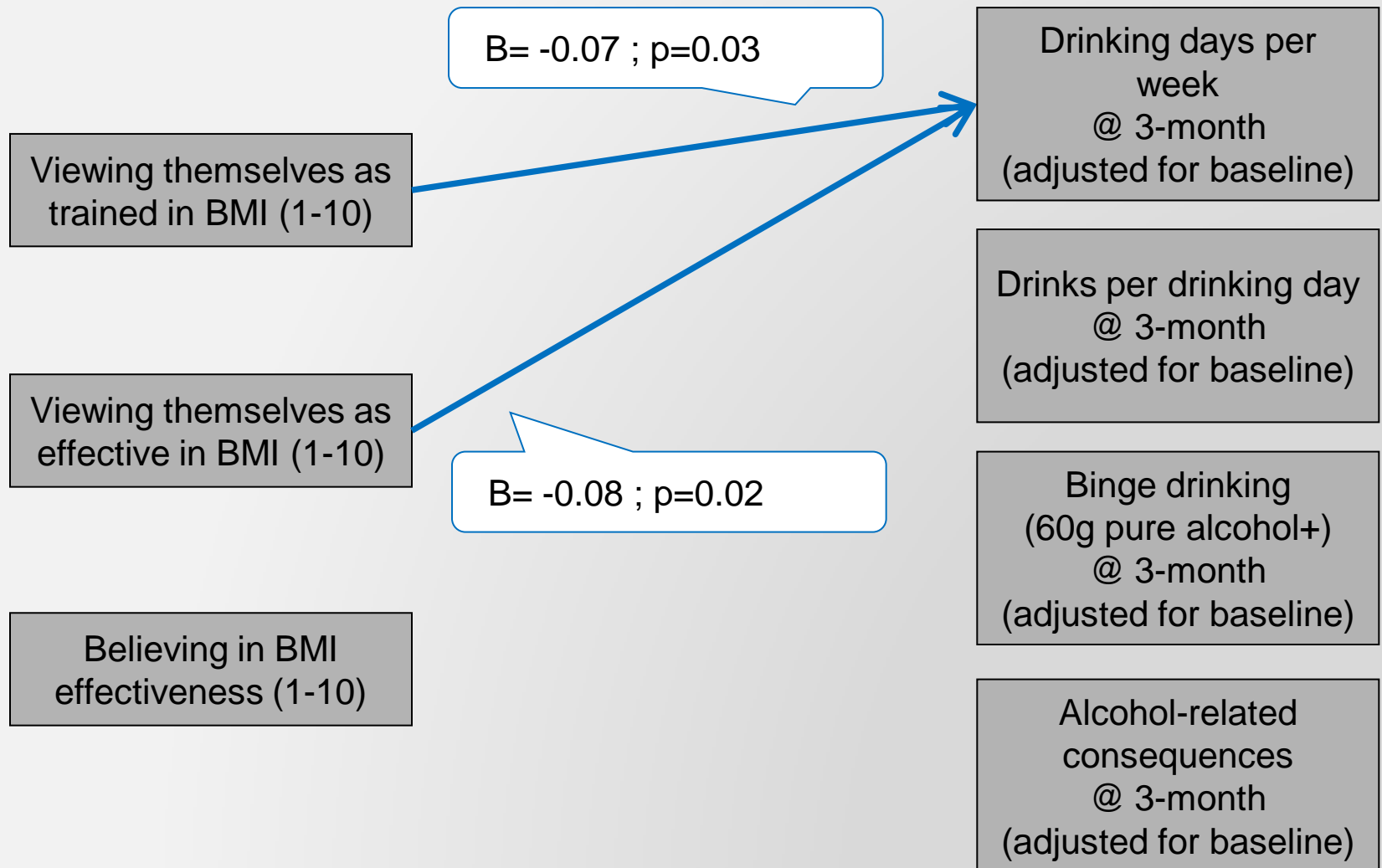
# Results – Characteristics to outcome (2)

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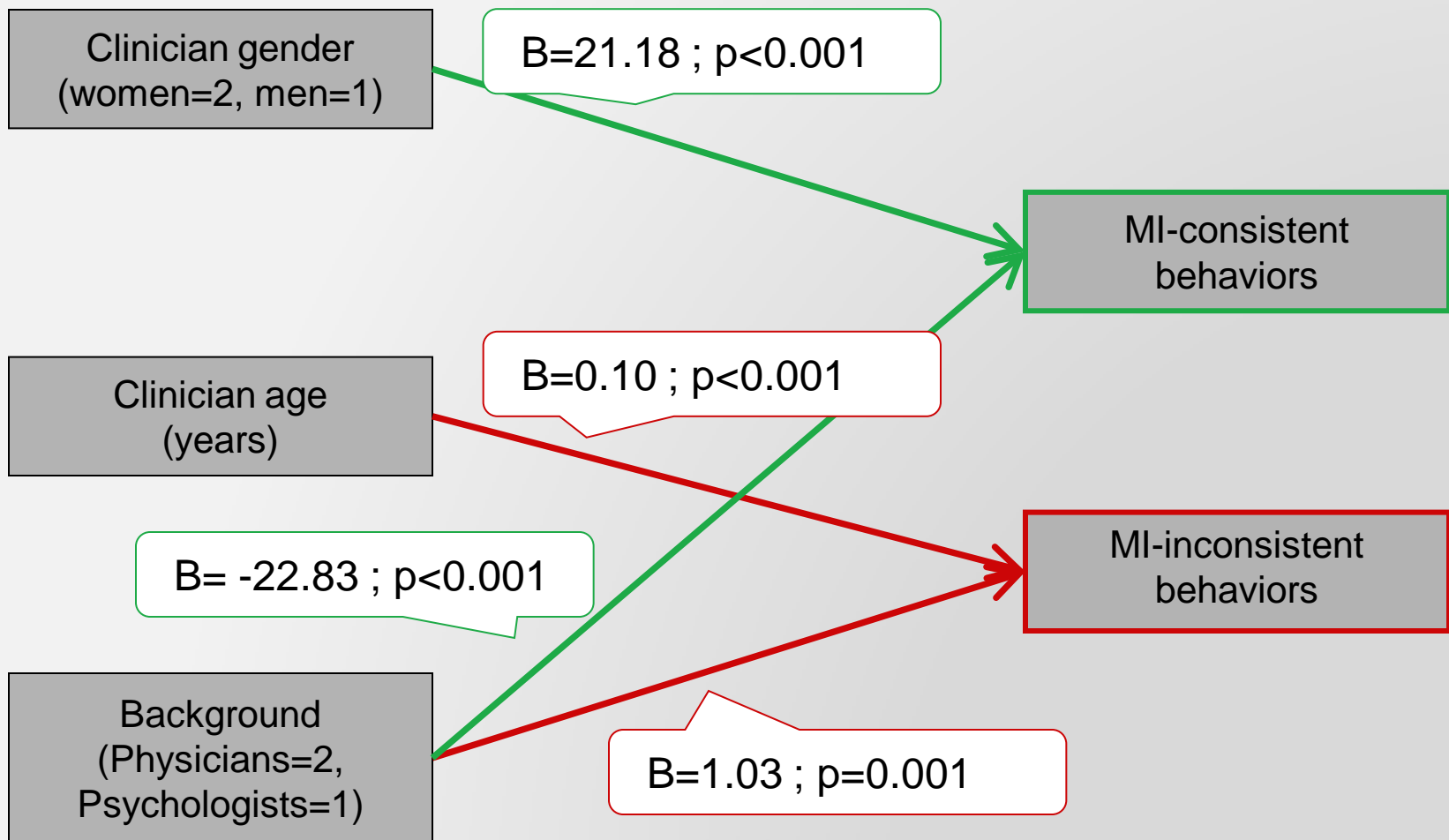


# Results – Characteristics to outcome (3)

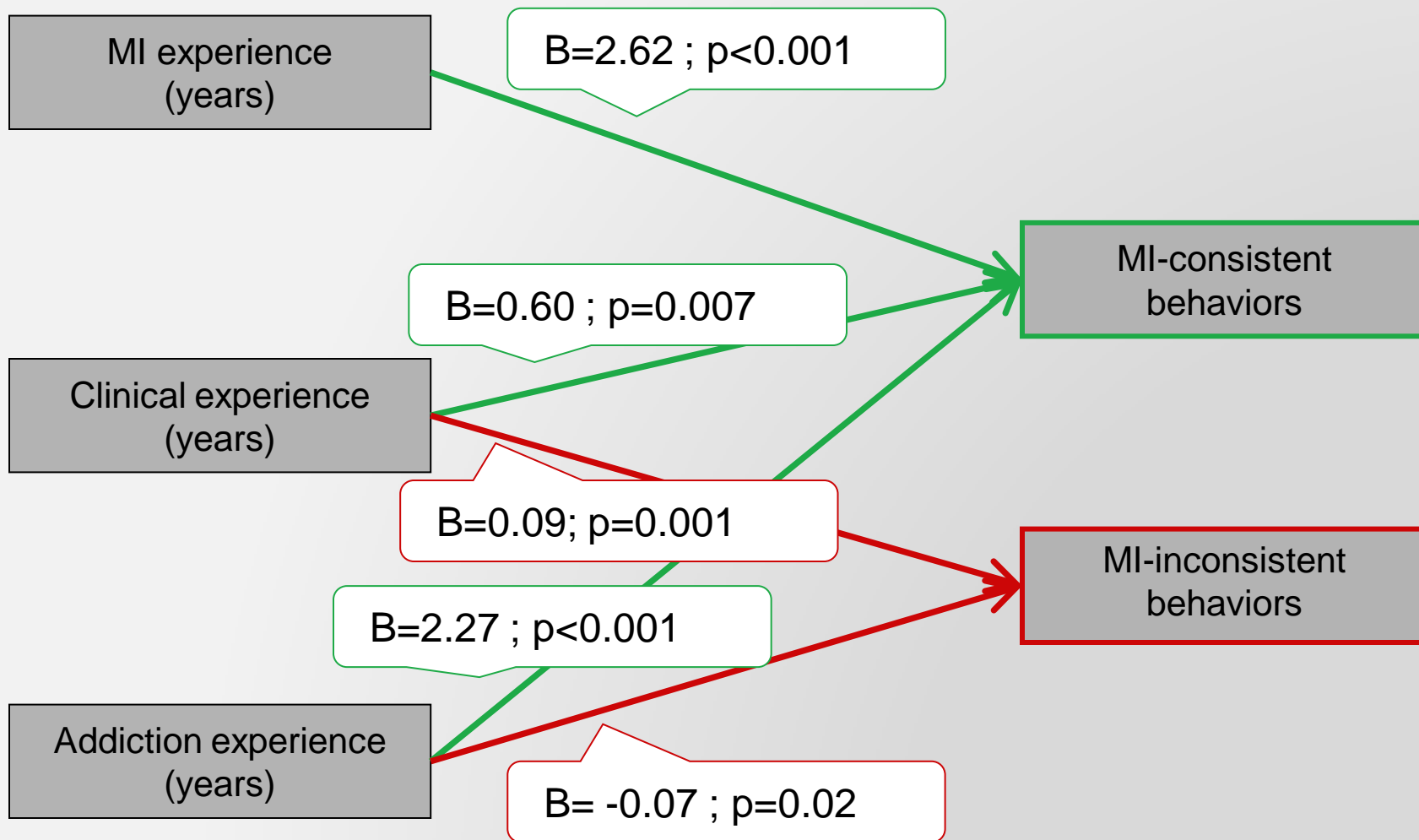


# Results – Characteristics to within-session behaviors (1)

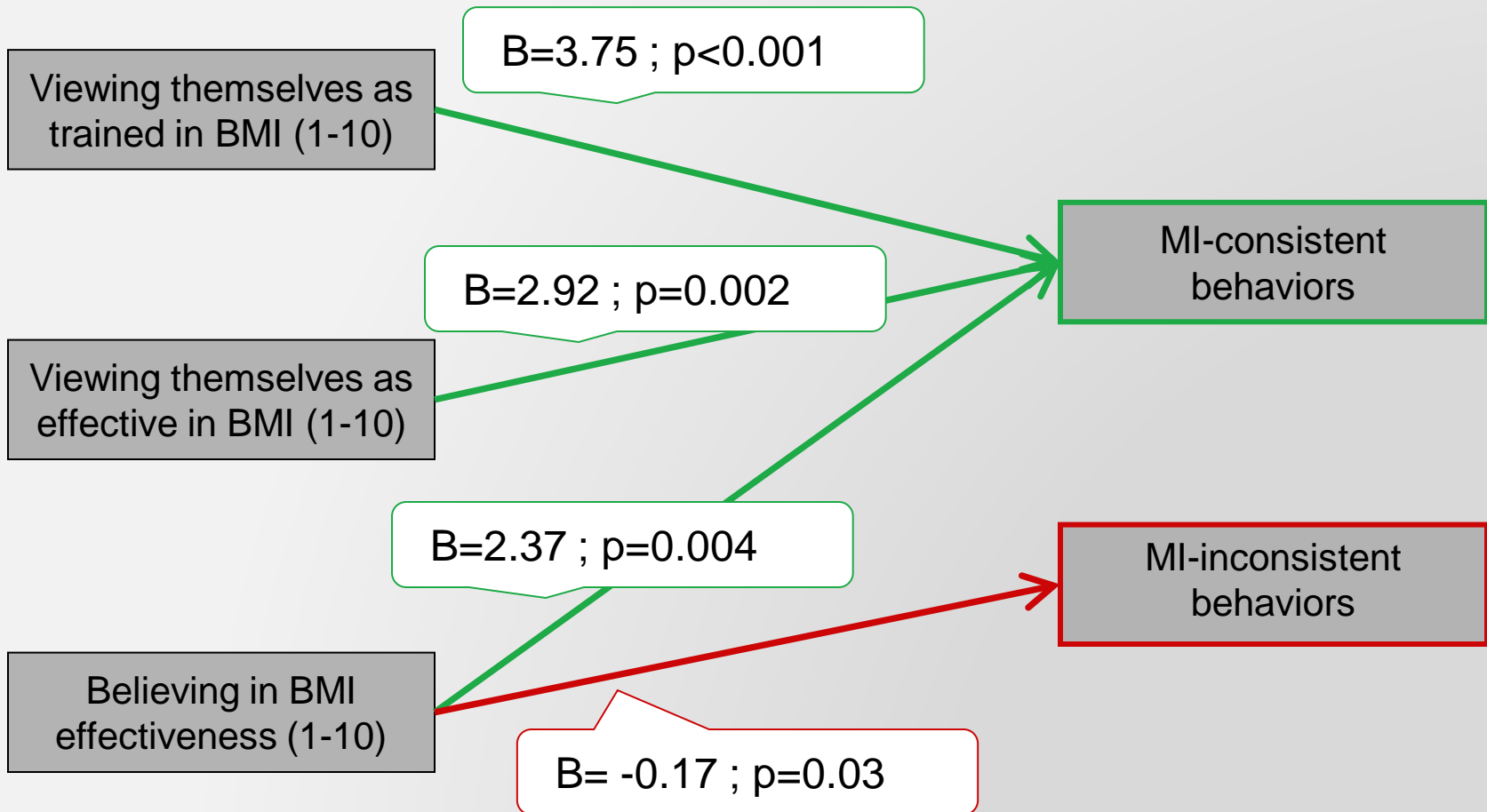
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# Results – Characteristics to within-session behaviors (2)



# Results – Characteristics to within-session behaviors (3)



# Results – Within-session behaviors to outcome

MI-consistent behaviors

MI-inconsistent behaviors

No significant associations

Drinking days per week  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

Drinks per drinking day  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

Binge drinking  
(60g pure alcohol+)  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

Alcohol-related consequences  
@ 3-month  
(adjusted for baseline)

# To summarize

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- Counselors' experience (addiction, clinical, MI), gender, professional background were related to MI-consistent behaviors frequency.

*Experienced female psychologists performed better in MI*

- Counselors' experience, age, professional background were related to MI-inconsistent behaviors frequency.

*Experienced male physician had more MI inconsistent behaviors*

# BUT

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- Counselors' within-sessions MI behaviors did not significantly predict alcohol or consequence outcomes.

*Good MI practice was not associated to a better drinking outcome*

# However...

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- Counselor years of experience (but not MI and clinical experience) were associated with change in alcohol use at 3 month follow-up.
- Counselor attitudes toward BMI (viewing themselves as trained and effective) were associated with change in alcohol use at 3 month follow-up.

*I'm experienced in the field and I perceive myself as trained and efficient*



# Conclusions

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- In this study, some counselors' characteristics were related to good MI practice but good MI skills were not related to outcome.
- Interestingly, the subjective perception of own's training and efficacy appeared to be linked to outcome, independently of the adherence to the MI model.
- More research is needed to understand counselor influence on BMI outcomes, integrating client characteristics and behaviors as mediators of outcome.

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# Thank you for your attention!

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