

Defining Sexual Consent: The Role of Rape Myth Acceptance and Identification of Nonconsensual Sexual Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

- The complexities surrounding real life sexual consent negotiations make it difficult for college students to have a clear understanding of how to conceptualize, communicate, and interpret sexual consent.¹
- The nuances of understanding consent are associated with the acceptance of myths about what counts as rape or a nonconsensual experience (e.g., it is not rape if the victim does not fight back).²
- Due to the prevalence of rape myths, many individuals with nonconsensual sexual experience histories have been exposed to false beliefs and these ideas affect how survivors conceptualize and identify their own experiences.³
- The relationship of rape myth acceptance with misconceptions about how consent should be negotiated³ may play a role in how people understand and define sexual consent and their own histories of nonconsensual sexual experiences

Descriptive Information for the Eight Sexual Consent Themes		
Themes, <i>M (SD)</i>	Example Words	Quotes from People Who Scored High
Substances, 0.19 (0.69)	<i>influence, alcohol, drug</i>	"when people are in mutual agreement to be sexually involved...without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs" (Man, 21)
Sexualized Violence, 0.35 (0.80)	<i>rape, assault, abuse</i>	"'Yes' is always needed for sexual consent and if sexual consent or agreement is not given then it is considered sexual assault or rape or long term sexual abuse" (Woman, 19)
Nonverbal Communication, 0.15 (0.49)	<i>body, language, situation</i>	"Communicating using words rather than body language is a smart way to ensure that all sexual partners are comfortable with moving forward" (Woman, 18)
Freely Given, 0.37 (0.77)	<i>freely, mind, coerce</i>	"Consent needs to be freely given (without pressure or any sort of influence like alcohol)...and it should be enthusiastic" (NonBinary, 20)
Ongoing, 0.27 (0.70)	<i>time, stop, continue</i>	"Sexual consent can be revoked at any point in the sexual interaction, and people need to understand that it means they need to stop" (Man, 18)
Comfort, 0.96 (1.10)	<i>comfortable, aware, partner</i>	"In the midst of sexual intercourse, both partners must make sure that the other is comfortable with each event that is occurring" (Man, 23)
Permission, 0.28 (1.20)	<i>permission, give, agreement</i>	"Sexual consent means when someone agrees, gives permission, or says "yes" to sexual activity with another persons" (Woman, 20)
Sexual Activity, 0.34 (1.03)	<i>activity, engage, oral</i>	"when two individuals or more consensually engage in sexual activity, physical touch, and intimacy" (Woman, 21)

ANALYSES

- Quantitative text analysis procedures were applied to the consent definitions to derive themes of sexual consent
- Multiple linear regression models with gender covariates were used to assess the relationships between rape myth acceptance (IRMAS-SF), the sexual consent themes, and identification and NSE history

CONCLUSION

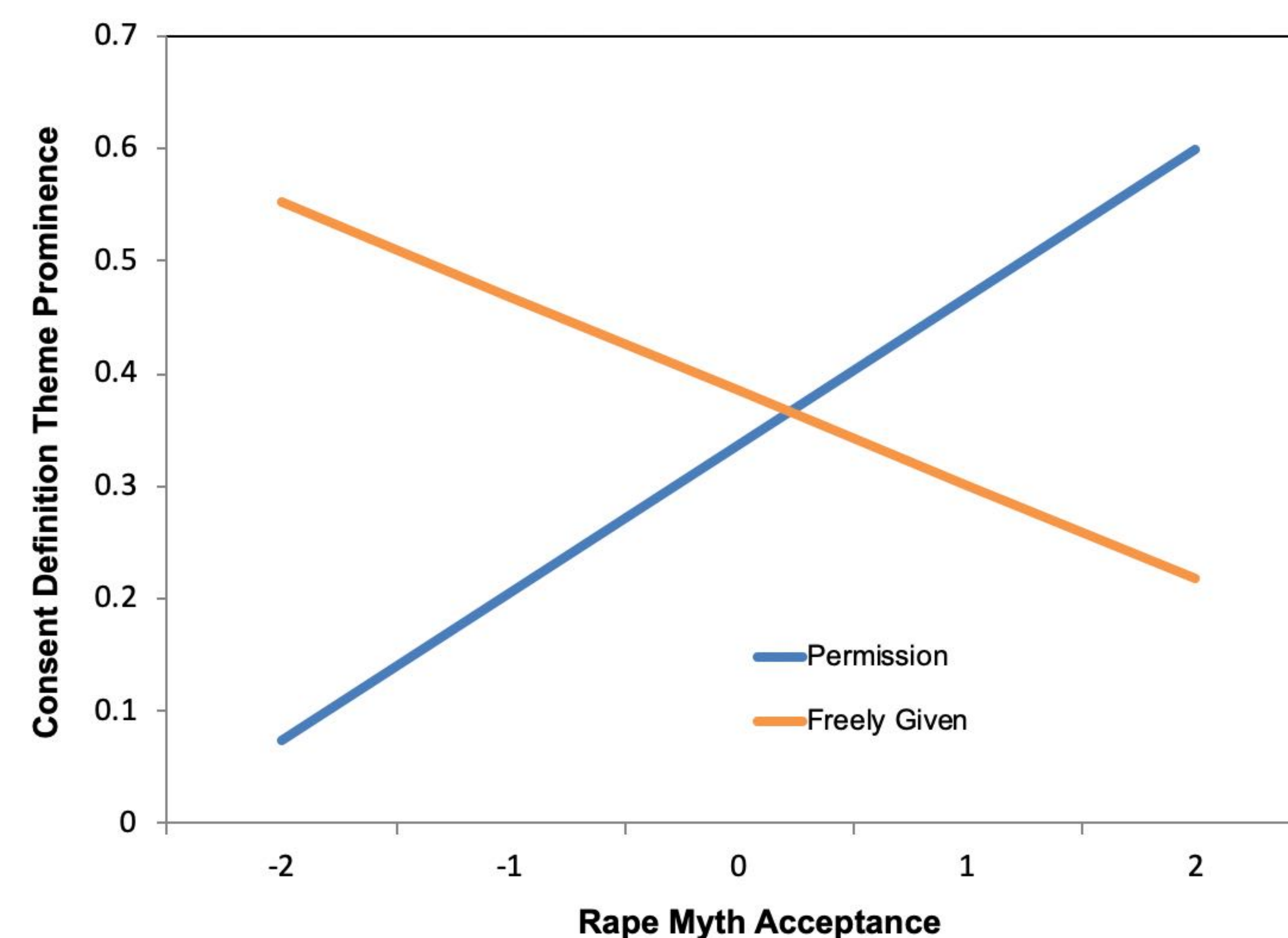
- The negative relationship between rape myth acceptance and the Freely Given consent theme compared to the positive relationship with the Permission consent theme captures the more nuanced components of consent and coercion compared to more discrete definitions
- These results support the rationale that college students with a narrow understanding of what sexual violence can resemble (i.e., higher rape myth acceptance) would be less likely to define consent in more nuanced terms such as "Freely Given."
- College students with higher rape myth acceptance are also significantly less likely to identify their histories of nonconsensual sexual experiences with sexual violence labels
- These findings provide evidence for the necessity of targeting rape myth acceptance in sexual violence prevention and consent education.

AIMS

- To examine how undergraduate students define sexual consent
- To determine the role of rape myth acceptance and nonconsensual sexual experience history and identification on definitions of sexual consent
- To assess rape myth acceptance as a mediator of the relationship between nonconsensual sexual experience history/identification and consent definitions.

Relationship between Rape Myth Acceptance and Consent Themes

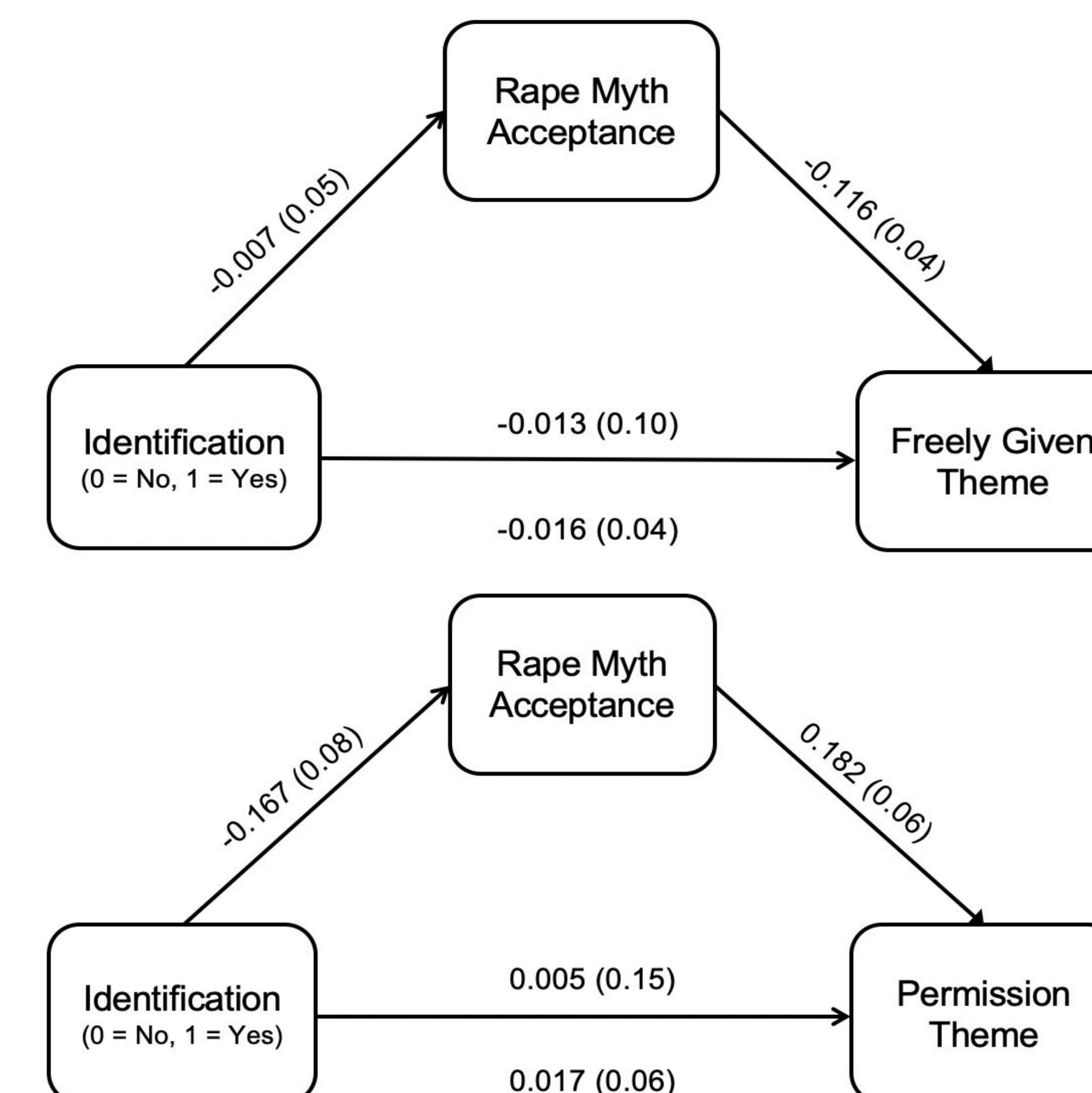
- Higher rape myth acceptance scores were significantly associated with less prominent discussion of the Freely Given theme ($\beta = -0.11$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .002$), and more prominent discussion of the Permission theme ($\beta = 0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .001$) in consent definitions after controlling for gender.



ABBREVIATIONS:
NSEs: Nonconsensual Sexual Experiences; NSEI: Nonconsensual Sexual Experience Inventory;
IRMAS-SF: Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale—Short Form

Mediation Analyses

- Identification has a significant relationship with rape myth acceptance, such that non-identifiers have higher rape myth acceptance and identifiers have lower rape myth acceptance ($\beta = -0.17$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .048$).
- NSE history and identification did not significantly predict for any of the consent themes. The Sobel test of significant mediation was not significant between NSE history nor identification and the Freely Given and Permission consent themes with rape myth acceptance as the mediator.



METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

- Undergraduates ($N = 1081$) who were recruited to take part in an anonymous online study of "consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences" through the introductory psychology pool (SONA).
- Participants completed surveys on their sexual experiences, rape myth acceptance, and responded to an open-ended question asking them to define "sexual consent."

MATERIALS/MEASURES

- NSEI (Kilimnik & Meston, 2018)
- IRMAS-SF (Payne et al., 1999)
- *In your own words, please describe what the term sexual consent means to you?*

REFERENCES

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