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Exploring Predictors of Canadian Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees and How They Should be Helped

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Exploring Predictors of Canadian Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees and How They Should be

Helped

by

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Abstract

In response to the recent crisis in Syria, Canada is accepting refugee immigrants. The aim of the current paper was to explore Canadian attitudes toward Syrian refugees in hopes to find ways to help refugees adapt to life in Canada. Ninety-nine undergraduate students completed an online questionnaire. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 44 ($M= 19.49$). The goal was to establish a relationship between attitudes and potential helping behaviour. Correlational results replicated the relationships between interdependence and warmth as well as status and competence as demonstrated in the Stereotype Content Model. Regression analysis found support for the mediator competence, but not the variable warmth. Influencing the perceived competence of another group may increase willingness to endorse helping behaviour. Subsequently, increasing helping behaviour may reduce the barrier of prejudice that refugees face when immigrating to a new country. General conclusions indicate that Canadians tend to view Syrian refugees positively.

Exploring Predictors of Canadian Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees and How They Should be

Helped

As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in a speech at the Canada House in London,

England, "We have a responsibility — to ourselves and to the world — to show that inclusive

diversity is a strength and a force that can vanquish intolerance, radicalism, and hate." Host

societies are more likely to be inclusive of minority groups, particularly refugees who have

already overcome hardship and are in an economic crisis (Economic Council of Canada, 1991).

As well, refugees potentially advance Canada's diversity, contribute to the country's economic

stability, and accepting refugees helps maintain alliances with other countries. However,

regardless of benefit, being accepting and willing to help other people is a humanitarian

implication (Economic Council of Canada, 1991). Canada seemingly reciprocates Syrian

refugees' contribution by offering stability, safety, and opportunity. Previous research has not

focused on Syrian refugees, as this is a fairly recent crisis that has emerged. The purpose of the

present study was to investigate Canadian attitudes toward incoming Syrian refugees, which

augmented the understanding of Canada's relationship with immigrants. The goal was to

determine how perceived characteristics of Syrian refugees may predict people's views about if

and how they should be helped. This study contributed to the potential reduction of stigma,

discrimination, and prejudice towards minority out-groups.

In 1954, psychologist Gordon Allport proposed a relationship between stereotypes and

prejudice. A recent review found that Allport's idea of predicting prejudice, initially presented

over half century ago, is still being researched (Stephan, 2008). In attempting to predict

prejudice, sometimes the perceived threat is enough to produce negative attitudes toward an out-

group. According to a meta-analysis by Esses, Deaux, Lalonde, and Brown (2010), many articles

emphasized that perceived threat from immigrants influences attitudes. The Integrated Threat

Theory identified four perceived threats that elicit negative attitudes toward the threatening

group: realistic threats, symbolic threats, negative stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety (Stephan

& Stephan, 2000). Realistic threats are defined threats of sharing economic resources, threats to

political power, and threats to physical wellbeing. In comparison, symbolic threats involve

perceived group differences in morals, values, and beliefs. Third, intergroup anxiety occurs when

people feel personally threatened in group situations for fear of being embarrassed or rejected.

Finally, the fourth threat is in this model is negative stereotypes which serve as biases for

expectations of a threatening group. When expectations are negative, unpleasant interactions

between groups are anticipated (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Prior research found that all four

threats accounted for a substantial amount of variance for attitudes toward immigrants (Stephan

& Stephan, 1996; Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; Murray & Marx, 2013). Further, it was

found that realistic threats are a better predictor of prejudice than symbolic threats (Schweitzer,

Perkoulidis, Krome, Ludlow, & Ryan, 2005).

        In addition, research has found that perceived threat from unauthorized immigrants is

stronger than authorized immigrants (Murray & Marx, 2013). As a result, researchers interpreted

that people actually view authorized immigration positively. Consequently, due to perceived

threat of illegal immigration, anti-immigration bills have tried to be passed in North America

(Esses, Brochu, & Dickson, 2012). Instead of taking political measures, perhaps changing the

way one perceives a threat may be a crucial step in reducing prejudice.

        What is more, as a result of perceived threats from immigrants, attitudes are not only

negative, they are dehumanizing (Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008; Esses, Medianu, &

Lawson, 2013). Dehumanization is defined as a claim that an opposing group does not have

value or humanness. Thus, dehumanization was found to lead to a lack of admiration and less

favourable attitudes toward an out-group (Esses, et al., 2008; Esses, et al., 2013). A means in

which dehumanization is depicted is through the media. The media reinforces negative

perceptions by providing biased, one-sided portrayals of immigrants (Esses, et al., 2013).

Consequently, dehumanizing media portrayals have lead to less favourable attitudes and less

support for immigrant and refugee policy in Canada (Esses, et al., 2008). Therefore, negative

attitudes are presented as an obstacle for immigrants.

　　　All in all, in order to promote social equality and diversity, trying to predict helping

behaviour is necessary. Jackson & Esses (2000) looked at three types of helping: empowerment,

direct assistance, and group change. Empowerment's goal is the removal of barriers so a helping

group can aid a recipient group to help themselves. Direct assistance is eliminating problems and

not holding the recipient group responsible to solve their own problems. Lastly, group change

does not particularly involve helping, rather it involves encouraging group members to change so

that they can solve their own problems (Jackson & Esses, 2000). Researchers found that people

who perceived economic competitiveness (also referred to as perceived status) with the

immigrants, showed less empowerment help. Further, the researchers found a negative

correlation between Social Dominance Orientation and empowerment to be significant (Jackson

& Esses, 2000). Social Dominance Orientation is a personality trait scale that predicts social

attitudes. However, results concluded that the relationship between Social Dominance

Orientation and helping behaviour was significantly mediated by zero sum beliefs. Therefore,

through perceived economic competitiveness, willingness to help immigrants was reduced.

　　　As an extension of this work, attitudes are not only predicted by status, but also by the

type of intergroup interdependence (Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996). Theory of Ambivalent Prejudice

sees that attitudes towards another group can have both positive and negative components. Thus, studies on interdependence have shown that being ambivalent about a group may affect the way you process information about them (Maio et al., 1996). For example, participants who had ambivalent feelings toward refugees and had read a story with a strong argument promoting immigration are easily persuaded to favour immigration. This finding instills hope that people who display ambivalent stereotypes can change their ambivalent views to positive views, which will reduce prejudice toward out-groups.

Thus, it was proposed that perceived status and interdependence could be used to predict dimensions of stereotypes. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) identified two dimensions, warmth and competence, which comprise different kinds of stereotypes. Warmth refers to the perception of likeability and friendliness of the opposing group. In contrast, competence is the perceived abilities of the other group. Together, a high or low level of the two dimensions creates a 2x2 matrix (see Figure 1). Warmth and competence differentiate four kinds of stereotypes and the model identifies associated emotional reactions to the stereotypes (Fiske, et al., 2002). Within each quadrant, a corresponding stereotype exists.

	Competitive Interdependence	**Cooperative Interdependence**
Low Status	Low warmth, low competence Contemptuous Prejudice	High warmth, low competence Paternalistic Prejudice
High Status	Low warmth, high competence Envious Prejudice	High warmth, high competence Admiration

Figure 1. Warmth and Competence differentiating kinds of stereotypes in the Stereotype Content Model

Fiske et al. (2002) found that social structuring of groups predicts perceived stereotype content; hence, status and interdependence between groups systematically predicts perceived warmth and competence. Status, as defined by these researchers, is the perceived socioeconomic standing of a group in comparison to other groups, whereas interdependence detects how competitive or cooperative two groups are with each other. Specifically related to competitiveness are zero-sum beliefs, which were used to measure interdependence. Studies categorizing stereotypes based on the dynamics in the Stereotype Content Model interpreted the clustered quadrants as being stable, valid, and significant (Fiske et al., 2002). Also, cross-cultural evidence supported the social structure of the Stereotype Content Model (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). However, it should be noted that not all stereotyped groups of people fit one particular category. For instance, blue collared workers and gay populations hovered between quadrants (Fiske et al., 2002). Overall, the Stereotype Content Model demonstrates that perceived predictors of stereotypes (warmth and competence) seem to be the primary means of altering attitudes.

Looking specifically at types of help that fit with the Stereotype Content Model, Cuddy et al. (2008) used the components of warmth and competence in predicting the endorsement of active and passive facilitation (see Figure 2).
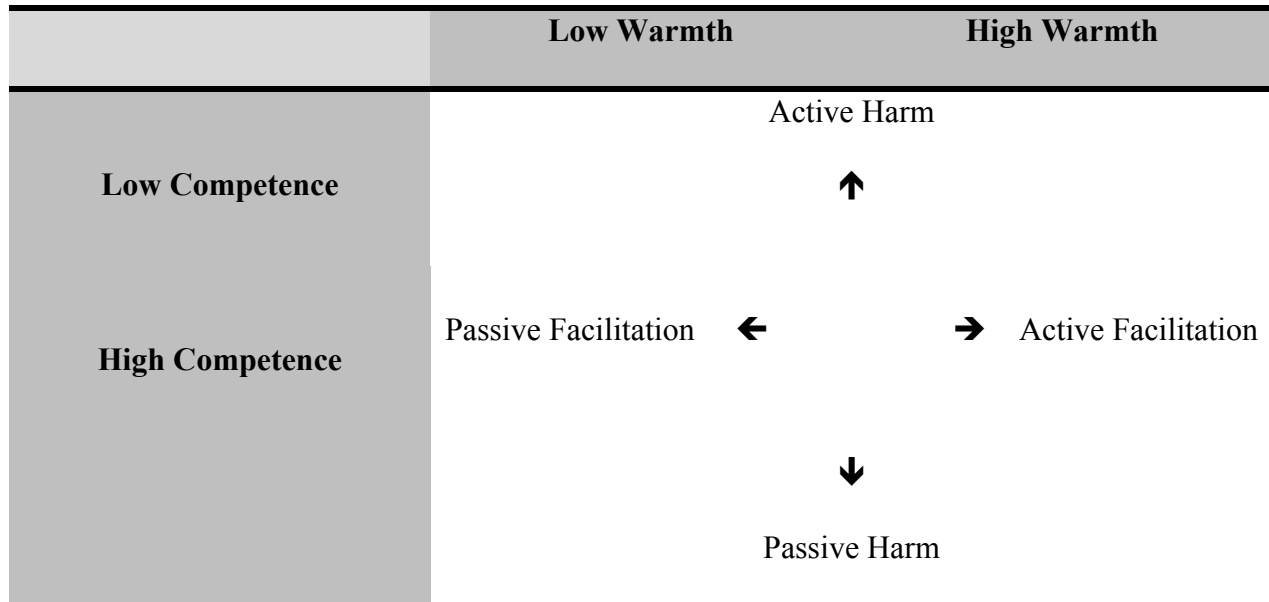
	Low Warmth	High Warmth
Low Competence	Active Harm ↑	
High Competence	Passive Facilitation ←	→ Active Facilitation
	↓ Passive Harm	

Figure 2. Endorsement of Helping Behaviour in the context of the Stereotype Content Model.

In this context, the term active refers to more effort and intention whereas passive is defined by having less of those characteristics. Thus, active facilitation explicitly aims to benefit the target compared to passive facilitation which is defined by tolerable cooperation with a group (Cuddy, et al., 2008). Moreover, active harm refers to explicitly intending to hurt a target, whereas passive harm is diminishing social worth through neglecting a group. Therefore, improving negative stereotypes from the Stereotype Content Model may increase endorsement of helping behaviour (active facilitation). Regarding Syrian refugees in Canada, the more facilitation that is executed by Canadians, the easier the refugees will adjust to life in Canada will be.

In the present study, the Stereotype Content Model was used to understand the relationship between stereotypes and associated prejudicial attitudes between Canadians and

Syrian refugees. Due to the current Syrian crisis, investigating attitudes toward Syrian refugees is relevant. This research contributed to the understanding of Syrian refugees in hopes to endorse positive helping behaviour when they come to Canada. First, it is hypothesized that Syrian refugees will fall into a contemptuous stereotype due to perceived lack of warmth and low perceived competence of this group. Next, it is hypothesized that the relationships found in the Stereotype Content Model will be replicated. That is, perceived status will predict competence and perceived interdependence will predict warmth. Lastly, this study will determine if competence and warmth mediate the relationships between status and willingness to endorse helping behaviour as well as interdependence and helping behaviour. The completion of a questionnaire assessing agreeableness with various statements on warmth, competence, status and interdependence, as well as helping behaviour should provide an insight on Canadian attitudes toward Syrian refugees in hopes to reduce negative prejudice and help incoming refugees.

Method

Participants

One hundred and thirty students participated in the study. Twenty-eight questionnaires were omitted due to incomplete surveys and three were deleted because of response bias. The remaining 99 questionnaires were used in the statistical analyses. Participants were first and second year psychology students from King's University College in London, Ontario. Of the students, 69 were female and 30 were male. Age of the participants ranged from 18 to 44 years old ($M = 19.49$). Students were recruited voluntarily via SONA. Upon completing a related assignment, students were granted up to 2.5% bonus percentage points toward their final grade.

Materials

A questionnaire consisting of five scales and three open-ended questions was generated using Qualitrics software (see Appendix A). Each scale contained five items created for this research by the author. The 25 questions were all randomized in order and nine of the questions were counterbalanced. Participants expressed their agreeableness to the 25 items on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (-3) to strongly agree (+3). Four of the scales were measuring the predictor variables of the perceived warmth, perceived competence of Syrian refuges, as well as their status, and the nature of the relational interdependence with Canadians (competitive or cooperative). The fifth scale will measure the criterion variable of helping behaviour. The three open-ended questions explored attitudes toward and knowledge regarding Syrian refugees in Canada.

Warmth. Warmth statements were based on the description of warmth from the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002). In the study, warmth was measured by perceptions of likeability, approachability, and kindness of refugees (α= .80)

Competence. The competence scale was also modified from the description of competence in the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002). Competence was measured by the perceived abilities and skills the refugees have (α= .58). For example, perceptions of refugees' work ethic and intelligence will be assessed.

Status. In relation to the Stereotype Content Model, status refers to the socioeconomic standing of Syrian refugees as perceived by Canadians (Fiske et al., 2002). Statements prepared for this study included perceptions of refugees' education level, employment, and economic success (α= .44)

Interdependence. The type of interdependence between refugees and Canada can be perceived as competitive or cooperative (Fiske et al., 2002). That is, people may think that those things that benefit Syrians come at the expense of Canadians (competitive relations) or that they help Canadians (cooperative relations). The all-or-nothing mindset of perceived competitiveness is known as zero-sum beliefs (Jackson & Esses, 2000). Statements such as "Canada will lose resources or power if Syrian refugees gain it" reflect zero-sum beliefs (that is, high perceived competitive relations and low cooperative relations). Thus, statements in this scale were modified from both the definition of interdependence and zero-sum beliefs, α= .82 (Fiske et al., 2002; Jackson & Esses, 2000).

Helping behaviour. As the outcome variable, participants were asked about their endorsement of helping behavior toward Syrian refugees (Cuddy et al., 2008). The prosocial behaviour of helping refers to the voluntary actions intended to aid refugees. Measures were created from Cuddy et al.'s (2008) ideas surrounding this empowerment helping (α= .57). Statements include perceptions of if and how refugees will benefit from various means of help (e.g. "Refugees deserve free education to get them started in Canada").

Open-ended questions. Three questions explored participant's attitudes on issues including refugees receiving free tuition from schools, the screening process of refugees coming to Canada, and participant's opinions about having 25000 refugees coming to Canada in the near future. It is valuable to note what the majority of participants think about social issues to better understand the relationship between Syrian refugees and Canadian citizens. The questions were based on the social issues described in the media in 2015.

Procedure

A convenience sample of students was recruited from first and second year psychology courses at King's University College. Participation in this study was on a volunteer basis. Students self-selected this study by signing up via the SONA system. Participants completed the survey online following a link provided after signing up. Students were able to complete the survey at their convenience. The duration of this study was less than one hour. Participants had to click to agree to the terms outlined in the consent form before proceeding to the questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the debrief form appeared. To receive the bonus marks (up to 2.5%) for completing a related assignment, students e-mailed the assignment to the researcher.

Design

This study's correlational design looked at the predictor variables of warmth, competence, status, and interdependence on the criterion variable of willingness to endorse helping behaviour. Descriptives were collected to see if Syrian refugees were perceived positively or negatively. It was hypothesized that Canadians view Syrians negatively. Correlational analysis explored the relation between attitudes toward Syrian refugees and helping behaviour. It was hypothesized that status and interdependence correlates with warmth and competence. Further, regression analysis looked at possible mediators. It was hypothesized that perceived warmth and competence are mediators of status and interdependence on empowering forms of helping behaviour.

Results

The first hypothesis posited that Canadians would view Syrian refugees as having low warmth and low competence levels. This would be indicated with scores significantly lower than

the scale midpoint of zero. Descriptives on these variables found a moderately high score for the variable warmth (*M*=1.03, SD= .94). This scale was significantly above the scale midpoint, *t*(98)= 10.85, *p*< .001. In addition, competence scores were also moderately high (*M*= .94, *SD*= .76) and significantly above the scale midpoint of zero, *t*(98)= 12.27, *p*< .001. Status scores of Syrian refugees were only slightly positive (*M*=.021, *SD*= .68) and did not differ significantly from zero, *t*(98)= .32, *p*= .754. Perceived interdependence scores were moderately negative and significantly different from zero, *t*(98)=7.47, *p*<.001, suggesting higher levels of cooperation rather than competitiveness (*M*= -.90, *SD*= 1.20).

Moreover, correlational analyses were conducted on all variables (see Table 1).

Table 1

Correlations Between Four Predictor Variables and Helping Behaviour

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Warmth	-----				
2. Competence	.62***	-----			
3. Status	.20*	.34***	-----		
4. Interdependence	-.61***	-.43***	-.28**	-----	
5. Helping Behaviour	.24*	.27**	.23*	-.39***	-----

Note. Pearson's correlations indicated in table. * p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001.

The second hypothesis looked to see if interdependence systematically predicted warmth and if status predicted competence scores. A significant negative correlation was found between warmth and interdependence, *r*= -.61, *p*< .001. It appeared that the less competitive and more cooperative the relationship was between Canadians and Syrian refugees, the warmer Canadians viewed the refugees. What is more, a significant positive association was found between

competence and status, $r= .34$, $p= .001$. Therefore, as perceived status of Syrian refugees increased, the more competent Canadians viewed them.

Third, regression analyses were ran to determine potential mediation effects of the variables warmth and competence on the relationships between interdependence and helping behaviour as well as status and helping behaviour. Using the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation is indicated when: (1) the predictor variable predicts both the criterion variable and the mediator, (2) the mediator predicts the criterion variable, and (3) the relation between the predictor variable and the criterion variable is reduced to non-significance when the mediator is controlled. The relation between perceived status and helping behaviour ($\beta=.26$, $t=2.27$, $p=.025$) was mediated by perceived competence. Predicting helping with both status and competence reduced the relation between status and helping to non-significance ($\beta=.15$, $t=1.46$, $p=.149$), whereas the relation between competence and helping remained significant ($\beta=.22$, $t=2.13$, $p=.036$). The statistic for the Sobel's test was significant, $z= 1.97$, $p= .048$, suggesting that the relationship between status and helping behaviour was significantly reduced by the inclusion of the mediator competence (see Figure 3).
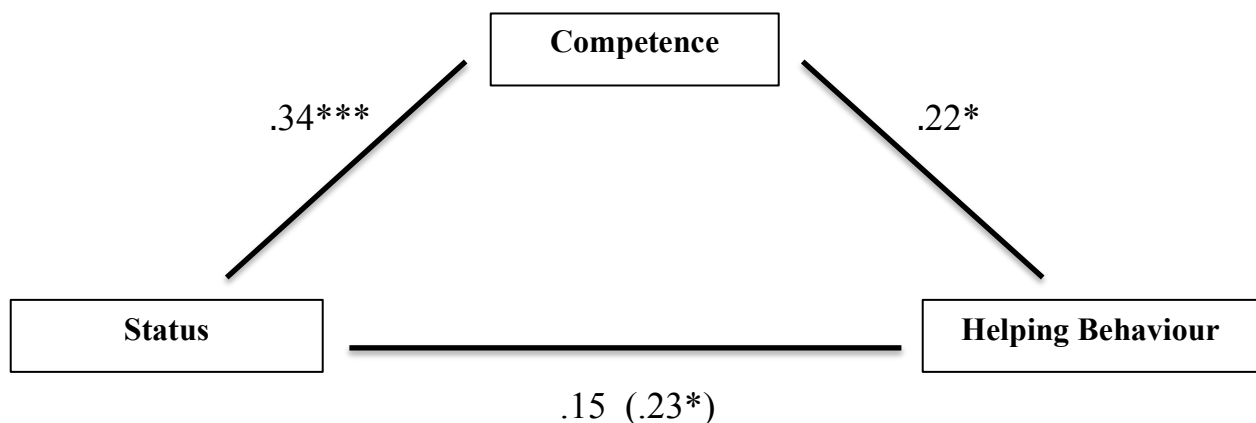

Figure 3. Competence as the potential mediator between perceived status and helping behaviour. *Note.* Person correlations are indicated on figure paths. * p< .05; *** p< .001.

In the mediation analysis testing whether perceived warmth explained the relationship between interdependence and helping behaviour was non-significant. Thus, the direct relationship between interdependence and helping behaviour remained significant (β=-.39, t= -3.28, p=.001).

Open-ended answers were coded by theme and the frequency in which themes emerged was tallied. First, calculation of responses on refugees deserving free tuition (n= 96) found that 7.29% of participants found that it was an extremely good idea, 35.42% thought it was a fair idea, 8.33% presented mixed feelings, 7.29% thought everyone should get free tuition, 38.54% disliked the idea, and only 3.13% expressed that they extremely disliked the idea of offering free tuition to incoming Syrian refugees. Further, responses for knowledge about the screening process for incoming refugees (n= 94) found that 57.45% of participants thought the process was fair, 17.02% thought it should be a strict process, 13.83% of students explained that they did not know anything about the screening process, and 10.63% expressed that the process was too intense/not fair for refugees. Lastly, when students answered to their opinion on 25000 refugees coming to Canada in the next year (n= 93), 32.36% of respondents thought it was an extremely good decision for the government to bring them into Canada, 35.43% indicated it was a good idea, 19.35% said it was a rationale decision to make, and 12.90% of participants thought it was unfair to Canadians to bring that many refugees into the country.

Discussion

Syrian refugees were viewed positively according to Canadian students. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, refugees did not fall into the contemptuous stereotype from the Stereotype Content Model. Instead, due to high levels of perceived warmth and high levels of perceived competence of incoming Syrian refugees, Canadians included them as part of their in-group according to the Stereotype Content Model. Moreover, congruent with the Stereotype Content

Model, it appears as though interdependence was strongly associated with warmth and status was strongly correlated with competence. This suggests the support for the second hypothesis of interdependence and status systematically predicting warmth and competence. Lastly, the final hypothesis was partially supported. Competence significantly explained the relationship between status and willingness to endorse helping behaviour, whereas warmth was not found to be a mediator for helping behaviour. Therefore, it is inferred that altering competence may be a constructive way of changing helping behaviour.

As for interpreting the open-ended questions, it appears that students generally have mixed feelings about relevant issues regarding Syrian refugees coming to Canada. Perhaps the mixed responses were a reaction to a degree of ambivalent feelings (Maio, et al., 1996). First, students seemed to be quite defensive about Syrian refugees getting free tuition from their institution. A similar amount of people who thought the idea was fair also thought it was unfair for Syrians to get free education. It may be the case that free tuition from Western university served as a realistic threat to students, hence the more negative responses in this particular questions (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Schweitzer, et al., 2005). A significant amount of participants expressed that refugees should also have a loan system set in place like domestic students in Ontario have. In addition, only a minimal amount of students suggested that everyone should be granted free education. Since student debt is a deficit of higher education, it was anticipated that students would suggest that they deserve free tuition as well.

Second, participants seemed to not be aware of the specifics of what happens during the process of taking in refugees. However, the majority of participants had faith in the government to implement a fair process for all involved. Some participants went on to explain how a strict process was necessary for Canadians' safety, but the process was not dehumanizing for the

Syrians. All in all, despite not knowing exactly what the refugees go through to come into

Canada, confidence that the process is fair was commonly expressed in the open-ended

responses.

Lastly, participants had mixed feelings about bringing in 25000 refugees. The vast

majority of students thought bringing in refugees was a positive action and some even suggested

that taking in more refugees would be helpful, yet almost a third of students thought that

accepting 25000 refugees was just a rational decision for the government to make or that they

disliked the incoming amount of refugees. Therefore, as an integral component to the

questionnaire, the open-ended questions allowed to students to express their feelings and

thoughts about relevant issues regarding Syrian refugees. As demonstrated, there were both

positive and negative answers, insinuating that incoming Syrian refugees may be a controversial

topic.

In relation to previous research, this study did not find parallel results. The application of

the Stereotype Content Model on Syrian refugees in Canada found different results in

comparison to other groups (Cuddy et al., 2008; Esses, et al., 1998; Schweitzer, et al., 2005).

Attitudes toward immigrants and other refugee groups suggest that Syrian refugees should have

fallen into a stereotyped quadrant as opposed to being viewed as admirable. Two fundamental

components of this study may have contributed to the current finding. First, Canadians inherently

uphold strong levels of tolerance as a result of living in a culturally mosaic country. Canada's

mosaic is demonstrated through high levels of cultural competence, cultural attunement, and

cultural humility (Racher, 2007). Perhaps this social norm favoured attitude scores to be more

positive toward Syrian refugees. Second, through the media, Canadians have learned about

Syria's history, brutal events, and unfortunate living conditions. The difference between taking

refuge in Canada compared to immigrating to Canada may elicit more sympathetic attitudes, thus resulting in more positive attitudes scores.

In terms of theoretical implications, the components of the Stereotype Content Model were mostly replicated in this study and the relationships between the variables of warmth and competence as well as status and interdependence were demonstrated (Fiske et al., 2002). High or low levels of perceived warmth and competence predict kinds of stereotypes. In congruence with the model, status and interdependence between groups predicts warmth and competence levels. Therefore, the Stereotype Content Model adequately describes the perceptions of one group on another group through the evaluation of attitudes. It is important that intergroup relations can be predicted so that potential prejudice between groups can be reduced in order to avoid conflict.

After predicting the stereotype, the next step would be to identify how to reduce the associated prejudice for each of the four kinds of stereotypes in the Stereotype Content Model. First, since high warmth and high competence elicit admiration in this cluster, so there is no negative stereotype to change because groups in this category are considered in-group. Related to the present study, Syrian refugees in Canada appear to fall into this admiration quadrant. Out of the four quadrants of the Stereotype Content Model, two are seen as ambivalent (Cuddy, et al., 2008). This means that out of warmth and competence, one dimension is low and the other dimension is perceived as high (envious and paternalistic stereotypes). As shown in previous research on ambivalent prejudice, it appears that ambivalent feelings can be more easily persuaded compared to non-ambivalent views (Maio et al., 1996). Informing the host group about positive characteristics and benefits of an opposing group can potentially reduce negative attitudes for these stereotypes. Lastly, when addressing how to alter negative attitudes related to

contemptuous stereotypes, perhaps changing perceptions of the predictor variables outlined in

the Stereotype Content Model would improve attitudes. Research has found that changing the

perceived competitiveness between groups elicited more positive attitudes (Fiske et al., 2002).

Also, researchers found that directly counteracting zero-sum beliefs, via an editorial, improved

attitudes toward immigrants (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001). Finally, as

demonstrated in the present study, perhaps altering perceived competence improves negative

attitudes.

Practical implications of the findings in this study lead to alleviating barriers for

incoming refugee groups. A substantial barrier to adjustment to life in a new country is the

negative attitude the host population has against incoming groups. Improving attitudes will

minimize the barrier of potential prejudice and discrimination. Subsequently, improving attitudes

will allow a people to live in coherence and harmony, avoiding dehumanization, divergence, and

warfare. Thus, the Stereotype Content Model provides an understanding for what components of

attitudes need improvement. In accordance to the current study's findings, adjusting the way

Canadian's view Syrian refugees' competence can lead to more positive attitude outcomes such

as the willingness to helping others. Since competence was a significant mediator between status

and helping behaviour, the more capable Canadian's view Syrian refugees, the more willing

Canadian's will be to endorse helping behaviour for incoming refugees. One means through

which competence can be improved is via the media. Reputable news broadcast interviews and

articles can aid in informing the public on how skillful and educated Syrian refugees are. This

allows Canadians to realize how Syrian refugees will be able to contribute to Canada's society,

thus instilling more positive attitudes towards them.

There were some limitations to this study. As this was an exploratory correlational study, no claims of causation can be made for the endorsement of helping behaviour toward Syrian refugees. Moreover, a larger sample would have been beneficial. Lastly, limitations of this study include a restricted sample, as students are generally not representative of the general population. In particular, this student sample attends a liberal arts college, are all psychology students, and are likely knowledgeable about current events and social justice issues. It is possible that this sample was not ideal for adequately representing the Canadian population. Finally, perhaps students felt pressure to respond to the questionnaire in a socially desirable manner.

Social desirability was an important issue for this research's controversial topic. Social desirability may have been a contributor to ambivalent feelings, resulting in pressure to respond in a pro-social manner. As this was a preliminary study of Syrian refugees in Canada with no previous research on this sub population, it was useful to conduct a correlational design. With this foundation, there is potential to reduce this bias through an experiment. Future research could use reaction time to gauge automatic responses versus thoughtful answers. A lower reaction time would indicate a more implicit response in comparison to a longer response time (Redding, 2004). Thus, implicit stereotyping occurs when people are unaware of the way stereotypes influence their social judgments (Jackson, 2013, p.121). On the other hand, explicit stereotyping occurs when people are aware of the factors that influence their impressions of others. Therefore, distinguishing between implicit and explicit stereotyping through the implicit-association test (IAT) will allow future research to gather accurate intergroup perceptions. Focusing on implicit stereotyping will also rectify the problem of social desirability.

Future research could use a community sample rather than a student sample. With a community sample, there may be a higher likelihood of seeing stereotyped attitudes such as the

contemptuous stereotyped attitudes found in previous research. However, if the positive perception of Syrian refugees found in this research is valid, then the results would be replicated even in a more generalizable sample. Therefore, more research on the subpopulation of Syrian refugees is needed to understand how they are truly perceived.

In conclusion, the Stereotype Content Model was supported as a measure of predicting positive or negative attitudes. The present study found that Canadians tend to view Syrian refugees more favourably, contrary to negative outcomes found in previous literature. Overall, the application of this model may be effective in reducing prejudice and promoting social equality.

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Appendix A

Exploration of Attitudes Toward Refugees in Canada

Gender: ☐ Female   ☐ Male ☐ Other   ☐ Prefer not to say

Age: _____

Year of Undergraduate Study: ☐First year   ☐Second year   ☐Third year   ☐Fourth year

Nationality: _____

Please complete the following survey. Click one answer for each of the statements below from strongly disagree (-3) to strongly agree (+3).

Warmth Scale

Most refugees are withdrawn.

Compromising with a refugee is difficult because they are disagreeable people.

I am able to trust the refugees coming to Canada.

Syrian refugees are likeable.

Refugees tend to be a friendly population.

Competence Scale

Refugees are as competent as I am.

Syrian refugees are smarter than Canadians.

Refugees do not have the same skills as I do.

Refugees are more hardworking than I am.

Refugees are capable of learning new skills.

Status Scale

Many refugees held jobs in Syria that are seen as prestigious.

Refugees are able to be economically successful in another country.

Level of education is generally low among refugees.

Syrian refugees are wealthy.

Refugees have high social ranking in Canada.

Interdependence/Zero Sum Scale

The more power Canada gives to refugees, the less power Canadians will have.

Refugees hardly use any of Canada's resources.

Refugees are taking jobs away from Canadians.

Programs that help refugees hurt other Canadians.

Money spent of refugees is money taken away from other Canadians.

Helping Behaviour Scale

Refugees deserve free education to get them started in Canada.

The Canadian government should provide language training to help refugees adjust.

Refugees are responsible for solving their own problems in Canada.

People should educate the public about the difficulties refugees face when coming to Canada in order to help improve their adjustment.

Settlement assistance programs should be implemented for incoming refugees.

Open-ended Questions:

1. What do you think about the Canadian government bringing 25000 refugees to Canada?
2. What do you know about the selection process that refugees go through to come to Canada?
3. What is your opinion about Syrian refugees getting free tuition at Western and other universities?