

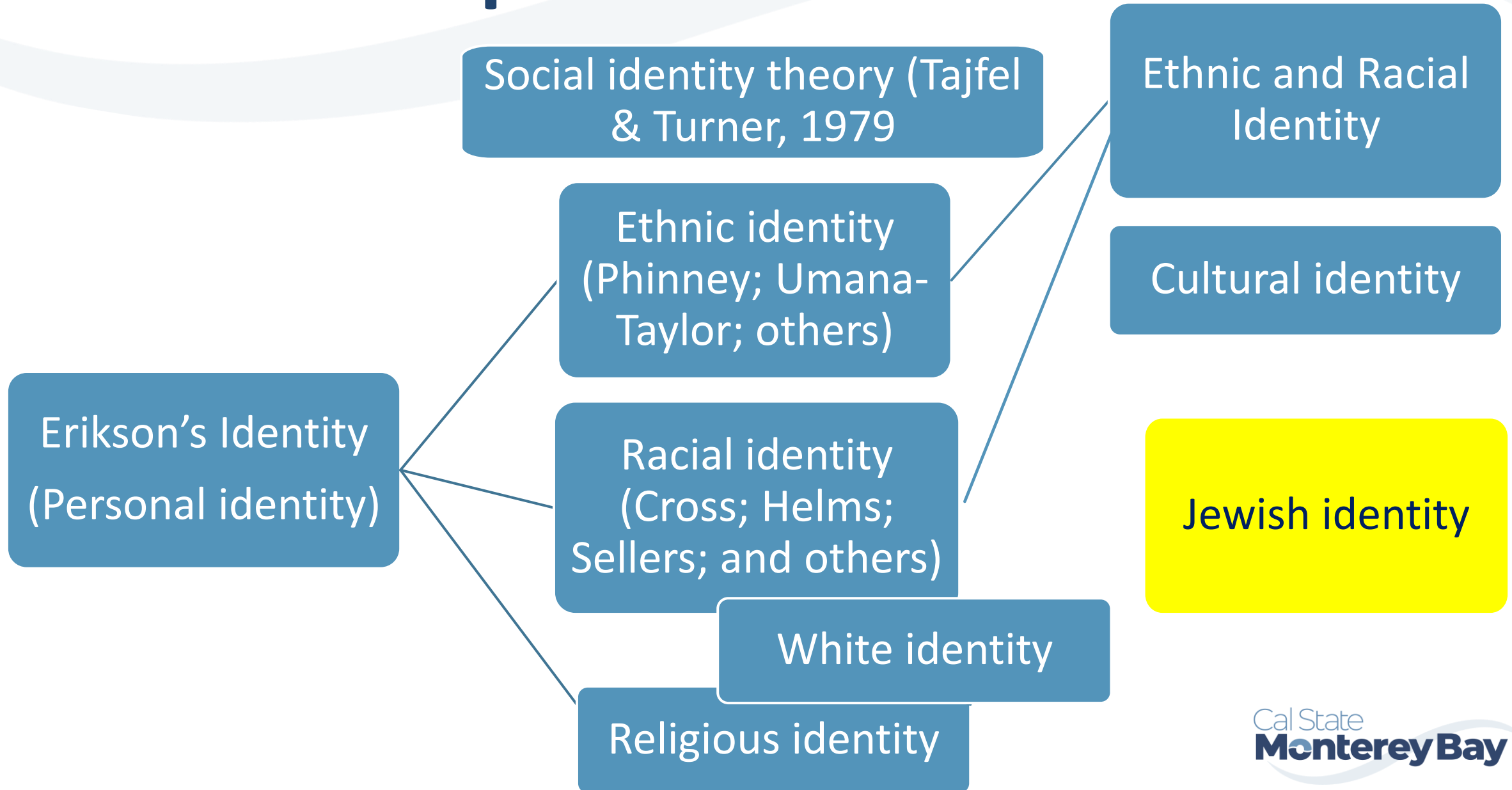
Personal experiences of antisemitism, Jewish ethnic identity, and mental health outcomes: Preliminary findings

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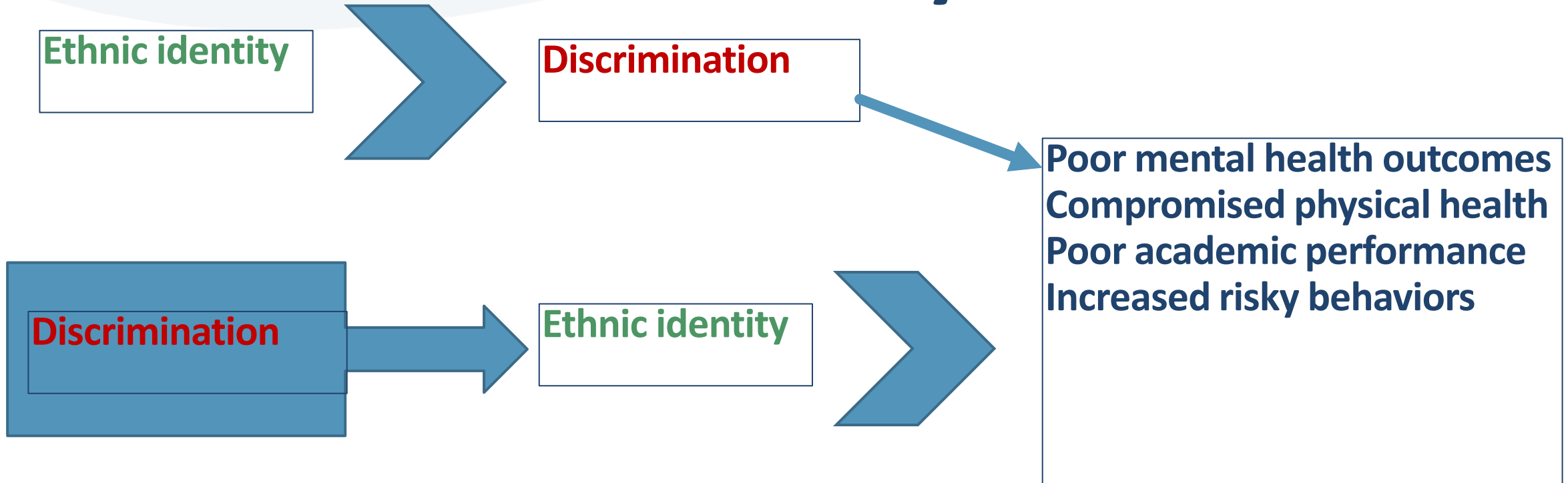
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Smetana, Lenore Walker

Construct map



Models of Ethnic Identity



Does this apply to Jews?

The Complexity of Ethnic Identity Among Jewish American Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Jewish Americans may grapple with issues of ethnic identity differently than the larger White American group. Drawn from a large multisite sample ($N = 8,501$), 280 Jewish American (207 female, 73 male) emerging adults were compared with White American and ethnic minority samples on ethnic and U.S. identity. Jewish Americans rated themselves as significantly higher on measures of ethnic and U.S. identity compared with White Americans but not as highly as ethnic minorities. Ethnic identity search, affirmation, and resolution also predicted higher self-esteem for Jewish Americans, similar to the pattern for other ethnic groups. In addition, ethnic identity search and affirmation moderated the link between perceived discrimination and

KEYWORDS

Ethnic identity; Jewish American; Jews; perceived discrimination; self-esteem; White

- Hypothesis 1: Jewish Americans would score higher on ethnic identity measures than other White Americans, but, as relatively invisible minorities, their level of ethnic identity would be lower than that of other ethnic minority groups.
- Hypothesis 2: Within the Jewish sample, ethnic identity would be associated with self-esteem.
- Hypothesis 3: Also within the Jewish sample, ethnic identity would moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health outcomes. The relationship between perceived discrimination and mental health outcomes would be lower for those individuals with strong ethnic identities.

Table 2. Multivariate analysis of variance of ethnic identity and American identity scores by ethnic groups.

	Jewish Americans <i>M (SD)</i>	African Americans <i>M (SD)</i>	Asian Americans <i>M (SD)</i>	White Americans <i>M (SD)</i>	Hispanic Americans <i>M (SD)</i>
EI affirmation	27.81 (0.41)	29.06 (0.27) _a	26.31 (0.23) _a	26.23 (0.09) _a	27.07 (0.21)
EI search	17.21 (0.30)	17.99 (0.20) _a	16.44 (0.17) _a	15.15 (0.07) _a	15.62 (0.15) _a
EI total	45.08 (0.65)	47.05 (0.44) _a	42.74 (0.37) _a	41.38 (0.15) _a	42.69 (0.33) _a
EIS exploration	18.20 (0.34)	20.02 (0.23) _a	18.93 (0.20)	16.26 (0.08) _a	18.54 (0.18)
EIS affirmation	22.21 (0.19)	21.94 (0.13)	21.53 (0.11) _a	22.54 (0.04)	22.34 (0.10)
EIS resolution	10.79 (0.22)	11.83 (0.15) _a	11.20 (0.12)	10.54 (0.05)	11.61 (0.11) _a
AI affirmation	28.87 (0.35)	28.36 (0.24)	27.13 (0.20) _a	29.82 (0.08) _a	29.10 (0.18)
AI search	18.80 (0.26)	17.77 (0.17) _a	17.01 (0.13) _a	18.63 (0.06)	17.63 (0.13) _a
AI total	47.66 (0.55)	46.12 (0.37) _a	44.14 (0.31) _a	48.45 (0.13)	46.73 (0.28)

Note. Variables sharing subscripts indicate significant differences in simple pairwise contrasts with Jewish Americans as the referent group. EI = ethnic identity; AI = American identity.

****** $p < .01$.

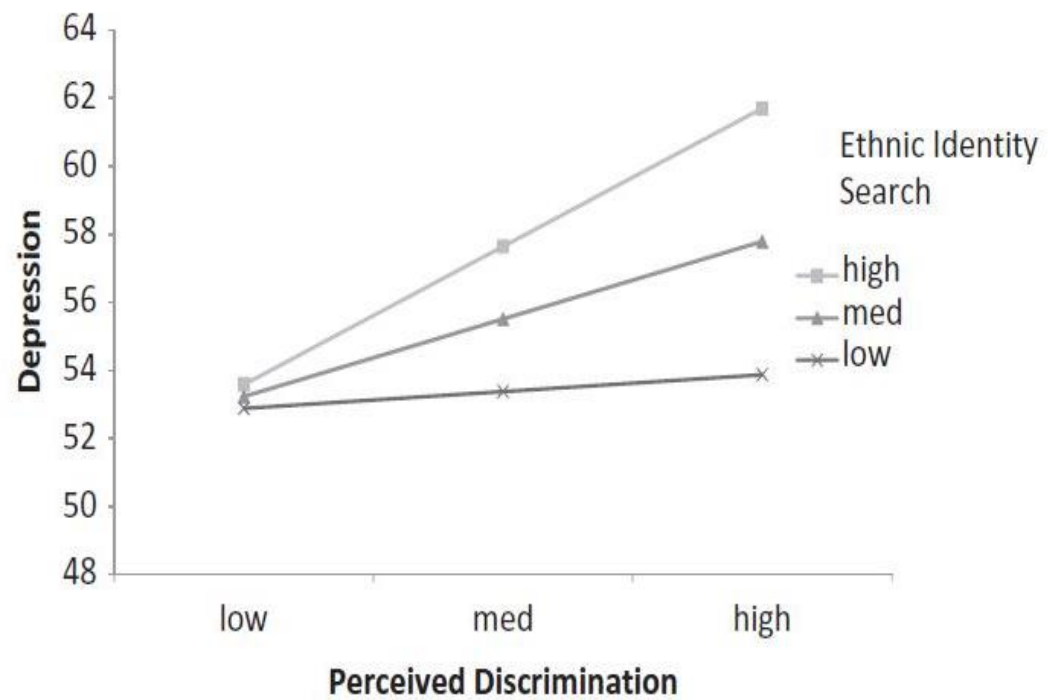


Figure 1. Moderation of perceived discrimination, by ethnic identity search on depression.

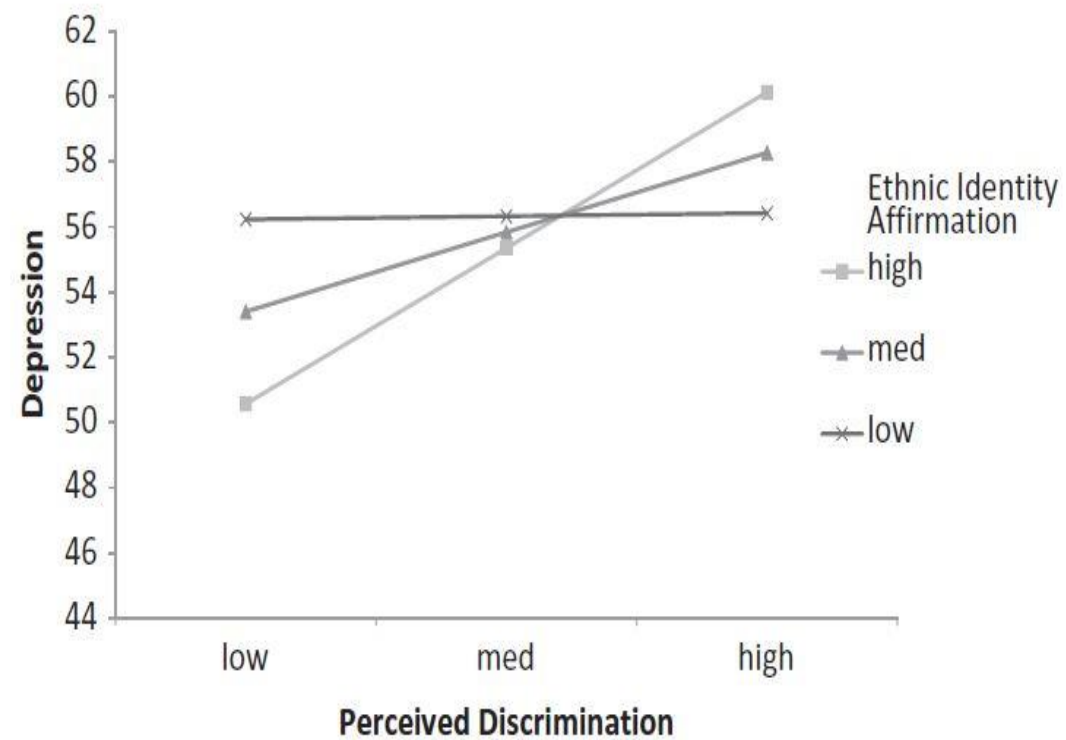


Figure 2. Moderation of perceived discrimination, by ethnic identity affirmation on depression.

**Can measures of discrimination =
antisemitism?**

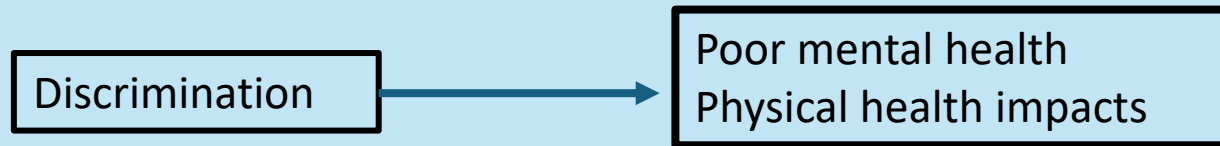
Malcarne, V. L., Chavira, D. A., Fernandez, S., & Liu, P.-J. (2006). The scale of ethnic experience: Development and psychometric properties. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 86(2), 150–161.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa8602_04

Factor 2: Perceived Discrimination

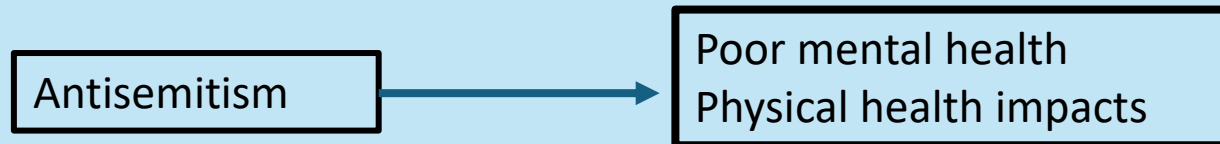
- 1. Generally speaking, my ethnic group is respected in America.**
- 2. My ethnic group has been treated well in American society.**
- 3. My ethnic group does not have the same opportunities as other ethnic groups.**
- 4. I often have to defend my ethnic group from criticism by people outside of my ethnic group.**
- 5. Discrimination against my ethnic group is not a problem in America.**
- 6. My ethnic group is often criticized in this country.**
- 7. In America, the opinions of people from my ethnic group are treated as less important than those of other ethnic groups.**
- 8. In my life, I have experienced prejudice because of my ethnicity.**
- 9. I have not felt prejudiced against in American society because of my ethnic background.**

Background

- Although chronic and acute discrimination have well-established, cumulative, and detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of individuals who are ethnic and racial minorities (e.g., Benner et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020), there is limited research of the impact of contemporary, and the more recent, antisemitism, on Jews.

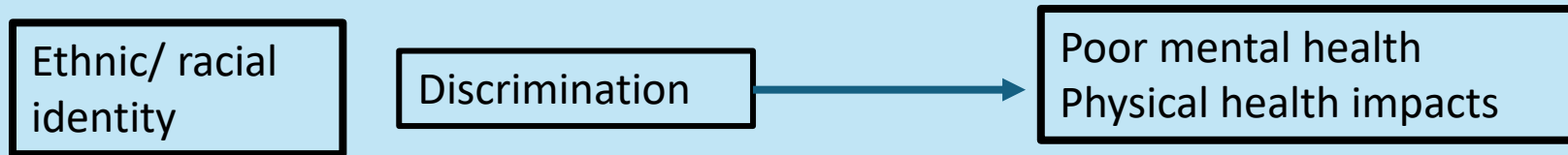


- It is likely that these acts of antisemitism and discrimination take a toll on the psychological well-being of Jews.

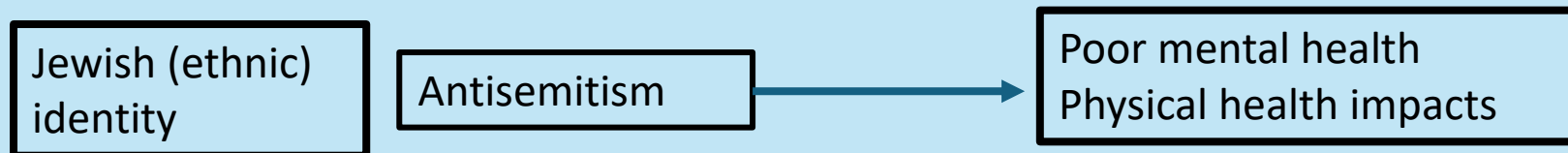


Background

- There is substantial evidence that racial and ethnic identities buffer the effects of discrimination on physical and mental health (e.g. Pascoe & Richman, 2009).



- Similarly, Jewish ethnic identity may buffer the effects of antisemitism on psychological well-being.



Stress and coping framework—exposure to discrimination depletes resources => more stress and health implications

Minority stress theory=> minorities experience additional stressors due to discrimination and violence that result in negative health outcomes

Social identity theory=> self-concept is based on positive and negative evaluation of one's social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)

- Strong sense of ethnic identity reduces effects of discrimination on psychological adjustment
- Rejection sensitivity theory→ strong ethnic identity will worsen the impact of ethnic discrimination on mental health outcomes. Rejection can leave one feeling psychologically burdened (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

Hypotheses

1. Frequency of personal experiences of antisemitism and Jewish discrimination will relate to poor mental health outcomes
2. Perception of being identifiably Jewish will relate to increased discrimination and antisemitism and poor mental health outcomes
3. Jewish ethnic identity will buffer the effects of antisemitism and discrimination on mental health outcomes

Procedures

Solicitation to participate in a research study on Jewish identity and antisemitism was disseminated on the electronic mailing lists for several Jewish psychology and related fields' professional organizations (e.g., Jewish therapists, social workers) with a link to the electronic survey.

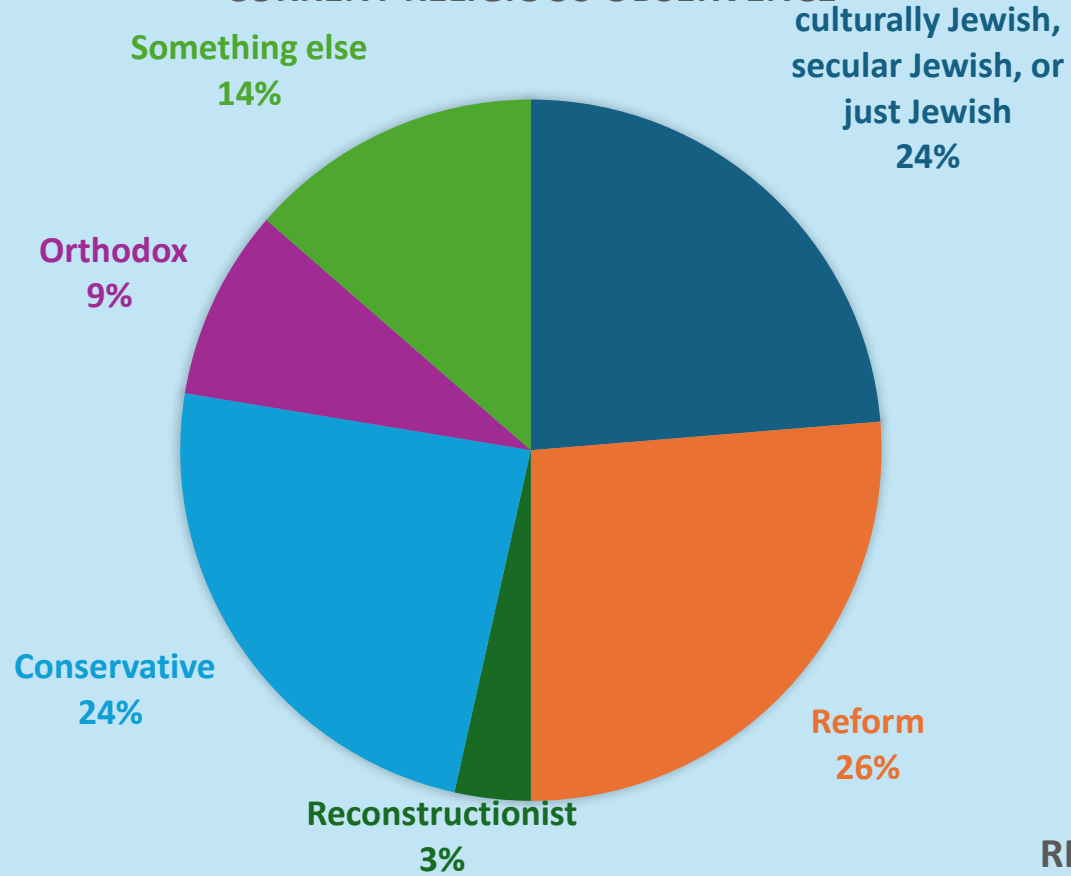
Reminders about the study were posted approximately every two weeks for the 12 weeks of data collection.

Once participants provided consent, they were directed to a screening question, "Do you consider yourself Jewish?". Those individuals who answered affirmatively continued to the questionnaire, and those who answered negatively were exited from the survey.

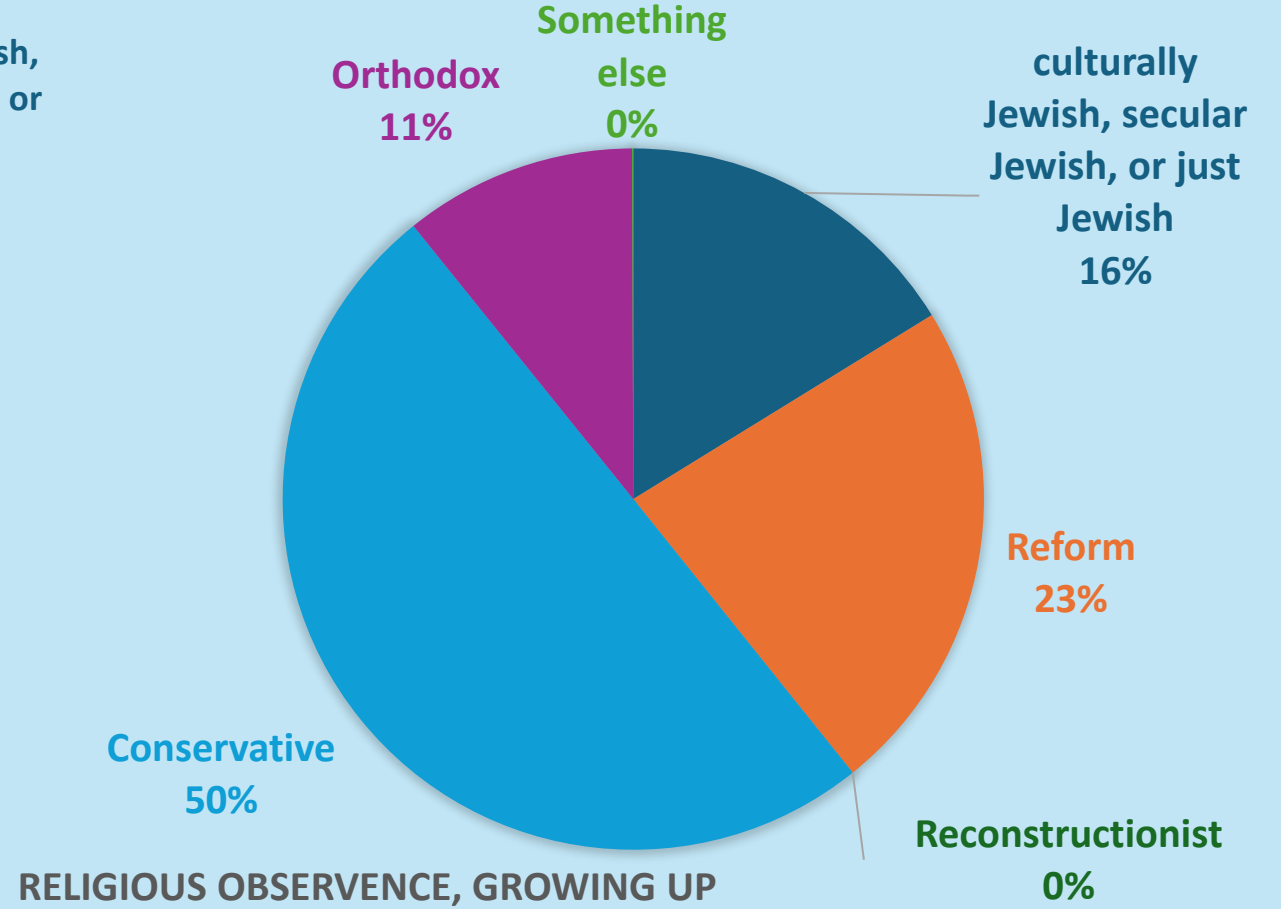
Participants

- 228 individuals (F = 182 [80%], M = 44, NB = 1, Trans = 1) completed the survey.
- Ranged in age from 21 to 87 years old ($M = 53.21$ years, $SD = 16.53$).
- 78% were born in the United States, 65.8% of their mothers and 63.6% of their fathers were born in the United States.
- Jewish background: 91.2% had a Jewish father, 91.7% a Jewish mother, 90.8% a Jewish maternal grandmother, 89.5% a Jewish maternal grandfather, 89% a Jewish paternal grandmother, and 89% a Jewish paternal grandfather.
- Jewish heritage (they could indicate more than one choice)
 - 203 individuals indicated they were Ashkenazi
 - 7 indicated they were Mizrahi
 - 20 indicated they were Sephardic
 - 10 indicated they were Other
 - 7 indicated they were None
 - 2 indicated they did not know

CURRENT RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE



Something



Religiosity

For current religiosity, participants rated the item, “Aside from special occasions like weddings, funerals and bar mitzvahs, how often do you attend Jewish religious services, in person or online, at a synagogue, temple, minyan, or havurah?”, using a scale of 1 = *never*, 2 = *seldom*, 3 = *a few times a year such as for High Holidays*, 4 = *once or twice a month*, 5 = *once a week*, and 6 = *more than once a week*.

- **The mean on this item was 3.28 (*SD* = 1.13).**

For the item, “About how often do you pray or say a prayer?” using a scale of 1 = *never*, 2 = *less than once a week*, 3 = *once a week*, 4 = *several times a week*, 5 = *once a day*, and 6 = *several times a day*.

- **The mean was 3.21 (*SD* = 1.62).**

Measures

Ethnic identity. Participants rated 12 items of Roberts et al.'s (1999) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure using a scale of 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. Items were reworded to be specific to Jewish participants. For example, the item "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs" was reworded to "I have spent time trying to find out more about being Jewish, such as its history, traditions, and customs." Cronbach's alpha for the **search** subscale was .73 and .88 for the **belongingness** and affirmation subscale.

Participants also rated 16 items from the identity **centrality**, **private regard**, and **public regard** subscales from Sellers et al.'s (1997) Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity with item wording adapted for Jews. For example, the item "Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself," (reverse scored) became "Overall, being Jewish has very little to do with how I feel about myself," (reverse scored). Cronbach's alphas for the respective subscales for this sample were .73 (identity centrality), .56 (private regard), and .85 (public regard).

Jewish cultural identity. Participants indicated their Jewish **cultural identity** by rating the 15 items of the cultural identification subscale of the American Jewish Identity Scale, using the scale 1 = *not at all true of me*, 2 = *a little true of me*, 3 = *fairly true of me*, and 4 = *very true of me* (Friedlander et al., 2010). A sample item is "I enjoy Jewish literature." Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .83.

- *Perceptions of Jewishness in Appearance.* Participants answered three items about thinking they “look Jewish”: **do you think you “look Jewish?”**, do other Jews think you “look Jewish?”, and do non-Jews think you “look Jewish?” Each item was rated using the scale 1= *not at all*, 2 = *slightly*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *moderately*, 5 = *very much*.
- *Perceptions of Jewishness in Names.* Participants answered three items about thinking their first name is Jewish: **do you think your first name is identifiably Jewish?**, do you think Jews could identify that your first name is Jewish? and do you think non-Jews could identify that your first name is Jewish. Each item was rated using the scale 1= *not at all*, 2 = *slightly*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *moderately*, 5 = *very much*. Participants also answered the same questions, using the same scale, about their last name (surname) such as **“Do you think your last name (surname) is identifiably Jewish?”** The first name items and the last name items were used as separate items in analyses.
- *Whiteness.* Participants answered two questions about their perceived Whiteness: **“Based on your appearance, would most people assume you are White?”** and **“Based on your name would most people assume you are White?”**, using the scale 1= *definitely not*, 2 = *probably not*, 3 = *possibly*, 4 = *probably*, 5 = *definitely*. In addition, they answered **“Do you consider yourself White?”**, using the scale 1= *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *very much*

Discrimination. Participants rated 13 items of the **Subtle and Blatant Discrimination** measure, using a scale of 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *always* (Schaafsma, 2011). Items were re-worded to be specific for Jewish participants. For example, the item, “How often do you have the feeling that ...You are not being accepted because of your ethnic background?” was re-worded to be “How often do you have the feeling that ...You are not being accepted because of your Jewish background?”. Cronbach’s alpha for the subtle discrimination subscale was .93, and for the blatant subscale was .80.

Antisemitism experiences. Participants rated 21 items adapted from the antisemitic experience items from Pew Research Center Survey of Jews and the antisemitism experience items from the American Jewish Committee Survey of American Jews on Antisemitism in America 2024, using a scale of 1 = *never, not at all*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *almost always*. Sample items include: “In the past 12 months, how often have you...been called offensive names because you are Jewish or of Jewish background,” “...been the target of antisemitic vandalism or messaging (such as flyer or pamphlets) left on your personal property,” and “avoided wearing, carrying or displaying something that would identify you as Jewish in your workplace or around colleagues.” Cronbach’s alpha for these items was .88. A mean score was used for analyses.

Experiences of antisemitism Top 5	<i>M(SD)</i>
In the past 12 months, how often have you...	
avoided publicly wearing, carrying, or displaying things that might help people identify you as a Jew?	2.98 (1.29)
avoided posting content online that would identify you as a Jew or reveal your views on Jewish issues?	2.91 (1.40)
avoided certain places, events, or situations out of concern for your safety or comfort as a Jew?	2.86 (1.14)
seen anti-Jewish graffiti or vandalism in your local community?	2.77 (1.11)
heard someone say Jews care too much about money.	2.76 (1.11)

Self-esteem. Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1989), using the scale 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. An example item is “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.” Cronbach’s alpha for this sample was .90.

Sadness/Depressive Symptoms. Participants rated the 8 items of the PROMIS sadness and depressive symptom scale, using a scale of 1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always* (Hays et al., 2009). One sample item is “In the past 7 days, how often you felt the following: I could not stop feeling sad.” For this sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .93.

Anxiety symptoms. Participants rated the 8 items of the Neuro-QOL Anxiety, Short Form, using a scale of 1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always* (Cella et al., 2012). A sample item included “In the past 7 days, how often have you felt the following: I felt uneasy.” For this sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .92 for this sample.

Somatic Symptoms. Participants rated the eight items of the somatic symptoms scale about their experience of somatic symptoms, using a scale of 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *very much* (Gierk et al., 2014). They responded to items such as “In the past 7 days, how much have you been bothered by any of the following problems?” including stomach or bowel problems, back pain, pain in arms, legs, and joints, headaches, chest pain or shortness of breath, dizziness, feeling tired or having low energy, and trouble sleeping. For this sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .76 for this sample.

Results: Demographic differences

- Women higher on anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms
- Men higher on Public Regard

	Age
Do you think your first name is identifiably Jewish?	-.28***
Do you think Jews could identify that your first name is Jewish?	-.30***
Do you think non-Jews could identify that your first name is Jewish?	-.22***
Based on your appearance, would most people assume you are White?	.26***
Based on your name, would most people assume you are White?	.26***
Do you consider yourself White?	.24***

		Young 21-43 years old N = 75	Middle 44-61 years old N = 76	Older 62-87 years old N= 77
Look Jewish	Self	3.36 (1.12)	3.08 (1.20)	3.23 (1.33)
	Other Jews	3.41 (1.21)	3.09 (1.26)	3.21 (1.30)
	non-Jews	3.01 (1.31)a	2.55 (1.18)a	2.85 (1.24)
First name	Self	2.60 (1.73)a,b	1.93 (1.38)a	1.71 (1.27)b
	Other Jews	2.83 (1.81)a,b	2.09 (1.58)a	1.75 (1.38)b
	non-Jews	2.08 (1.42)a,b	1.59 (1.04)a	1.45 (.99)b
Last name	Self	3.08 (1.73)	2.70 (1.54)	2.85 (1.71)
	Other Jews	3.00 (1.75)	3.00 (1.65)	3.03 (1.73)
	non-Jews	2.61 (1.67)	2.21 (1.44)	2.47 (1.44)
	Appear White	4.28 (1.15)a,b	4.59 (.72)a	4.84 (.44)b
	Name White	3.61 (1.21)a,b	4.04 (.84)a	4.19 (.63)b
	Self White	3.27 (1.43)b	3.42 (1.37)c	4.03 (1.36)b, c

Results

H1: Frequency of personal experiences of antisemitism and Jewish discrimination will relate to poor mental health outcomes

- Correlations of variables

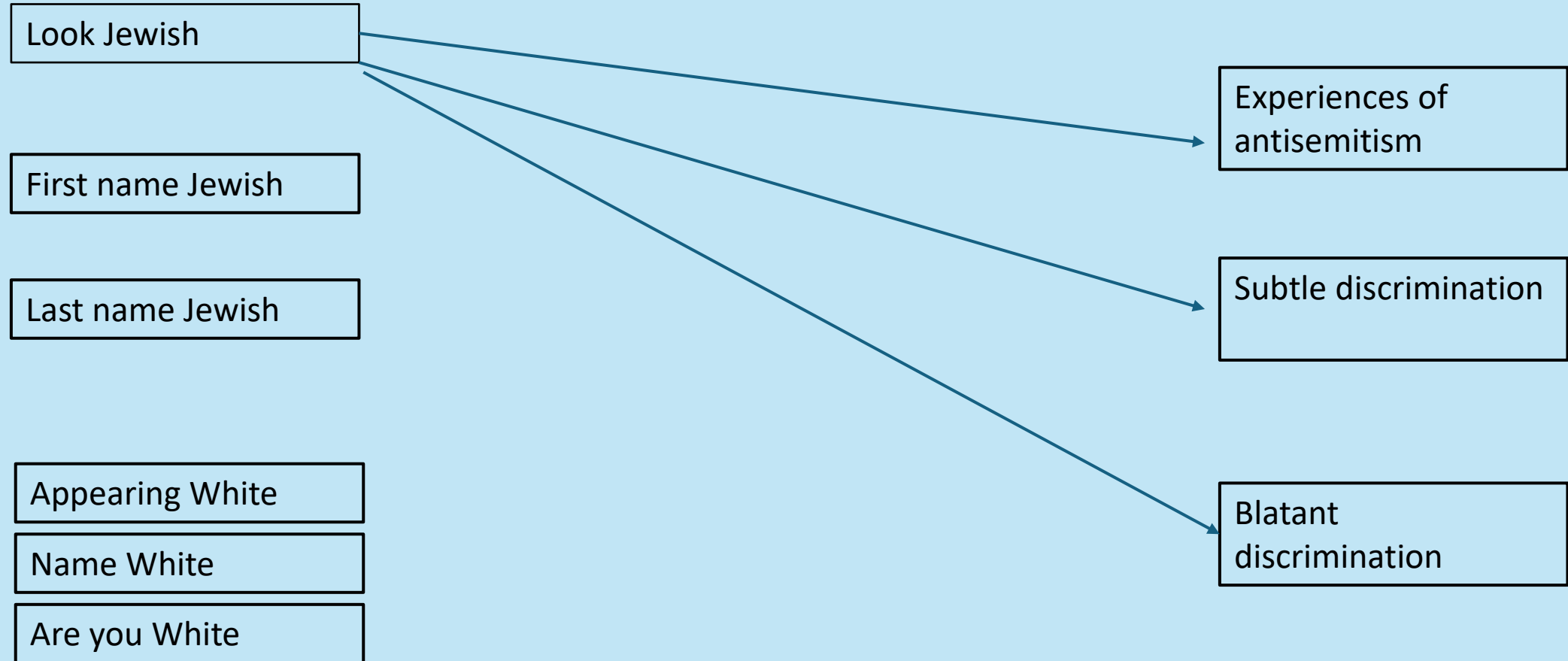
Correlations							
	Mean experiences of Antisemitism	Blatant discrim	Subtle discrim	Anxiety	Depress	Somatic	Self- esteem
Mean experiences of Antisemitism		.60**	.69**	.42**	.31**	.25**	-.29**
Blatant discrimination			.61**	.24**	.22**	.23**	-.22**
Subtle discrimination				.41**	.30**	.25**	-.33**
Anxiety					.63**	.48**	-.41**
Depression						.47**	-.57**
Somatic							-.23**
Self-esteem							

	Young 21-43 years old N = 75	Middle 44-61 years old N = 76	Older 62-87 years old N= 77
Experiences of Antisemitism	2.29 (.53)a	2.17 (.49)b	1.79 (.53)a,b
Subtle Discrimination	2.58 (.76)a	2.57 (.65)b	1.95 (.67)a,b
Blatant Discrimination	2.05 (.58)a	1.99 (.54)	1.83 (.58)a

Results

H2: Perception of being identifiably Jewish will relate to increased discrimination and antisemitism and poor mental health outcomes

- Hierarchical linear regression: Antisemitism, blatant and subtle discrimination
 - First block: Appearance
 - Second block: First and last names
 - Third block: Whiteness

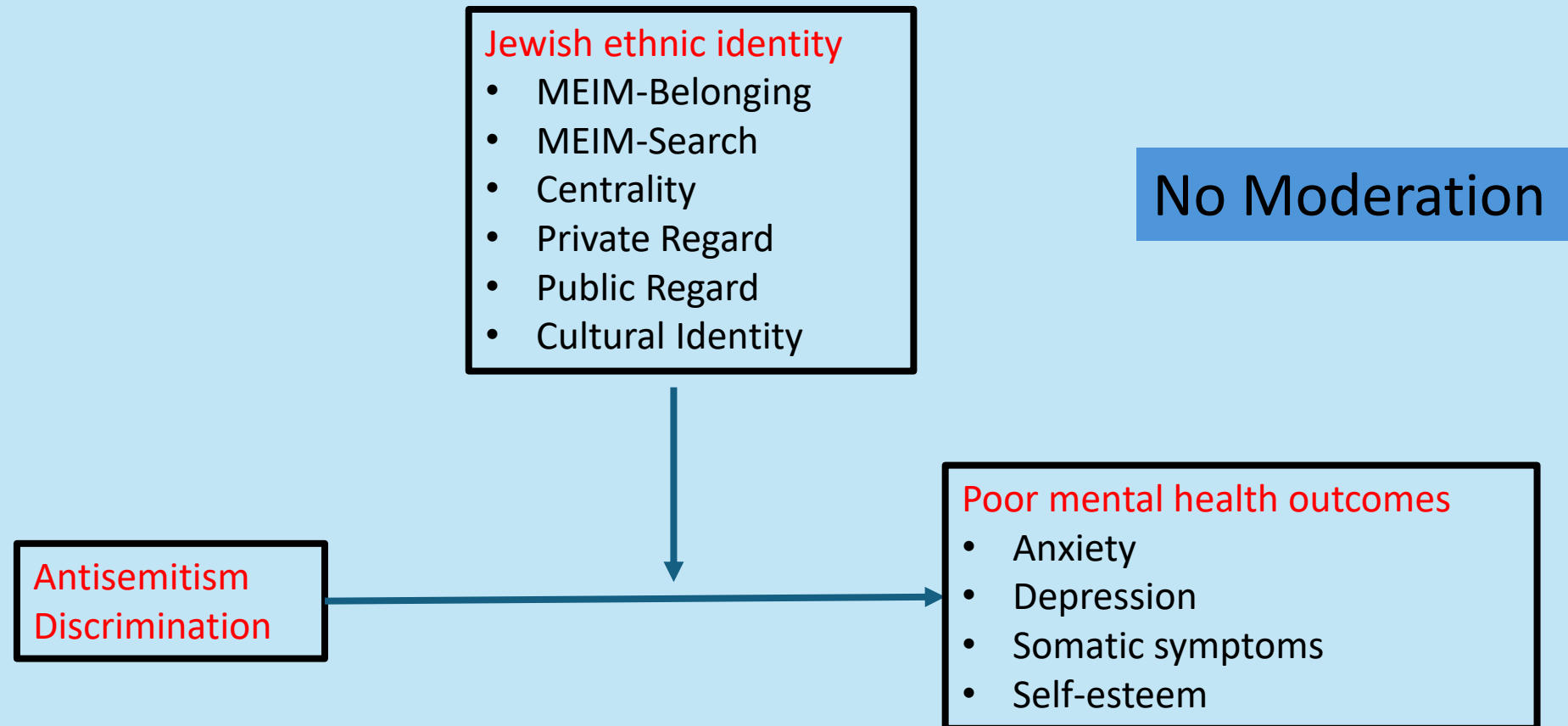


Identifiably Jewish items regressed on experiences of antisemitism

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.055 ^a	.003	-.011	.56047	.003	.215	3	213	.886
2	.143 ^b	.020	-.022	.56358	.017	.609	6	207	.723
3	.423 ^c	.179	.131	.51974	.159	13.133	3	204	<.001

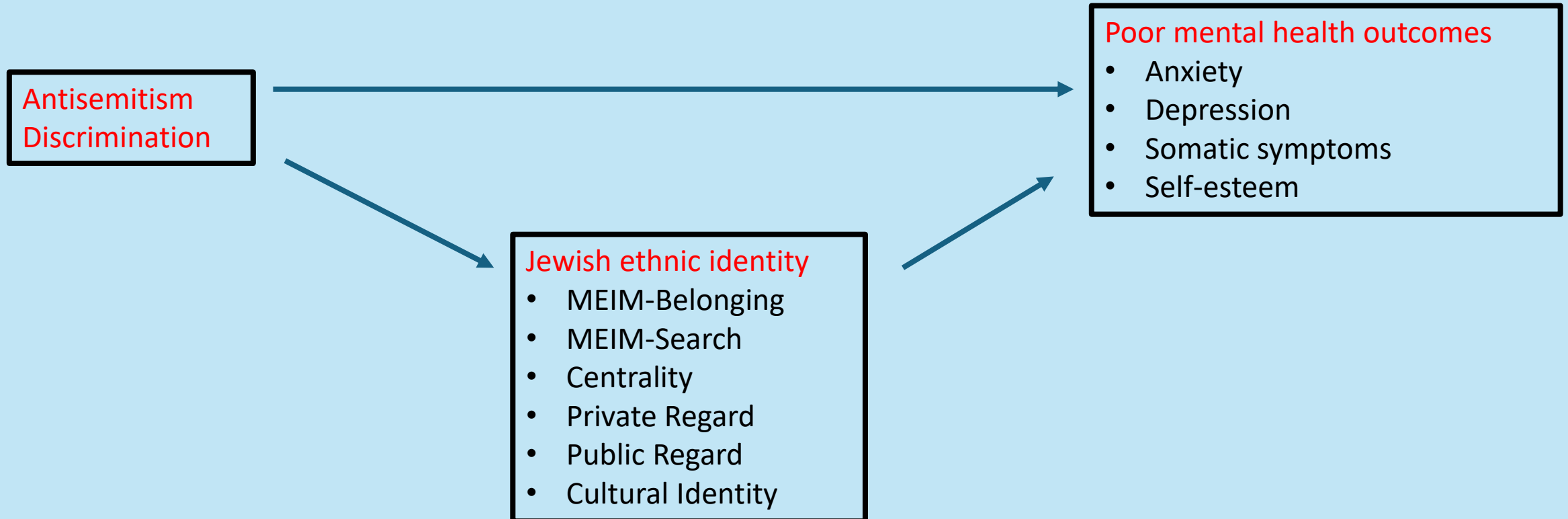
- Predictors: “Based on your appearance, would most people assume you are White? “ and “Do you consider yourself White?”
- Same for blatant discrimination
- “Do you consider yourself White?” predicted subtle discrimination
- “Based on your name, would most people assume you are White” predicted depression, self-esteem (+)
- “Based on your appearance, would most people assume you are White? predicted somatic symptoms

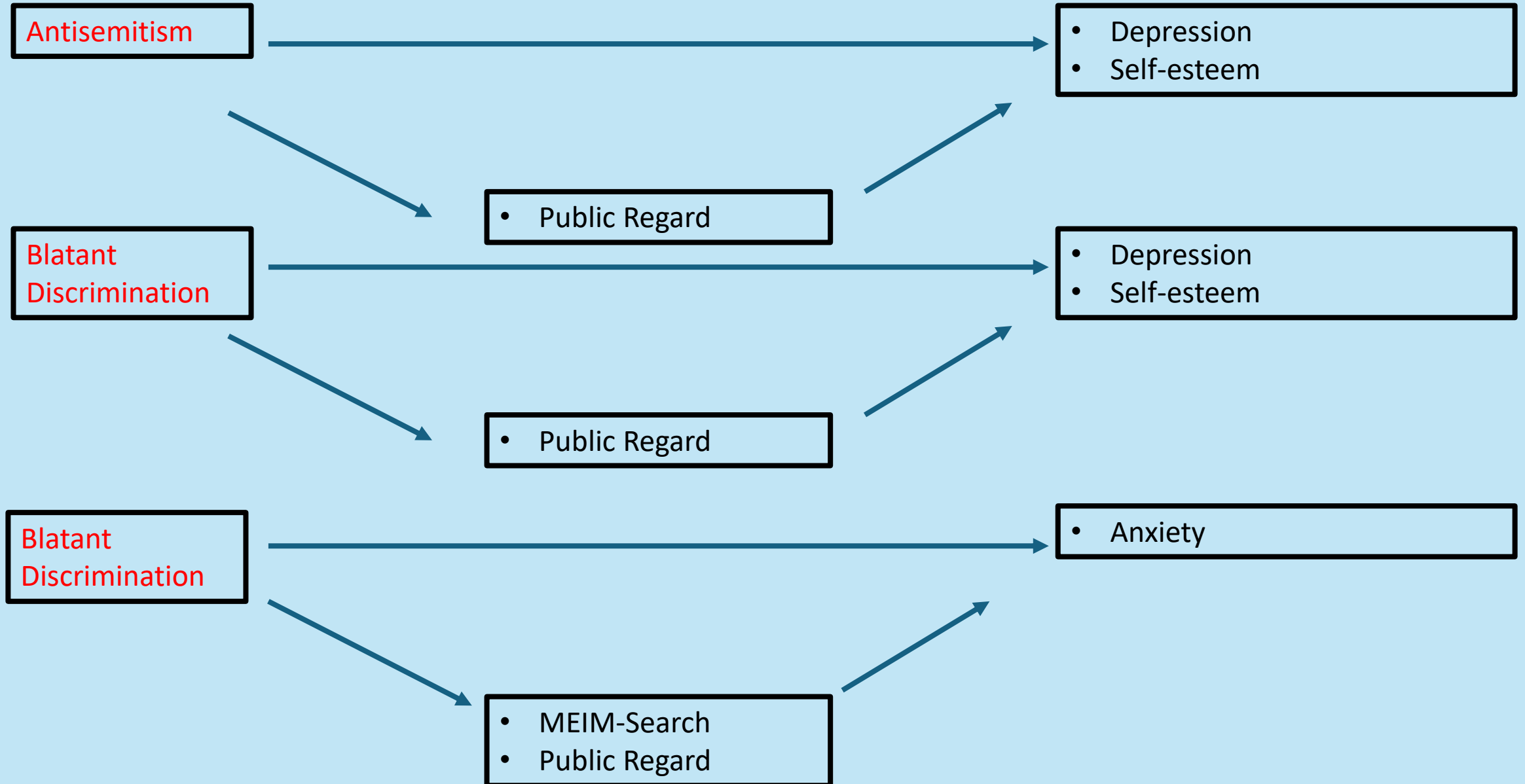
H3: Jewish ethnic identity will buffer the effects of antisemitism and discrimination on mental health outcomes



H3: ~~Jewish ethnic identity will buffer the effects of antisemitism and discrimination on mental health outcomes~~

There is an indirect effect of Jewish ethnic identity on antisemitism and discrimination to mental health outcomes.





Public Regard items

1. Overall, Jewish people are considered good by others.
2. In general, others respect Jewish people.
3. Jewish people are not respected by the broader society (R)
4. In general, other groups view Jewish people in a positive manner.
5. Society views Jewish people as an asset.

Discussion

- There is an association of antisemitism and discrimination to mental health outcomes
- For Jews, their self-perception of Whiteness may relate to antisemitism and discrimination and mental health outcomes
- Jewish ethnic identity may not buffer against the impact of antisemitism and discrimination on mental health outcomes.
 - Public regard may lessen the relationship of antisemitism and discrimination on mental health outcomes
 - Jews may experience worse mental health outcomes when they think Jews are negatively viewed as a group by others.

Future directions

- Psychometrics on the antisemitism measure
- Analyses by religious observance, zip code?
- Emotional attachment to Israel; Centrality of Israel to Jewish identity
- Measures unexplored:
 - Psychological training helped
 - Qualitative: Acts of antisemitism; altered sense of Jewish identity; what have you done to cope
 - Resilience
 - Locus of control