

## HISPANICALLY SPEAKING NEWS

### **STUDY: Media Plays Role in Dehumanizing Immigrants and Refugees**

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A new study from Western University suggests that the news media may take advantage of an existing uncertainty and unease around immigration policies and the treatment of immigrants and refugees to create a crisis mentality in which these groups are portrayed as “enemies at the gate” attempting to invade western nations.

In “Uncertainty, Threat, and the Role of the Media in Promoting the Dehumanization of Immigrants and Refugees,” published in this month’s *Journal of Social Issues*, Victoria Esses from Western’s Department of Psychology and Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations, and her team, including Stelian Medianu and Andrea Lawson, examine the effects of common media portrayals of immigrants and refugees on dehumanization and its consequences. These portrayals include suggestions that immigrants spread infectious diseases, that refugee claimants are often bogus, and that terrorists may gain entry to western nations disguised as refugees.

Esses and her team conducted a number of experiments to examine the potential consequences of media depictions focusing on threats immigrants and refugees pose to members of host societies that are particularly prevalent in the media in Canada and other Western countries: immigrants are sources and spreaders of infectious diseases, refugee claimants are bogus queue-jumpers who are trying to take advantage of lax refugee policies to gain entry to western nations, and terrorists are trying to gain entry to western nations as refugee claimants.

These studies suggest that the media may not only promote dehumanization of immigrants and refugees through depictions that highlight potential threats to the host society, but provide ready justifications for the dehumanization and consequent outcomes.

Esses says that the resultant dehumanization of immigrants and refugees may appeal to members of the public, serving to justify the status quo, strengthening boundaries between newcomers and established residents, and defending against threats to the established residents’ position in society.

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