

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Previous research has found that Asians (versus Caucasians) exhibit higher levels of ought and undesired self-discrepancies. We examined if these ethnic differences could be better explained by acculturation.

**Methods:** Participants ( $N = 155$ ) completed two sessions. In session 1, participants completed a computer task to measure self-discrepancy. In session 2, participants' ought self-discrepancies and closeness to an undesired self were primed.

**Results:** The relationship between closeness to an undesired self and ethnicity was mediated by acculturation. Acculturation had significant moderation effects for affect when self-discrepancies were primed.

**Discussion:** Interventions based on these systems (i.e., Self-System Therapy; Vieth et al., 2003) should consider acculturation when treating diverse individuals.

## Introduction

- Self-discrepancy theory predicts that self-guides influence affect (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986)
  - Ideal self = *want* to be
    - Higher levels of discrepancy = depression
  - Ought self = *should* be
    - Higher levels of discrepancy = anxiety
  - Undesired self = *do not want* to be
    - Closeness to an undesired self = negative affect
- Ought self discrepancy and closeness to an undesired self in Asian participants predicted depression better than ideal self-discrepancies (Cheung, 1997)
- Closeness to an undesired self had a direct path to social anxiety in Asian but not Caucasian participants (Hardin & Leong, 2005)
  - However, Japanese participants *less* distressed over discrepancies (Heine & Lehman, 1999)
- Acculturation
  - Changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences
  - May better explain previously found ethnic differences in self-discrepancy research

## Participants

- Participants were 155 adult students
  - Mostly women ( $n = 102$ ; 66%)
  - Caucasian ( $n = 91$ , 59.1%), Asian/Asian American ( $n = 46$ , 29.9%), African-American ( $n = 10$ , 6.5%), Multi-racial ( $n = 6$ , 0.6%)
  - Median age was 19.82 ( $SD = 1.74$ )
  - Most ( $n = 132$ , 85%) were U.S. citizens
  - Ranged in generational status from first to fifth or more generations
    - Mean generational status of 3.19 generations ( $SD = 1.52$ ).
  - English was language spoken in home ( $n = 121$ , 78%)
    - Chinese ( $n = 15$ , 9.7%), Korean ( $n = 14$ , 9.1%), and other ( $n = 4$ , 2.6%) as the primary language
- Main analyses: only Asian/Asian American and Caucasian participants

## Measures

### Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS; Stephenson, 2000)

- Measure of dominant and ethnic acculturation
- Dominant acculturation = Adoption of, or immersion in, the dominant society
- Ethnic acculturation = Retention of, or immersion in, an ethnic society other than dominant society

### Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

- Positive (e.g., *excited*; *proud*) and negative activated affect (e.g. *upset*; *scared*).

- State instructions given
- Used to measure affect during priming task

### Brief State Anxiety Measure (BSAM; Berg et al., 1998)

- Measure of state anxiety
- Measured anxiety during priming task

### Ought, Ideal, and Undesired Self-Discrepancies (Shah et al., 2004)

- Listed Ought, Ideal, and Undesired traits on computer
- Rated each characteristics on a 0 to 9 Likert-type scale from 0 ("not at like me") to 9 ("exactly like me")
- For ought/ideal rating closer to 0 was "more discrepant"
- For undesired rating closer to 9 was "closer to undesired self"

## Procedure

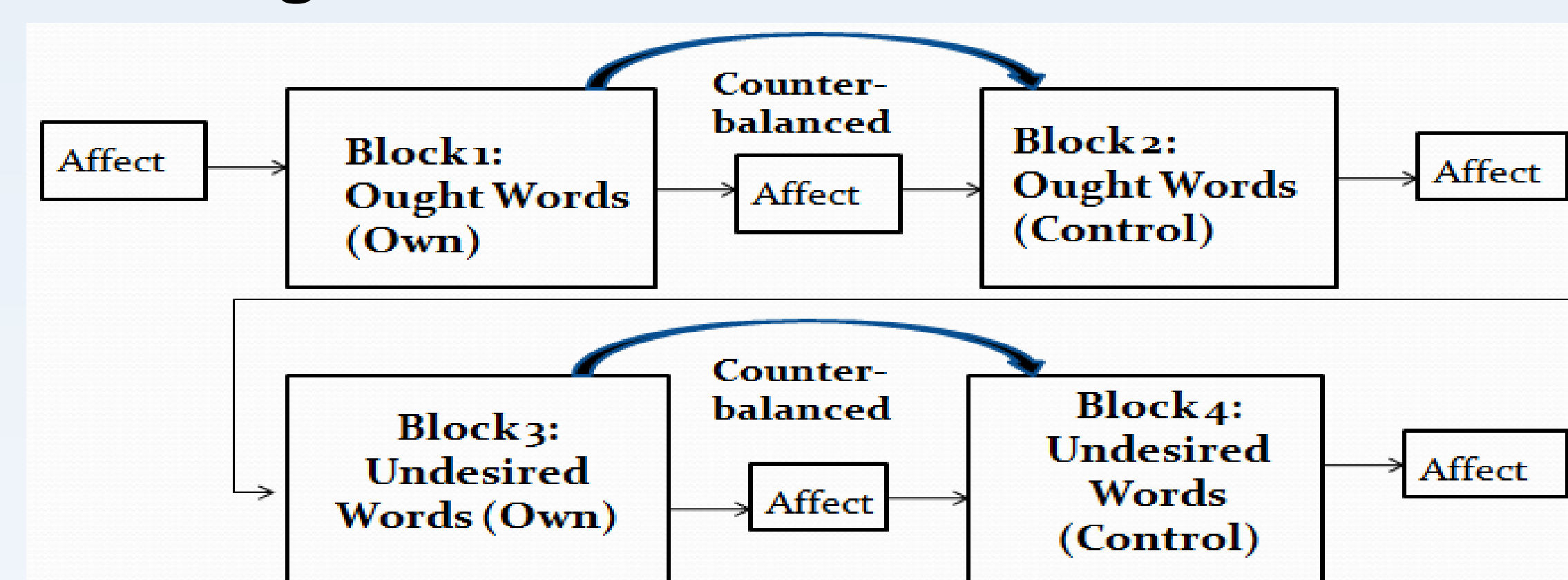
### Session 1:

- Answered questionnaires
- Completed measure of ought, ideal, undesired selves

### Session 2: (approximately a week later)

- Answered questionnaires
- 2 most discrepant ought/undesired traits are primed (as can be seen in below figure): Why is it important to be \_\_\_\_\_?

### Priming Task Procedure:



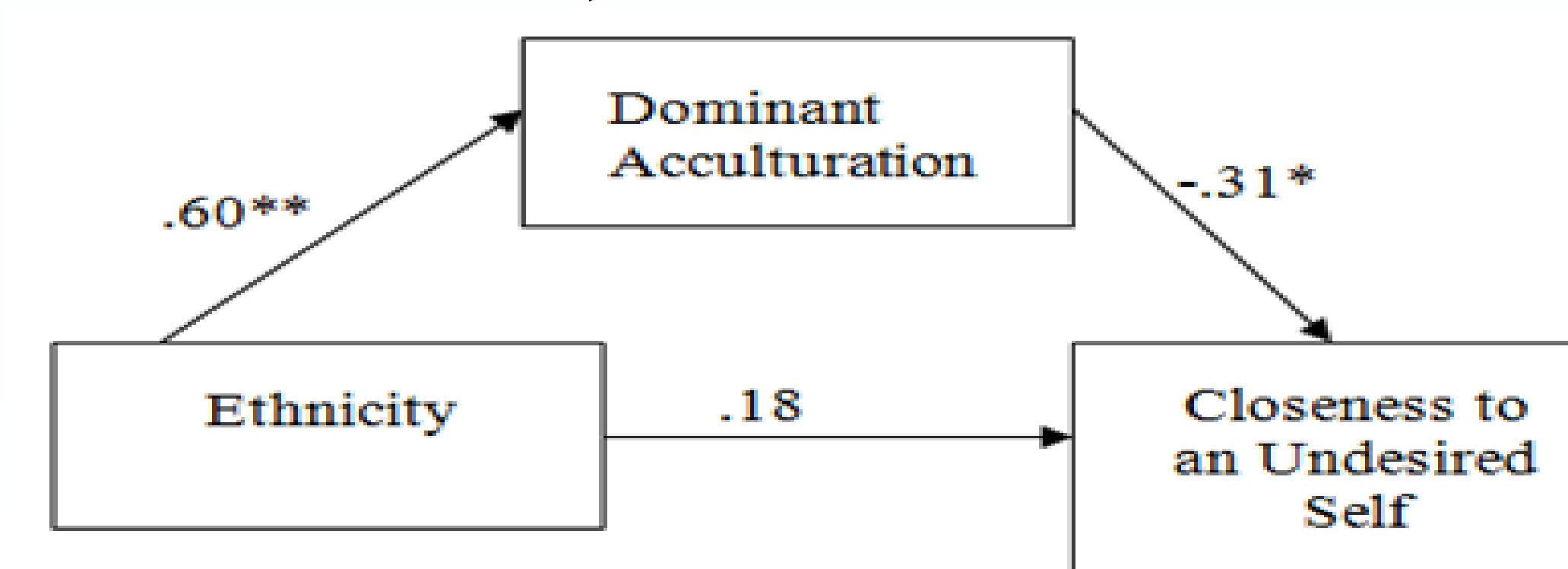
### Analyses: Indirect effects (i.e., mediation)

- were conducted using bootstrapping
- Maximum likelihood estimator was used to report standardized path estimates for the figure\*

## Results

- No significant differences between Asian and Caucasian participants on ought, ideal self-discrepancy, or closeness to an undesired self
- Dominant acculturation carried the indirect effects of ethnicity on closeness to an undesired self
- The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effects was  $-1.507$  to  $-.058$  (significant at  $p < .05$ )

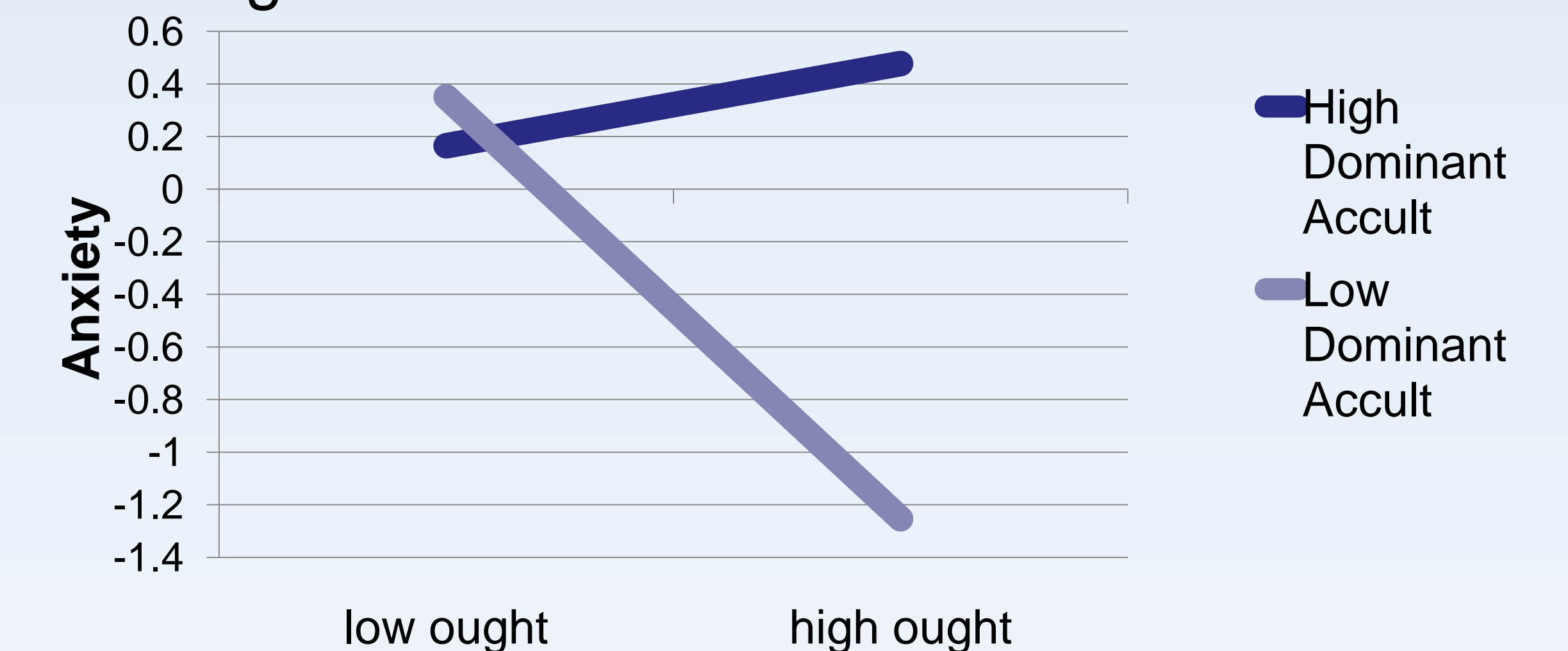
### Model of the relationship between ethnicity, dominant acculturation, and closeness to an undesired self



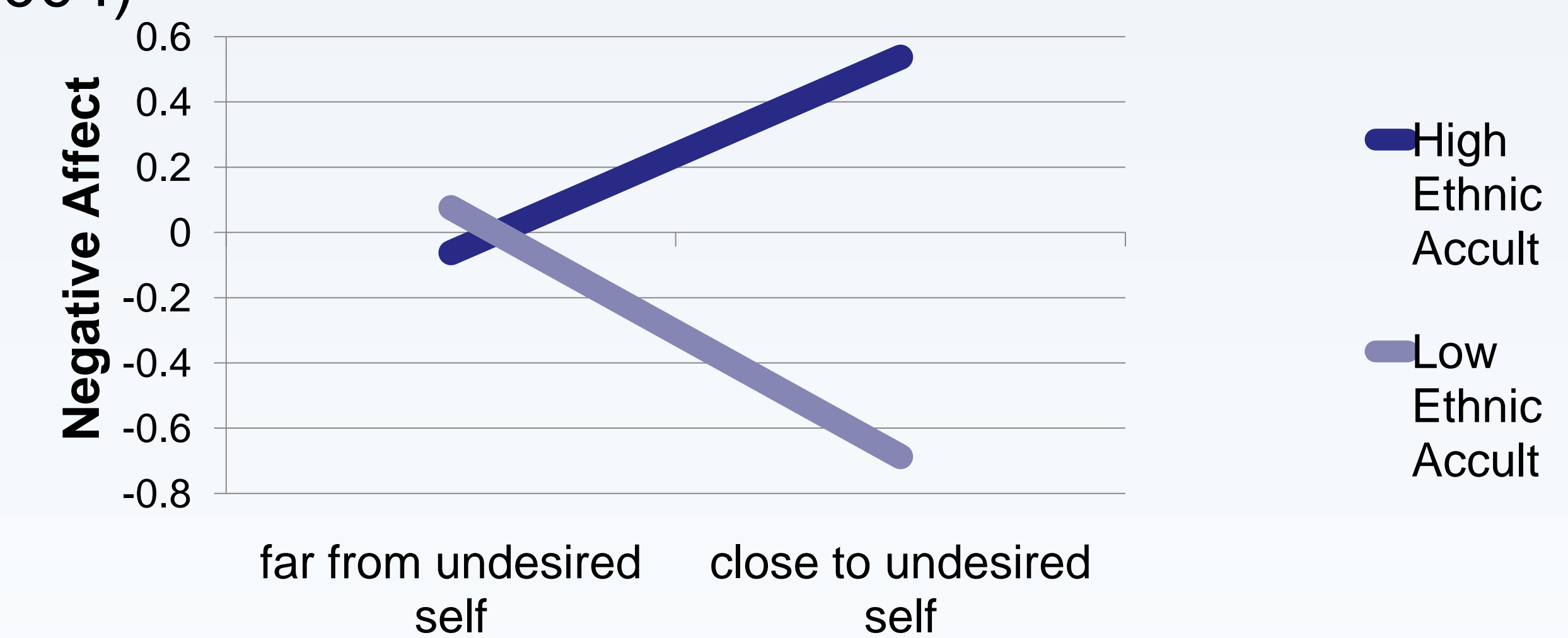
Note. Paths are standardized coefficients. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

## Results: Priming Task

- Ethnicity did not predict anxiety experienced from own ought words or negative affect over own undesired words
- Significant interaction between ought self-discrepancy and dominant acculturation (part  $r = .23$ ,  $p = .030$ ) predicting anxiety experienced from own ought words



- Significant interaction between ethnic acculturation and closeness to an undesired self (part  $r = .26$ ,  $p = .004$ )



## Discussion

- Differences found when utilizing acculturation (rather than *only* ethnicity) as a predictor
- Assimilation to Western culture mediated the relationship between closeness to an undesired self and ethnicity
  - Acculturation may better explain how ethnicity exerts its effect on closeness to an undesired self
- Ought self-discrepancy and closeness to an undesired self operate differently dependent on levels of acculturation
  - Considering levels of acculturation when using therapies based on self-discrepancy theory (i.e., Self-System Therapy; Strauman et al., 2006) may be beneficial