

The Role of Language in the Media in Influencing Public Perceptions of Refugees

Alison Pulliam

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Chad Magnuson, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Brianne Friberg, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Stuart Schwartz, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Marilyn Gadowski, Ph.D.
Honors Assistant Director

Date

Abstract

The refugee crisis has become a worldwide epidemic in recent years. As refugee entrance into host countries is debated, media outlets are covering the issue regularly. These media outlets use various types of language when portraying refugees. Many publications have been found to convey hostile and divisive themes as well as use specific linguistic tools, which contribute to negative portrayals of refugees. Media outlets have the potential to influence public perceptions of refugees because the general public in a host country receives its information primarily from the media. Overt and subtle language used to describe refugees has been previously found to influence public opinions. This study of 101 students at a conservative Christian university in the mid-Atlantic United States was designed to examine whether manipulated language in news articles impacted perceptions of refugees. Participants were randomly assigned to the positive or negative language condition and then asked to complete a survey assessing four facets of perception. None of the results were significant, indicating the language in the article did not impact perceptions of refugees. This study was limited by lack of diversity in the sample, the use of self-report data, potential personal confounds, and a small sample size. The results implied a need for balance when calling for media ethics and a need for many more empirical studies in this area.

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The Role of Language in the Media in Influencing Public Perceptions of Refugees

The global refugee crisis has become a topic of increasing interest in recent years. By mid-2016, growth in war led to a global total of 65.3 million forcibly displaced people, or people who had been forced out of their home for any reason (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016a). Refugees and asylum seekers comprised a portion of the people defined as forcibly displaced. Refugees are defined as those who have a well-founded reason to fear persecution as a result of race, religious beliefs, nationality, political orientation, or participation in a certain social group (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016b). Asylum seekers are those claiming refugee status whose claims have not yet been formally evaluated (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016b). Within the past 10 years, around 900,000 refugees had been resettled to industrialized countries while even more were being hosted by developing nations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015b). The total number of refugees worldwide had grown to 21.3 million by mid-2016 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016a).

Refugee policy in the United States has a relatively short yet varied history. The United States began to develop formal policy around 1950 when it helped establish the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The country had recently passed the 1948 Displaced Persons Act to admit people fleeing from communism or the Middle East. The United States passed similar acts in 1953 and 1957, causing a large increase in the numbers of refugees entering the country. Refugee policy continued for many years on a path of openness with few restrictions. However, The Refugee Act of 1980 established the first system of resettlement procedure. Since then, the debate surrounding

immigration and refugee acceptance has been tense (McBride, 2002). In a review of refugee policy history in the United States, McBride stated that the general public does not always differentiate the nuances between the definitions of refugees and immigrants and instead tends to be opposed to all newcomers. Nonetheless, the United States continues to admit a number of refugees each year. In mid-2015, a total of 267,222 refugees were recorded as residing in the United States (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015a). With 224,508 additional pending applications, the United States became the third largest recipient nation of new asylum claims (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015a). Moreover, the Obama administration pledged to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees and 85,000 total refugees before the end of the fiscal year in 2016 (United States Department of State, 2015).

The refugee crisis is often covered by the media due to its relevance. However, refugee portrayal is more complicated than simple representations by a media outlet. Evidence supports the idea that discussion of the refugee crisis is impacted by an intricate interaction among public opinion, government policy, and media representation (McKay, Thomas, & Kneebone, 2011). In particular, there seems to be an interesting interaction between public perceptions of refugees and the role of the media. In order to address this dynamic, it is important to examine the composition of public perceptions and break down the media representation into its various themes and language.

Public Perceptions of Refugees

Themes of Concern

Public opinion about refugees involves a number of specific concerns or ideas the public would like to discuss. Themes of concern do not have to be positive or negative

themselves, but instead provide the content of topics within public discourse. Though the media may create concerns through their content, in many cases, the media also serves to reflect topics within public discussion of the refugee crisis (Yaylaci, & Karakus, 2015). In other words, the media does not always create narratives of its own volition; rather it appeals to its audience by representing the socially-shared ideas and language of the whole community (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, & Baker, 2008). Therefore, concerns of the general public can be assessed through a combination of direct studies, polls, and an analysis of the topics on which the media chooses to report. By analyzing topics covered by the media as well as direct interviews or surveys of the public, researchers have differentiated themes of concern which could be applied to the American population. The themes of concern held by the public include, but are not limited to, threats to values and culture, threats to security, and economic burden on the host country (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Greenberg, 2000; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck, Due, & Augoustinos, 2015; McKay et al., 2011; Santa Ana, 1999).

Threats to values and culture. One major theme of concern appearing in public discussion of refugees is the threat to the host nation's values and culture. For example, a mixed-methods survey completed via mail by 585 Australian adults revealed public concern for the impact to values and culture. Researchers used a series of check-box questions to gauge understanding of asylum issues and open-ended questions to learn more about influences on attitudes and perceptions. Analysis of the qualitative responses showed a major theme of concern to be the integration and assimilation into the host country's culture (McKay et al., 2011). More specifically, native citizens expressed concern that refugees either had been or would be unwilling to change their dress,

religion, and cultural beliefs to match those of the host country (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; McKay et al., 2011). A study of 142 refugees about discrimination toward migrants in Western Australia revealed that citizens were apprehensive about humanitarian migrants' ability to assimilate to Australian society because of culture and value differences. In fact, half of the 150 migrants snowball sampled from African, Middle Eastern, and ex-Yugoslavian refugee groups claimed to have been discriminated against due to a lack of assimilation to Australian language or culture (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008).

McKay et al. (2011) also found that a main theme of Australians' concern was a lack of assimilation to the host culture. Analysis of the open-ended survey responses revealed participants not only felt asylum seekers would not assimilate, but felt the persisting cultural differences were extremely threatening to Australian society. Moreover, this perceived threat was not limited to a specific time frame. Researchers categorizing the rhetoric of 7 publicized interviews of an Australian Liberal Party representative discovered that this public spokesperson emphasized how refugees had already failed to integrate into society (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010). Other Australians indicated via open-ended survey responses a fear over incoming refugees' willingness to integrate (McKay et al., 2011). This fear was centered on the future refugees and the uncertainty of whether they would integrate upon arrival. Combined, these results indicate that the threat to values and culture is a concern rooted in the past, present, and future. In the eyes of the nationals, assimilation is vital because citizens believed their own values and cultural practices would eventually be threatened or compromised if newcomers did not assimilate. Thus, this concern is not a matter to be solved by tolerance or coexistence according to the fearful residents. Further thematic

categorization of open-ended survey responses given by 585 Australians revealed that concern over lack of assimilation included a belief that a failure to adopt the host country's values posed an extreme threat to the identity and nationhood of the host country (McKay et al., 2011). The magnitude of this perceived danger makes the threat to values and culture a primary concern.

Threats to security. An additional dominant theme of concern to the public is the potential threat to security. Though concern over security could be evidenced in many ways, it is closely tied to illegal modes of refugee arrival. In a discursive and linguistic analysis of refugee coverage in the 12 highest-circulating Australian newspapers, Lueck et al. (2015) discovered that the publications used common tropes of people smuggling and national security. The researchers hypothesized that the connection to people smuggling in particular led to questions of border security and added to the narratives of criminality already made evident in their analysis. Concern over threat to security is found in public perceptions apart from the media as well. Qualitative results from a mixed methods survey of 585 Australians assessing perceptions of refugees revealed that the association with illegality resulted in the perception that the refugees were criminals themselves in every aspect. The participants' responses to open-ended questions indicated that immigrants were not only suspected of entering the country illegally, but they were perceived as participating in illegal activities after arriving. Furthermore, response categorization into themes showed that the belief in the criminality of refugees included the perception that refugees lead to an overall more violent society with more social problems (McKay et al., 2011).

Evidence of perceived threat to security exhibits itself in several ways. For example, in a study of 142 refugees in Western Australia, refugees reported experiencing discrimination most when their appearances differed from the Australians' appearances and when the refugees came from the Middle East. One interviewee even reported being asked if she was connected to terrorist groups (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008). Studies showed security fears were often not founded on solid evidence such as prior events or verified threats, so researchers proposed the theory that certain groups of vulnerable people become scapegoats who embody a society's fear at a given time (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011). When applied to refugees and the threat to security, this theory would state that the society fears terrorism. Refugees then become the national manifestation, or the scapegoat, of this fear because they are the present versions of terrorist regimes the society fears.

Economic burden. A final theme of concern expressed by the public was the potential economic burden on the host country. For example, an empirical analysis of news articles in the United States revealed that economic strain was a core topic forming the framework of public discussion (Santa Ana, 1999). In this study, seven out of the 43 excerpts describing immigrants were directly related to potential economic impact. More specifically, the idea of economic burden goes beyond direct financial cost to include the potential impact on public services such as the welfare system. For example, 57 opinion articles from a total of five media publications in Canada discussed public thoughts about the possible burden on programs like welfare (Greenberg, 2000). Studies that focused directly on public perceptions rather than media analysis also noted a concern for economic burden. In a qualitative study from the United Kingdom, two of the six

participants who were interviewed, both middle-aged white men living in the same neighborhood as refugees, expressed apprehension that incoming refugees would drain already-scarce economic resources (Leudar et al., 2008). Combined, these findings suggest that economic burden is a foundational topic in the public perceptions of refugees.

Generalizability to the Current Population

The research on how language in the media impacts public perceptions of refugees is limited, so it is important to analyze the external validity of the available results by evaluating the ability to generalize results to the population examined in this study. All data collected on threat to values and culture and threat to security were from studies conducted in Australia and the United Kingdom. A certain level of generalizability is expected between studies in these countries and the populations studied in the United States due to similarities in values, culture, and economic status. These similarities are supported by categorization as part of the global North. The global North includes the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and a few of the wealthiest Asian countries. These nations are separated from the global South, or the rest of the world, based on development and wealth (Royal Geographical Society, 2015). Division of the global North and South is also consistent with refugee trends. With the exception of South Africa, the top ten destinations for new asylum seekers in 2015 were a part of the global North (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015a). By contrast, all countries on the top 20 list of asylum-seeker producers were a part of the global South (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015b). Categorization as part of the global North has led recent researchers to generalize findings to other

refugee host countries which are also a part of the global North. Researchers conducting a literature review of 38 sources on Canadian perceptions of refugees concluded that their findings were indicative not just of Canadian perceptions, but of the perceptions held by citizens of other global North nations. Through their analysis, the researchers argued that the global North uses representations and policy to construct refugees as “other” and contribute to their own national self-images as wealthy and humanitarian countries (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman, & Brunger, 2016).

Concerning generalizability, the theme of economic burden was unique because it was identified as a concern held by Americans in addition to Canadians and the British. For example, a qualitative analysis of 107 articles from a Californian newspaper revealed that the topic of economic burden was the vehicle for portrayals of immigrants because it was a topic that piqued public interest (Santa Ana, 1999). Thematic categorization of 57 Canadian opinion articles also showed public concern over economic burden (Greenberg, 2000). Additionally, two of six British men interviewed about refugees indicated economic concerns (Leudar et al., 2008). Therefore, since a concern for economic burden was found to comprise public perceptions in the global North as well as America in particular, this theme could perhaps be more confidently generalized to populations in America than some of the other themes of concern.

Influences on Public Perceptions

After establishing the content of public perceptions of refugees, it becomes important to assess the influences that cause perceptions to form or change. Evidence suggests that content of the media not only helps identify perceptions, but also serves to direct public opinions about refugees, especially since it is the primary source of

information for the general public (Yaylaci, & Karakus, 2015). For instance, if a hostile light is shed on refugees by the media, this portrayal may play a role in the construction of society's negative perceptions of this group. Specifically, theorists have proposed that the perceived hostility and strength of a particular group of people can contribute to the formation of "enemy images" by those in a culture (Alexander, Brewer, & Herrmann, 1999). Alexander et al. (1999) utilized the three negative categorizations of enemies, dependents, and barbarians. The researchers defined enemies as a group of equal status and incompatible goals, dependents as a group of lower status and exploitative behavior, and barbarians as a group of lower status and incompatible goals. Their functional analysis of out-group stereotypes among 93 college students in the American Midwest revealed that negative depictions of an out-group were capable of eliciting similar negative perceptions of that out-group. One of their experiments resulted in 42% of respondents both identifying and responding to the manipulated portrayal of the out-group as an enemy. In the context of refugee portrayal, negative stereotypes about refugees as an out-group are formed and perpetuated at least in part by media depiction. Data from a Canadian study showed that the 50 participants were more likely to dehumanize refugees after reading an article depicting refugees as bogus or terrorists than they were after reading a neutral portrayal (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Even a single, isolated depiction had the power to influence perceptions of refugees.

Moreover, negative media representations of refugees have been found to spread more easily and affect certain people more than others. In a qualitative analysis of interviews of a small sample of 20 lay people and 10 experts in the United Kingdom, Pearce and Stockdale (2009) found that negative representations of asylum seekers

voiced by participants contained more specific information and were thus reproduced more easily than positive representations. Excerpts from interviews indicating negative perceptions closely aligned with media representations of asylum seekers. Additionally, the researchers analyzed differences in the opinions of lay people, or people with no prior direct contact with asylum seekers, and experts, or people working in the field of asylum. Though perceptions held by lay people were split evenly between positive and negative opinion, their views were more polarized on the extremes. Conversely, expert opinions were overall more positive and less polarized, suggesting prior contact and knowledge might impact perceptions of asylum seekers. The language in the media also seems to have the least impact on those groups of people who are able to disregard labels and critically analyze the reports. McKay et al. (2011) noted in their analysis of 585 qualitative survey responses that many participants displayed the theme of being threatened by cultural diversity. The sample was largely older with only 4.8% being under age 30 and 69.8% being over age 50. In addition, only 31.7% of participants reported having received a university education. According to the researchers, their qualitative and demographic findings are consistent with other research which suggests the ability to think critically apart from stereotypes is especially true of younger, more educated people who are not threatened by the prospect of cultural diversity.

Portrayal of Refugees in the Media

With the evidence indicating media representations have at least some impact on public perceptions, it is necessary to identify specific ways in which media outlets can manipulate their printed content and which parts of a media publication are most influential. In reality, there are likely a great number of ways media publications can

impact readers through their rhetoric. However, when focusing on the narrowed topic of language, general themes and specific tools emerge as influencers of public perceptions.

General Themes

Every news article tells a story. The direction of a piece is determined primarily by the direction of the publisher. Though some outlets attempt to remain neutral, most have a lean toward certain values and political ideologies based on readership, sponsorship, and editorial staff. Political beliefs and editorial practice shape the way newspapers report on topics (Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015). Writers can use details, terms, phrases, connotations, and more to form an overall image which reflects the organization's bias. Research examining media depictions of refugees has found the most common negative depictions to be those of out-group construction and those of hostility (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Esses et al., 2013; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lueck et al., 2015; Parker, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999).

In-group vs. out-group. First, researchers found the designation of in-groups versus out-groups to be a general theme used by the media (Lueck et al., 2015; Parker, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999). Out-group theory holds that social stereotypes divide one group from another to create two contrary groups (Alexander et al., 1999). More specific to refugee portrayal, analysis of discursive and linguistic features used by the 12 highest-circulating Australian news publications found that categorization of refugees was common and that, within this categorization, "otherness" was implied (Lueck et al., 2015). Further analysis of 40 articles selected from four of the same Australian papers, one new Australian paper, and five British papers revealed that linguistic tools enabled the construction of binaries (Parker, 2015). Binaries could be any two groupings that

divide refugees from the citizens of the host country in an “us versus them” mentality. Actual terms such as “that,” “this,” “them,” “those,” “here,” and “there” were identified as further reinforcing established differences between the groups (Santa Ana, 1999). This type of categorization using stereotypes showed close ties to hostility narratives in its use to justify discrimination and exclusion of the out-group. With in-group versus out-group division, the out-group designated by a specified term or nationality was then tagged with negative qualities. Tough policies and discriminatory ideas can then be easily justified due to the negative qualities attributed to the out-group (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010).

Hostility. Media sources are also often guilty of portraying refugees in a hostile light. In several research studies, hostility was identified when a source portrayed refugees as criminals, diseased, bogus, or in other dehumanizing ways (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Coole, 2002; Esses et al., 2013; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lueck et al., 2015; Santa Ana, 1999). Researchers qualitatively examining Australian newspaper coverage of illegal refugee arrivals found that threatening portrayals were used to cater to the publications’ political bias because hostility themes were used to support tougher policies (Lueck et al., 2015). The media sources pushed their biases by taking advantage of the uncertainty of the general public and capitalizing on the opportunity to depict refugees as enemies. Based on the premise that crises sell newspapers, Esses et al. (2013) analyzed the ability of the Canadian media to make the public feel as if they are in a crisis. In one experiment, the researchers exposed 50 participants to an editorial cartoon while the participants were reading an unrelated article. One level of the independent variable included a cartoon labelling refugees as diseased and the other level included the same

cartoon with no labels. Their findings led them to develop a structural equation model in which labels and hostile depictions used by news publications influenced public attitudes toward immigrants in the direction of the source's bias. Another analysis of three Canadian newspapers' coverage of a single refugee arrival event revealed that the media primarily presented concerns about both security and legality and called into question the legitimacy of the motives for seeking refuge. The newspapers were of high circulation but varying political leans and audiences. After excluding opinion pieces, researchers examined 32 articles. Security concerns were expressed in that 59% of the headlines alone used terms indicative of security threat and risk, including terms such as "detained," "tracked," "wanted," and "terrorist" (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011). Following previously-discussed research, such depictions of refugees may create overall images of hostility in the minds of the readers. For example, common depictions used by 20 articles from Australian daily papers and 20 from British daily papers included the portrayal of asylum-seekers as illegal and the call for their separation from law-abiding citizens (Parker, 2015).

Another primary hostile depiction of refugees is to portray them in a dehumanizing light. Dehumanization could be defined as an extreme version of in-group versus out-group division because the refugees being dehumanized were excluded even from the human group. Esses et al. (2013) divided dehumanization into two main factors: portrayal of a lack of prosocial values and the subsequent denial of full humanity. These aspects of dehumanization could be both explicit and implicit. The study required 50 participants to read a manipulated editorial and complete a priming task to determine if dehumanization had occurred. Results showed that the normal refugee depiction did not

lead to dehumanization but the bogus refugee depiction and the terrorist refugee depiction did lead to dehumanization. Refugees were often found to be dehumanized explicitly through specific language such as “burden” or “threat” and implicitly through a general lack of voice in 13 different Australian newspapers (Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lueck et al., 2015). A lack of voice may be difficult to analyze because it is by definition the absence of something and therefore has fewer tangible characteristics to study. However, specific language can be analyzed in order to examine dehumanization. For instance, an examination of articles written about immigrants in the *Los Angeles Times* over a two year period revealed 120 total negative comparisons conceptualizing immigrants as non-human (Santa Ana, 1999). The power of dehumanization to strip refugees of their inherent human rights and values and thus justify their exclusion from society made it a main tool in constructing hostility narratives (Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck et al., 2015; Santa Ana, 1999).

Overall, studies have found hostility to be the foremost theme in media representations of refugees. Two Australian newspapers analyzed by Klocker and Dunn (2003) frequently dehumanized refugees. Based on latent coding of the articles’ tones, the average tenor of the 470 newspaper articles analyzed was found to be 16.8% positive, 63% negative, 11.1% mixed, and 9.1% neutral. More specifically, of the 4,561 terms used to describe asylum seekers, 17.4% were identified as dehumanizing. In a qualitative analysis referencing articles published in at least 13 newspapers in the United Kingdom, Coole (2002) also observed few sources with positive outlooks. Instead, newspapers followed the hostility trends in ideas and language, creating what the researcher called a

climate of fear and mistrust. Hostility themes were seen to permeate the news outlets in order to perpetuate the values supported by each outlet.

Specific Tools

In addition to general themes employed by news publications, research has revealed several specific linguistic tools which were frequently found to contribute to narratives about refugees. Some of the most common tools were those of comparison. Specifically, media publications were found to use metaphor and metonymy to compare refugees to primarily non-human objects (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Khosravinik, 2009; Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck et al., 2015; Parker, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999).

Metaphors. A common linguistic technique used throughout news publications is the metaphor. A metaphor is a literary device that equates two words or phrases for the purpose of implicitly comparing them. Santa Ana (1999) explained that metaphor was a tool frequently used by newspapers to help readers understand social issues in simpler terms because the comparisons relate difficult aspects of society to familiar parts of life. Metaphors were particularly powerful because they are conceptual rather than just linguistic. Therefore, metaphors had the power to go beyond a linguistic construction to form a conceptual framework in the readers' minds. The impact of metaphors on the subconscious could go easily undetected due to the way they became subtly ingrained.

One of the most dominant metaphors in *The Los Angeles Times* compared immigrants to animals (Santa Ana, 1999). Animal metaphors can be obvious, directly substituting words like "refugees" with animal words such as "herds" or "flocks." They can also be more subtle when they substitute other parts of speech with words like "hunted," "ferret out," or "stampede." Santa Ana (1999) reported that 20% of the 174

identified comparisons of immigrants in the widely-circulated and slightly liberal paper took the form of animal metaphors. Further examination which also analyzed sports and business articles even revealed that animal metaphors were used almost exclusively of immigrants and that the animals used for comparison were almost always lower rather than noble creatures.

Another common metaphor compares refugees to water. Parker (2015) analyzed 40 articles from Australia and the United Kingdom and noted the frequent use of water metaphors. Another researcher identified water comparisons as metonymy rather than metaphor, but the idea of comparison still remains (Santa Ana, 1999). Common uses of the water metaphor employed terminology similar to that of describing natural disasters. Researchers qualitatively analyzing the 12 highest circulating Australian newspapers found that some water metaphors actually identified refugees with terms like “tide” and “flow” (Lueck et al., 2015). In fact, many water metaphors were identified in qualitative studies, but the data were quantified for *The Los Angeles Times*’ articles over a two-year period which were found to have used water imagery in 8% of total immigrant comparisons (Santa Ana, 1999). A wide range of uses for water metaphors was also identified. Parker noted that water metaphors were also frequently used by anti-immigration groups apart from the media and, in these cases, were used to dehumanize and justify tough policy. Though most studies emphasized the negativity of such dehumanizing metaphors, Khosravini (2009) believed the use of water as a representation was not always negative. His discursive analysis of six mixed-bias British newspapers revealed that water was mainly used to denote large quantities of people and, in his study, did not seem to contribute to negative representations of refugees.

Other comparisons were less frequent and were thus grouped together as secondary or occasional metaphors. These metaphors included comparisons to plants, debased people, commodities, instruments, and more (Santa Ana, 1999). Examples of plant metaphors were found in terms such as “uproot,” “crop,” and “weed out.” Comparisons to debased persons often related refugees to deviants such as criminals. This comparison was made by describing refugees as detainees or isolated individuals despite the fact that they were not actually criminals (Parker, 2015). Although specific categories of secondary metaphors were sporadic, a two-year study of *The Los Angeles Times*’ immigrant coverage which included 107 articles found secondary metaphors as a whole to make up 22.4% of the total identified metaphors (Santa Ana, 1999).

Metonymy. Metonymy is another literary tool of comparison identified in the construction of refugee representation. A comparison is known as a metonymy when a linguistic expression stands in for a broader concept. For instance, in a metonymy, a part may represent the whole, an object may represent its user, or an institution may represent the people (Santa Ana, 1999). An example of metonymy would be to say, “These suits are taking over our neighborhood,” where “suits” refers to corporate businessmen moving into the neighborhood. In the context of refugee portrayal, Santa Ana (1999) classified terms like “burden,” “disease,” “tide,” and “army” as metonymy because he interpreted the larger picture to portray the host population as a house or a body and the incoming population to be dangers to that house or body. According to his classification, 43% of identified comparisons were metonymy. Whether or not comparisons were actually identified as metonymy, researchers such as Bradimore and Bauder (2011) found representations as burdens or diseases to be quite common. Metonymy ultimately served

the same comparative and conceptual purpose as metaphor, thus clarification on exact divisions between the two was not as important for the current study.

Identification of metaphor and metonymy is important because both are powerful literary tools in the construction of narratives. If the comparison is not overt and obvious, contemporary metaphor theory suggests readers will remain unaware of the ingrained conceptual link that has formed between the subject and the object to which the subject was being compared (Santa Ana, 1999). Moreover, with few exceptions, the primary result of literary comparison tools was to dehumanize (Leudar et al., 2008). Alongside dehumanization, comparison tools also enabled out-group division. Analysis of news articles in Australia and the United Kingdom revealed that metaphors made binaries possible, which are the first step in creating in-group versus out-group categorization (Parker, 2015). Further analysis of 12 Australian papers showed comparisons to be a primary factor behind categorization of asylum seekers as “other” and thus justifying the need for tougher policy (Lueck et al., 2015).

Literature Gap

With media coverage of refugee issues increasing due to the political climate, it is important to understand the impact of the content on public opinion. It is impossible to remove bias completely, therefore the impact of the bias on society must be explored. By analyzing how different types of language affect the readers’ opinions, researchers can further explore the extent to which media content impacts public perceptions of refugees. Past research on perceptions of refugees has analyzed refugee destinations such as Australia and the United Kingdom (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Coole, 2002; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; Khosravini, 2009; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Leudar et al.,

2008; Lueck et al., 2015; McKay et al., 2011; Parker, 2015). Research has not kept up with the recent boom in the number of forcibly displaced people, though. A major literature gap exists for newer countries of asylum, specifically for the United States of America. In fact, only one study analyzed representations in the United States media, and this study was both dated and focused on immigrants as a whole rather than just refugees (Santa Ana, 1999). Moreover, there was a gap in empirical studies, as most studies were qualitative analyses of the media and included no actual manipulations. Empirically evaluating the influence of the media on perceptions of refugees holds implications for the future, because the findings could affect media ethics as an increasing number of people seek refuge in this country. This study will attempt to add to current research by answering the following questions:

- (1) Are perceptions of the symbolic threat of refugees greater for individuals exposed to a negative news portrayal as compared with individuals exposed to a positive news portrayal?
- (2) Are perceptions of the realistic threat of refugees greater for individuals exposed to a negative news portrayal as compared with individuals exposed to a positive news portrayal?
- (3) Are ratings of attitudes toward the out-group of refugees more negative for individuals exposed to a negative news portrayal as compared with individuals exposed to a positive news portrayal?
- (4) Are ratings of intergroup anxiety associated with refugees more negative for individuals exposed to a negative news portrayal as compared with individuals exposed to a positive news portrayal?

Method

Participants

The sample recruited for the study was a voluntary, convenience sample taken from Liberty University ($N=146$). Though 146 responses were initially recorded, two were deleted based on failure to consent and 26 chose to withdraw after reading the debriefing. Additionally, two response sets were removed for reporting not having read the article, five were removed for not passing the manipulation check, and ten were removed for abnormal or incomplete response patterns. After deleting these response sets, 101 participants were left. The remaining participants were 12% male and 88% female, all between the ages of 18 and 45 ($M=20.9$). Participants were 87.1% Caucasian, 5.9% African American, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% other. The majority of respondents reported their family of origin to be middle class or above, with only 20.8% reporting to be working or lower-class. Many participants failed to report in some survey items, so linear interpolation was used to fill in the missing data with the most probable response. The survey was posted through Qualtrics as a psychology activity, so most of the participants were likely those enrolled in a psychology course. All of the participants were eligible for course credit by counting the survey as a psychology activity.

Materials

In order to assess the role of language in the media, two original news articles were created to be randomly assigned for participants to read before completing the survey. One article, called “The Positive Portrayal,” was meant to have a positive representation of refugees based on the language used (see Appendix A). The other

article, called “The Negative Portrayal,” was meant to have a negative representation of refugees by incorporating phrasing used by actual media representations (see Appendix B). Though a specific country was not mentioned, both articles state that the refugees are from the Middle East. This location was chosen because the top refugee-producing countries are in the Middle East (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015a). The articles were intentionally crafted so that they were identical apart from specifically-manipulated language. Both articles used the same framework, the same fictional facts, and the same fictional quotations. Several sentences were even identical across both news stories. Each sentence in one article could be matched with a sentence in the other article which was either identical or differed in purposefully-manipulated linguistic choices based on research (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011, Leudar et al., 2008, Lueck et al., 2015, McKay et al., 2011, Parker, 2015, Santa Ana, 1999). All differing sentences can be found in Table 1 with the manipulated language identified by italics. Whereas the positive portrayal used neutral or affirmative language, the negative portrayal changed the phrasing to adverse language. Some phrasing such as the words “burden,” “intrusion,” and “divide” were selected based on their overall negative connotation. These words reflect concerns of the public and were depictions often used by the media (Leudar et al., 2008, McKay et al., 2011, Santa Ana, 1999). Certain dehumanizing metaphors have been identified as common in the portrayal of immigrants as well. One study found that, among other comparisons, the most dominant metaphor compared immigrants to animals, a secondary metaphor compared immigrants to plants, and a common metonym compared immigrants to water (Santa Ana, 1999). These three comparisons were conveyed in the negative portrayal through specific word choice.

Table 1

A Comparison of Language Differences Between the Positive Portrayal News Article and the Negative Portrayal News Article

Differences Between Articles	
Positive portrayal	Negative portrayal
Lynchburg <i>offers homes</i> to 50 refugees as part of resettlement <i>plan</i>	Lynchburg <i>swamped with</i> 50 refugees as part of resettlement <i>promise</i>
The <i>group</i> of refugees <i>includes</i> families and individuals <i>seeking asylum</i> from the war and <i>unrest</i> that <i>affects their homes</i> in the Middle East.	The <i>pack</i> of refugees <i>is riddled with</i> families and individuals <i>hailing</i> from the war and <i>corruption</i> that <i>defines their society</i> in the Middle East.
City officials say this <i>small gift</i> is Lynchburg's <i>way of providing support</i> to the 10,000 additional refugees promised entrance to the United States in 2016.	City officials say this <i>added burden</i> is Lynchburg's <i>duty in dealing with</i> the 10,000 additional refugees <i>flooding into the U.S. after being promised</i> entrance to the United States in 2016.
Lynchburg <i>resident</i> Craig Harper...	Lynchburg <i>native</i> Craig Harper...
Security is often <i>a</i> question when allowing new <i>groups of people</i> into the United States.	Security is often <i>in</i> question when allowing new <i>crops of refugees</i> into the United States.
City council representatives <i>believe</i> that the vetting process is sufficient to <i>prevent</i> safety threats.	City council representatives <i>claim</i> that the vetting process is sufficient to <i>weed out</i> safety threats.
As for financial contribution, <i>Lynchburg will not be the only resource for the community's new guests.</i>	As for financial contribution, <i>the resettlement will go beyond private organizations to tap into the city budget.</i>
<i>The city will partner with</i> Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Roanoke <i>to provide basic needs and assistance to incoming families.</i>	<i>In addition to aid provided by</i> Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Roanoke, <i>the city of Lynchburg will spend taxpayers' money to meet the needs created by the flock of foreigners.</i>
City officials ultimately hope that <i>welcoming</i> these refugees <i>unites</i> the community.	City officials ultimately hope that <i>the intrusion</i> of these refugees <i>does not divide</i> the community.
Mayor Jane Griffin <i>encouraged</i> residents...	Mayor Jane Griffin <i>urged</i> residents...
In the end, many believe the <i>greater reward</i> is worth it.	In the end, many believe the <i>great expense</i> is not worth it.

Refugees were compared to animals through identification as both a “pack” and a “flock.” They were compared to plants by referring to groups as “crops of refugees” and

saying that officials would “weed out” some. Finally, they were compared to water through association with the words “swamped” and “flooding.”

Measures

Symbolic threat measure. Symbolic threat refers to threat to the worldview of the in-group. Threats can consist of those to values, standards, attitudes, and more. After factor analysis, the scale created by Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman (1999) consisted of 7 questions to be rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). Examples of items to measure symbolic threat were, “Refugees should learn to conform to the rules and norms of American society as soon as possible after they arrive,” and “Immigration of refugees is undermining American culture.” Three items were reverse scored to reflect the degree of negativity of the perceptions. Scores were then averaged to yield a total possible range of one to ten, with higher scores indicating higher symbolic threat. The original study evaluated the perceptions held by University of Miami students ($N=124$) toward Cuban immigrants, New Mexico State University students ($N=91$) toward Mexican immigrants, and University of Hawaii students ($N=117$) toward Asian immigrants. Among the three groups, the mean symbolic threat was 4.82 while the standard deviation was 1.07. Internal consistency calculations demonstrated low reliability with Cronbach’s alpha scores of .71, .68, and .46 respectively (Stephan et al., 1999). Calculations for the present study yielded a Cronbach’s alpha score of .63, also indicating low reliability.

Realistic threat measure. Realistic threat refers to real physical or material threats to the in-group. There is an emphasis on perceived realistic threats over actual realistic threats. The measure primarily addresses the availability of resources and the

economic burden of the out-group as perceived by the in-group (Stephan et al., 1999). After factor analysis, the scale consisted of 8 questions to be rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). Examples of questions were, “Refugees get more from this country than they contribute,” and “Refugees have increased the tax burden on Americans.” Five responses were reverse-scored to reflect the degree of negativity in the perceptions. Scores were then averaged to yield a total possible range of one through ten, with higher scores indicating higher realistic threat. Among the three groups reported above, the mean realistic threat was 4.12 while the standard deviation was 1.71. The Cronbach’s alpha scores for surveys measuring perceptions of Cuban, Mexican, and Asian immigrants were .81, .82, and .80 respectively, indicating adequate reliability (Stephan et al., 1999). Internal consistency calculations for the present study yielded a Cronbach’s alpha score of .83, indicating adequate reliability.

Attitudes toward out-groups measure. Attitudes toward out-groups refers to different evaluative reactions and emotional reactions the in-group may feel toward the out-group which, in this case, was refugees. The measure consisted of 12 words including hostility, admiration, disliking, acceptance, superiority, affection, disdain, approval, hatred, sympathy, rejection, and warmth (Stephan et al., 1999). Participants were asked to rate each item on a Likert scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extreme*). Six items were reverse-scored in order to reflect the degree of negativity the participant felt toward the out-group. Scores were then averaged to yield a total possible range of zero to nine, with higher scores indicating more negative attitudes toward the out-group. Among the three groups reported above, the original study reported the mean intergroup anxiety to be 3.57. It also reported the standard deviation to be 1.69. The Cronbach’s alpha was .93, .92, and

.91 for surveys assessing perceptions of Cuban, Mexican, and Asian immigrants respectively, indicating high reliability (Stephan et al., 1999). Internal consistency calculations for the present study yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .84, indicating adequate reliability.

Intergroup anxiety. Intergroup anxiety refers to the emotions one group may feel when interacting with another group (Stephan et al., 1999). The measure consisted of 12 words including apprehensive, uncertain, worried, awkward, anxious, threatened, comfortable, trusting, friendly, confident, safe, and at ease. Participants were asked to rate each item on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely*). Six items were reverse-scored to reflect an index of anxiety felt when interacting with refugees. Scores were then averaged to yield a total possible range of one to ten, with higher scores indicating higher intergroup anxiety. Among the three groups reported above, the original study had a mean intergroup anxiety of 3.3 and a standard deviation of 1.53. The researchers also reported Cronbach's alphas of .91, .90, and .91 for surveys assessing perceptions of Cuban, Mexican, and Asian immigrants respectively, indicating high reliability (Stephan et al., 1999). Internal consistency calculations for the present study yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of .87, indicating adequate reliability.

Procedure

Before this study began, the research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University. A Qualtrics survey was opened and advertised on the University's Department of Psychology webpage as a psychology activity. The study was vaguely described as an assessment of social attitudes so as not to prime participants to think about refugees or the role of language in the news articles. Participants voluntarily

completed a consent form and survey. Each participant was randomly assigned one of the two prepared articles. Participants were asked to read the article carefully and then answer a series of questionnaires to assess their perceptions. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed about the true purpose of the study. They were given the option of withdrawing their responses in light of the debriefing information. Participants were compensated with points for their psychology courses regardless of their submission decision.

Results

This study used an experimental design with two levels of the independent variable. Multiple scales assessed realistic threats, symbolic threats, attitudes toward out-groups, and intergroup anxiety. Independent *t*-tests were run for each measure in order to determine the influence of the language in the article on that particular measure of perceptions. In order to control for Type I error inflation, the original alpha value of .05 was divided by the total number of *t*-tests, with a resulting alpha of .0125 for each analysis. Selected descriptive statistics for the independent-sample *t*-tests are shown in Table 2.

Symbolic Threats

It was hypothesized that participants exposed to a negative media portrayal would score higher on the symbolic threat measure. Data revealed that there was no significant difference between the conditions in symbolic threat, $t(99) = -.726, p = .23$.

Realistic Threats

It was hypothesized that participants exposed to a negative media portrayal would score higher on the realistic threat measure. Data revealed that there was no significant difference between the conditions in realistic threat, $t(99) = -.835, p = .20$.

Table 2

Selected Descriptive Statistics for Independent-Sample t-Tests of Perception Scale Scores Between Participants Who Read a Positive or a Negative News Article for a Sample of Liberty University Students

Measure	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	Sig.
Symbolic Threat					
Positive	50	5.0598	1.10545	-.726	.235
Negative	51	5.2299	1.24384		
Realistic Threat					
Positive	50	4.4767	1.44309	-.835	.203
Negative	51	4.7271	1.56791		
Attitudes Toward Out-Groups					
Positive	50	2.8620	.87229	-.201	.421
Negative	51	2.9068	1.32938		
Intergroup Anxiety					
Positive	50	4.7278	1.05580	-.010	.496
Negative	51	4.7301	1.35591		

Attitudes Toward Out-Groups

It was hypothesized that participants exposed to a negative media portrayal would score higher on the attitudes toward out-groups measure. Data revealed that there was no significant difference between the conditions in attitudes toward out-groups, $t(94.203) = -.201, p = .42$. The Levene's test resulted in a p value below .05 ($p = .011$) and equal variances were not assumed.

Intergroup Anxiety

It was hypothesized that participants exposed to a negative media portrayal would score higher on the intergroup anxiety measure. Data revealed that there was no significant difference between the conditions in intergroup anxiety, $t(99) = -.010, p = .50$.

Discussion

The results of this study showed no significant indication that negative language in news articles directly impacted participants' perceptions of realistic threats, symbolic threats, attitudes toward out-groups, and intergroup anxiety. These results are contrary to previous analyses of media writings and public perceptions of refugees (Alexander et al., 1999; Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Esses et al., 2013; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Greenberg, 2000; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck et al., 2015; McKay et al., 2011; Parker, 2015; Santa Ana 1999). Most previous researchers hypothesized that language would have some influence on public perception.

The measure of symbolic threat can be compared with findings on threat to values and culture because each item directly assessed the perceived threat to values and culture of the host nation. Refugees' failure to assimilate to the host culture was found to be a main theme of concern for Australians (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; McKay et al., 2011). Newspapers often portrayed refugees as intrusive, usually through metaphor. This frequent comparison led researchers to hypothesize that negative language in the media negatively impacted perceptions of refugees (Parker, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999). The results of this study did not align with

previous research or hypotheses. Moreover, there was no significant difference between the positive and negative conditions, indicating that negative language did not affect perceptions of refugees.

The measure of realistic threat can be compared to findings on economic burden and threat to security because the measure refers to material or physical threats. Each item assesses tangible threats such as financial burden, strain on social programs, and an increase in crime. Previous research showed that news publications often focus on a threat to security in their discourse (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Lueck et al., 2015). More specifically, a belief in the criminality of refugees was associated with the perception that refugees lead to a more violent society (McKay et al., 2011). Economic burden was also found to be a core concern for Americans in particular (Santa Ana, 1999). Economic burden included direct financial threat as well as indirect strain on resources such as welfare (Greenberg, 2000; Leudar et al., 2008). Not only were realistic threats found to be of concern, but research revealed that labels indicating realistic threat negatively influenced participant opinion (Esses et al., 2013). The results of this study did not align with the findings of Esses et al. (2013), as there was no significant difference in perception of realistic threat between the conditions.

The measures for attitudes toward out-groups and intergroup anxiety can be compared to findings on in-group versus out-group division because the two measures focus on results of group division. Both measures assess the feelings of the in-group toward the out-group. Out-group theory states that the created groups will be contrary to one another (Alexander et al., 1999). Parker (2015) and Santa Ana (1999) both claimed that out-group division was created by media publications through the use of binaries.

This study employed binaries through dehumanizing vocabulary such as “crop” and “flock” in “The Negative Portrayal.” “The Negative Portrayal” also differentiated between groups by referring to the quoted source as a Lynchburg “native” rather than just a Lynchburg “resident.” After observing the use and tone of divisive language news articles, both Parker and Santa Ana concluded that such language would lead to in-group versus out-group categorization and be damaging to perceptions toward the out-group. An experiment about enemy images even revealed that hostile depictions of the out-group often elicits a hostile response from the in-group (Alexander et al., 1999). These findings are inconsistent with this study, which found no significant difference in either attitudes toward others or intergroup anxiety between the language conditions.

Though the results of this study were not in agreement with a majority of the previous experimental or analytical research, one researcher did draw conclusions consistent with these data. Khosravini (2009) had a more positive outlook on the use of water metaphor in particular, claiming that it did not seem to work toward a negative presentation. He asserted that a much more complex system was at play than simple linguistic portrayals and that seemingly negative depictions can sometimes reinforce the image of refugees as victims, thus necessitating help rather than a negative reaction. Likewise, the results of this study suggested one portrayal containing negative language did not have a significant impact on the perceptions held by the readers.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include a lack of diversity in the sample demographics which could affect generalizability. This study was conducted at a conservative Christian college in the American mid-Atlantic, so participants had similar ages, education levels,

and religious backgrounds. Recent voting polls also indicated that Liberty University students held conservative political affiliations (Rohr, 2016). The similarity may make it difficult to generalize results to the rest of the American population.

Another limitation is that this study used self-report data and online administration. The anonymous nature of the survey likely reduced participants' need to change answers to protect their own image, but self-report data could still be biased due to social desirability. The online and remote administration of the survey made it difficult to know if participants took the survey seriously or if they completed it simply to claim credit on a psychology activity. In fact, many participants failed to report on at least one or more item. Precautions were taken such as using a manipulation check, removing data from participants who reported not reading the article, and removing data with abnormal response patterns. However, complete response sets collected in a controlled environment would have been ideal.

Furthermore, it is hard to quantify how much influence one article has over a person's perceptions. Participants could have already been influenced by years of television broadcasts, written media, and even social media, as well as other environmental influences. If the participants' opinions had already been molded by previous media exposure, one article with no backing from a credible source may not have held much influence. The individual articles also may not have had large enough manipulations to significantly differentiate between positive and negative. Real negative news articles would use different facts and quotations, not just language, in order to tailor to the intended agenda.

In addition to prior news exposure, other factors could have played a role in perceptions. Though great efforts were made to remove confounds from the articles, confounds in the participants' lives could not be removed. For example, a participant could have had a more polarized positive or negative perception based primarily on prior contact rather than on the language used by the assigned article. Efforts such as a large sample size and random assignment of participants to each condition of the independent variable were taken in order to reduce the impact of personal confounds on the data.

Finally, this study was limited by the possibility of Type II error. A post-hoc power analysis run through G* Power revealed a power of only .26 to detect a small effect. Though the power to detect a small effect was low, adequate power (.802) was present to detect a medium effect. A sample of 620 participants or more would have been necessary to detect a small effect, but this study only gathered usable data from 101 participants. Therefore, it is possible that Type II error was present because the sample size was not large enough to detect a small effect.

Implications and Future Research

The results of this study have implications for media ethics. Previous researchers have noted negative representations in the media and hypothesized that these portrayals will lead the readers to hold negative perceptions (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2016; Parker, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999). Experimental research has also suggested that negative manipulations of portrayed image or labels can lead to negative perceptions and reactions (Alexander et al., 1999; Esses et al., 2013). However, data from this study did not align with previous findings. No significant difference in perception was found between participants assigned to the

positive and negative conditions. In light of these results, a balance needs to be found when calling for ethics in the media. Many researchers were quick to condemn the media based on hypotheses drawn from subjective observations (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck et al., 2015, Parker, 2015; Santa Ana, 1999). The current empirical study was inconclusive regarding the impact of language in the media on public perceptions of refugees, though. Further experimental research should be done to explore how much impact language actually has, if at all. In the meantime, writers should strive to be ethical while still maintaining a freedom of expression in how they portray people and events.

The results of this study also have implications for future research. First, more empirical studies are needed. Scholarly research has not kept up with the demands of the refugee crisis around the world. Past research has focused mainly on popular refugee destinations such as Australia and the United Kingdom (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Coole, 2002; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; Khosravinik, 2009; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Leudar et al., 2008; Lueck et al., 2015; McKay et al., 2011; Parker, 2015). Though the results of these studies may be generalizable to other countries with similar cultures, there is a major need for research to fill the holes left by past studies. Future research should increase its relevance to the current refugee crisis by focusing on new refugee destinations such as the other European countries and the United States.

In addition to expanding the participant range, it would be beneficial for future studies to vary their research design. Past research has largely been archival or correlational (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011; Coole, 2002; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Greenberg, 2000; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010; Khosravinik, 2009; Klocker &

Dunn, 2003; Leudar et al, 2008; Lueck et al; 2015; McKay et al., 2011; Olsen et al., 2016; Parker, 2015; Pearce & Stockdale, 2009; Santa Ana, 1999; Yaylaci & Karakus, 2015). Some studies focused only on analyzing actual news articles, while others measured public perceptions and compared the data to media portrayals. A lack of experimental design is problematic because no conclusions can be drawn about the causation of negative perceptions. Studies which subjectively analyze news articles or participant interviews leave too much room for researchers to draw their own conclusions based on non-objective observations rather than on empirical data. Future research should place an emphasis on the experimental design to determine whether language in the media influences public perceptions or if the two are merely correlated. New studies may also employ a longitudinal design to account for change as related to current events or changes in policy. Longitudinal research could eliminate the confound of prior media exposure by either measuring perceptions periodically while controlling media exposure or by measuring perceptions periodically while also analyzing the media the participant already consumes during the time frame. Future studies may also want to include a variety of participants as well as a variety of people groups as the subjects of portrayals. A variation of participants would allow researchers to study the group differences between perceptions and certain demographic factors. A variation of people groups described by media portrayals would allow researchers to study either more specific groups of refugees, such as different nationalities, or a more general group, such as immigrants as a whole.

This study explored new areas of research by being one of the first studies to empirically examine the influence of language in the print media on public perceptions of

refugees. One of two articles, a positive portrayal and a negative portrayal, was randomly assigned to participants using a function in Qualtrics to be read before responding to a survey. Contrary to previous research and hypotheses, the results did not reveal a significant impact of negative language on measures of symbolic threat, realistic threat, intergroup anxiety, or attitudes toward others. If nothing else, this study represents the need for further empirical research as opposed to subjective analysis. Though many researchers have identified negative language in the media and hypothesized the implications, few have empirically validated these claims. If language is as impactful as is believed by some researchers, then further experiments will help explore the depths of the influence. However, the inconclusive results of this study suggest the impact of language may not be as clearly defined as previously hypothesized. Empirical evidence will be vital to the exploration of this topic even if, like this study, it fails to support prior claims that negative language impacts public perceptions.

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Appendix A

The Positive Portrayal

Lynchburg offers homes to 50 refugees as part of resettlement plan

LYNCHBURG, Va. – The city of Lynchburg announced a plan Monday to resettle 50 refugees to the surrounding area over the next 3 months.

The group of refugees includes families and individuals seeking asylum from the war and unrest that affects their homes in the Middle East. City officials say this small gift is Lynchburg's way of providing support to the 10,000 additional refugees promised entrance to the United States in 2016.

Despite the city's reassurances, some locals have expressed concern over financial and security qualms.

Lynchburg resident Craig Harper explains, "Most people are just nervous that refugees would cost too much or make the community unsafe."

Security is often a question when allowing new groups of people into the United States. City council representatives believe that the vetting process is sufficient to prevent safety threats.

As for financial contribution, Lynchburg will not be the only resource for the community's new guests. The city will partner with Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Roanoke to provide basic needs and assistance to incoming families.

City officials ultimately hope that welcoming these refugees unites the community. Mayor Jane Griffin encouraged residents by saying, "The situation before us is one that involves both sacrifice and working together."

In the end, many believe the greater reward is worth it.

Appendix B

The Negative Portrayal

Lynchburg swamped with 50 refugees as part of resettlement promise

LYNCHBURG, Va. – The city of Lynchburg announced a plan Monday to resettle 50 refugees to the surrounding area over the next 3 months.

The pack of refugees is riddled with families and individuals hailing from the war and corruption that defines their society in the Middle East. City officials say this added burden is Lynchburg's duty in dealing with the 10,000 additional refugees flooding into the U.S. after being promised entrance to the United States in 2016.

Despite the city's reassurances, some locals have expressed concern over financial and security dangers.

Lynchburg native Craig Harper explains, "Most people are just nervous that refugees would cost too much or make the community unsafe."

Security is often in question when allowing new crops of refugees into the United States. City council representatives claim that the vetting process is sufficient to weed out safety threats.

As for financial contribution, the resettlement will go beyond private organizations to tap into the city budget. In addition to aid provided by Commonwealth Catholic Charities in Roanoke, the city of Lynchburg will spend taxpayers' money to meet the needs created by the flock of foreigners.

City officials ultimately hope that the intrusion of these refugees does not divide the community. Mayor Jane Griffin urged residents by saying, "The situation before us is one that involves both sacrifice and working together."

In the end, many believe the great expense is not worth it.