

ZEPPELIN UNIVERSITÄT

POLITICS, ADMINISTRATION & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BACHELOR THESIS

Pictorial Boundaries

Exclusionary effects of stereotypic visual representations
of refugees

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Abstract

Research has recently revealed exclusionary effects of an extensive focus on the vulnerability and helplessness of refugees. The present experiment explored whether the predominantly used visual frame of refugees as female, helpless, and passive affects stereotypical beliefs about the individuals in the images (e.g., their incapability, vulnerability, backwardness) and if these perceptual changes are associated with changes in the willingness to accept more refugees via the generalized perception of refugees as economically more burdensome. Participants from Germany (N=404) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (dependency vs. capacity). They were shown four images, featuring either refugees from a passive, vulnerable, helpless, or an active, resilient, and capable perspective. As predicted, refugees in the dependency representations were perceived as more passive, incapable, helpless, vulnerable, backward, and uneducated than refugees in the capacity representations. This perception is associated with a decrease in the willingness to accept more refugees, mediated by the generalized perception of the whole social group of refugees as economically more burdensome. Practical implications for public-relations practices of NGOs, IOs, and policy makers are discussed.