

# Face-off:

## Does religious context alter the way we “read” faces?

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### INTRODUCTION

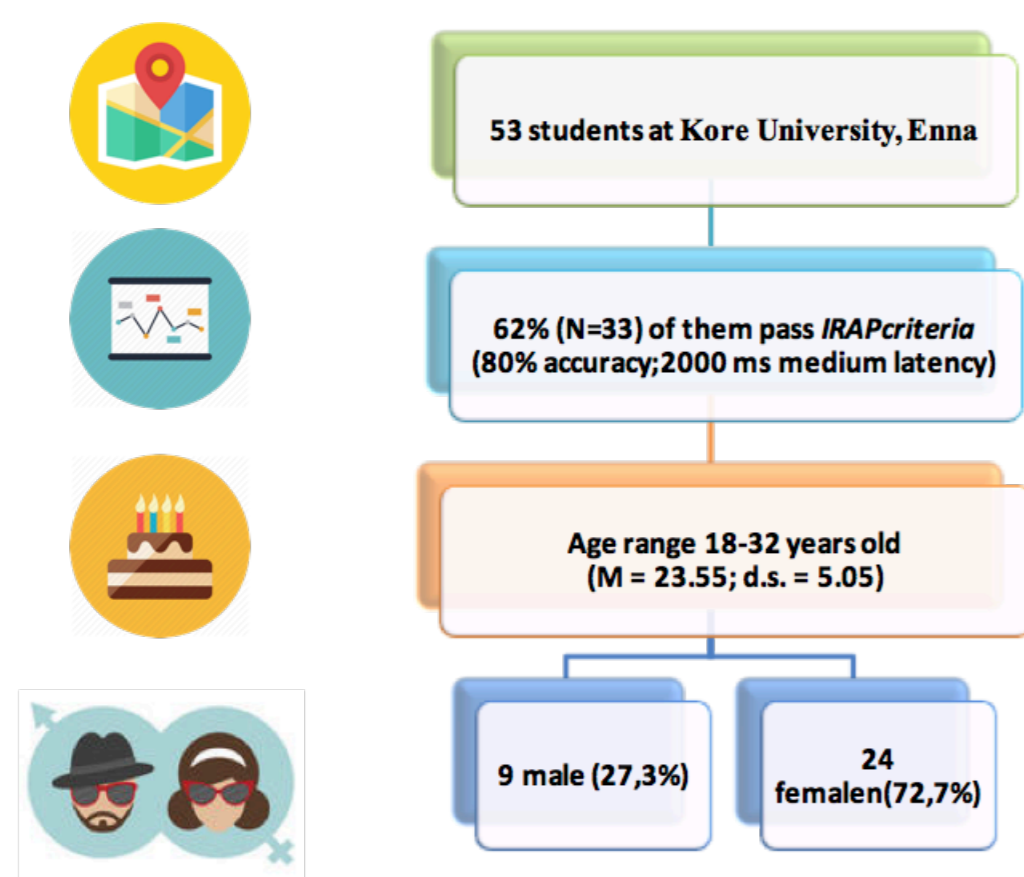
According to Relational Frame Theory prejudice, as a verbal operant class, is the verbal outcome of processes of derivation and transformation of stimulus function (Hayes, Niccolls, Masuda & Rye, 2002). It is well known that the explicit assessment of prejudices is enormously influenced by social desirability, and therefore it has been suggested to investigate prejudices using implicit procedures. For example McCauley (2014) investigated implicit religious bias using Implicit Association Test (IAT), proving that Christians subjects in that study were more biased against Muslims than Muslims were against Christians.

### AIM

The present study aims to empirically test the validity of an implicit model of responding (recognition) to facial positive and negative emotions (specifically joy and fear) in the context of Christian and Islamic religious symbols, using the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP). Specifically, our hypothesis was that religious symbols could alter the derivation of joy or fear in specific populations with different history with respect to religions.

### METHOD

#### Participants



#### Instruments

AAQ II - Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (Bond et al., 2011);  
CFQ - Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire (Gillanders et al., 2010);  
SEE - Scale of Ethnocultural Empathy (Wang et al., 2003);  
SDO - Social Dominance Orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999);  
RWA - Right Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1998).  
Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP; Figure 1).

#### Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP)

Standardized picture of facial expressions of fear and happiness were presented in the context of Christian and Muslims symbols in an IRAP task (Fig 1). The instruction reported “Please answer as if the CHRISTIAN SYMBOL evokes JOY and as if the ISLAMIC SYMBOL evokes FEAR”, in coherent blocks.

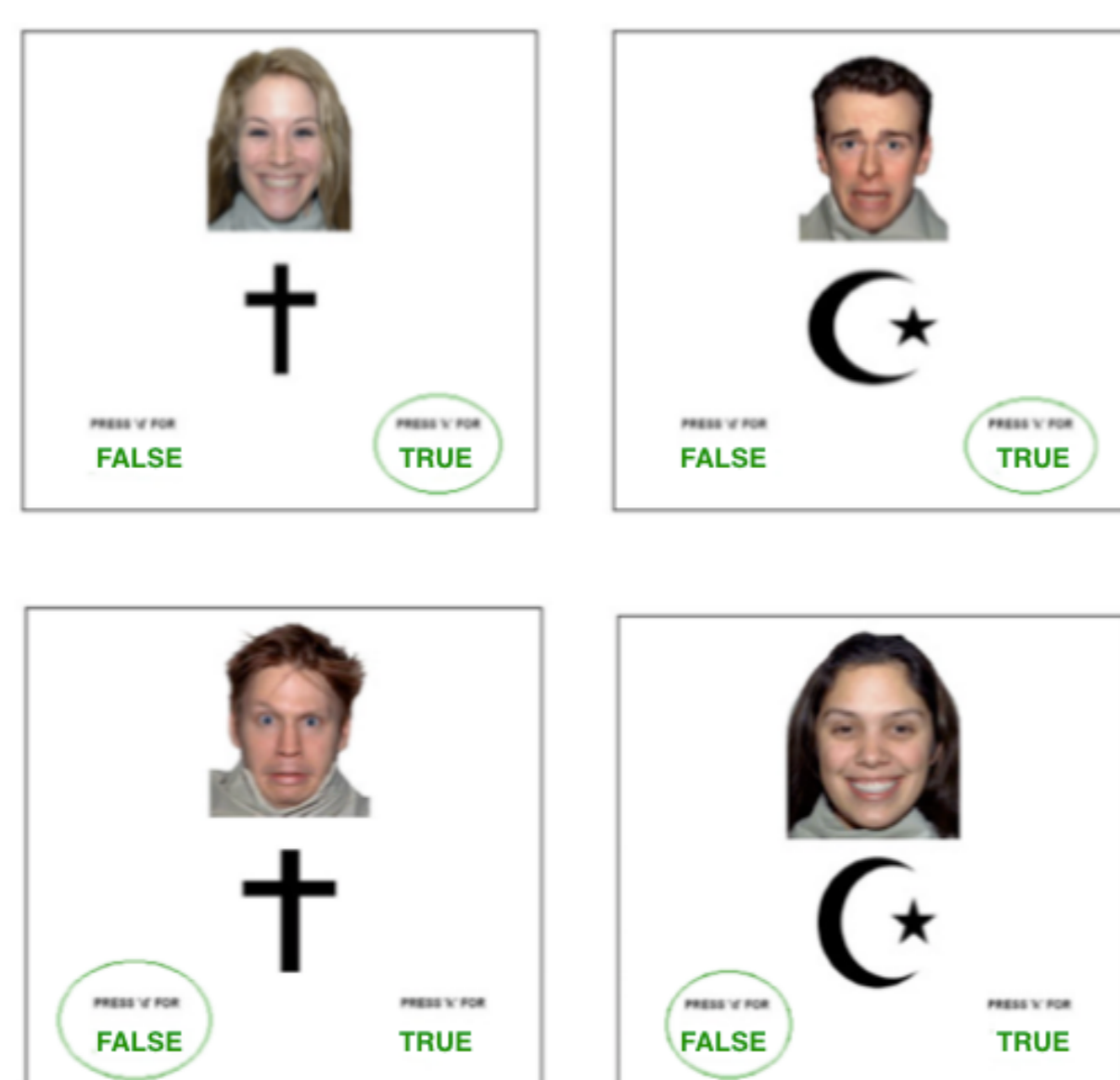


Figure 1 An example of the four IRAP trial-types.

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### RESULTS

At scales participants showed mean scores different than those reported in normative samples. Data are for this reason shown in table 1.

QUESTIONNAIRES	Participants N = 33	Participants of Italian Validation	T; p
	M (d.s.)	M (d.s.)	
Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (AAQ-II)	45.33 (7.10)	51.50 (8.24)	-4.11; p<.001; ES=-.81
Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire (CFQ)	34.44 (12.52)	40.2 (11.04)	-2.52; p=.017; ES=-.49
SEE - Empathic Feeling and Expression	4.67 (.80)	4.12 (.86)	3.83; p<.001; ES=.68
SEE - Empathic Perspective Taking	6.62 (.73)	3.06 (.87)	26.9; p<.001; ES=4.45
SEE - Acceptance of Cultural Differences	4.00 (.70)	4.49 (1.00)	-3.81; p<.001; ES=-.57
SEE - Empathic Awareness	4.25 (.77)	4.43 (.99)	-1.27; p=.21

Table 1. Participant Characteristics.

At the IRAP task different patterns of brief implicit relational responding ( $F(3, 102) = 22.10$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .394$ ) emerged. Namely the 1st trial type (cross-joy) showed the greatest effect size (Fig. 2), and relational responding in the context of Islamic symbols were against the hypothesis, i.e. subjects were faster in responding that crescent-moon did not evoke fear, rather than crescent-moon evoking fear.

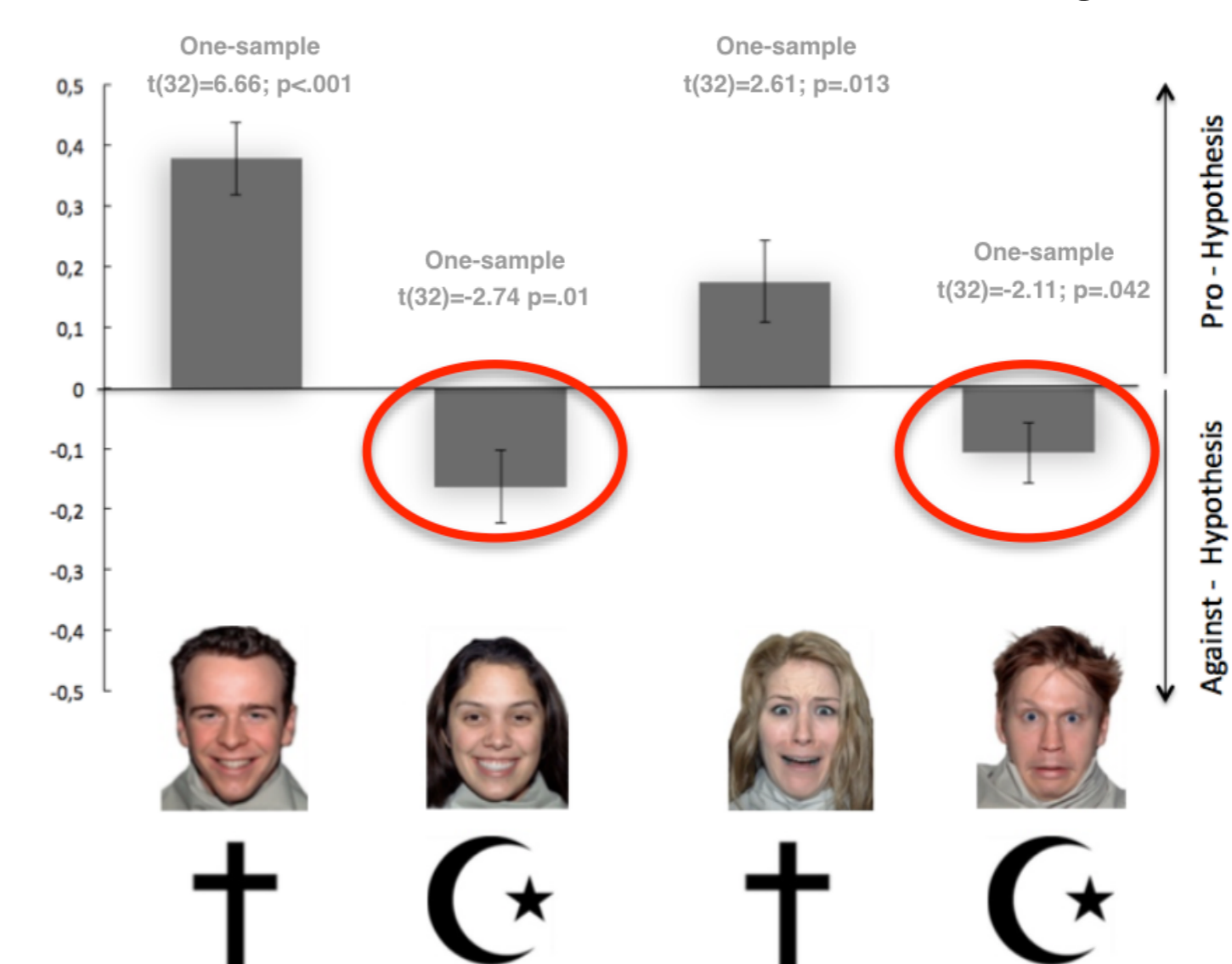


Figure 2. D-IRAP average score of the sample and in consistent-inconsistent task (all D-score are different from zero).

- All the IRAP trial types are unrelated, this might prove that the acquisition of joy and fear related to religious symbols are independent operants.
- In participants with high ( $N=20$ ) explicit positive bias toward Catholicism implicit positive bias toward Catholicism, experiential avoidance and cognitive fusion correlated (Fig 3). Data show that the most inflexible and conservative Italian students are faster to recognize emotions in Catholic rather than in Muslim context.
- In participants with low ( $N=12$ ) positive explicit bias towards Catholicism there is a correlation between RWA and implicit positive bias towards Catholicism (Figure 3).

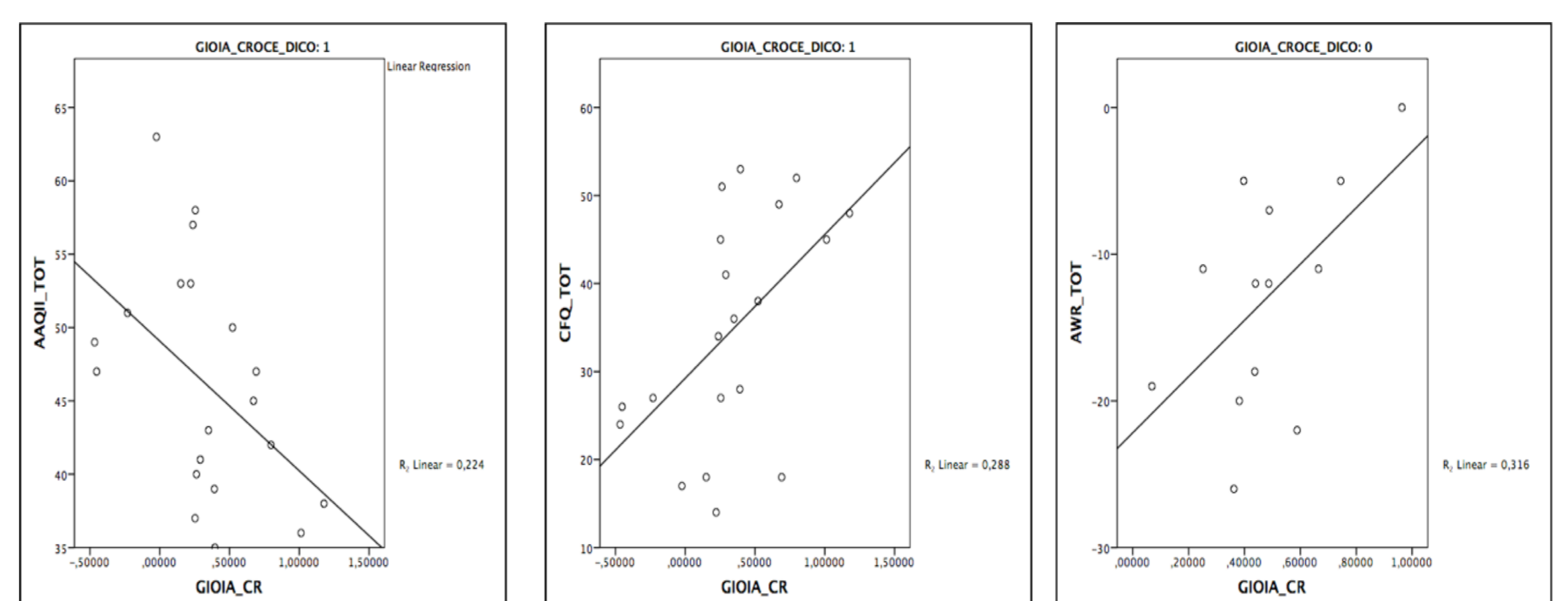


Figure 3. Correlations with IRAP D-score with AAQ II, CFQ and RWA.

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