

# “When I think of refugees, I think of...”

Philipps



Universität  
Marburg

On stereotypes, emotional reactions, and action tendencies towards fled people as a function of group label and motivation to leave the country

Patrick F. Kotzur, Nora Forsbach, & Ulrich Wagner

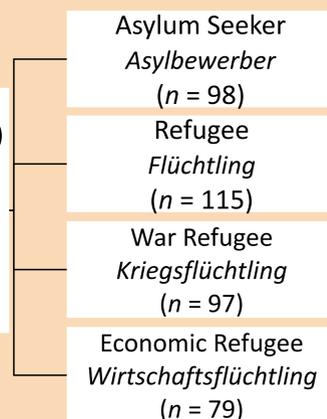
## AIMS

According to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir, 1921), language plays a crucial role in shaping people's perception of the world. Previous empirical work established the link between language and evaluation of groups (e.g., Asbrock et al., 2014; Hall, Phillips & Townsend, 2015; Morrison & Chung, 2011; Rios & Ingrassia, 2016; Schönbach, 1970). In the present study, we investigated the content, as well as cognitive, emotional and behavioral consequences of the social perception of fleeing or fled people among German students as a function of (a) the label (refugee vs. asylum seeker), and (b) the motive to leave the country (war vs. economic hardship vs. no specification).

## METHOD

### Factorial Survey (Dec. 2015)

$n = 389$  German university students without migration background (66.1% female,  $\bar{X}$ -age 26.8)



### Dependent Variables (5-point-scales):

- **Basic Stereotype Dimensions (Asbrock, 2010):**
  - Warmth  $\alpha_s = .84-.86$
  - Competence  $\alpha_s = .65-.72$
- **Emotions (Kotzur, Schäfer, & Wagner, 2016, adapt.):**
  - Pity  $\alpha_s = .73-.88$
  - Envy  $\alpha_s = .56-.87$
  - Anxiety  $\alpha_s = .91-.94$
  - Contempt  $\alpha_s = .60-.90$
  - Admiration  $\alpha_s = .89-.90$
  - Anger  $\alpha_s = .91-.94$
- **Action Tendencies (Kotzur et al., 2016, adapt.):**
  - Active Facilitation  $\alpha_s = .84-.92$
  - Active Harm  $\alpha_s = .54-.86$
  - Passive Facilitation  $\alpha_s = .62-.85$
  - Passive Harm  $\alpha_s = .72-.88$
- **Group-Specific Stereotypic Beliefs (open question):** When you hear the term [group], whom do you think of? Please write down everything that comes to your mind. Please also indicate where you think [group] comes from and why they've come to Germany. To do so, please complete the following sentence: When I think of [group], I think of...

## RESULTS

### “Refugee” vs. “Asylum Seeker”

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Results of *t*-tests for Equality of Means of Dependent Variables

	Refugee	Asylum Seeker	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Warmth	3.60 <sub>a</sub> (.72)	3.51 <sub>a</sub> (.70)	.127
Competence	3.14 <sub>a</sub> (.65)	3.11 <sub>a</sub> (.70)	.044
Pity	<b>4.02<sub>a</sub> (.72)</b>	<b>3.79<sub>b</sub> (.79)</b>	<b>.304</b>
Admiration	<b>3.40<sub>a</sub> (.98)</b>	<b>3.12<sub>b</sub> (.93)</b>	<b>.293</b>
Contempt	1.21 <sub>a</sub> (.46)	1.34 <sub>a</sub> (.54)	.259
Envy	1.73 <sub>a</sub> (.87)	1.82 <sub>a</sub> (.96)	.098
Anxiety	1.68 <sub>a</sub> (.80)	1.89 <sub>a</sub> (.91)	.245
Anger	<b>1.45<sub>a</sub> (.68)</b>	<b>1.68<sub>b</sub> (.94)</b>	<b>.280</b>
Active facilitation	<b>3.78<sub>a</sub> (.86)</b>	<b>3.44<sub>b</sub> (.89)</b>	<b>.389</b>
Active harm	1.15 <sub>a</sub> (.44)	1.25 <sub>a</sub> (.57)	.200
Passive facilitation	<b>4.39<sub>a</sub> (.68)</b>	<b>4.16<sub>b</sub> (.76)</b>	<b>.320</b>
Passive harm	1.76 <sub>a</sub> (.85)	1.93 <sub>a</sub> (.89)	.200

Note. All scale means range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Non-significant differences between means at  $p \leq .05$  are marked with the same subscripts. Adjusted *t*-value consulted whenever the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated.

### “Refugee” vs. “War Refugee” vs. “Economic Refugee”

Table 3  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Results of *F*-tests for Equality of Means of the Dependent Variables

	Refugee	War Refugee	Economic Refugee	$\eta^2$
Warmth	<b>3.60<sub>a</sub> (.72)</b>	<b>3.66<sub>a</sub> (.67)</b>	<b>3.22<sub>b</sub> (.72)</b>	.068
Competence	3.14 <sub>a</sub> (.65)	3.36 <sub>a</sub> (.71)	3.12 <sub>a</sub> (.72)	.024
Pity	<b>4.02<sub>a</sub> (.72)</b>	<b>4.29<sub>b</sub> (.58)</b>	<b>3.42<sub>c</sub> (.89)</b>	.224
Admiration	<b>3.40<sub>a</sub> (.98)</b>	<b>3.59<sub>a</sub> (.84)</b>	<b>2.55<sub>b</sub> (.91)</b>	.218
Contempt	<b>1.21<sub>a</sub> (.46)</b>	<b>1.10<sub>a</sub> (.23)</b>	<b>1.44<sub>b</sub> (.68)</b>	.078
Envy	<b>1.73<sub>a</sub> (.87)</b>	<b>1.48<sub>a</sub> (.75)</b>	<b>2.06<sub>b</sub> (1.08)</b>	.063
Anxiety	1.68 <sub>a</sub> (.80)	1.55 <sub>a</sub> (.69)	1.67 <sub>a</sub> (.88)	.006
Anger	<b>1.45<sub>ab</sub> (.68)</b>	<b>1.36<sub>a</sub> (.50)</b>	<b>1.70<sub>b</sub> (.99)</b>	.036
Active facilitation	<b>3.78<sub>a</sub> (.86)</b>	<b>3.93<sub>a</sub> (.70)</b>	<b>2.88<sub>b</sub> (1.01)</b>	.262
Active harm	<b>1.15<sub>a</sub> (.44)</b>	<b>1.03<sub>a</sub> (.12)</b>	<b>1.30<sub>b</sub> (.53)</b>	.066
Passive facilitation	<b>4.39<sub>a</sub> (.68)</b>	<b>4.48<sub>a</sub> (.48)</b>	<b>3.86<sub>b</sub> (.86)</b>	.149
Passive harm	<b>1.76<sub>ab</sub> (.85)</b>	<b>1.62<sub>a</sub> (.68)</b>	<b>1.94<sub>b</sub> (1.01)</b>	.022

Note. All scale means range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Significant differences between means are marked with brackets and different subscripts ( $p \leq .05$ , Bonferroni-corrected). The means and standard deviations depicted in the refugee column are the same as in Table 1. Welch's *F*-value consulted whenever the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated.

Table 2  
Selected Results of Content Analysis of Group Characteristics and Motivation to Flee

Category	Refugee	Asylum Seeker
<b>Group Characteristics</b>		
In Need	23 <sub>a</sub> (20.0%)	11 <sub>a</sub> (11.2%)
Different Way of Life	17 <sub>a</sub> (14.8%)	10 <sub>a</sub> (10.2%)
Experience of Trauma	4 <sub>a</sub> (3.5%)	5 <sub>a</sub> (5.1%)
Experience of Loss	20 <sub>a</sub> (17.4%)	28 <sub>a</sub> (28.6%)
Well-Educated	0 <sub>a</sub>	3 <sub>a</sub> (3.1%)
<b>Motivation to Flee</b>		
War and Security	<b>80<sub>a</sub> (69.6%)</b>	<b>48<sub>b</sub> (49.0%)</b>
General Hardship/Better Life	41 <sub>a</sub> (35.7%)	25 <sub>a</sub> (25.5%)
Economy	36 <sub>a</sub> (31.3%)	24 <sub>a</sub> (24.5%)
Persecution	<b>34<sub>a</sub> (29.6%)</b>	<b>14<sub>b</sub> (14.3%)</b>
Freeloading	<b>2<sub>a</sub> (1.7%)</b>	<b>8<sub>b</sub> (8.2%)</b>
Germany as Pull-Factor	8 <sub>a</sub> (7.0%)	7 <sub>a</sub> (7.1%)
Lack of Prospects	14 <sub>a</sub> (12.2%)	8 <sub>a</sub> (8.2%)

Note. All values are counts in the respective condition, with percentages of the frequency of mentioned category per condition in brackets. Interrater reliability = 94.2% correspondence. Brackets and different subscripts indicate statistical significant differences ( $p \leq .05$ ) between cells.

Table 4  
Selected Results of Content Analysis of Group Characteristics and Motivation to Flee

Category	Refugee	War Refugee	Economic Refugee
<b>Group Characteristics</b>			
In Need	<b>23<sub>ab</sub> (20.0%)</b>	<b>29<sub>a</sub> (30.5%)</b>	<b>6<sub>b</sub> (7.6%)</b>
Different Way of Life	<b>17<sub>a</sub> (14.8%)</b>	<b>11<sub>ab</sub> (11.6%)</b>	<b>3<sub>b</sub> (3.8%)</b>
Experience of Trauma	<b>4<sub>ab</sub> (3.5%)</b>	<b>11<sub>a</sub> (11.6%)</b>	<b>0<sub>b</sub></b>
Experience of Loss	<b>20<sub>ab</sub> (17.4%)</b>	<b>27<sub>a</sub> (28.4%)</b>	<b>5<sub>b</sub> (6.3%)</b>
Well-Educated	0 <sub>a</sub>	1 <sub>ab</sub> (1.1%)	4 <sub>b</sub> (5.1%)
<b>Motivation to Flee</b>			
War and Security	<b>80<sub>a</sub> (69.6%)</b>	<b>49<sub>b</sub> (51.6%)</b>	<b>2<sub>c</sub> (2.5%)</b>
General Hardship/Better Life	41 <sub>a</sub> (35.7%)	32 <sub>a</sub> (33.7%)	31 <sub>a</sub> (39.2%)
Economy	<b>36<sub>a</sub> (31.3%)</b>	<b>14<sub>b</sub> (14.7%)</b>	<b>39<sub>c</sub> (49.4%)</b>
Persecution	<b>34<sub>a</sub> (29.6%)</b>	<b>14<sub>b</sub> (14.7%)</b>	<b>2<sub>c</sub> (2.5%)</b>
Freeloading	2 <sub>a</sub> (1.7%)	3 <sub>a</sub> (3.2%)	7 <sub>a</sub> (8.9%)
Germany as Pull-Factor	8 <sub>a</sub> (7.0%)	11 <sub>a</sub> (11.6%)	7 <sub>a</sub> (8.9%)
Lack of Prospects	14 <sub>a</sub> (12.2%)	13 <sub>a</sub> (13.7%)	13 <sub>a</sub> (16.5%)

Note. All values are counts in the respective condition, with percentages of the frequency of mentioned category per condition in brackets. Interrater reliability = 94.2% correspondence. Brackets and different subscripts indicate statistical significant differences ( $p \leq .05$ , Bonferroni-corrected) between cells. The values depicted in the refugee column are the same as in Table 2.

## DISCUSSION

Our results demonstrate that the used terminology to refer to fleeing or fled individuals does make a difference, and that the choice of the term should not be taken lightly. Similarly benevolent stereotypes prevailed towards both asylum seekers and refugees. Nonetheless, refugees provoked higher levels of pity, admiration, and facilitation, which are theoretically connected to more benevolent stereotypes. This may be related to group-specific beliefs about the groups' intentions (e.g. fleeing war/persecution were more closely connected to refugees, freeloading to asylum seekers). Comparing war refugees vs. economic refugees vs. no specification showed that economic refugees received the least favorable scores and were the “odd ones out”. Comparing war refugees with refugees without specification, both score profiles matched (almost) perfectly. This is in line with the qualitative findings demonstrating that participants ascribed largely similar group characteristics to both groups.

## REFERENCES

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## CONTACT

Patrick Kotzur  
Philipps University Marburg  
kotzur@uni-marburg.de  
www.sozialpsychologie-marburg.de