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# When History Perpetuates Narratives and Stereotypes: The Burden of Historical Representations on Well-being

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## INTRODUCTION

Representations of the past create a problematic interpretation of the relationship between past and present (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). For example, historical lessons learnt in the past (slavery and colonialism) now inform the discourse on stereotypes and prejudice (Sartre, 2001).

From a psychological perspective, Sharma and Sharma note that historical representations of a stereotyped group's social identities develop vulnerability instead of positive meaning (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). Just as individual narratives predict subjective well-being (Fivush et al., 2007; Lim and Leong, 2020), an often overlooked but important function of historical narratives is their role in predicting social anxiety and self-esteem.

Accordingly, an important question the study addresses is the extent that historical narratives being propagated impact individual sense of well-being. The discussion in the literature is inconclusive. Likewise, the implications of negative historical representations on the health of a stigmatized group have not been widely documented.

Against the backdrop of this, the present study poses these questions: how do historical representations relate to the well-being of Africans living in Europe? How do historical representations relate to already established literature on perceived discrimination? What is the role of social identification and stereotype confirmation concerns on the observed relationship?

## METHOD

To test the hypotheses, we performed the following analyses. First, we tested for the relationships among the variables. Then, a mediation analysis was conducted using *stereotype confirmation concerns* and *social identification* as mediators to understand other mechanisms underlying the hypothesised effect.

### Participants.

A total of 225 Africans living in Europe participated in the study. Age range 18-63 ( $M = 30.70$ ,  $SD = 10.46$ ). Countries of residence were widely dispersed in the sample, with majority ( $N = 163$ , 72.4%) living in the UK and the rest having residences across Europe ( $N = 62$ , 27%).

### Procedure

Data was collected online via Prolific Academic ( $N = 200$ , 78%) and social media platforms ( $N = 56$ , 22%).

### Measures

**Historical Representations (HR).** A 12-item scale  $\alpha = .81$ .

**Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI).** A 21-item anxiety scale  $\alpha = .92$  (1).

**Perceived Discrimination (PD).** A 22-item scale  $\alpha = .95$  (2).

**Stereotype Confirmation Concerns (SCC).** A 11-item scale  $\alpha = .95$  (3).

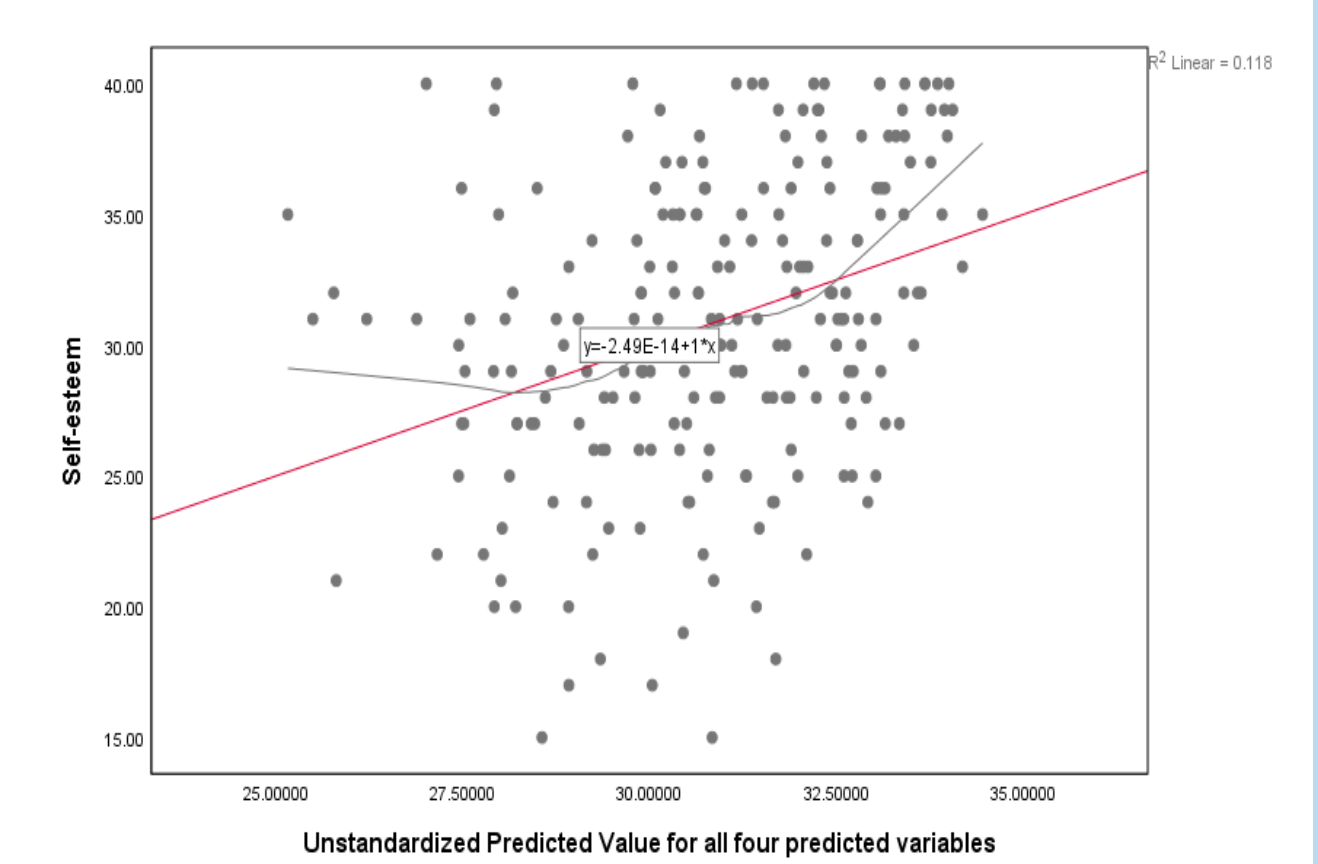
**Self Esteem (SE).** A 10-item scale  $\alpha = .88$ . (6)

**Social Identification (SI).** A 13 item-scale  $\alpha = .87$  (9).

### Self-esteem as an outcome variable.

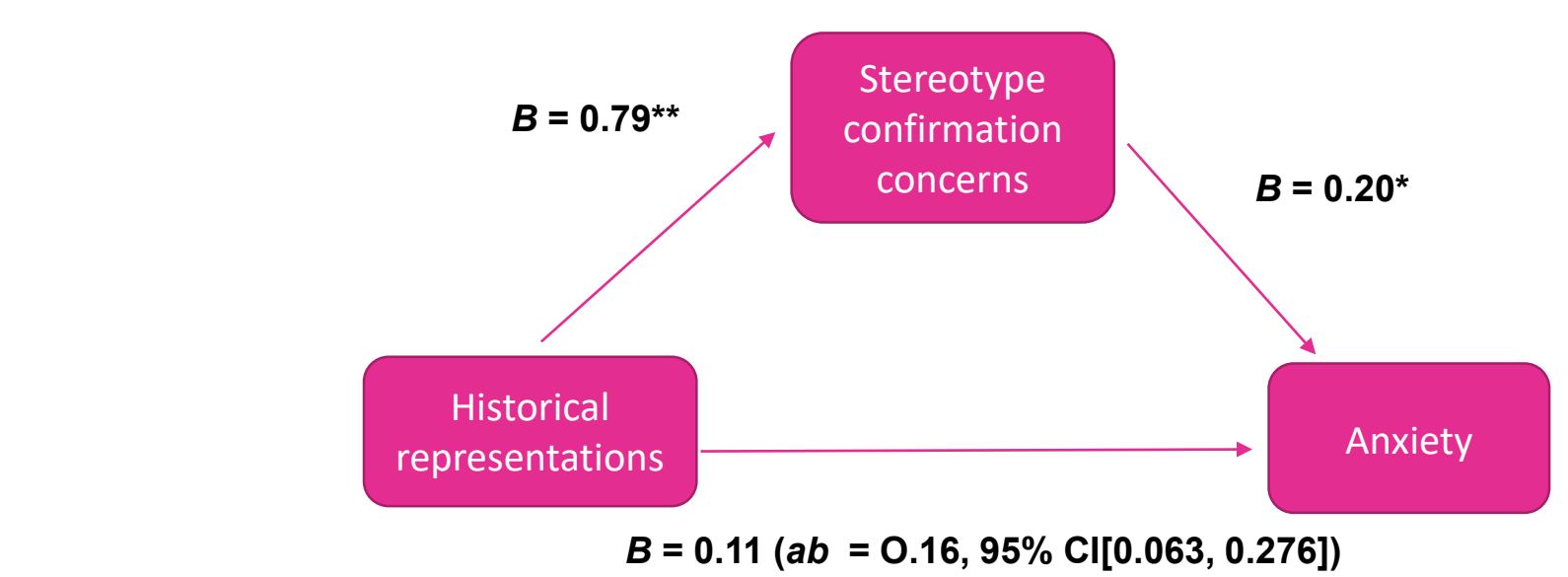
The regression model at step 1 using HR and PD as predictor variable was not statistically significant. ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(2, 222) = .74$ ,  $p = .48$ ). In step 2 we regressed HR, PD, SCC, and SI on SE. The analysis yielded a significant regression model ( $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(2, 220) = 7.335$ ,  $p < .001$ ). (Fig. 3) SCC ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p = .05$ ) and SI ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ) had a significant effect on SE. HR and PD did not predict SE in the model.

Fig.3 Scatter plot of self-esteem by the unstandardized predicted value of all four variables.



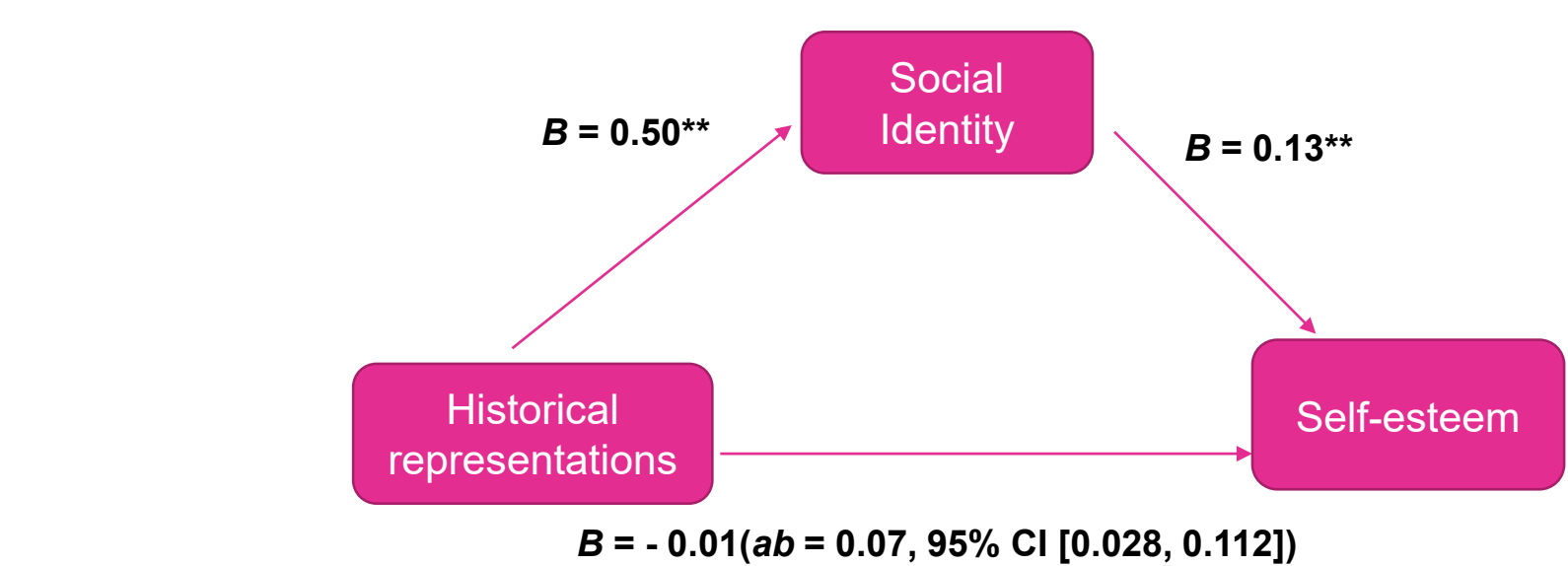
### Indirect effects

Fig. 4 Significant indirect effect of historical representations on increased anxiety via stereotype confirmation concerns.



\* $P < .05$  \*\* $P < .001$

Fig.5 Significant indirect effect of historical representations on increased self-esteem via social identification.



\*\* $P < .001$  \* $P < .05$

## RESULTS

A zero-order correlation revealed a positive significant correlation between HR and PD  $r(223) = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ . This suggests that HR relates to already established literature on perception of discrimination. (Table 1) The analysis also revealed a small positive relationship between HR and anxiety  $r(223) = .19$ ,  $p = .003$ . No significant relationship was found between HR and SE.

Table 1. Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study Variables.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1.HR	--						42.47	7.91
2.PD	.30**	--					46.58	23.26
3.SCC	.41**	.57**	--				25.92	15.07
4.Social identity	.29**	.13**	.19	--			69.03	13.69
5.BAI	.19**	.23**	.32**	-.05	--		34.47	10.79
6.SE	.01	.02	.02	.02	.02	--	5.70	5.70

1. Historical representations, 2. Perceived discrimination, 3. Stereotype confirmation concerns, 4. Social identity, 5. Beck anxiety inventory, 6. Self-esteem

**Anxiety as an outcome variable.** A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test whether both HR and PED predicted participants' anxiety. A significant regression model was found ( $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(2, 222) = 8.326$ ,  $p < .001$ ), in which both HR ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and PD ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .01$ ) had a significant effect on anxiety (Fig. 2).

Fig.2 Scatter plot of Anxiety by Historical representations and perceived discrimination.

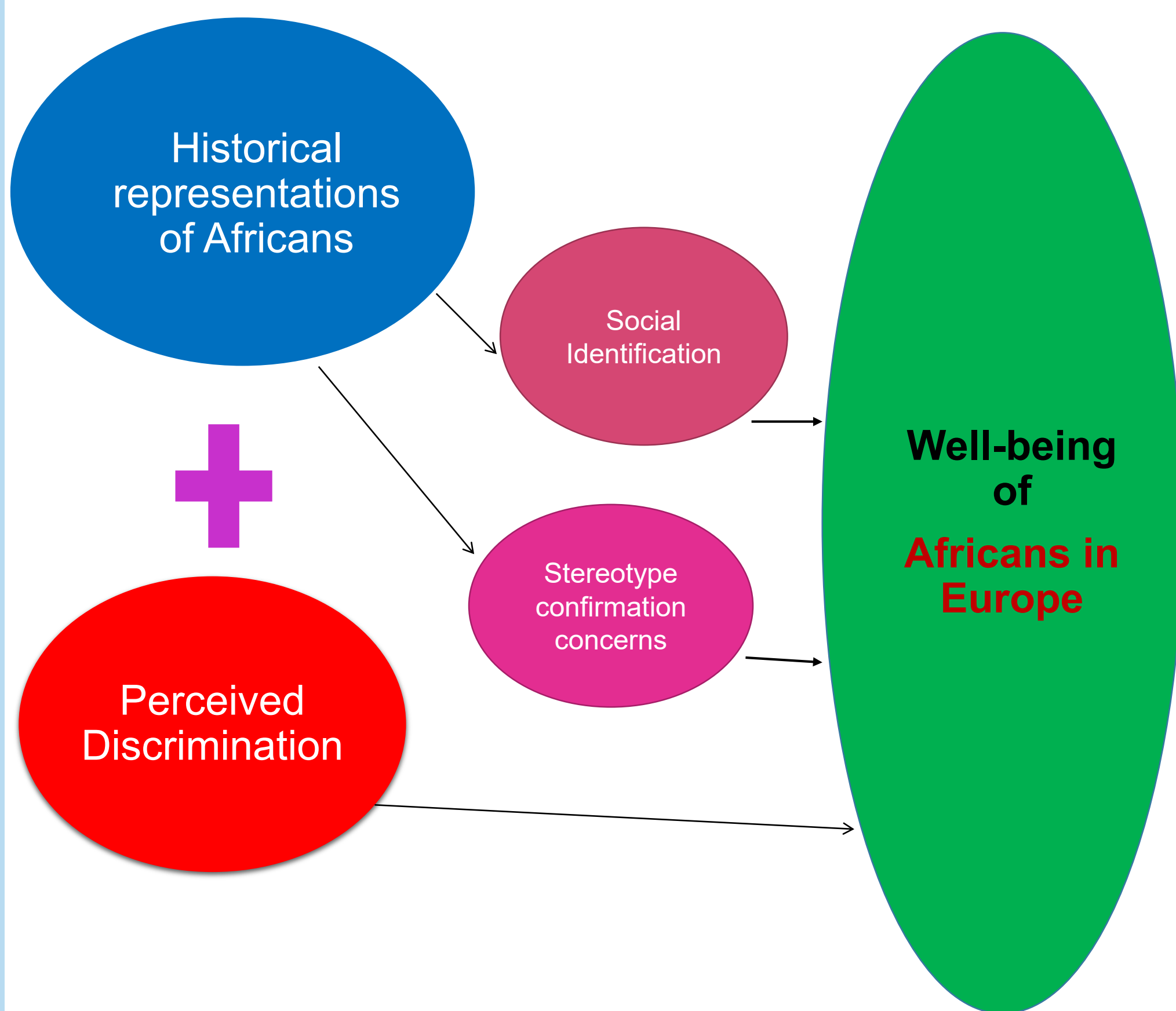
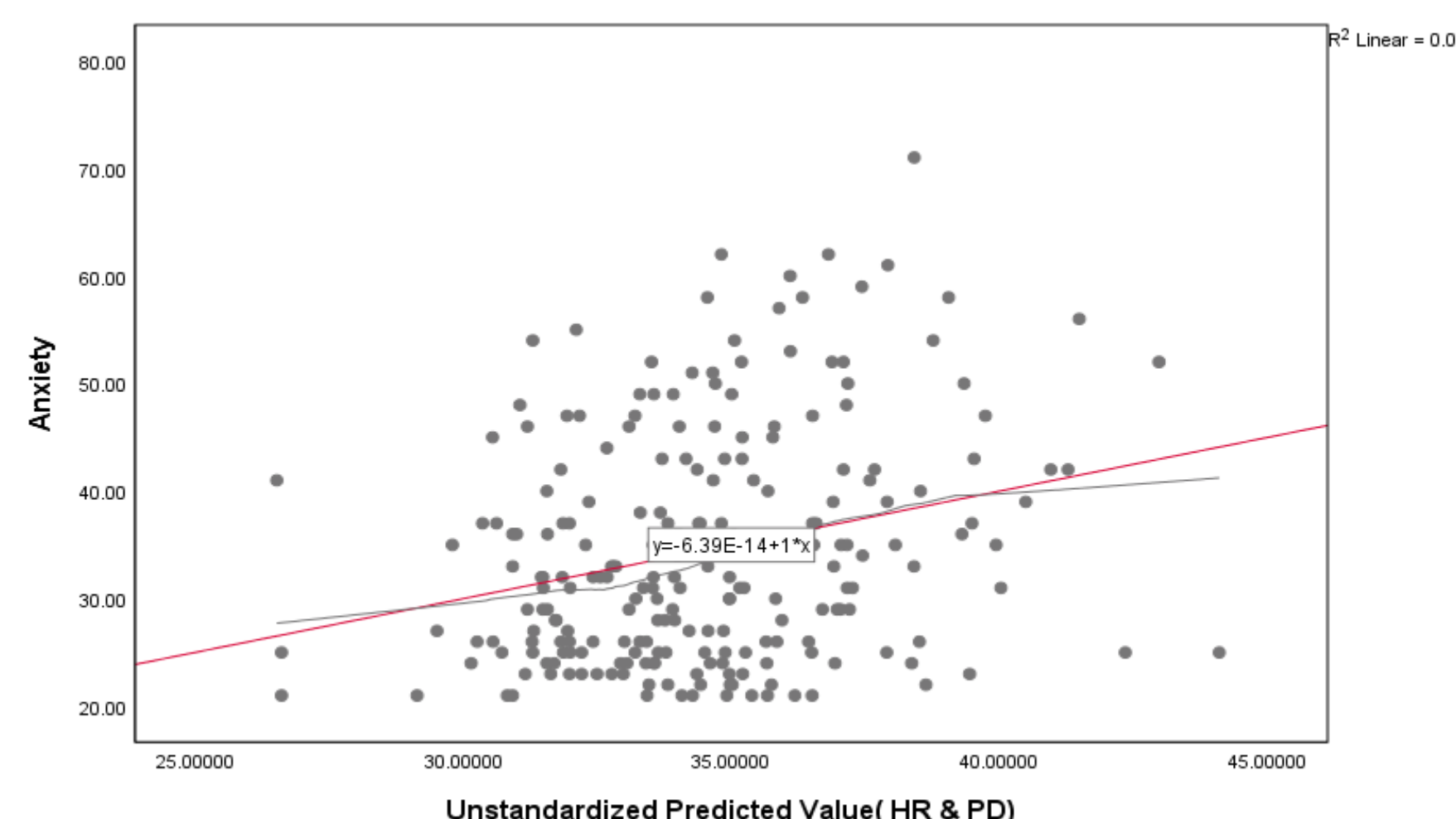


Figure 1. Conceptual Representation of the Hypothesised Model

**Footnote:** As no standard scale existed, we created a measure of people's historical representations of Africans. The scale consisted of 12 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item includes "I think I am part of historically oppressed group". The questionnaire was pilot tested on 50 participants recruited from 'Prolific Academic'. We used the principal component analysis for factor extraction with direct oblimin rotation to examine the item. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy was 0.8, above the recommended minimum value of 0.6. Bartlett's test sphericity was significant  $\chi^2(225) = 967.414$ ,  $P < .001$ , suggesting a reasonable factorability. The commonalities were all above .3 and a one-factor solution accounted for 35.79% of the variance. Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 4.29. given these indicators and internal consistency ( $\alpha = .81$ ), all 12 items were deemed suitable, and we were confident in using this scale. ( $M = 42.48$ ,  $SD = 7.92$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The study introduces a new measure of "historical representations of Africans" (HR) and explored its relationship with perceived discrimination.

We presented mediation analyses suggesting that HR may function as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it may predict higher concern about confirming stereotypes and thence greater anxiety and lower self-esteem. On the other hand, it may predict greater social identification with Africans and thence higher self-esteem.

In other words, historical events may be associated with an individual's ill-being through their frequent activation and recall. Historical representations relate to perceived discrimination and this effect predicts poorer psychological well-being among Africans in Europe.

## CONCLUSIONS

Historically oppressed people's awareness of how their racial history is represented may positively or negatively relate to well-being.

Representation of a group's history is essential in understanding the well-being of ethnic minorities.

Historical representations and perceived discrimination undermine the psychological health of a stigmatized group.

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