

Status and Cooperation Shape Lesbian Stereotypes

Testing Predictions from the Stereotype Content Model

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Abstract. Research on perceptions of homosexuals implicitly assumes that individuals think about lesbians as an undifferentiated group. By contrast, this paper investigated the stereotypes of the overall category as well as of different subgroups of lesbians within the frame of the stereotype content model (SCM). Participants ($N = 70$) rated the overall category and four subgroups on perceived warmth, competence, status, and interdependence (cooperative vs. competitive). Results showed that the overall category landed in the middle of the competence-warmth space, while the subgroups spread across the SCM dimensions. Moreover, perceived status and cooperation predicted competence and warmth stereotypes, respectively. Perceived competition failed to predict warmth stereotypes. The importance of these findings for lesbian stereotyping and for the SCM is discussed.

Keywords: stereotype content model, lesbians, subgrouping

Despite advances in civil rights during the last half of the 20th century, prejudice toward gay men and lesbians appears to be firmly entrenched throughout both the United States and Europe (Herek, 2000; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007; for a review, see Herek, 2007; see also Eurobarometer, 2008). Since the 1970s social scientists have studied antihomosexual prejudice in general and its cognitive component in particular (i.e., stereotypes, see Hegarty & Massey, 2007). Surprisingly, even though both lesbians and gay men encounter substantial obstacles in their everyday life (Herek, 2000, 2007), research on stereotypes of homosexuals has focused almost exclusively on gay men (e.g., Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006; Jackson & Sullivan, 1989; Madon, 1997; Morrison & Bearden, 2007). As a consequence, research on stereotypes of lesbians is somewhat limited (for a review, see Lee & Crawford, 2007). However, studies report converging results on the way people stereotype lesbians (e.g., Dew, 1985; Page & Yee, 1985; Taylor, 1983; Unger, Hilderbrand, & Madar, 1982). According to gender inversion theory (Kite & Deaux, 1987), homosexual women are viewed as not very feminine, lacking in maternal instincts, and displaying typically male behaviors and habits.

Unfortunately, to date researchers have focused mainly on the representation of the “typical lesbian” and have failed to analyze heterosexuals’ stereotypes of a diverse range of lesbians. In doing so, researchers have implicitly assumed that heterosexuals think about lesbians as an undifferentiated group. However, research on social cognition

has repeatedly shown that perceivers process group-related information at multiple levels, ranging from the broader (i.e., overall category) to more specific (i.e., subgroups) levels (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Eckes, 1994; Park, Ryan, & Judd, 1992; Richards & Hewstone, 2001). Indeed, stereotypes ascribed to the overall category might be distinct to those ascribed to the nested subgroups (Brewer et al., 1981; Richards & Hewstone, 2001). For instance, perceivers may hold a global image of gay men and several differentiated representations of specific gay subgroups, such as straight-acting or feminine gay men (e.g., Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006; Maurer, Park, & Rothbart, 1995). Considering lesbians more specifically, research has typically referred to such a group as a subgroup of the broader categories of women or of homosexuals. Indeed, in the extensive work on ambivalent sexism, lesbians are viewed as more competent and less socially warm than other subgroups of women (e.g., housewives, see Glick & Fiske, 2001a,b). In a similar vein, lesbians as a subgroup of the general category of homosexuals are perceived as more masculine than gay men (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Taylor, 1983).

Recently, work by Geiger, Harwood, and Hummert (2006) showed that perceivers hold a more complex representation of lesbians, at least in the US context. Indeed, individuals viewed lesbians as a superordinate category comprising seven subgroups distinguished on the basis of their valence. Hence, physically attractive lesbians (i.e., feminine lesbians; see also Louderback & Whitley, 1997)

and those who are proud of their sexual orientation (i.e., feminist and free-spirit lesbians) were viewed more positively than those who are physically unattractive (i.e., butch lesbians) or sexually confused (sexually deviant, confused, and hypersexual lesbians).

On the basis of these findings, we further explored the complexity and variability in the stereotypes of lesbians. Moreover, extending prior research we further aimed to identify the dimensions that could account for the stereotype contents of lesbians. Indeed, the work of Geiger et al. (2006) provides evidence for a complex cognitive representation of lesbians as a group. A key remaining point – and the focus of the present research – regards the predictors of the multiple stereotypes ascribed to lesbians. Thus, in the present paper we investigated the social dimensions that could promote and maintain a specific representation of lesbians, both as an overall category and as a group defined by distinct subgroups. To achieve this goal, we recast the present investigation within the frame of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

Such an issue seems particularly relevant in order to change prejudicial attitudes toward homosexuals in general and toward lesbians in particular. As a matter of fact, it has been argued that the extent to which social psychologists can contribute to changing prejudicial attitudes depends, in part, upon the ability to understand the dimensions underlying the cognitive representations of social groups (see Glick & Fiske, 2001b).

Stereotype Content Model (SCM) and Homosexuality

Most research on stereotyping has focused on the processes involved in activating and applying stereotypes (for reviews see Fiske & Taylor, 2008; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Recently, research (e.g., Alexander, Brewer, & Hermann, 1999; Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999; Fiske et al., 2002; Phalet & Poppe, 1997; Poppe & Linssen, 1999) has begun to look at the content of stereotypes as well as to the crucial dimensions that might explain such contents. One of the most promising approaches in this domain is the SCM (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske, et al., 2002). According to this model, warmth (e.g., sincerity, friendliness) and competence (e.g., ability, efficacy) are two basic dimensions that capture the stereotypes of social groups. In addition, two social-structural parameters, namely the relative status of groups and the nature of intergroup interdependence (cooperative or competitive), jointly determine the content of stereotypes (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2002). Relative status determines perceptions of a group's competence, such that high-status groups are viewed as competent, and low-status groups are viewed as incompetent. Furthermore, interdependence determines perceptions

of a group's warmth, such that cooperative or nonthreatening groups are perceived as warm and nice, and competitive and threatening groups are viewed as cold and distant.

Studies on the SCM and homosexuals have shown that the overall category of gay men is perceived as moderately and equally warm and competent (i.e., gay men fall in the center of the warmth \times competence space) (Fiske et al., 2002). These findings are likely due to a conflict between different stereotypical representations toward different subgroups of gay men that cancelled each other out, resulting in an overall neutral perception (Clausell & Fiske, 2005).

Studies on lesbians, on the other hand, have shown that the overall category is viewed as competent, but not warm (Fiske et al., 2002; see also Glick & Fiske, 2001a,b) due to the perceived similarity with heterosexual men.

Unfortunately, and differently from the studies on gay men, no prior study compared the stereotype contents of the overall category of lesbians to those of different subgroups of lesbians. Notably, previous research within the frame of the SCM showed that the assessment of the stereotype content only at global level fails to capture the complex representation of social groups. This seems to occur both when the superordinate category fell in the middle of the SCM space (Clausell & Fiske, 2005) and when the superordinate category was clearly rated. Indeed, past research showed that subgroups of immigrants (Lee & Fiske, 2006), and that subgroups of men and women (Eckes, 2002) were rated differently on warmth and competence compared to their respective superordinate categories (i.e., immigrants, typical man, and typical woman), which were rated as neither competent nor warm (immigrants), competent and not warm (typical man), and warm but not competent (typical woman).

Moreover, SCM studies have failed to explore the role of social-structural parameters in accounting for the stereotype contents of lesbians. Therefore, no prior research has defined whether the perceived warmth and competence of lesbians could be predicted by perceived status and interdependence, respectively.

Based on these findings, the current research aimed to (1) clarify the stereotype contents of lesbians in terms of warmth and competence, considering lesbians to be a group made up of different subgroups; (2) identify the dimensions that could promote such stereotypes. This latter point seems crucial for two distinct, albeit related, reasons. First, Clausell and Fiske (2005) showed that perceived status predicted the attribution of competence to different subgroups of gay men, while perceived interdependence did not predict the attribution of warmth. Therefore, although intergroup interdependence successfully predicts warmth in most of the SCM studies (Cuddy et al., 2008), it does not predict the perception of warmth for gay men. Moreover, given that the role of social-structural parameters in accounting for the stereotype contents of lesbians was not addressed, the pertinence of such structural parameters in

explaining the stereotype contents of homosexuals is still unclear.

Second, we suspected that the relationship between perceived interdependence and warmth was not consistent for gay men, stemming from the fact that the interdependence variable focused mainly on perceived economic competition between heterosexuals and gay men. Notably, past research suggested that gay men and lesbians are often stereotyped as threatening both important social values and social health (e.g., via a perceived association with HIV/AIDS and amoral behaviors; see Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Cottrell, Richards, & Nichols, 2010; Herek, 2000; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006; Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). By contrast, economic competition seems, at least in part, to be irrelevant in shaping homosexual-heterosexual intergroup perception and behaviors. On the basis of these findings, we argued that the perceived warmth of gay men and lesbians may be better predicted by a broader measure of interdependence defining the perception of either competition or cooperation between homosexuals and heterosexuals, without a specific focus on economic matters.

To achieve this aim, the present study included a new measure of intergroup interdependence developed by Eckes (2002). Most of the studies on SCM typically assessed group interdependence by means of a scale that measures the perceived competition between groups, without assessing the perceived positive interdependence between groups (see Cuddy et al., 2008). Eckes (2002), on the other hand, proposed an alternative scale that addresses the mutual intergroup cooperation. Notably, this scale does not restrict the notion of interdependence to economic issues, but rather measures the general perception of a fair “give and take” as well as the perception of a cooperative relationship between groups. The present study tested the concurrent validity of this alternative structural parameter of intergroup relations in defining the stereotype-related contents of lesbians as a target group.

The Study

The present study examines the stereotype contents of the superordinate category of lesbians as well as those of different subgroups within the framework of the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002). Drawing upon the SCM, we advance two alternative hypotheses regarding the overall category. According to North American studies (Fiske et al., 2002; Glick & Fiske, 2001a, 2001b), one would expect that lesbians – as a superordinate category – are perceived as competent but not warm (Hypothesis 1a). Alternatively, considering that the media have contributed to define a more complex representation of lesbians as an outgroup (Geiger et al., 2006), and in line with previous studies on gay men (Clausell & Fiske, 2005), one could argue that different and conflicting subgroup representa-

tions result in a neutral perception of the group as a whole (Hypothesis 1b).

Moreover, considering that subgroups can be rated differently on warmth and competence dimensions regardless of the fact that the superordinate category appears neutral (Clausell & Fiske, 2005) or not on the SCM dimensions (Eckes, 2002; Lee & Fiske, 2006), we expected lesbian subgroups to be differentiated across the competence \times warmth space (Hypothesis 2).

In line with the assumptions outlined by the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) and assuming that the homosexual-heterosexual intergroup relationship is less likely to be shaped by economic competition (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Cottrell et al., 2010; Herek, 2000; Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2009), we further predicted that perceived status should positively correlate with competence (Hypothesis 3); and that perceived cooperation – but not necessarily perceived competition – should positively correlate with warmth (Hypothesis 4).

To test these hypotheses, we set up a two-step study: First, a pilot study was conducted to define which subgroups were comprised in the overall category “lesbians.” Second, in the main study we assessed the representation of lesbians as a whole and of the different subgroups in terms of the warmth and competence dimensions. Participants’ perception of the heterosexual-lesbian intergroup relationship was also assessed on relative status, competition, and cooperation.

Pilot Study: Selecting Lesbian Subgroups

Method

Participants

Thirty-two Italian undergraduates (16 men, 16 women) from a large university in Italy voluntarily completed the questionnaire. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 years ($M = 20.8$; $SD = 1.90$). All participants were heterosexual.

Questionnaire and Procedure

Participants were contacted by the experimenter and told that we were interested in the way people perceive different social groups. Following the instructions outlined by Fiske et al. (2002), respondents were asked to list the main subgroups of lesbians that came to mind and to provide what they believed to be the most salient traits of each subgroup. Participants were further reminded that there were neither right nor wrong answers.

Since a limited number of possible entries could function as a potential cues in indicating the expected number

of subgroups, participants provided their answers on a blank page. A list of basic demographic questions followed on the back side of the paper, namely age, sexual orientation, and nationality.

Results and Discussion

Five lesbian subgroups were identified: butch lesbians (mentioned by 75% of participants), feminine lesbians (40%), closeted lesbians (28%), outed lesbians (25%), and bisexual lesbians (5%). Following the guidelines from previous research on SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) we considered only those subgroups mentioned by at least 15% of the respondents. Therefore, only the first four subgroups were considered (see Appendix A for the most salient traits of each subgroup). While the first two subgroups involved gender role conformity, the last two subgroups concerned the social visibility of sexual orientation. These findings are consistent with those obtained by Geiger et al. (2006), which identified seven distinct subgroups of lesbians in a US sample. In both studies feminine lesbians were distinguished from butch lesbians. In the work of Geiger et al. (2006), moreover, feminist and confused lesbians were described in a similar fashion to the closeted and outed lesbian subgroups that emerged in our study. The participants in our study, however, did not name three of the subgroups identified by Geiger et al. (2006), namely, free spirit lesbians, hypersexual lesbians, and sexually deviant lesbians.

At least two distinct, albeit related, reasons could account for these divergent findings. First, in our study, participants all claimed to be heterosexual, while Geiger et al. (2006) did not record participants' sexual orientation. It is worth noting that ingroup (homosexual) and outgroup perspective (heterosexuals) on the same target (lesbians) can be dramatically different (Wilkinson, 2006). Ingroup members, in fact, tend to have a more differentiated representation of their group than do outgroup members (Park & Rothbart, 1982). Therefore, the potential inclusion of homosexual participants in Geiger et al.'s study (2006) may have contributed to the identification of a larger number of subgroups. Second, since our study was conducted in Italy, while Geiger et al.'s study (2006) was undertaken in the United States, one may argue that these findings could be due to the different representations of the lesbian outgroup in the respective national contexts. Although some imported American TV shows (e.g., *Ellen*, *The L World*, and *Will & Grace*) have contributed to differentiating the representation of the gay and lesbian community in Italy, the strong endorsement of the Catholic culture, traditionally an antagonist to gay men and lesbians, may have contributed to reducing the visibility of the homosexual community in Italy in comparison to other European countries and to the United States (Lingiardi, Falanga, & D'Au-

gelli, 2005). Such a difference could account for a less differentiated representation of the lesbian outgroup in Italy as opposed to the United States.

Based on the results of this pilot study, in the main study participants were asked to rate the overall category of lesbians, as well as the four identified subgroups on the crucial dimensions of the SCM.

Main Study: Attribution of Warmth and Competence

Method

Participants

A total of 70 (33 male, 37 female) Italian undergraduates from a large university in Italy voluntarily took part to the study. Their age ranged from 18 to 38 years ($M = 21.99$, $SD = 3.18$). All participants defined themselves as heterosexual. Thereof, 30 (14 men, 16 women) provided their answers with respect to lesbians as a superordinate category and the remaining 40 (19 men, 21 women) assessed each subgroup outlined in the pilot study¹. The presentation of the subgroups was counterbalanced across participants.

Questionnaire and Procedure

Depending on the experimental condition, participants rated either the superordinate category or the subgroups on competence ($\alpha = .79$) and warmth ($\alpha = .75$) as well as on the status ($\alpha = .75$) and competition ($\alpha = .73$) scales (Fiske et al., 2002). Moreover, participants rated either the superordinate category or the subgroups on the cooperation ($\alpha = .70$) scale (Eckes, 2002), (for all measures see Appendix B). Participants provided their answers on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Following the instructions outlined by previous studies on the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), participants were informed that we were not interested in their personal beliefs, but in how they thought people in general viewed each group. These instructions were intended to reduce social desirability concerns and to tap perceived cultural stereotypes. Although the study aimed to assess cultural stereotypes, it has been shown that reported cultural stereotypes are often highly positively correlated with personal stereotypes (Gordijn, Koomen, & Stapel, 2001; see also Fiske & Cuddy, 2006). In a similar vein, Crandall, Eshleman, and O'Brien (2002) showed that the extent to which a discriminative behavior toward an outgroup was judged to be consensually accept-

¹ The subgroups identified in the pilot study are not mutually exclusive, since feminine lesbians and butch lesbians can of course be outed or closeted. However, in line with the Clausell and Fiske (2005) study on subgroups of gay men, in our study lesbian subgroups are treated as though mutually exclusive.

ed within the ingroup, it strongly predicted perceivers' attitudes toward that group.

Results

Perceived Warmth and Competence of the Superordinate Category

In order to investigate the stereotypical contents of the superordinate category, we performed a paired *t*-test on warmth and competence ratings. The results showed that perceived warmth ($M = 3.00$; $SD = .60$) did not significantly differ from perceived competence ($M = 3.15$; $SD = .78$); $t(29) = -1.4$, $p = .173$, $r = .25$. Moreover, a one sample *t*-test (test value = 3, the scale midpoint) revealed that perceived warmth and competence means did not differ significantly from the scale's midpoint: warmth $t(29) = 0$, $p = 1$, $r = 0$; competence $t(29) = 1.09$, $p = .286$, $r = .20$. Therefore, in line with previous studies on gay men (Clausell & Fiske, 2005), the superordinate category of lesbians landed in the middle of the competence-warmth space.

Further, we conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis on warmth and competence scores of the superordinate category. The results showed a three-cluster solution. Warmth and competence ratings within clusters were compared by means of a series of paired *t*-tests, while warmth and competence ratings between clusters were compared by ANOVAs. Results confirmed the three-cluster solution (see Table 1 for the means of warmth and competence of each cluster). Findings showed that respondents evaluated the overall category of lesbians differently. Specifically, $N = 13$ participants evaluated the superordinate category as more competent than warm, $N = 9$ participants rated the same target as equally competent and warm, and the remaining $N = 8$ participants rated the overall category as neither competent nor warm.

Table 1. Competence and warmth means for each cluster (superordinate category)

Cluster	Stereotype dimension	
	Warmth	Competence
Cluster 1	3.78a	= 3.94a
Cluster 2	2.94b	< 3.32a
Cluster 3	2.41b	= 2.38b

Note. Within each row means differ if > or < is indicated ($p < .001$). Within each column means not sharing a subscript differ significantly from one another ($p < .001$).

Perceived Warmth and Competence of the Lesbian Subgroups

To examine the stereotypical contents of the four subgroups, we performed a 4 (Target: feminine, butch, outed and closeted lesbians) \times 2 (Stereotype dimension: warmth vs. competence) repeated-measures ANOVA on partici-

pants ratings, with all the variables as within-subjects factors. The analysis did not yield a main effect of the stereotype dimension $F(1, 38) = 2.40$, $p = .130$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. The ANOVA revealed a main effect of target $F(3, 38) = 17.39$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$, which was qualified by an interaction with the stereotype dimension $F(3, 38) = 16.56$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. Between target comparisons on the warmth dimension revealed that participants rated feminine lesbians as warmer ($M = 3.31$; $SD = .78$) than butch lesbians ($M = 2.55$; $SD = .64$), $p = .001$, and than closeted lesbians ($M = 2.69$; $SD = .80$), $p = .001$. Feminine lesbians were perceived to be as warm as outed lesbians ($M = 3.25$; $SD = .70$), $p = .220$. Butch lesbians were viewed as less warm than outed lesbians, $p = .001$, and as warm as closeted lesbians, $p = .220$. Finally, outed lesbians were perceived to be warmer than closeted lesbians, $p = .001$. In sum, feminine and outed lesbians were perceived to be warmer than closeted and butch lesbians.

Considering competence ratings, feminine lesbians were rated as equally competent ($M = 3.14$; $SD = .67$) as butch lesbians ($M = 3.25$; $SD = .74$), $p = .267$ and outed lesbians ($M = 3.21$; $SD = .78$) $p = .556$. However, feminine lesbians were perceived to be more competent than closeted lesbians ($M = 2.73$; $SD = .60$), $p = .001$. Butch lesbians were rated as competent as outed lesbians, $p = .633$ and more competent than closeted lesbians, $p = .001$. Finally, outed lesbians were rated as more competent than closeted lesbians, $p = .001$. In sum, closeted lesbians were perceived as being less competent than feminine, outed, and butch lesbians.

Within-target comparisons showed that feminine lesbians were rated as warm ($M = 3.31$; $SD = .78$) as competent ($M = 3.14$; $SD = .67$), $p = .186$. Butch lesbians, however, were rated as being less warm ($M = 2.55$; $SD = .64$) than competent ($M = 3.25$; $SD = .74$), $p = .001$. Outed lesbians were rated as warm ($M = 3.25$; $SD = .70$) as competent ($M = 3.21$; $SD = .78$), $p = .726$. Finally, closeted lesbians were rated as warm ($M = 2.69$; $SD = .80$) as competent ($M = 2.73$; $SD = .70$), $p = .647$ (see Table 2 for the means of warmth and competence ratings for each target). In sum, consistently with Hypothesis 2, we found that lesbian subgroups spread across the SCM space. More specifically, feminine and outed lesbians were perceived as being equally warm and competent, while

Table 2. Competence and warmth means for lesbian subgroups

Subgroup	Stereotype dimension	
	Warmth	Competence
Feminine lesbians	3.31a	= 3.14a
Butch lesbians	2.55b	< 3.25a
Outed lesbians	3.25a	= 3.21a
Closeted lesbians	2.69b	= 2.73b

Note. Within each row means differ if > or < is indicated ($p < .001$). Within each column means not sharing a subscript differ significantly from one another ($p < .001$).



Figure 1. Lesbian subgroups in the warmth \times competence space.

butch lesbians were perceived as more competent than warm. Finally, closeted lesbians were perceived as neither competent nor warm. Looking at competence judgments, closeted lesbians were perceived to be less competent than feminine, outed, and butch lesbians. In terms of judgments of warmth, feminine and outed lesbians were perceived as being warmer than both butch and closeted lesbians (see Figure 1).

Correlations of Social-Structural Scales with Warmth and Competence

To define the relationship between stereotype dimensions (i.e., perceived competence and warmth) and social-structural scales (i.e., perceived status, competition, and cooperation) we calculated bivariate correlations between such dimensions. Regarding the superordinate category, results showed that perceived status did not correlate significantly with the attribution of competence ($r = .11, p = .559$). Moreover, neither perceived competition ($r = -.22, p = .248$) nor cooperation ($r = .10, p = .521$) correlated significantly with the attribution of warmth.

Regarding the subgroups, in line with Hypothesis 3, perceived status positively correlated with competence stereotypes. Perceived cooperation positively correlated with warmth stereotypes but perceived competition did not correlate with warmth, confirming Hypothesis 4 (see Table 3). All other correlations were not significant (all $p > .148$).

Table 3. Correlations between social-structural scales and stereotype dimensions

Predictors	Stereotype dimension	
	Competence	Warmth
Status	.59*	.05
Competition	.06	-.19
Cooperation	.24	.65*

Notes. * $p < .001$. All other $p > .148$.

General Discussion

The present research analyzed the social perception both of lesbians as a whole and of different subgroups within the theoretical perspective of the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002). In line with Hypothesis 1b, results indicated that the superordinate category of lesbians fell in the center of the warmth \times competence space. Therefore, lesbians as a whole were perceived as moderately and equally warm and competent. Furthermore, and in line with Hypothesis 2, individuals identified four distinct subgroups of lesbians, which were perceived differently from each other in terms of warmth and competence. Specifically, feminine and outed lesbians were viewed as warm and competent while butch lesbians were perceived as more competent than warm. Finally, closeted lesbians were viewed as neither competent nor warm. These findings provide support to the idea that heterosexuals do not think about lesbians monolithically, but rather seem to have differentiated representations of distinctive subgroups. With few exceptions (Geiger et al., 2006), empirical efforts on lesbian stereotyping explored only the stereotypes of the overall category. The current research, however, demonstrates that heterosexuals ascribe different stereotypes to distinct lesbian subgroups.

Notably, the four subgroups identified in the pilot study overlapped substantially with those emerging from the cluster analysis on the overall category. We might assume that feminine and outed lesbians define the first cluster, while butch and closeted lesbians define the second and the third cluster, respectively. Given this state of affairs, one might further argue that the pattern of results obtained for the overall category (i.e., lesbians landed in the middle of warmth-competence matrix) could be due to the conflicting stereotypical representations of different subgroups. Indeed, it is possible that different participants were thinking of different subgroups at varying frequencies when they rated the overall category. This interpretation largely mirrors Clausell and Fiske's (2005) claim to explain the puzzling neutrality of the overall gay male stereotypes on warmth and competence matrix.

However, three of the four subgroups were judged to be more competent than warm, whereas participants rated the overall category as moderately and equally warm and competent. This apparent discrepancy is in line with empirical evidence attesting that subgroups could be characterized by features that were not encompassed by the representation of the overall category. As a case in point, Kunda, Miller, and Claire (1990) clearly showed that participants described a subgroup (e.g., a Harvard student carpenter) by features that were not presented in the self-report descriptions of the two broader categories (e.g., Harvard student and carpenter). Moreover, research on stereotype change confirms the idea that the representation of the general category could not be a simple average of the representations of the subgroups (Brewer et al., 1981; Carnaghi & Yzerbyt, 2007; Kunda & Oleson, 1995, 1997; Rothbart & John,

1985; Yzerbyt, Coull, & Rocher, 1999). Indeed, these studies showed that features that were at odds with the representation of the superordinate category were isolated into subgroups. Therefore, the subordinate level of categorization may encompass distinct, and sometimes contradicting characteristics with respect to the category as a whole.

Looking at the predictors of the stereotypical contents, the findings on the superordinate category diverged from those on the subgroups. For the superordinate category, perceived status did not significantly predict the warmth stereotypes. Moreover, neither perceived competition nor cooperation reliably predicted the attribution of warmth. Such findings are likely to be due to the specific location of the superordinate category of lesbians in the SCM space. Since lesbians as a whole appeared neutral in the warmth \times competence space, the sociostructural variables could not account for such undifferentiated representation.

Considering the four subgroups, in line with Hypothesis 3, perceived status predicted competence stereotypes. Moreover, in line with Hypothesis 4, participants' ascription of the warmth-related traits to the subgroups was significantly predicted by participants' perception of the intergroup cooperation but not by perceived intergroup competition. These results replicate, albeit with a different target group, Clausell and Fiske's (2005) findings on gay men, demonstrating that competition is not a valuable predictor of perceived warmth for groups defined by sexual orientation. We argued that the failure of the competition variable in predicting the perceivers' ascription of warmth-related stereotypes to lesbians is likely due to the fact that competition is typically operationalized in terms of economic aspects of the intergroup relation, which is, at least in part, irrelevant in defining the homosexual-heterosexual context (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Cottrell et al., 2010; Herek, 2000; Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2009). Our data support this theoretical conjecture. Indeed, the present research shows that the perceived warmth of groups defined by sexual orientation (i.e., lesbians) was predicted by a broader measure of perceived interdependence which defined the perception of a fair/unfair relation between social groups, without a specific restriction on economic issues. On the basis of these findings, one may argue that perceived competition and perceived cooperation do not necessarily lead to convergent predictions on perceived warmth. Indeed, competition and cooperation variables differently emphasize the role of the economic issues. Accordingly, such variables could differently predict the attribution of warmth, depending on the relevance that economic issues have in shaping the interdependence between groups.

However, we cannot establish a specific causal relationship between stereotype dimensions and predictors given that this is a correlational study, as are most studies based on the SCM (Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Eckes, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002). Therefore, future research should address this issue, for example, by manipulating the social-structural variables of status and perceived intergroup cooperation to

infer causal influence on subsequent stereotypes of lesbians. Another limit of the present research should be acknowledged. Like previous studies on gay and lesbians subgroups (Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Geiger et al., 2006), we considered only university students as participants. One direction that would be extremely interesting to take in further research is the exploration of the cognitive representation of lesbians among different groups (i.e., ingroup members, outgroup members, students, adults, people with high vs. low in prejudice toward lesbians). Moreover, future studies might address the interindividual differences that could account for a neutral representation of the category of lesbians as a whole. For instance, participants' interindividual differences in terms of quality and quantity of contact with lesbians might account for the participants' cognitive accessibility of different subgroups when judging the overall category.

Nonetheless, despite the limitations of the current study, we believe that the present findings have several implications for gender inversion theory (Kite & Deaux, 1987) in general, and for lesbian stereotyping in particular. According to this theory, stereotypes of lesbians should include traits that are typically associated with males (i.e., low warmth, high competence). However, in the present study traits typically associated with males were comprised only in one of the four subgroups (i.e., butch lesbians). Therefore, extending prior research, our findings seem to suggest that gender inversion theory (Kite & Deaux, 1987) addresses an important facet of lesbian stereotypes, but could not fully account for the contents of stereotypes of such a group.

Our findings offer interesting implications to changing prejudicial attitudes toward lesbians. The current research suggests that social interventions aimed at reducing homophobia should strategically address the structural relationships between heterosexuals and lesbians on perceived status and interdependence. Specifically, our results indicate that different interventions should be set up to promote such changes, according to the stereotypical contents of the subgroups that are the target of the intervention. For instance, a positive view of butch lesbians could be corroborated by a social intervention aimed at creating a positive intergroup interdependence. This strategy could be also helpful to ameliorating the representation of the closeted lesbians if the same intervention further weakens the status disparities between groups.

We know that such practical implications might be limited to the Italian context, and that further research is needed to advance more general conclusions. Nonetheless, even if discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is the second most widespread form of discrimination in Europe – and it is stronger in Italy than in several other UE countries (Eurobarometer, 2008) – no prior study in Europe in general, and in Italy in particular, has addressed the cognitive representation of the lesbian outgroup. Therefore, we consider our study a first important step toward better understanding the representations of lesbians outside the

United States. Further studies should directly compare the stereotypical representations of lesbians across countries in order to determine which cultural parameters could promote an articulate representation of such a group.

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Appendix A

Pretest, traits of lesbian subgroups

<i>Butch lesbians</i>	<i>Feminine lesbians</i>
Masculine	Beauty
Unattractive	Sensitive
Overweight	Attractive
Without maternal instincts	Friendly
<i>Closeted lesbians</i>	<i>Outed lesbians</i>
Insincere	Proud
Ashamed	Straight
	Sincere

Appendix B

Scales (warmth, competence, status, competition, and cooperation)

Warmth	As viewed by society, how . . . are lesbians*? [friendly, well-intentioned, warm, sincere]
Competence	As viewed by society, how . . . are lesbians? [competent, confident, capable, skillful]
Status	How prestigious are the jobs typically achieved by lesbians? How economically successful have lesbians?
Competition	If lesbians get special breaks (such as preference in hiring decisions), this is likely to make things more difficult for people like me. The more power lesbians have, the less power people like me are likely to have Resources that go to lesbians are likely to take away from the resources of people like me.
Cooperation	Does a fair give and take exist between lesbians and heterosexuals? How likely is it that lesbians are in a cooperative relationship with heterosexuals? How much does joint progress in society depend on mutual cooperation with lesbians?

Note. For the Competence and Warmth Scales, the points of ellipsis were replaced by the words in brackets for each question. *In the subgroup condition the word “lesbians” was replaced by each subgroup outlined in the pilot study.