

# OWNERSHIP AVERSION

SELF-SIGNALING UNDERLIES PREFERENCES FOR CONSUMPTION WITHOUT OWNERSHIP

TYLER FRASER MACDONALD – BOSTON UNIVERSITY, QUESTROM SCHOOL OF BUSINESS; [tfm8@bu.edu](mailto:tfm8@bu.edu)

CAREY MOREWEDGE – BOSTON UNIVERSITY, QUESTROM SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

## SUMMARY

Consumers often prefer to purchase products that allow them to affirm their identities and communicate positive qualities about themselves (Berger & Heath, 2007; Bodner & Prelec, 2003). However, **due to the rise of the sharing economy and other technological advancements, consumption is evolving, replacing legal ownership of private goods with legal access to shared goods** (Morewedge et al., 2020).

This shift presents a serious threat to the benefits that have been traditionally conferred by psychological ownership. For example, feeling like something is MINE fosters greater connection between consumers and the things they own (Belk, 1988), causes consumers to value goods more (Morewedge, et al., 2009) and gives consumers a greater appreciation of products (Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2011). However, **we examine an upside to the growing domain of access-based consumption.**

In this research, we examine how **self-signaling**, a desire to secure good news about oneself, influences consumer ownership preferences for products that are identity conflicting but otherwise offer attractive benefits. We argue that **in order to avoid negative self-signals, consumers prefer to make purchases that confer lower levels of psychological ownership.** This effect occurs **because consumers perceive access-based consumption as less diagnostic of their true preferences.** Thus, when an item is weakly connected to a consumer's sense of self (i.e., product-self link), greater feelings of ownership will impose a negative self-signal and consumers will be more likely to prefer to access (vs. ownership) of the item in order to avoid threatening their sense of self.

## HYPOTHESIS

Consumers prefer more ambiguous, access-based forms of temporary ownership (over full legal ownership) in order to avoid negative self-signal.

## METHODS

Participants imagined needing to acquire a product that either:

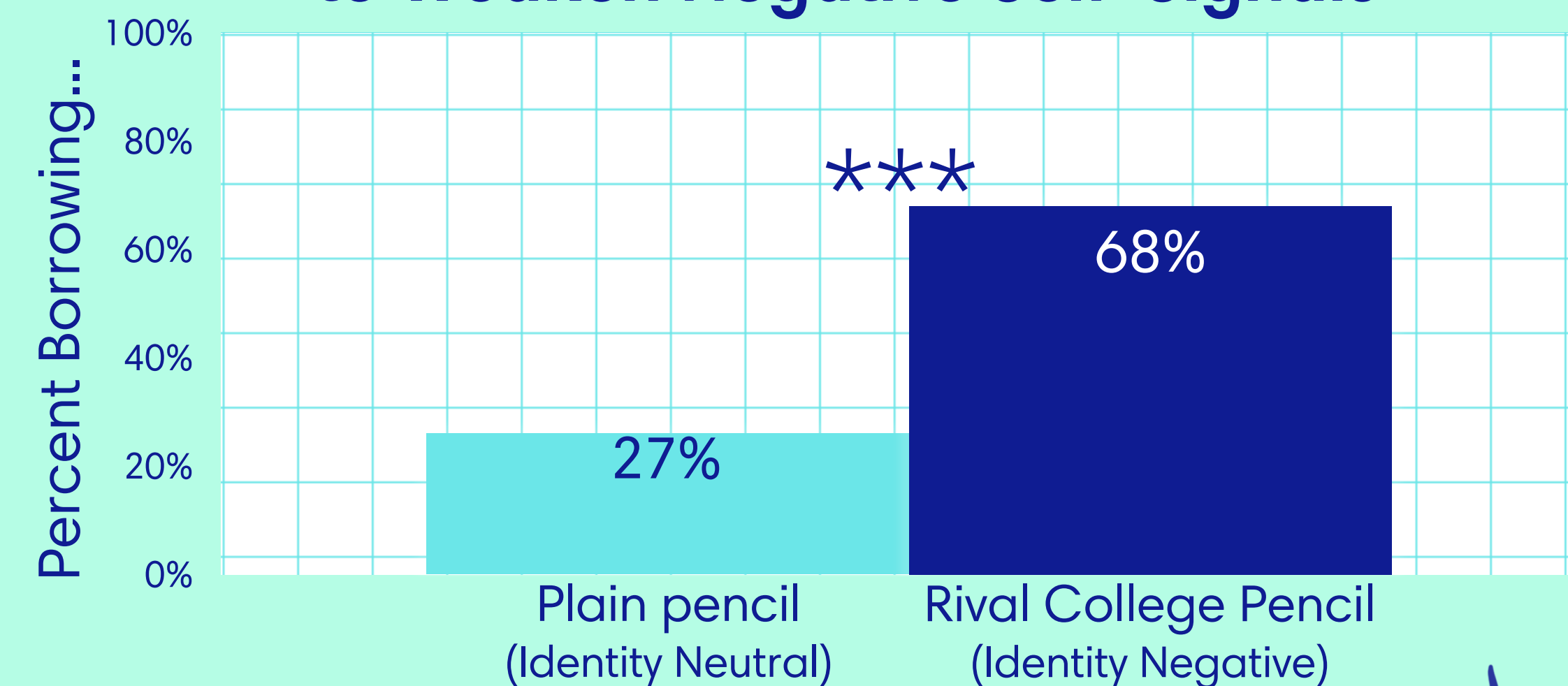
- 1) conflicted with their identity (**negative signal**)
- OR
- 2) was neutral to their identity (**control**)

Participants then chose to rent or buy the product.

## FIELD EXPERIMENT 1:

N = 249; Boston University Students

### People Prefer Ambiguous Ownership to Weaken Negative Self-Signals

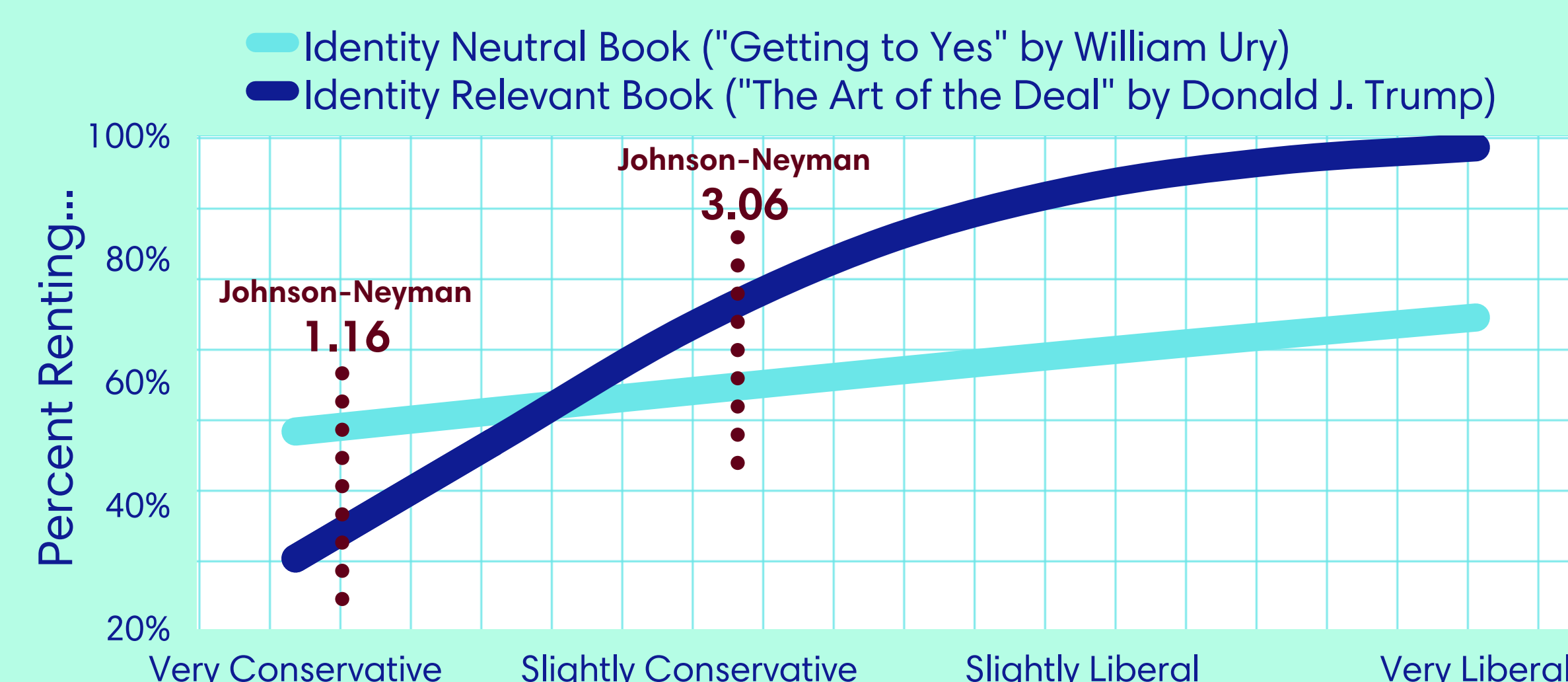


## EXPERIMENT 2:

MODERATION; IDENTITY STRENGTH

N = 404; CloudResearch Panel

### Identity Strength Moderates Preference for Ambiguous Ownership

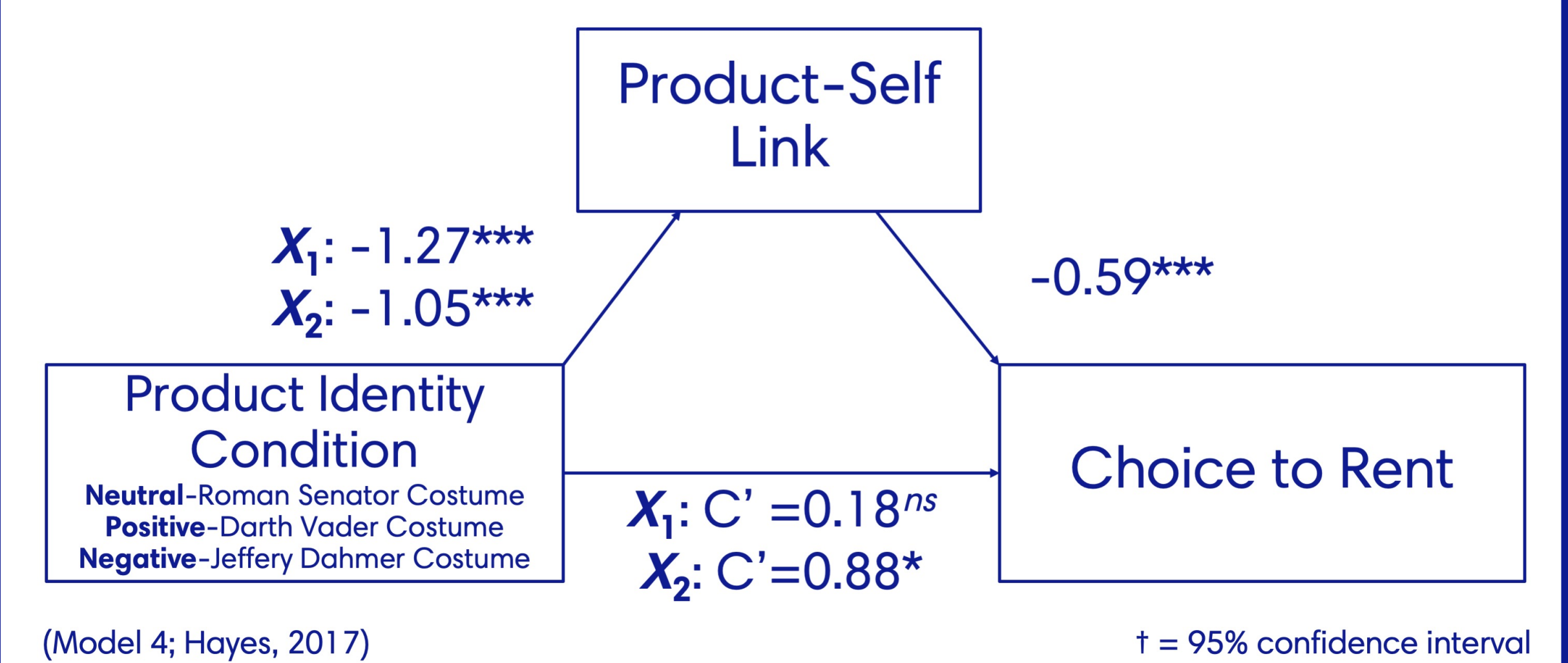


## EXPERIMENT 3:

MEDIATION; PRODUCT-SELF LINK

N = 300; Amazon Mechanical Turk

$X_1$ : Indirect (**Neutral vs. Negative**): .75 ( $CI_t = [.42, 1.19]$ )  
 $X_2$ : Indirect (**Positive vs. Negative**): .61 ( $CI_t = [.31, 1.03]$ )

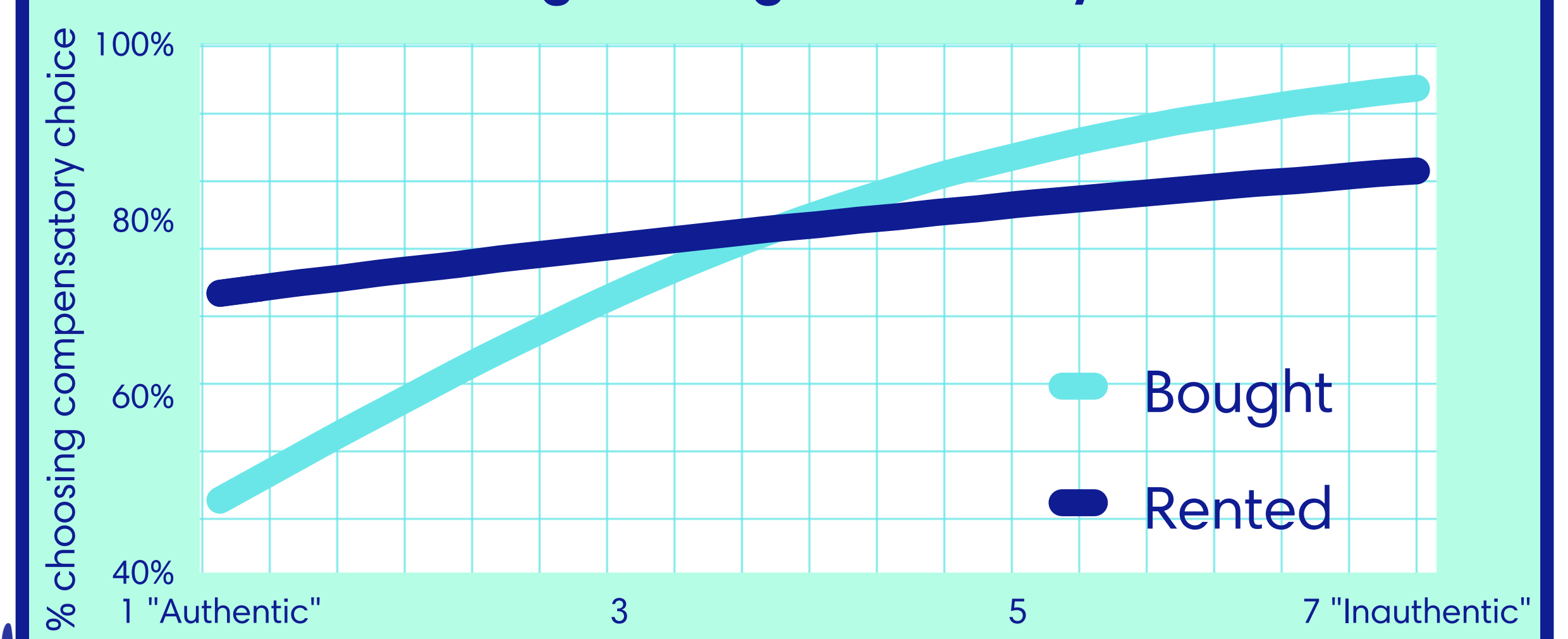


## EXPERIMENT 4:

MODERATION; IDENTITY THREAT

N = 400; Amazon Mechanical Turk

### Ambiguous Ownership Weakens Negative Self-Signals; Alleviating Feelings of Identity Threat



## TAKEAWAY

Ambiguous ownership (e.g., rentals) allows consumers to obtain all the benefits of consuming identity conflicting products while suffering none of the signaling consequences

For study details and references, please scan the QR code below:

