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The Role of the Media in the Automatic Dehumanization of Refugees

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University of Western Ontario

The Problematization of Refugees by the Media

Tories unveil bill to thwart 'bogus' refugees

TAMARA BALUJA
Ottawa — The Globe and Mail
Published Thursday, Feb. 16 2012, 10:21 AM EST

The Tories have introduced a bill that will once again attempt to deter "bogus refugees" from applying to Canada. The new bill, Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, will go back on many of the changes the Conservatives were forced to make under a minority government in their previous attempt to reform the asylum system in 2010.

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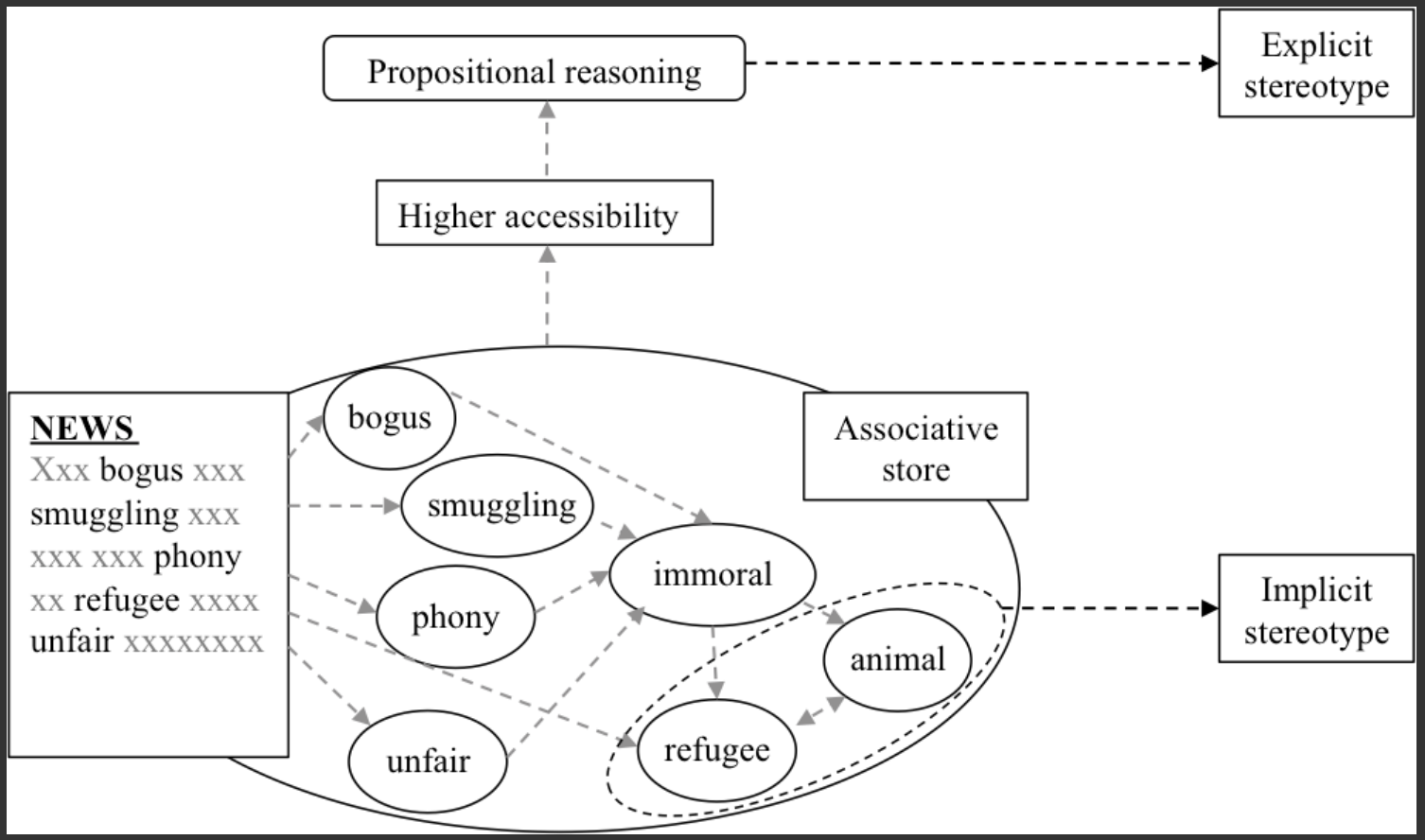
Research Question

- What is the impact of the media's portrayal of refugees on people's perception of refugees?

Theoretical Assumptions

- Implicit Social Cognition Model of Media Priming (Arendt, 2013)



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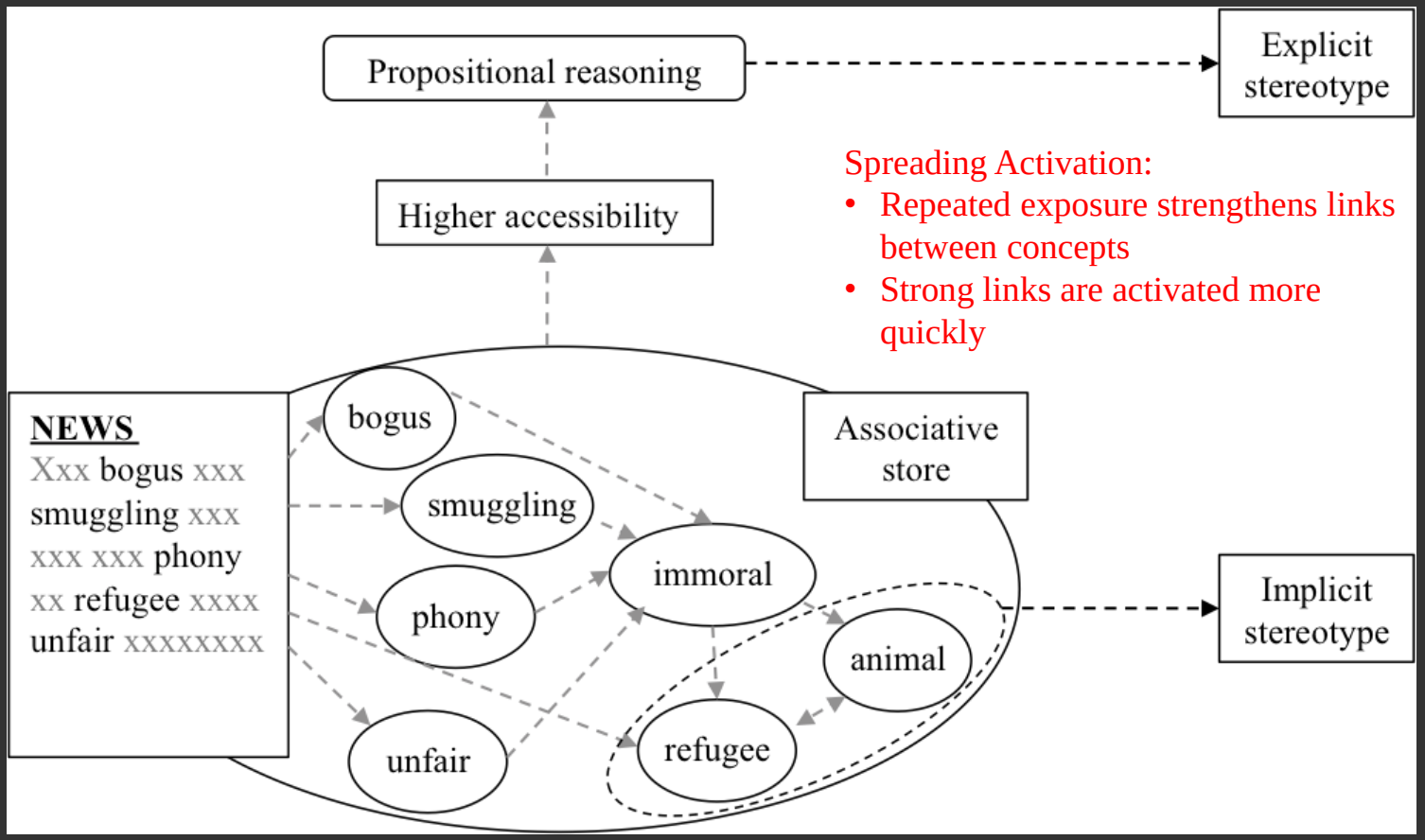

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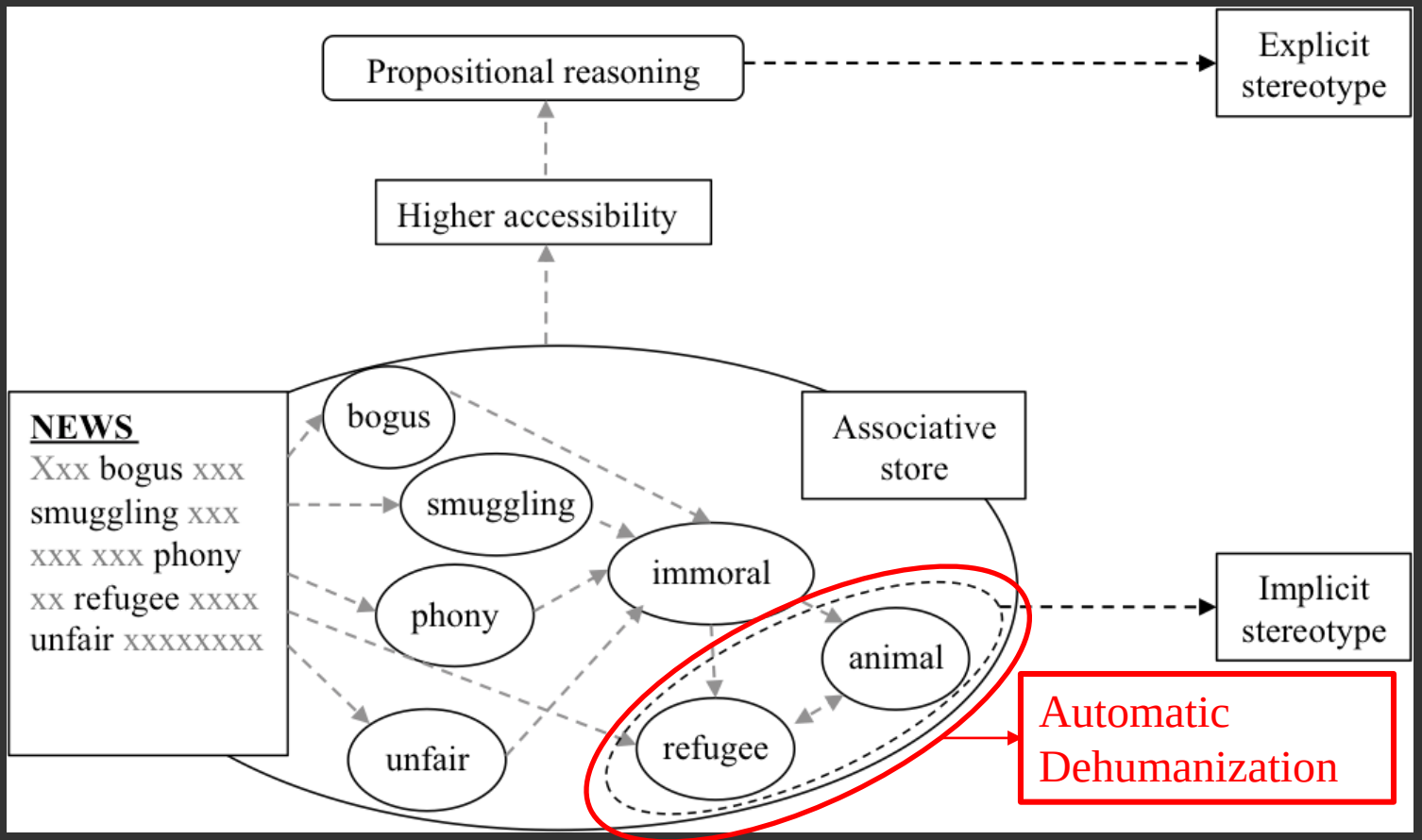
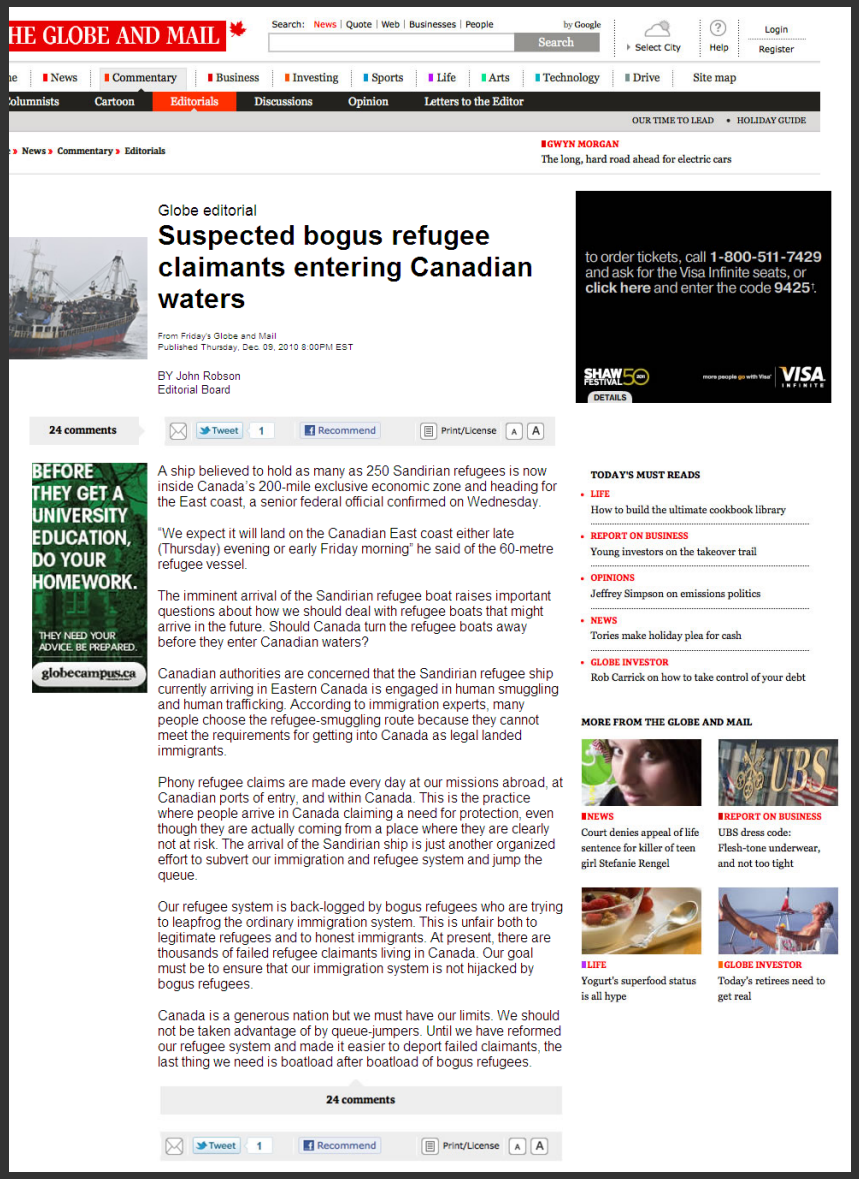


Procedure – Study 1

- Three different editorials based on those used to describe the Tamil refugees in 2010: bogus, terrorist, neutral
- Fictitious refugee group arriving by boat on the east coast of Canada: Sandirians
- Automatic dehumanization of refugees through association with animals: Sequential priming task

Media Article: Bogus



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"We expect it will land on the Canadian East coast either late (Thursday) evening or early Friday morning" he said of the 60-metre refugee vessel.

The imminent arrival of the Sandirian refugee boat raises important questions about how we should deal with refugee boats that might arrive in the future. Should Canada turn the refugee boats away before they enter Canadian waters?

Canadian authorities are concerned that the Sandirian refugee ship currently arriving in Eastern Canada is engaged in human smuggling and human trafficking. According to immigration experts, many people choose the refugee-smuggling route because they cannot meet the requirements for getting into Canada as legal landed immigrants.

Phony refugee claims are made every day at our missions abroad, at Canadian ports of entry, and within Canada. This is the practice where people arrive in Canada claiming a need for protection, even though they are actually coming from a place where they are clearly not at risk. The arrival of the Sandirian ship is just another organized effort to subvert our immigration and refugee system and jump the queue.

Our refugee system is back-logged by bogus refugees who are trying to leapfrog the ordinary immigration system. This is unfair both to legitimate refugees and to honest immigrants. At present, there are thousands of failed refugee claimants living in Canada. Our goal must be to ensure that our immigration system is not hijacked by bogus refugees.

Canada is a generous nation but we must have our limits. We should not be taken advantage of by queue-jumpers. Until we have reformed our refugee system and made it easier to deport failed claimants, the last thing we need is boatload after boatload of bogus refugees.

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Canadian authorities are concerned that members of the Sandirian refugee ship currently arriving in Eastern Canada are part of an outlawed terrorist group. According to immigration experts, the Sandirian refugee vessel may have been used for gun running in the past and "hardcore" terror leaders may be among the refugees. It is too dangerous for Canada to admit possible members of banned terror organizations who could easily use our generosity to raise funds, recruit new members, and rekindle the violence in their homeland.

Canada has no obligation to accept refugees with possible terrorist links and thus be dragged into a deadly, far-off conflict. Of even greater concern is the distinct possibility that terror leaders who may be hiding on the Sandirian refugee ship are seeking to set up a terror-based government-in-waiting in our midst and even import their civil war into Canada.

We should not pollute our citizenry by introducing refugees with criminal and terrorist links into our fold. Our goal must be to ensure that our citizens are safe and that our refugee system is not hijacked by terrorists.

Canada is a generous nation but we must have our limits. Until we have reformed our refugee system and made it easier to deport failed claimants, the last thing we need is boatload after boatload of refugees with terrorist ties.

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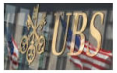

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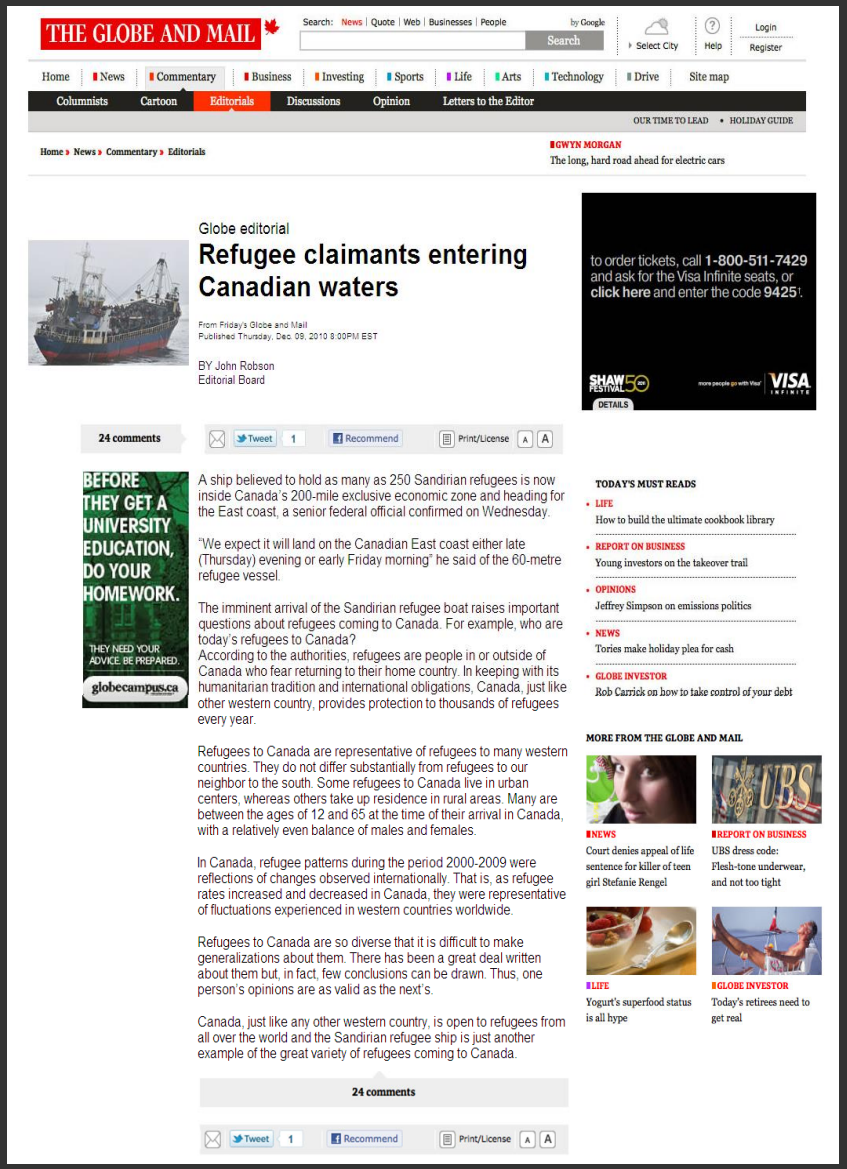
Media Article: Neutral



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The imminent arrival of the Sandirian refugee boat raises important questions about refugees coming to Canada. For example, who are today's refugees to Canada?
According to the authorities, refugees are people in or outside of Canada who fear returning to their home country. In keeping with its humanitarian tradition and international obligations, Canada, just like other western country, provides protection to thousands of refugees every year.

Refugees to Canada are representative of refugees to many western countries. They do not differ substantially from refugees to our neighbor to the south. Some refugees to Canada live in urban centers, whereas others take up residence in rural areas. Many are between the ages of 12 and 65 at the time of their arrival in Canada, with a relatively even balance of males and females.

In Canada, refugee patterns during the period 2000-2009 were reflections of changes observed internationally. That is, as refugee rates increased and decreased in Canada, they were representative of fluctuations experienced in western countries worldwide.

Refugees to Canada are so diverse that it is difficult to make generalizations about them. There has been a great deal written about them but, in fact, few conclusions can be drawn. Thus, one person's opinions are as valid as the next's.

Canada, just like any other western country, is open to refugees from all over the world and the Sandirian refugee ship is just another example of the great variety of refugees coming to Canada.

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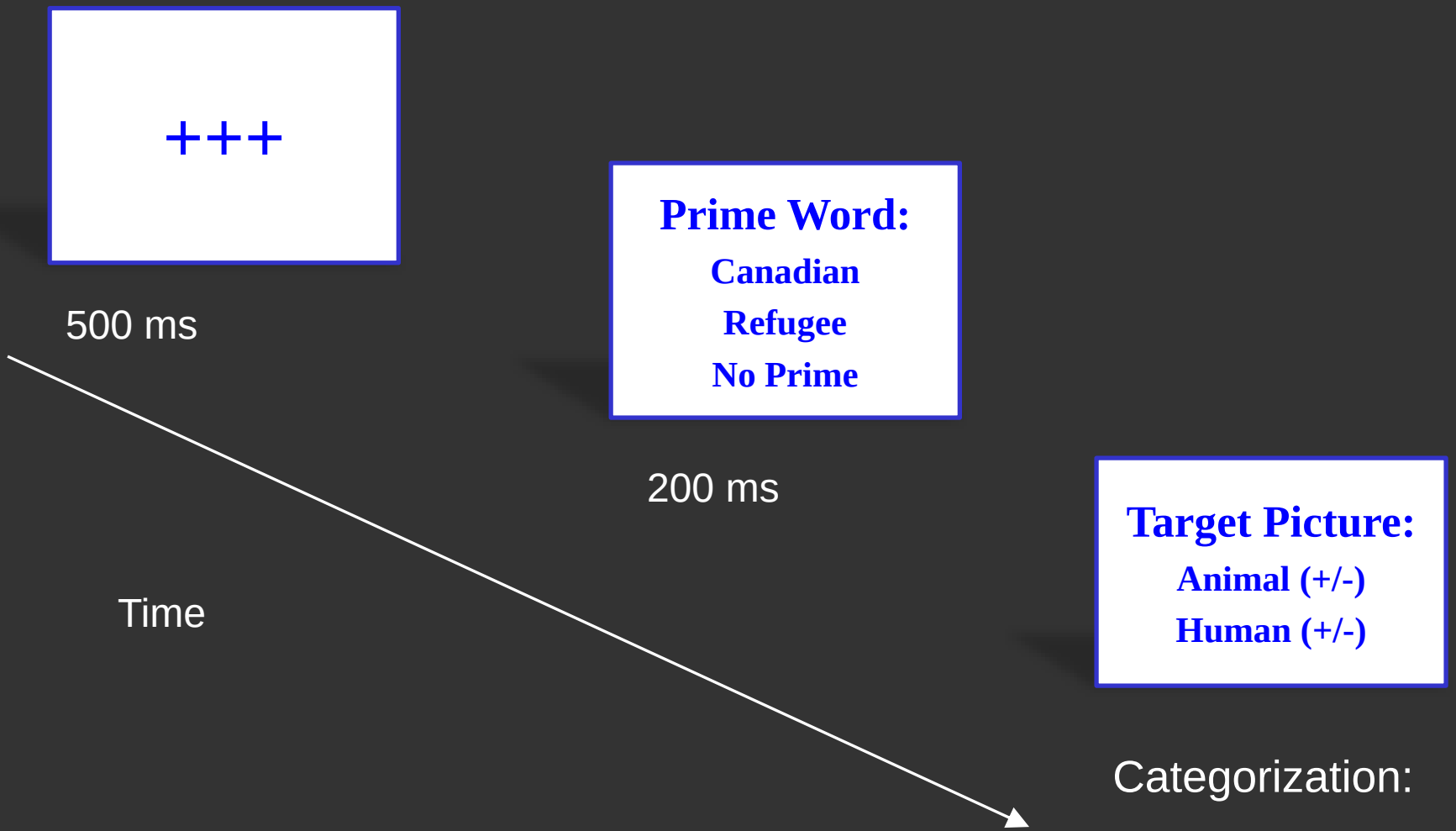
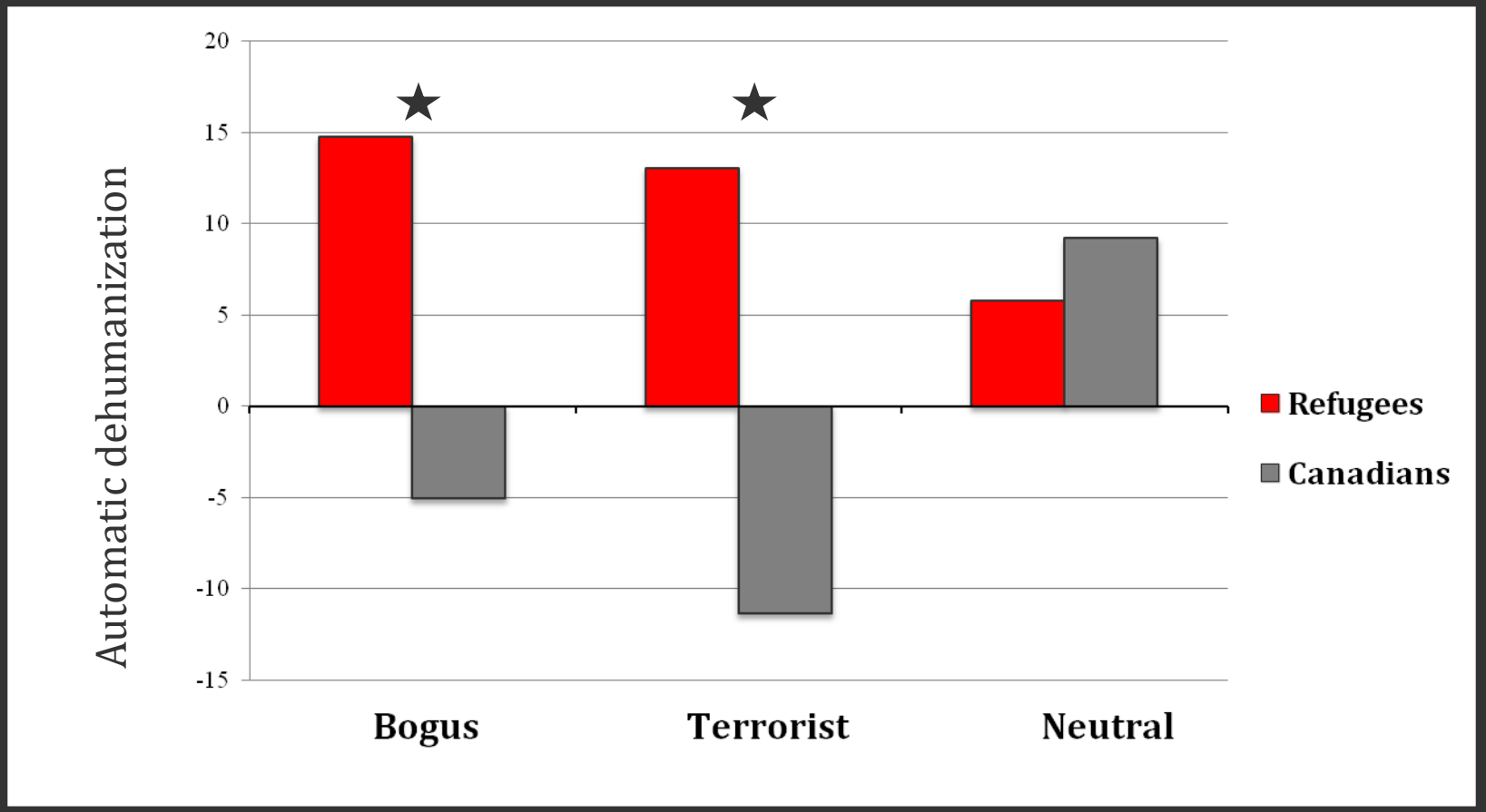
Sequential Priming Procedure for Assessing Automatic Dehumanization



Effect of Reading Editorial on Automatic Dehumanization



- Higher values indicate more dehumanization
- Participants dehumanized refugees more than Canadians only after reading the bogus and terrorist editorials

Procedure – Study 2

- Four different editorials based on those used to describe the Tamil refugees in 2010: bogus, victim, neutral and control
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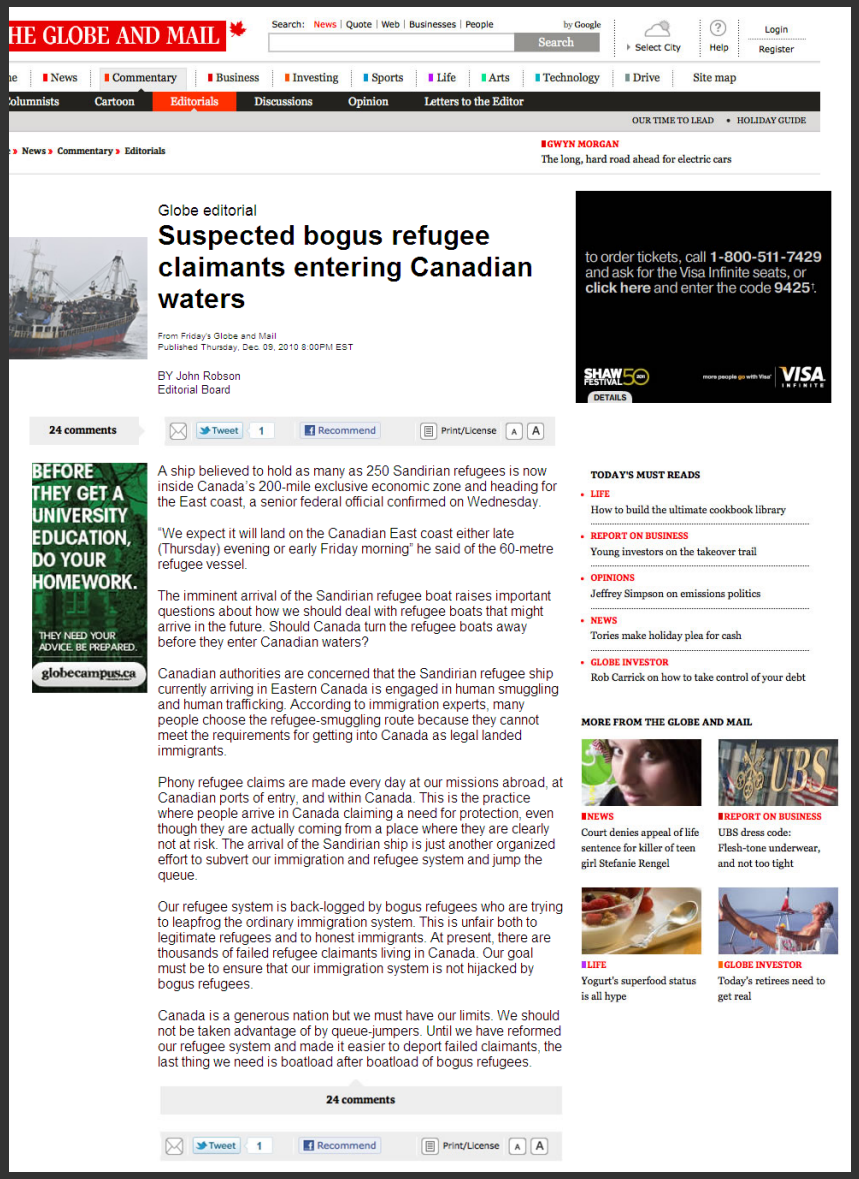
Media Article: Bogus



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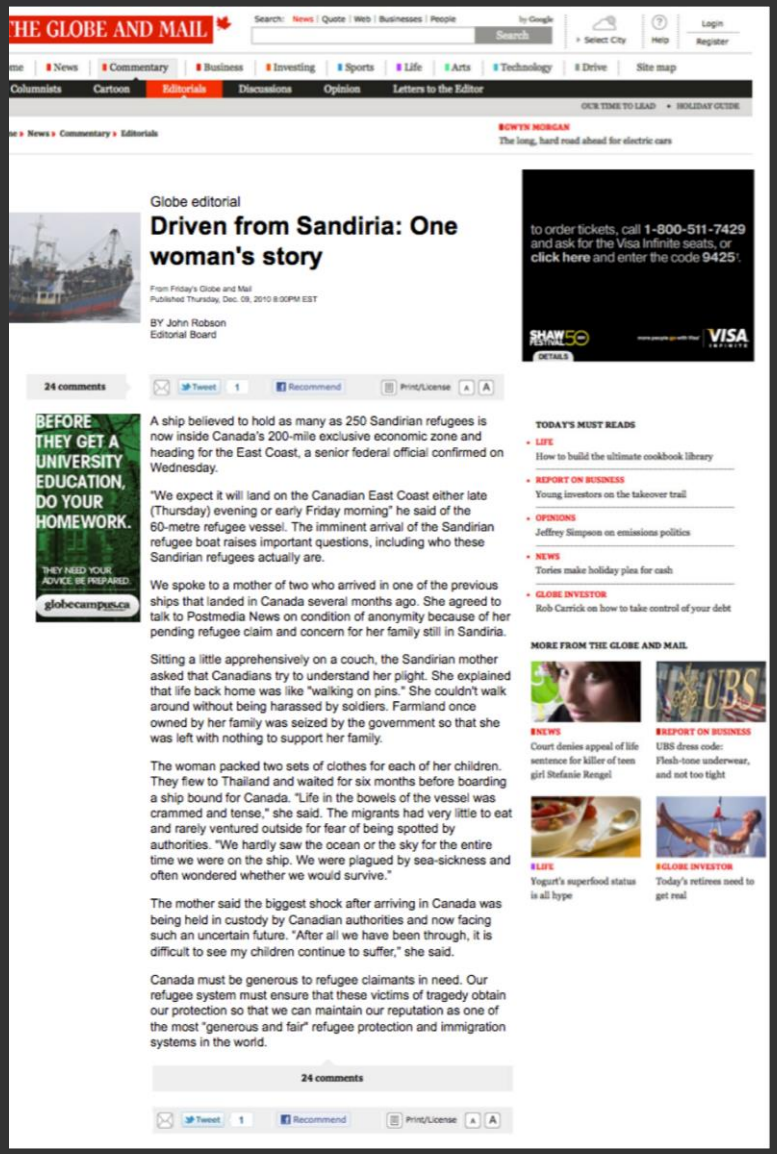

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We spoke to a mother of two who arrived in one of the previous ships that landed in Canada several months ago. She agreed to talk to Postmedia News on condition of anonymity because of her pending refugee claim and concern for her family still in Sandiria.

Sitting a little apprehensively on a couch, the Sandirian mother asked that Canadians try to understand her plight. She explained that life back home was like "walking on pins." She couldn't walk around without being harassed by soldiers. Farmland once owned by her family was seized by the government so that she was left with nothing to support her family.

The woman packed two sets of clothes for each of her children. They flew to Thailand and waited for six months before boarding a ship bound for Canada. "Life in the bowels of the vessel was crammed and tense," she said. The migrants had very little to eat and rarely ventured outside for fear of being spotted by authorities. "We hardly saw the ocean or the sky for the entire time we were on the ship. We were plagued by sea-sickness and often wondered whether we would survive."

The mother said the biggest shock after arriving in Canada was being held in custody by Canadian authorities and now facing such an uncertain future. "After all we have been through, it is difficult to see my children continue to suffer," she said.

Canada must be generous to refugee claimants in need. Our refugee system must ensure that these victims of tragedy obtain our protection so that we can maintain our reputation as one of the most "generous and fair" refugee protection and immigration systems in the world.

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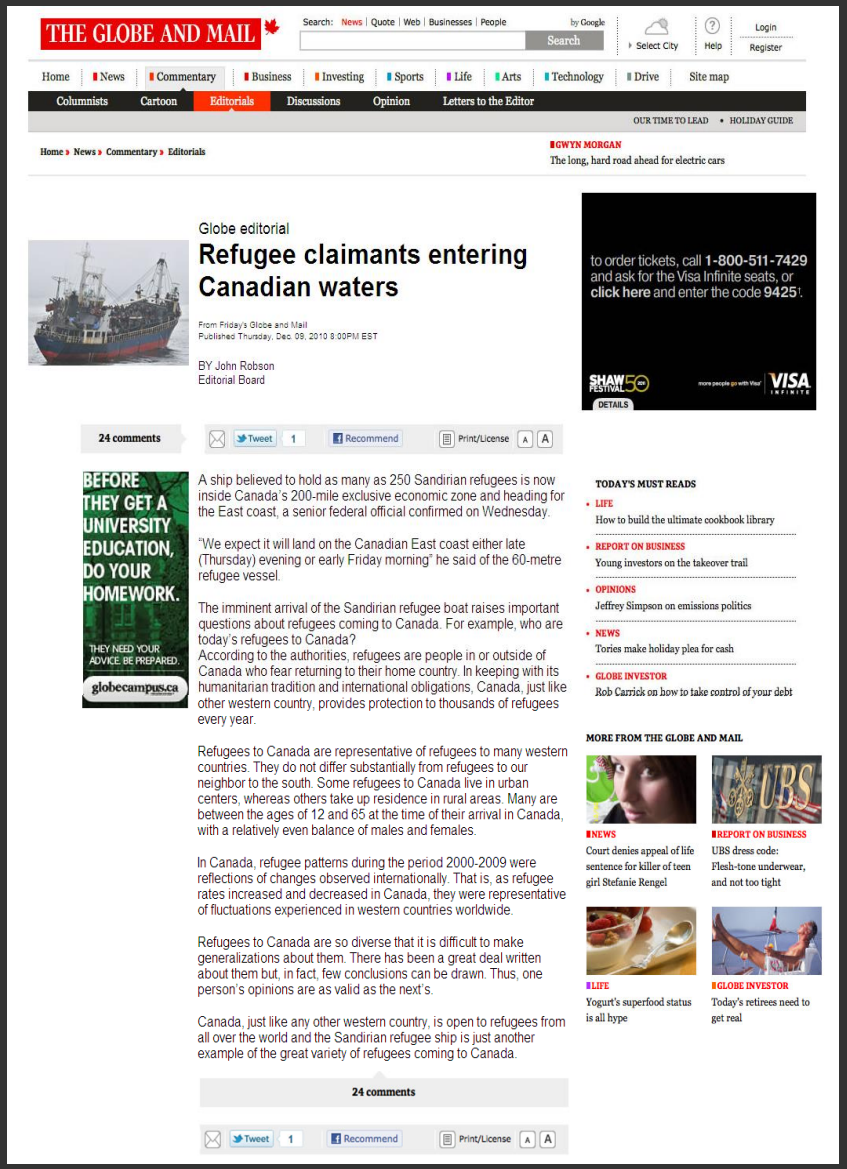
Media Article: Neutral



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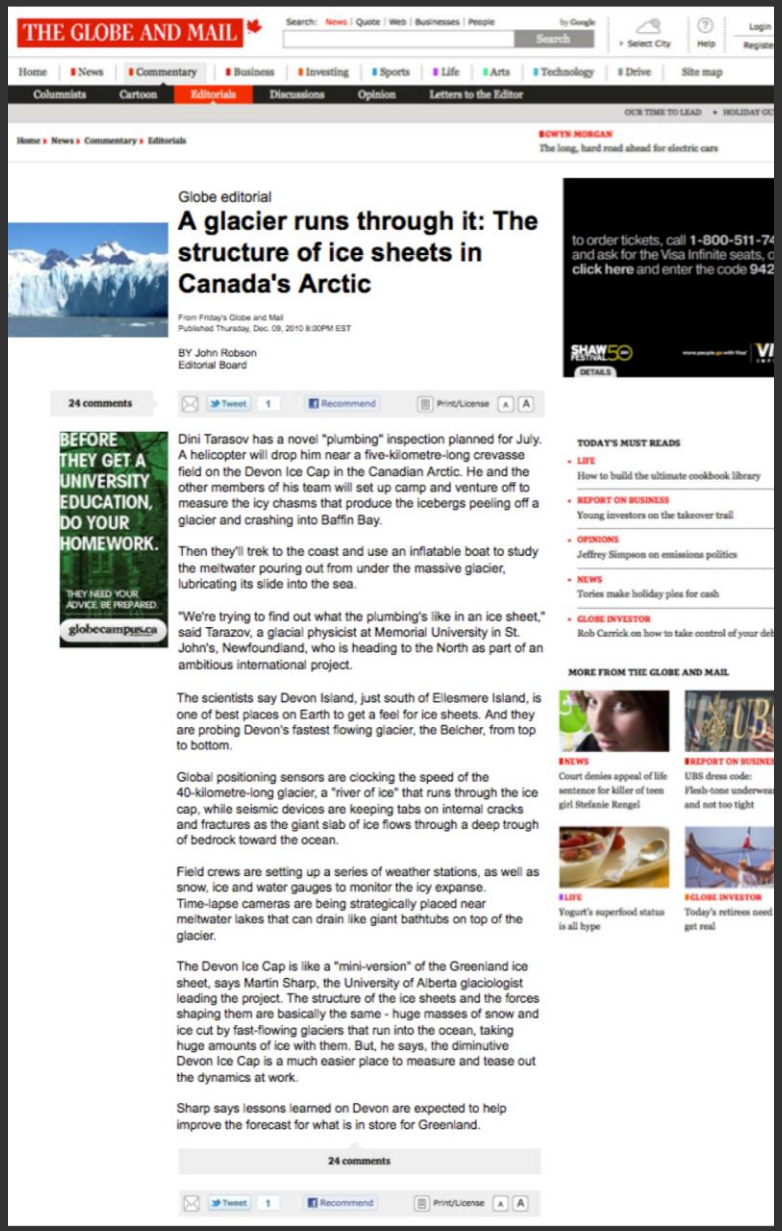

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A glacier runs through it: The structure of ice sheets in Canada's Arctic

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Dini Tarasov has a novel "plumbing" inspection planned for July. A helicopter will drop him near a five-kilometre-long crevasse field on the Devon Ice Cap in the Canadian Arctic. He and the other members of his team will set up camp and venture off to measure the icy chasms that produce the icebergs peeling off a glacier and crashing into Baffin Bay.

Then they'll trek to the coast and use an inflatable boat to study the meltwater pouring out from under the massive glacier, lubricating its slide into the sea.

"We're trying to find out what the plumbing's like in an ice sheet," said Tarazov, a glacial physicist at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, who is heading to the North as part of an ambitious international project.

The scientists say Devon Island, just south of Ellesmere Island, is one of best places on Earth to get a feel for ice sheets. And they are probing Devon's fastest flowing glacier, the Belcher, from top to bottom.

Global positioning sensors are clocking the speed of the 40-kilometre-long glacier, a "river of ice" that runs through the ice cap, while seismic devices are keeping tabs on internal cracks and fractures as the giant slab of ice flows through a deep trough of bedrock toward the ocean.

Field crews are setting up a series of weather stations, as well as snow, ice and water gauges to monitor the icy expanse. Time-lapse cameras are being strategically placed near meltwater lakes that can drain like giant bathtubs on top of the glacier.

The Devon Ice Cap is like a "mini-version" of the Greenland ice sheet, says Martin Sharp, the University of Alberta glaciologist leading the project. The structure of the ice sheets and the forces shaping them are basically the same - huge masses of snow and ice cut by fast-flowing glaciers that run into the ocean, taking huge amounts of ice with them. But, he says, the diminutive Devon Ice Cap is a much easier place to measure and tease out the dynamics at work.

Sharp says lessons learned on Devon are expected to help improve the forecast for what is in store for Greenland.

24 comments

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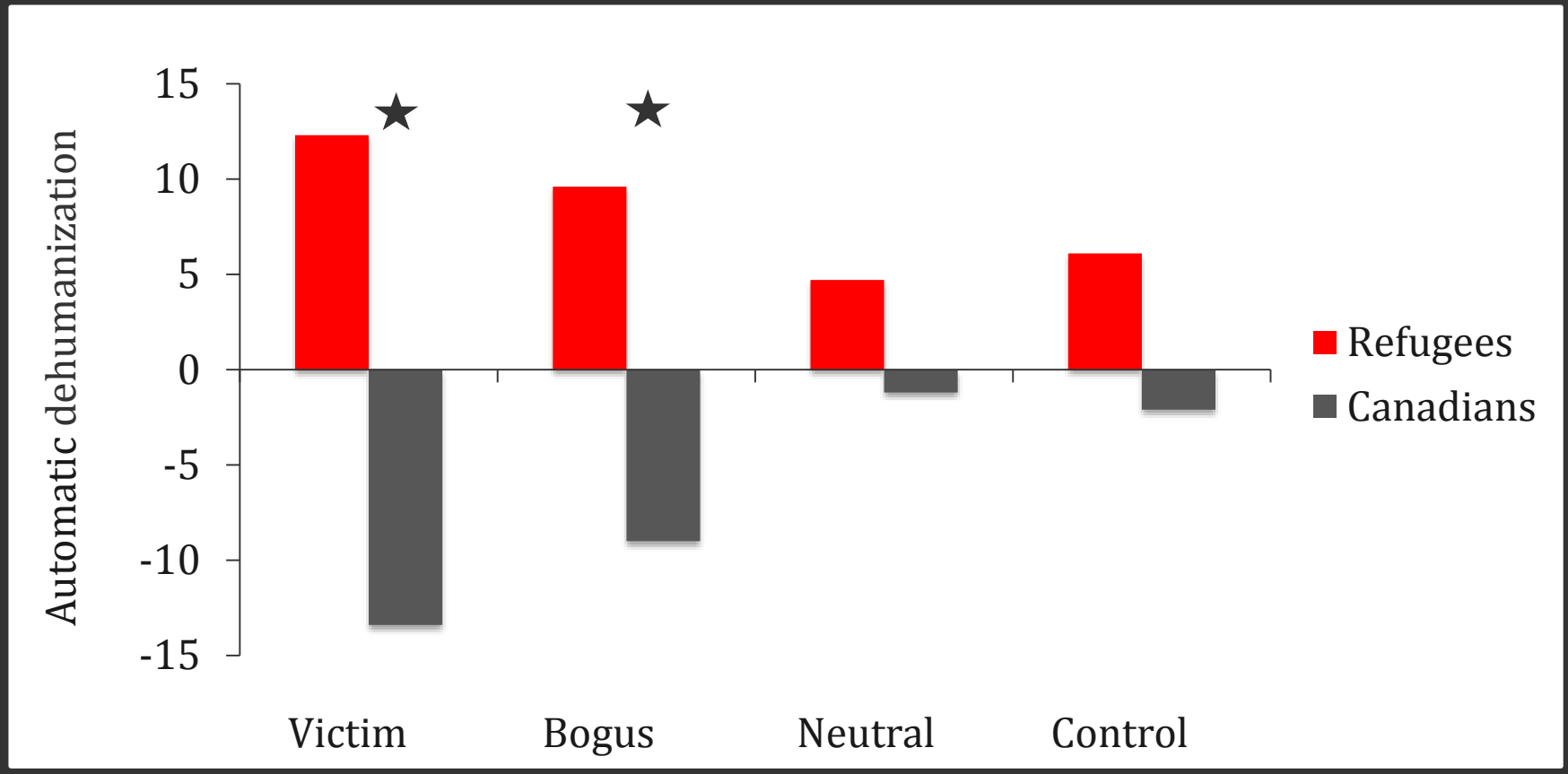
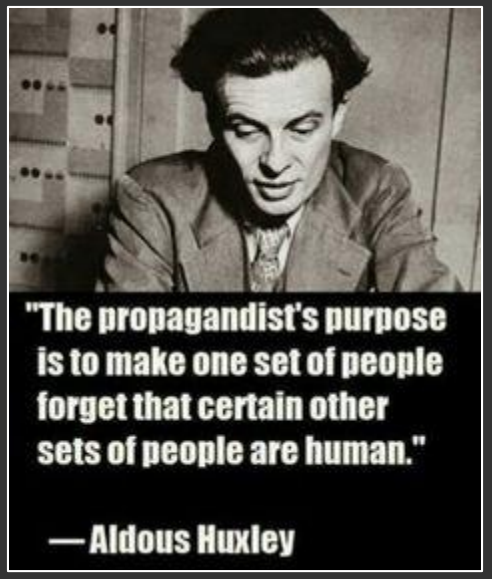
Effect of Reading Editorial on Automatic Dehumanization



- Higher values indicate more dehumanization
- Participants dehumanized refugees more than Canadians only after reading the bogus and victim editorials

Implications of this Research

- Uncovers processes involved in stigmatization and exclusion of refugees
- Media depictions of refugee-related events can promote dehumanization
- Evidence of automatic dehumanization of refugees: reading some of the common messages prevalent in the media can increase the automatic association between refugees and animals



Implications of this Research

- Avoid the terms bogus, terrorists and even victims in political messaging when talking about refugees

- These terms can lead to automatic refugee dehumanization

QUESTIONS?

Sequential Priming Procedure for Assessing Automatic Dehumanization

Computer screen

Prime: Refugee, Canadian or no prime

↓

Human or animal pictures (positive or negative)

Conceptual Task:
Categorization as human or animal

Evaluative Task:
Categorization as positive or negative

Human Target Pictures (positive & negative)

Human Target Pictures: 4 positive (happiness & pride) & 4 negative (sadness & anger), male and female

Source of pictures: Tracy et al., 2009

Animal Target Pictures (positive & negative)

Animal Target Pictures: 4 positive (baby seal, butterfly, dragonfly, ladybug) & 4 negative (cockroach, rat, fly, worms)