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Perceived Competence and Agreeableness Predict Positive Behaviors Toward Mexican Immigrants: Less Acculturated Hispanics are More Welcoming of Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

The resettlement of immigrants who have fled their countries because of dire consequences at home and better opportunities elsewhere, has given rise to a range of prejudices toward them in their host countries. We examined prejudices and discrimination toward immigrants, specifically Mexican immigrants, as a function of their perceived competence and warmth within the context of the Stereotype Content Model. We also examined perceiver's agreeableness, openness to experience, attitudes and acculturation level, and their links with prejudices toward immigrants. We found that an immigrant's competence elicited strong and more positive feelings and responses than warmth. More competent immigrants were more likely to be liked and welcomed. Of the Big Five variables, Agreeableness was strongly linked with positive sentiments and actions toward immigrants. However, Attitudes toward immigrants showed the strongest correlations with the criterion variables, of how individuals will feel and intend to behave toward immigrants. Finally, acculturation within Latinos correlated negatively with positive feelings and actions toward immigrants. More acculturated Latinos were less welcoming of immigrants. The findings serve to inform policymakers of the varied prejudices held of immigrants and the types of discrimination they are likely to face in order to help them implement humane policy options.

Keywords: immigration, immigrants, acculturation, competence, agreeableness, prejudices

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Prejudice Toward Immigrants: Competences Elicit Stronger and More Favorable Sentiments

Millions of people worldwide have been displaced by wars, political unrest, ethnic or religious conflicts, or economic instability, and the resettlement of these masses has given rise to anti-immigrant sentiments and stereotypes in host countries, with governments taking or threatening to take harsher actions to limit immigration (Quintero, 2017; Sunstein, 2016). Immigrants may bring valued skills that may benefit the host countries, but these qualities are often overshadowed by stereotypes and fears of immigrants as lacking in abilities, taking jobs away from citizens, or corrupting the values of the host country (Shear & Benner, 2018; Merelli, 2017). Amid the negative reactions, positive attitudes toward immigrants still persist, indicating a range of sentiments towards them. Those who are welcoming point to evidence that immigration may vitalize the host country, with immigrants showing high rates of entrepreneurialism and acquisition of skills (Lofstrom, 2014; Reeves, 2016), and immigrant children demonstrating extraordinarily strong upward educational and income mobility of any group of children (Betts & Lofstrom, 2000; Reeves, 2016).

People immigrate to the United States to attend schools, reunite with family members, escape religious, ethnic or political persecution or conflict, or in search of better jobs (Navarro, 2009). Regardless of the reasons, immigrants bring varied skills reflecting the range of training or educational opportunities which they received in their home countries (Moore, 2017). Many were physicians, pharmacists, dentists, electricians, carpenters, farmers, or therapists in their respective countries (Moore, 2017).

In this study, we examined the range of attitudes and sentiments toward immigrants, and if the prejudices and discrimination toward them varied as a function of their skills and competences. Though stereotypes of immigrants are generalized (Caprariello et al., 2009), we posited that sentiments toward immigrants vary, and that how welcoming hosts are of immigrants depends on the perceived competences and warmth of the immigrants. Further, we investigated if personality, attitudes, and acculturation levels of their hosts mitigated these prejudices and discrimination.

The Stereotypic Content Model (SCM) has been widely used to explain why people are prejudiced and discriminate against others (Lee & Fiske, 2006). According to this model, how we feel and act toward others are based on two criteria: our perceptions of others' competence and warmth (Lee & Fiske, 2006). Competence is assessed based on an

individual's acquired skills, performance level, job status, and income, with higher competence attributed to those with better skills and performance, higher income levels or job status. A person's warmth is based on similarity and cooperation, with higher warmth attributed to those with shared common attitudes and group goals. The two dimensions are assessed in combination. For example, college students, perceived as both high in warmth and competence, are likely to be admired and welcomed. The elderly, perceived to be high in warmth and low in competence, are pitied and helped. The homeless, who are perceived low on both warmth and competence, are likely to elicit disgust and be demeaned (Lee & Fiske, 2006).

This model may be useful in assessing prejudices toward immigrants. Evidence suggests that the American public views low status migrants with contempt and disgust, seeking to exclude them from the country (Caprariello et al., 2009). One would expect that low-skilled immigrants would be perceived as less threatening because they are not competing for jobs. However, in a society that places greater value on merit than on need or equality (Berman et al., 1985), low competence may outweigh attributions of warmth or sympathies for those in need. By contrast, immigrants with greater skills may elicit greater admiration, but only if they do not compete with their hosts for the same jobs. Competition for jobs may elicit lower warmth attributions, and thus, greater discrimination (Caprariello et al., 2009). Levine & Campbell (1972) labelled such a competition for perceived limited resources Realistic Conflict theory.

Periods of economic decline may heighten these prejudices and elicit feelings of relative deprivation in the hosts (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015). Evidence suggests that fear and anxiety may exacerbate negative attitudes toward an outgroup of a different culture and language (Plant et al., 2008). However, outgroups may be perceived as warmer, friendlier, and more trustworthy to the extent they adapt to and cooperate with the ingroup (Fiske et al., 2006). Indeed, prejudices may be mitigated by a forged commonness in group identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012). By contrast, an uncooperative outgroup is ascribed negative traits and is more likely to be discriminated against (Fiske et al., 2006; Riek et al., 2006). Thus, to the extent that immigrants integrate and pursue shared goals with their hosts, they may be perceived as warmer and be accepted. Thus, the model may prove useful in testing prejudices and discrimination toward immigrants based on their perceived competence levels and warmth (Cuddy et al., 2007).

Personality factors, attitudes, and acculturation levels may also provide a better understanding of prejudices toward immigrants. Ekehammar and Akrami (2003) proposed that attitudes toward various outgroups stem from one or more personality basic traits. They found that Openness to Experience and Agreeableness were negatively correlated with generalized prejudice. Hodson et al. (2009) also found Openness to be negatively linked with prejudice even when statistically controlling for other Big Five factors. In this study, the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) were negatively correlated with Openness whereas SDO was negatively correlated with Agreeableness (Hodson et al, 2009). These findings suggest that people who score higher on these two factors may be more accepting of immigrants.

Attitudes are the most direct way of measuring prejudice toward others and the topic of immigration. Sentiments toward immigrants have been openly expressed in opinion polls, public debates, and policy forums, and range from outright hostility and fear to sympathy and support (Navarro, 2009; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002). Immigrants have been depicted as incompatible with American culture, as cunning opportunists who manipulate the system, and culturally inferior and prone to crime. Positive attributes describe immigrants as hardworking and dedicated, ambitious, loyal, willing to make familial sacrifices, and entrepreneurial (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez Orozco, 2002).

Attitudes toward others based on social categories (e.g. race, gender, nationality, religion, etc.) must be taken into account because they may be laden with biases and be an important source of error in measurement (Cuddy et al., 2011). For example, Plant et al. (2008) found that participants with more reported anger and anxiety toward outgroups avoided interethnic interactions and blamed the outgroup for negative outcomes in their interactions. Specifically, anger in White participants was linked with avoidance of Hispanics, while anxiety in Hispanics was associated with avoidance of Whites (Plant et al., 2008). By comparison, positive expectations about interacting with outgroup were linked with higher behavioral approach of an outgroup (Plant et al., 2008). Thus, individuals may respond with greater affect and make more extreme decisions about who to trust, doubt, avoid, or associate with, based on pre-existing prejudices (Cuddy et al., 2011).

Attitudes toward immigration have also found differences. Binder et al. (1997) measured Mexican-American and Anglo attitudes toward immigration reform in the U.S. counties bordering Mexico. They found that Latino attitudes toward immigration policies can be characterized as presenting "two competing views, which involves the cultural perspective and the socio-economic status (SES) perspective." The former suggests that Latinos, because of their shared cultural history with nations south of the U.S. border, are more likely than Anglos to oppose restrictions imposed by immigration policies. The latter, on the other hand, suggests that differences between Latino and Anglo immigration attitudes are less a function of national origin rather than how integrated Latinos are into American society. Separate from recency of migration experience, the more integrated the Latino populations are into American society, the more the Latino attitudes will resemble Anglo attitudes toward immigration (Binder et al., 1997). The less Mexican a respondent identified him or herself to be, the more restrictive was their stance toward immigration policies. Previous research has demonstrated that being a member of a high-status group is much more appealing than being a member of a low status group (Ellemers et al., 1992). Moreover, a threat to a high-status outgroup results in being more likely to demean a low status group (Cadinu & Reggiori, 2002). By these accounts, the more acculturated Hispanics may be less welcoming of immigrants.

In this study, key research questions asked whether individuals' sentiments and behaviors toward an immigrant would vary as a function of their perceived competence and warmth of immigrants. We reasoned that prejudices and discrimination would vary, and that individuals would be more welcoming of immigrants who were perceived as warm and competent. Thus, for the first hypothesis we predict that more positive feelings and actions

will be expressed and taken, respectively, toward immigrants who are perceived to be warmer and more competent.

Auxiliary research questions about how prejudice is expressed toward immigrants also concerned personal factors and pre-existing prejudices. Specifically, we reasoned that individuals who were higher in Openness to experience and Agreeableness would be more welcoming of immigrants. Thus, for our second hypothesis, we predicted that more positive feelings and actions will be expressed toward immigrants by those who are more open to experience and agreeable. Moreover, attitudes and behaviors had to be assessed controlling for pre-existing prejudices. For our third hypothesis, we expected that individuals with more positive attitudes toward immigrants will be more welcoming of immigrants.

We also reasoned that those who were less acculturated would be more welcoming of immigrants. Thus, we predicted for our fourth hypothesis that within the Hispanic sample, the less acculturated Hispanics will express more positive feelings and behaviors toward immigrants.

Methods

Participants, Design, and Procedure

Originally, 507 undergraduate students participated in this study, and were recruited from a central Texas University. Seventy-eight participants were eliminated for not completing the survey or having missing data. The data for 429 participants was left to analyze in this study. Of the 86 male participants, 2.3% identified as Asian, 8.1% as African American/Black, 33.7% as Hispanic/Latino, 46.5% as White, 8.1% as Mixed, and 1.2% as Other. Of the 343 female participants, 3.5% identified as Asian, 14% as African American/Black, 30.6% as Hispanic/Latina, 42.6% as White, 9% as Mixed, and 3% as Other.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four vignettes in a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design. The vignette about a Mexican immigrant was used because Mexican immigrants make up the majority of the immigrant population in the United States, constituting more than 11.7 million immigrants by 2014 (Zong & Batalova, 2016). The vignette below describes one of four conditions. In this particular vignette an immigrant is highly competent and skilled and warm, who will not be competing with Americans for jobs or resources.

> An immigrant from Mexico, with name initials C.G., arrives in the United States. C.G. can speak, read, and write in English and Spanish, is highly skilled and has a master's degree from a well-respected university. C.G. will not likely compete for the same job positions that Americans will be applying for, but because C.G. is self-sufficient and self-reliable, will not take advantage of social services and resources available to Americans.

The other three conditions varied the descriptions. A low competent immigrant was described as someone without degrees and who could only speak Spanish. This is because an immigrant that is high on warmth is not likely to compete for jobs and take advantage of resources, an immigrant in a low warmth condition was described as someone who would be competing with Americans for jobs and taking advantage of resources.

Dependent Variables

Immediately following the manipulation, participants answered 4 questions about how they felt towards the immigrant and four questions about how they would behave towards the immigrant in the story. Specifically, four questions asked the extent to which participants would admire, envy, feel disgust towards, and sympathize with the immigrant. Four behavioral questions asked the extent to which they would exclude, help, associate with, and fight with the immigrant. All eight responses were noted on a 7-point Likert scale from Very Unlikely (1) to Very Likely (7).

Manipulation Checks

Two items asked participants about how warm they perceived the immigrant to be. Also, two questions asked participants about how competent they perceived the immigrant to be. These items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from Not at all (1) to Extremely (5).

Additional Measures

Big Five

The brief and revised 10 item measure of the Big Five adapted from the original scale (Costa & McCrae, 1992) was used (Gosling et al., 2003). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a descriptor using a Likert scale on 7 points ranging from Disagree Strongly (1) to Strongly Agree (7). Openness to Experience and Agreeableness were measured with two items each. Examples of items measuring Openness to Experience were: "Complex" and "Conventional." Examples of items measuring Agreeableness were "Sympathize" and "Quarrelsome." Test-retest reliability for agreeableness and open to experience were $r = .58$ and $r = .48$, respectively. Inter-item reliability was not reported.

Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Ashby Plant, David Butz, and Margarta Tartakovsky developed a scale to measure attitudes toward Hispanics, specifically discriminatory attitudes toward Hispanics in 2008. Inter-item reliability tests of these developed scales are quite robust with alpha of .94 for White participants and .90 for Hispanic participants. Seven questions were adapted from this questionnaire to measure Attitudes toward Immigrants. An example of a question on this scale is: "Hispanic immigrants are demanding too much in their pull for equal rights." Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Acculturation Scale

Participants who identified themselves as Hispanic/Latina(o) on the survey, were administered a 13-item acculturation scale (Marin et al., 1987) that asked participants about their preferred usage of language and interaction with a racial/ethnic group. The Likert scaled items on 5 points from Only Spanish to Only English measured language use and media preference items. Ethnic social relations preferences ranged from Only Latinos/Hispanics to Only Americans. This scale's inter-item reliability that combined the language use with social relations preferences subscales has been shown to be quite robust with the reliability alpha coefficient at .92 (Marin et al., 1987). This acculturation scale may also be linked to recency of migration to the U.S.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The reliability for the seven item Attitudes toward Immigrants scale was quite robust (Cronbach's α = .91). The reliability of the 13 item Acculturation scale was also acceptable (Cronbach's α = .89). The two items measuring Openness, $r = .10$, $p < .05$, did not correlate with each other, and the two items measuring Agreeableness, $r = .21$, $p < .001$, also, did not correlate with each other. Thus, the two Openness and two Agreeableness items were analyzed separately.

Independent sample t-tests conducted to check whether the manipulations worked indicated that only the two competence items were both statistically significant, $t(426) = 3.89$, $p < .001$, and $t(425) = 9.01$, $p < .001$. The manipulation checks for the two warmth items were not statistically significant.

Tests of Hypotheses

The first three hypotheses were tested using a MANOVA that allowed two dichotomous variables, their interaction, and five continuous independent variables to be regressed on four emotional (disgust, sympathize, admire, envy) and four behavioral (help, fight, associate, exclude) variables. The analysis met assumptions of normality, equality of covariance, and absence of multicollinearity. In addition, scatterplot matrices show linearity among the dependent variables. The multivariate tests of this model using Wilks' Lambda criteria showed that both Warmth, $F(8, 402) = 2.09$, $p < .05$, and Competence, $F(8, 402) = 15.51$, $p < .001$, but not their interactions, were significant (Table 1). Additionally, two of the Agreeableness items were significant, $F(8, 402) = 3.38$, $p < .01$ and $F(8, 402) = 2.01$, $p < .05$, including the Positive Attitudes Toward Immigrants, $F(8, 402) = 27.22$, $p < .001$. The two Openness items were not significant.

Table 1

Effects of Personality, Attitudes towards Immigrants, and Perceived Characteristics (Competence and Warmth) on Feeling and Acting with a Specific Immigrant

IV	DV	Wilk's k	F	Df	P	MS	F	df
Agreeableness Sympathy		.937	3.38	402	.001			
	Admire					11.16	5.851	1
	Sympathize					27.10	17.811	1
	Help					21.24	15.382	1
Agreeableness Quarrelsome		.961	2.01	402	.044			
Positive Attitude toward immigrants		.649	27.22	402	.000			
	Disgust					229.85	131.48	1
	Admire					141.50	74.18	1
	Sympathize					117.10	76.97	1
	Help					119.68	86.65	1
	Fight					27.69	19.50	1
	Associate					180.48	110.66	1
	Exclude					111.48	82.45	1
Warmth		.960	2.09	402	.036			
	Disgust					16.03	9.17	1
	Admire					13.71	7.19	1
Competence		.764	15.51	402	.000			
	Disgust					12.66	7.24	1
	Admire					129.55	67.91	1
	Envy					107.35	55.60	1
	Help					6.11	4.43	1
	Associate					56.36	34.56	1
	Exclude					17.38	12.85	1

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects were conducted only if the Multivariate tests using the Wilks' Lambda criteria showed significance. The Warmth manipulation elicited main effect differences between Low and High Warmth conditions in two emotions: Disgust, $F(1, 409)$ = 9.17, $p < .01$, and Admiration, $F(1, 409)$ = 7.19, $p < .01$. Disgust was far more likely to be elicited in the Low Warmth and Admiration in the High Warmth conditions. See Table 2 for mean differences between conditions for Warmth.

Table 2
Mean Differences Between Conditions for Warmth

	Warm	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Disgust	Low	219	2.54	1.687	2.380	2.700
	High	211	2.15	1.438	2.014	2.286
Admire	Low	220	4.48	1.766	4.313	4.647
	High	210	4.88	1.494	4.739	5.021

Table 3
Mean Differences Between Conditions for Competence

	Competent	N	M	SD	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Disgust	Low	202	2.59	1.57	2.442	2.738
	High	228	2.13	1.56	1.982	2.278
Admire	Low	202	4.03	1.54	3.885	4.175
	High	228	5.24	1.54	5.095	5.385
Envy	Low	202	2.15	1.22	2.035	2.265
	High	228	3.14	1.54	2.995	3.285
Help	Low	202	4.91	1.40	4.777	5.043
	High	229	5.28	1.32	5.155	5.405
Associate	Low	202	4.33	1.55	4.183	4.477
	High	229	5.18	1.42	5.046	5.314
Exclude	Low	202	2.55	1.39	2.419	2.681
	High	229	2.05	1.22	1.935	2.165

The Competence manipulation elicited significant condition differences for Disgust, F(1, 12.66) = 7.24, p < .01, Admiration, F(1, 129.55) = 67.91, p < .001, Envy, F(1, 107.35) = 55.60, p < .001, Helping, F(1, 6.11) = 4.43, p < .05), Associate, F(1, 56.36) = 34.56, p < .001, and Exclude, F(1, 17.38) = 12.85, p < .001. Table 3 shows mean differences between conditions for Competence. There is less Disgust, and greater Admiration and Envy for immigrants in the High Competence condition than those in the Low Competence condition. Additionally, immigrants with higher competence were more likely to be Helped, Associated With and less likely to be Excluded than immigrants in the low competence condition.

Only one Agreeableness item significantly predicted two emotions and one behavior (Table 1). Specifically, Agreeableness predicted Admiration, F(1, 409) = 5.85, p < .05, Sympathize, F(1, 409) = 17.81, p < .001, and Help, F(1, 409) = 15.38, p < .001. Correlation analyses examining the relationships between this predictor and these four criteria, shown in Table 4, indicate that the more Agreeableness in the participant's personality, the more likely they reported they would admire, sympathize, help, and include the immigrant.

Attitudes toward Immigrants significantly predicted three emotions and four behaviors (Table 1). Specifically, Attitudes predicted Disgust, F(1, 409) = 131.48, p < .001, Admiration, F(1, 409) = 74.18, p < .001, Sympathize, F(1, 409) = 76.97, p < .001, Help, F(1, 409) = 86.65, p < .001, Fight, F(1, 409) = 19.45, p < .001, Associate, F(1, 409) = 110.66, p < .001, and Exclude, F(1, 409) = 82.45, p < .001. The correlation matrix supports these findings. Table 4 shows that individuals with more positive attitudes toward immigrants report that they would be more likely to admire, sympathize, help, and associate with the immigrant. Also, these individuals would be less likely to feel disgust, fight, and exclude the immigrant in the vignette.

A correlation analysis was used to test the fourth hypothesis. The analysis showed that among Hispanics, Acculturation was correlated negatively with Admire, r(129) = -.26, p < .001, Help, r(129) = -.31, p < .001, and Associate, r(129) = -.31, p < .001. Thus, the more acculturated the Hispanic participant, the less likely they reported they would admire, help and associate with the immigrant in the vignette.

Table 4.

Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Dependent Variables	Competence	Agreeableness	Positive Attitude
Disgust		-.212*	-.487**
Admire	.395**	.204*	.360**
Sympathize		.211*	.401**
Envy	.315**		
Help		.239**	.487**
Fight			-.301**
Associate	.221*	.184*	.433**
Exclude		-.225**	.434**

* p < .05, ** p < .01. *Note*: N = 423 – 428.

Discussion

Our results showed that sentiments and actions taken toward immigrants are influenced by their perceived competence. Additionally, the Agreeableness, Attitudes, and Acculturation of the participants predicted prejudices and behaviors are also influenced. Specifically, the Agreeableness personality trait was found to be predictive of prejudices and behaviors because people who have high levels of Agreeableness may tend to be more agreeable towards everyone. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were partially supported. Hypotheses 3 and Hypothesis 4 were more strongly supported.

The Competence condition evoked far more emotional and behavioral outcomes than the Warmth condition. High competent immigrants were more likely to be admired and envied and more likely to be included, associated with, and helped. This finding suggests that our high regard for highly skilled and competent immigrants attenuates prejudices and discrimination against them. Perhaps this finding reflects the tendency to weigh stable factors such as Competence more heavily than Warmth (Fiske et al., 2002). An immigrant's Competence, or the lack thereof, may evoke far more emotions and behaviors than an immigrant's Warmth because ability is perceived as an unchanging and fixed construct, while an affect may vary and be unreliable.

The strength of the Competence condition may also reflect the valued stereotypes Americans see themselves as possessing and expect others to have, such as being hard-working, skilled, and prosperous (Weber, 1904/1992, p. 175). High competent immigrants who are seen assimilating to these values may be perceived as an ingroup and a better fit with their host country. Thus, these highly skilled immigrants may be more likely to be welcomed and accepted (Gaertner & Dovidio,2012; Linville & Jones; 1980).

Additionally, only one Agreeableness item was linked with two emotions and two behaviors. Our results partially support previous findings linking Agreeableness with greater acceptance of outgroups (Hodson et al., 2009). We suspect that the Openness to experience items, may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Participants reported that they didn't understand the term Conventional. Additionally, the term Complex was interpreted by many to mean problematic rather than openness.

Attitudes toward immigrants showed the strongest and most consistent correlations with all but one criterion variable. This suggests that the Likert measure of attitude is a robust and reliable predictor of how individuals will feel and intend to behave toward immigrants. The Acculturation results within the Latino sample were as predicted and support prior findings (Binder et al., 1997). More acculturated Latinos have adopted more mainstream attitudes toward immigrants.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are limitations in the current study. First, the vignettes presented were hypothetical. Participants may not respond or express themselves as openly in person as they would toward a fictional character in a story. Individuals are more likely to control and keep their prejudices in check in real interactions. A future study may assess reactions based on face

to face interactions with immigrants. Second, the vignette in the story was about a Mexican immigrant. Participants' prejudices toward different outgroups may vary. Their prejudices toward immigrants from Western Europe may differ from those they expressed in this study. A future study would examine prejudices toward immigrants from different cultures. Third, our Warm condition was weak. The manipulation check indicated that it did not have the intended effect. Perhaps a vignette about an immigrant who cooperated or sacrificed for the host country would increase the Warmth strength of this condition. Fourth, our participants were college students, and their sentiments toward immigrants may differ from those who are not. The generalizability of the findings may be limited to attitudes held by college students.

Conclusion

This Stereotypic Content Model along with additional measures were tested to determine how people would feel and behave toward immigrants who varied in their competence and warmth. These measures have not been previously been tested together in previous research. Immigrants are not all treated the same, and a better understanding of how immigrants are treated were obtained by examining the issue in a multifactorial way. Our results suggest that attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants depend on their competence, to some extent warmth, and by the agreeableness, attitudes and acculturation of the perceiver. This serves to inform policymakers of the varied prejudices held of immigrants and the types of discrimination they are likely to face in order to help them implement humane policy options.

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