

## MORE COMPETENT THAN WARM: THE IMPLICIT STEREOTYPES OF AMERICANS

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Past research, based on explicit measures, has shown that Americans are rated as competent but not warm. In the present study, we assessed the implicit stereotype of Americans along the two dimensions of competence and warmth. Participants (Italian university students) completed a Go/No-go Association Task, in which Americans and Italians were the target categories and competence and warmth the target attributes. They also completed a questionnaire measuring three individual difference variables, namely Social Dominance Orientation, national identification, and political orientation. We hypothesized that Americans would be more associated with competence than warmth; we also expected Americans to be more associated with competence and less with warmth than Italians. Predictions were supported. The implicit associations were not correlated with the individual difference variables, thus suggesting they are a reflection of a well-learned cultural stereotype of Americans.

Key words: Stereotypes; Americans' implicit competence; Americans' implicit warmth; Stereotype content model; Go/No-go Association Task.

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### INTRODUCTION

The public image of America has faced a great challenge since the 9/11 attacks. Hostile attitudes have intensified within both Western and non-Western countries, as a result of American foreign politics. Findings from the *Pew Global Attitudes Project* (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008) showed that favor ratings toward America have dropped over the past few years.<sup>1</sup> Negative perceptions of the United States are most widespread among nations of the Middle East/Conflict Area, but the image of the superpower has also slipped among its closest allies. Its perceived unilateralism and the war in Iraq seem to be the key factors in the decline of the American image. There is a general consensus that the United States carries out its foreign politics without taking into account the interests of other nations (unilateralism). America's credibil-

ity has been further eroded by the war in Iraq: in 2005, at least half of the people living in the countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center declared they felt less confident about the United States' trustworthiness, as a consequence of the Iraq war. Global opinion polls also showed that large majorities of respondents in Muslim countries, as well as in France and Germany, believed the United States was carrying out the war against terrorism in order to control Middle East oil and to dominate the world.

Many recent analyses of the American image have underlined the ambivalent relation linking the United States to the rest of the world (e.g., Hertsgaard, 2002; Sardar & Wyn Davies, 2002). For both its enemies and allies, the United States is at the same time threat and seduction (Joffe, 2001): if the prosperity of the American way of life represents an attractive model, its military power is felt as intimidating (Hertsgaard, 2002).

As Glick et al. (2006) aptly observed, both weak and more extreme forms of anti-Americanism represent a threat to the United States: while intense hostility can lead to terrorist attacks, weaker forms of opposition from potential or actual allies can limit cooperation toward world security enhancement. In this vein, Glick and collaborators investigated the anti-American sentiments of college students living in 11 geographically and culturally different nations. Their work was inspired by two socio-psychological models of intergroup relations: the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; see also Cuddy et al., 2009; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), and image theory (see, e.g., Alexander, Brewer, & Livingston, 2005; Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995). According to the stereotype content model, relative socio-economic status and interdependence (cooperative vs. competitive) generate two basic stereotypic dimensions: competence and warmth. Among high-status groups, those that are perceived as cooperative will be evaluated as competent and warm, thus generating admiration and respect; in contrast, competitive high-status groups will be evaluated as competent but cold, engendering negative emotions, such as envy and jealousy.

According to image theory, three dimensions are crucial in the formation of outgroup stereotypes: 1. goal compatibility; 2. relative power, that is, perceived inequality in political power and economic and military resources; 3. relative status, that is, perceived difference in cultural sophistication. Powerful outgroups having incompatible goals can be perceived as arrogant imperialists or brutal barbarians, depending on whether their cultural status is higher or lower than the ingroup's status. Although image theory does not include a specific figure for more powerful outgroups with cooperative goals, research has shown that these groups are perceived as allies, when their cultural status is lower than the ingroup's status (Bilali, 2010; Capozza, Trifiletti, Vezzali, & Andrighetto, 2009; Trifiletti, Falvo, Dazzi, & Capozza, in press).

Instead of the favor ratings used by the Pew Research Center, Glick et al. (2006) investigated the stereotypic traits of the United States, as well as the emotions felt toward this country and its perceived intentions. Results showed that America was regarded as secure of its superiority, and more oriented toward the domination of other nations than the promotion of human rights. Consistent with the predictions of the stereotype content model, the United States was evaluated as competent but cold; moreover, high ratings on arrogance fitted the imperialist image proposed by image theory. Even though envy toward America was low, participants expressed similar levels of admiration and contempt, thus revealing their ambivalent attitudes. The perception of the United States as competent but not warm was also confirmed by results obtained by the Pew Research Center in 2005. Americans were described as hardworking and inventive by

the majority of respondents in the nine countries participating in the survey; they were described as greedy in seven countries, and violent in six.

In Italy, this ambivalent image of America has remained relatively stable, as shown by Volpato, Manganelli, Mucchi Faina, Canova, and Durante (2010). These investigators compared Italian participants' evaluations, measured by Glick et al. (2006) during Spring 2002 (namely, before the war in Iraq), with new data collected between 2003 and 2005 (after the invasion of Iraq). They found a similar pattern of attributions, with America being rated as more competent and arrogant than warm. After the invasion, there were only slight changes in perceptions: ratings were higher on arrogance and lower on competence, probably as a consequence of the protracted conflict.

### THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of the present study was to extend Glick et al.'s (2006) results by investigating the stereotypic perceptions of the United States at an implicit level. The study was carried out in Italy. As an implicit technique, we used the Go/No-go Association Task (GNAT; Nosek & Banaji, 2001), which, like the IAT (Implicit Association Test; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003), measures implicit evaluations by revealing the association between target categories (e.g., Whites/Blacks) and target attributes (e.g., good/bad). In the GNAT, participants are instructed to press the space bar (*go*) when a target item (signal) appears on the computer screen, and not to press any key (*no go*) when a distracter item (noise) appears. In one condition, target items are stimuli belonging to a target category (e.g., Whites) or a target attribute (e.g., good); distracter items are stimuli belonging to the contrasting category (Blacks) or the contrasting attribute (bad). In another condition, targets are the White and bad stimuli; distracters are the Black and good stimuli. Two conditions are also used for the other category (Blacks). Whether the target category is more strongly linked to good or bad stimuli is revealed by measuring the difference in response accuracy between the two conditions. The accuracy in discriminating the signal from the noise is expected to be higher when the two components of the signal (e.g., Whites and good) are strongly associated, compared to when they are weakly associated (e.g., Whites and bad). A sensitivity index ( $d'$ ), derived from signal detection theory (Green & Swets, 1966), is generally used to measure accuracy.<sup>2</sup>

In order to assess the implicit stereotypes of the United States, we used Americans and Italians as categories and competence and warmth as attributes. Our hypothesis is that Americans are more associated with competence than warmth. Moreover, given the lower international power assigned to the Italian ingroup (Capozza et al., 2009), Americans should be more associated than Italians with competence, and, given Americans', but not Italians', competitive goals, Americans should be less associated than Italians with warmth. In general, participants' automatic evaluations of Americans should reflect the stereotype of the United States, widespread in the Italian culture (for an application of GNAT in the field of intergroup relations, see Capozza, Andrighetto, Falvo, & Trifiletti, 2006).

Implicit attitudes and beliefs have been defined as introspectively unidentified traces of past experience (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). They may be the product of socialization or cultural knowledge (see, e.g., Banaji, 2001; Rudman, 2004; Rudman, Phelan, & Heppen, 2007); therefore, they may be largely shared within a given society, and not correlated with individual differ-

ence variables, such as levels of explicit prejudice. The idea that implicit representations may derive from cultural knowledge is supported by studies performed in the context of the dissociation model (Devine, 1989, 1995; see also Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Implicit negative associations concerning a target group can occur even in individuals who explicitly reject the negative stereotype (see also the dual process models of attitude, e.g. Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Strack & Deutsch, 2004).

To explore whether the implicit stereotypes of Americans are a reflection of a cultural stereotype, we considered some individual difference variables, in particular: social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), namely the desire for social inequalities; identification with the Italian ingroup (social identity theory; Tajfel, 1981), and political left-wing/right-wing orientation. Our expectation was that these variables, which generally affect intergroup relations, would be not correlated with the implicit warmth and competence stereotypes of Americans.

To our knowledge, this is the first time that, in the context of international relationships, the stereotypes of competence and warmth are measured at an implicit level (for other studies assessing the automatic stereotypes of competence and warmth, see Nunes, Judd, Kervyn, Smith, & Park, 2009).

## METHOD

### Participants

Ninety-three Italian psychology students (34 males, 59 females) at a large university in Northern Italy participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Mean age was 24.60 ( $SD = 6.06$ ). Data were collected at the beginning of 2007.

### Materials and Apparatus

We used 52 stimuli: they were person names and traits (see Appendix). Stimuli representing the two target groups were 14 Italian names (e.g., Marco, Anna) and 14 American names (e.g., Bill, Helen). Ten names were used in the experimental trials and four in the practice trials. As regards the two attributes, we used 12 competence traits (e.g., efficient, skilled) and 12 warmth traits (e.g., friendly, kind). Eight traits were used for the experimental trials and four for the practice trials. Competence and warmth traits were selected as typical exemplars of the respective category. Five independent judges were provided with a list of 30 traits and were instructed to sort them into three coding categories: competence, warmth, or neither competence nor warmth. We selected only those traits which were included in the competence or warmth category by all judges. This procedure resulted in the selection of 12 traits for competence and 12 traits for warmth. For both competence and warmth, two experimental traits were presented twice (see Appendix), so as to have 10 experimental trials for each of the two attributes. Stimuli representing the two groups and stimuli representing the two attributes were matched for length. Participants completed the GNAT on a Pentium 4/3 GHz, 512 MB RAM, with an Intel 82865G Graphics Controller. Presentation of stimuli and data collection were controlled by the Inquisit software package (Version 2.0, 2006).

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## Procedure

*The GNAT.* Participants were tested individually. The GNAT consisted of four blocks, presented in a randomized order. Each block included 56 trials. Participants completed 16 practice trials before the presentation of the 40 experimental trials. In the practice trials, the 16 practice stimuli were used (see Appendix). Two target labels were showed in the upper-left and upper-right quadrants of the screen as a reminder of the group and the attribute to be identified (e.g., American names and competence traits). The label and the stimuli were presented in blue type for the group and white type for the attribute. Stimuli appeared in a random order in the center of the screen. Participants were asked to hit the space bar (*go*) as quickly as possible for items representing the target group or the target attribute, and to do nothing (*no go*) for the distracter items, representing the contrast group or the contrast attribute. The response deadline was 800 ms. A subsequent trial started after the answer or when the deadline was reached. A 400 ms interstimulus interval (ISI) was used (see Blair, Ma, & Lenton, 2001). During the ISI, feedback about performance accuracy was provided. A correct response, namely a *hit* (pressing the space bar for a target item) or a *correct rejection* (not pressing the space bar for a distracter item), was followed by a green “O”; an error — namely a *false alarm* (pressing the space bar for a distracter item) or a *miss* (not pressing it for a target item) — was followed by a red “X.” These feedback letters remained on the screen for 200 ms.

The targets in the four experimental blocks were: Italian names + competence traits; Italian names + warmth traits; American names + competence traits; American names + warmth traits. Before the experimental blocks, participants completed four practice blocks, discriminating Italian from American names and competence from warmth traits. In the practice blocks a longer deadline was used (1000 ms).

*Explicit measures.* After the GNAT, participants completed a questionnaire measuring individual difference variables. Social dominance orientation was assessed using an Italian adaptation of the SDO<sub>6</sub> scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; for the Italian adaptation, see Aiello, Chirumbolo, Leone, & Pratto, 2005). Sample items are: “Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups”; “It would be good if groups could be equal” (reverse-coded). We used a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* with higher scores indicating a stronger desire for group-based inequality ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Items were averaged to form a single measure of social dominance orientation. Identification with the Italian ingroup was measured with 11 items from the scale by Capozza, Brown, Aharpour, and Falvo (2006, Study 1). Sample items are: “I positively evaluate the fact of being Italian”; “I have the typical qualities of Italians.” On the 7-point scale, ranging from *definitely false* to *definitely true*, the higher the score the stronger the identification ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Items were averaged to form a single measure of identification with the Italian ingroup. Finally, political orientation was assessed by self-placement on a scale ranging from 1 (*very close to the left*) to 11 (*very close to the right*).

## RESULTS

For each experimental block, the sensitivity index ( $d'$ ) was computed, following the algorithm proposed by Green and Swets (1966; see also Banaji & Greenwald, 1995). After transforming the proportion of hits and the proportion of false alarms in  $z$ -scores, the difference between

the two  $z$ -scores was computed. Higher  $d$ 's indicate greater accuracy in discriminating target items (e.g., Americans + competence) from distracter items (e.g., Italians + warmth) and, thus, greater sensitivity to the target pairing.  $D$ -prime values of 0 or below indicate that respondents were unable to discriminate the signal from the noise or did not perform the task according to instructions (Nosek & Banaji, 2001).

One participant was removed from analyses for excessive errors on one of the four blocks ( $d' < 0$ ). Sensitivity measures were submitted to a 2 (target group: Italian vs. American names)  $\times$  2 (attribute: competence vs. warmth) repeated measures ANOVA. This analysis revealed a main effect for attribute,  $F(1, 91) = 23.30, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .20$ . Participants were more accurate when the attribute was a competence ( $M = 2.59, SD = 0.72$ ) than a warmth trait ( $M = 2.30, SD = 0.71$ ). This effect was qualified by a significant Target Group  $\times$  Attribute interaction,  $F(1, 91) = 38.37, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .30$ . Consistent with predictions, Americans were more associated with competence ( $M = 2.80, SD = 0.88$ ) than warmth traits ( $M = 2.07, SD = 0.84$ ),  $t(91) = 7.50, p < .001, d = 0.79$  (see Table 1). Moreover, competence was more associated with Americans than Italians ( $M = 2.38, SD = 0.90$ ),  $t(91) = 3.89, p < .001, d = 0.41$ , while warmth was more associated with Italians than Americans (for Italians:  $M = 2.52, SD = 0.80$ ),  $t(91) = 5.31, p < .001, d = 0.56$ .

TABLE 1  
 Mean scores for the sensitivity measure ( $d'$ )

Attribute	Target Group	
	Italian names	American names
Competence	2.38 <sub>a</sub> (0.90)	2.80 <sub>b</sub> (0.88)
Warmth	2.52 <sub>a</sub> (0.80)	2.07 <sub>c</sub> (0.84)

*Note.* Larger  $d'$  values indicate greater sensitivity to the target pairing. A different subscript, in the same row or column, indicates that the two means are significantly different,  $p < .001$ . Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

In order to test whether the implicit stereotype of Americans was correlated with the individual difference variables, we computed the following implicit measures: the difference between the  $d'$  relative to the Americans + competence block and the  $d'$  relative to the Americans + warmth block ( $I_1$ ); the difference between the  $d'$  relative to the Americans + competence block and the  $d'$  relative to the Italians + competence block ( $I_2$ ); the difference between the  $d'$  relative to the Italians + warmth block and the  $d'$  relative to the Americans + warmth block ( $I_3$ ). We also calculated  $I_4$ , namely the difference between the  $d'$  relative to the Italians + warmth block and the  $d'$  relative to the Italians + competence block. Correlations were computed between these measures and social dominance orientation, ingroup identification, political trends (see Table 2). As expected, all correlations between implicit stereotypes and individual difference variables were nonsignificant.

## DISCUSSION

The main goal of the current investigation was to extend the results obtained by Glick et al. (2006), considering the implicit stereotypes of competence and warmth. These authors, by ex-

TABLE 2  
Correlations between implicit stereotypes and individual difference variables

	I <sub>1</sub>	I <sub>2</sub>	I <sub>3</sub>	I <sub>4</sub>	SDO	Identification	Political orientation
I <sub>1</sub>	–						
I <sub>2</sub>	.59***	–					
I <sub>3</sub>	.53***	.04	–				
I <sub>4</sub>	.14	.61***	.44***	–			
SDO	.09	–.02	.12	.00	–		
Identification	–.02	–.11	.14	.01	.33**	–	
Political orientation	.00	.03	.04	.07	.52***	.32**	–

*Note.* The four indices are differences between d's relative to the following blocks: I<sub>1</sub> = Americans + competence – Americans + warmth; I<sub>2</sub> = Americans + competence – Italians + competence; I<sub>3</sub> = Italians + warmth – Americans + warmth; I<sub>4</sub> = Italians + warmth – Italians + competence. For the individual difference variables, the higher the score, the stronger the SDO (social dominance orientation) and identification with the Italian ingroup. For political orientation, the higher the score, the stronger the endorsement of right-wing positions.

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

aming the content of the American image in 11 geographically and culturally different nations, found that the United States was generally rated as more competent (and arrogant) than warm. In the present study, participants completed a Go/No-go task, in which the two groups, Italians and Americans, were the contrasting categories, and the two stereotypic dimensions, competence and warmth, were the contrasting attributes. Since competence-more-than-warmth stereotype of Americans is deeply set in the Italian society (see Glick et al., 2006; Volpato et al., 2010), on the basis of studies by Devine (1989, 1995) and Rudman and collaborators (Rudman, Feinberg, & Fairchild, 2002), we expected these attributions, culturally learnt, to be reflected in the automatic responding of participants. Also, we predicted that Americans would be associated more than Italians with competence and less associated than Italians with warmth. Findings supported our hypotheses and the idea that the two automatic stereotypes spring from knowledge of America's cultural stereotype. In fact, they were uncorrelated with relevant individual difference variables, such as SDO, national identification, and political orientation, which can in some way affect explicit evaluations when individuals report their personal views.

As regards the Italian ingroup, we found it was equally associated with competence- and warmth-related words. This result is consistent with findings from SCM studies which show that ingroups are usually perceived both as competent and warm (see, e.g., Fiske et al., 2002).

We believe our findings have important implications for international relations. In SCM research (see the studies on the BIAS map; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), it has been found that envied groups — stereotyped as competent but cold — elicit ambivalent behavioral reactions. Specifically, these groups tend to be the target of passive facilitation (e.g., cooperate with, associate with) and active harm (e.g., fight, attack) behaviors. Whether passive facilitation or active harm is activated may depend on which stereotypic dimension — high competence or low

warmth — is made salient by the situational cues. Situational contexts enhancing the perception of low warmth should increase behaviors of active hostility against the outgroup, while situational contexts making outgroup's competence more salient should promote cooperation. Given that the United States is perceived as more competent than warm at the explicit as well as implicit level, we can reasonably expect that explicit and implicit beliefs would activate consistent behavioral patterns, which can be different according to context. Indeed, Italians on some occasions wish to cooperate with Americans, in others hold out against them, especially when American policies seem to work against Italian interests and wellbeing (see, e.g., the opposition to the expansion of a U.S. military base, organized by residents of a Northern Italy town). It would be interesting, in future studies, to examine the independent contribution of implicit and explicit beliefs in explaining facilitation and harm behaviors (for the independent behavioral effects of implicit and explicit attitudes and beliefs, see Friese, Hofmann, & Wänke, 2008; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009).

The study by Glick et al. (2006) showed that the Italian sample rated Americans as much competent as arrogant. Future studies should measure the implicit stereotype of arrogance in order to reveal if it is associated to the United States and whether promotes overt behaviors of active harm.

Our conclusions are limited to the sample examined. Like in the study by Glick et al. (2006), our sample is not representative of the Italian population. However, as Glick and colleagues aptly observed, university students represent the future élites and opinion leaders of their nation; it is, thus, significant to examine their attitudes and beliefs when studying national stereotypes. Future research should consider samples of different nations in order to evaluate to what extent the implicit stereotype of Americans is shared across nations.

#### NOTES

1. The Pew Global Attitudes Project is a series of international public opinion surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, including a broad range of topics, such as attitudes toward the United States and its policies, terrorism, and globalization.
2. Response latencies can also be used in data analysis (see Nosek & Banaji, 2001, Experiment 5).

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APPENDIX  
Stimulus Words Used in the GNAT

*Ingroup names.* Stimuli used in the experimental trials: Andrea (m), Anna (f), Chiara (f), Elena (f), Giulia (f), Luca (m), Marco (m), Matteo (m), Paola (f), Simone (m). Stimuli used in the practice trials: Angela (f), Daniele (m), Federico (m), Silvia (f).

*Outgroup names.* Stimuli used in the experimental trials: Abbie, Billy, Bradley, Dolly, Helen, John, Kevin, Nancy, Rodger, Sally. Stimuli used in the practice trials: Harriet, Jennifer, Michael, Timothy.

*Competence attribute.* Stimuli used in the experimental trials: Abile (Able), Capace (Skilled), Competente (Competent, 2), Efficace (Effective), Efficiente (Efficient, 2), Esperto (Expert), Preparato (Qualified), Professionale (Professional). Stimuli used in the practice trials: Bravo (Capable), Ingegnoso (Ingenious), Realizzatore (Achiever), Valente (Skilful).

*Warmth attribute.* Stimuli used in the experimental trials: Affettuoso (Affectionate, 2), Amichevole (Friendly), Caloroso (Warm, 2), Cordiale (Sociable), Cortese (Courteous), Disponibile (Helpful), Generoso (Generous), Gentile (Kind). Stimuli used in the practice trials: Affabile (Affable), Estroverso (Extroverted), Ospitale (Hospitable), Sensibile (Sensitive).

*Note.* The number 2 in parentheses indicates that the stimulus was presented twice; f = female Italian name; m = male Italian name.

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