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# Media Influence and Third-Person Effect on Perception Formation About Immigrants in the State of New York

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The Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Media Influence and Third-Person Effect

on Perception Formation About Immigrants in the State of New York

by

Leslie S. Ramirez Soto

*A Thesis* submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

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MEDIA INFLUENCE AND THIRD-PERSON EFFECT  
ON PERCEPTION FORMATION ABOUT IMMIGRANTS IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Abstract

The present study examines hostile media bias and the third-person effect in those with anti-immigrant sentiments and those with pro-immigrant sentiments to determine the variables that influence their beliefs about immigrants and immigration in the state of New York. Based on McKeever, Riffe, & Dillman's (2012) survey conducted in North Carolina, this study builds on their results to evaluate if factors such as geographic location, concentration of immigrants, or political inclinations can change the results. Five-hundred respondents from New York State participated in a survey about their attitudes concerning immigrants and immigration. Results confirm that those with anti-immigrant sentiment will perceive a hostile bias in the media towards the pro-immigrant side, and that each group will perceive media as an influencer and persuasive medium opposed to their attitudes. Also, the results showed that time watching or reading news does not correlate with anti-immigrant sentiment, and that knowledge about immigrants and immigration issues does not mitigate perception or biases.

*Keywords:* immigrants, third-person effect, hostile media bias, immigration.

### Media Influence and Third-Person Effect

#### on Perception Formation About Immigrants in the State of New York

Immigration movements have been occurring in the United States since its formation, but states like New York and North Carolina have received the biggest migrant movements of the last decade (Singer, 2004). Since the 1900s New York has been one of the biggest gateway states in the United States, which means that it is an established and common destination for immigrants. Because of this, it is believed that New Yorkers will show less resistant to migrants' movements. In other words, New Yorkers will be more understanding about immigrants' difficulties and needs, whereas in North Carolina it is believed that the contrary could happen. The State of North Carolina has become an emerging gateway with an exponential growth in their immigrant population in the last decade, which means they originally had a very small immigrant population that suddenly grew (Singer, 2004).

Immigrants represent about 13% of the U.S. population, and more than 20% of the population of New York State (CBO, 2013). They play an important role in the country's economy and politics, especially Latinos, which according to 2004 data represent 13% of the labor force (CBO, 2005). Because of this, immigrants and immigration have become relevant topics on the media agenda. It has been posited that media has the ability to change people's perception and attitudes, to reaffirm stereotypes or deconstruct them, to establish social norms or to reform them. This means that the way in which information is covered in the media is important for society (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Because immigrants and immigration have been controversial topics in American society and the media, it is expected that the media will report on this group. By giving coverage to immigrants and immigration, media helps the formation of American perceptions about this

group. Moreover, mass media shape people's perception by serving as a source of learning about national trends and policies, so it becomes a problem when immigrants are depicted as "destructive, lawless, foreign, and unrooted" (Coutin & Chock, 1997, p. 127). In other words, this depiction helps to increase hostile views of immigrants, which is a detriment to the immigrants because it reinforces stereotypes and constructs misleading perceptions.

One of the main problems is that commonly immigrants and immigration are framed in such a way that encourages discrimination and the creation of stereotypes (Coutin & Chock, 1997; Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011). As news media emphasizes conflict and misconstrues perceptions, immigrants have to live with the consequences. King (2001) wrote that "Host-country media constructions of immigrants will be critical in influencing the type of reception they are accorded, and hence will condition migrants' eventual experience of inclusion or exclusion" (p. 2). Simply put, all these misconceptions created by media result in immigrants having a harder time adapting to the United States and gaining access to equal opportunities.

News is constructed in a manner where framing cannot be avoided. Framing is the theory that explains how journalists define a topic in the process of news production, from the moment it is decided to cover a certain topic, to the way in which it is given coverage, to what is said or written, and to its location and time given in the media (Tuchman, 1978). All these unconscious decisions have repercussions in the way society will think about these topics.

Past research has looked into the individual variables treated throughout this investigation, and acknowledged two processes that can influence people's perception of immigrants in relation to what is portrayed in the media (hostile media bias), and the self-awareness of what attitudes towards a certain topic is (third-person effect). This study uses a similar methodology like McKeever, Riffe, and Carpentier's (2012) in the state of New York to



compare and contrast how variables like state, location, concentration of immigrants, and others, might change the results of the study or how they may stay the same.

McKeever et al. (2012) parted from the assumption that the pro- or anti-immigrant sentiment is negatively related to perception of media coverage, and that the anti-immigrant sentiment is positively related to the influence of media coverage. The present study also parts from these assumptions and compares and contrasts the results obtained in North Carolina, a state where this phenomenon of large numbers of migrants' movements grew significantly in the past ten years, versus New York State where since its formation immigrants movements have occurred. Both studies use the term "immigrant" while referring specifically to "Latinos" because they are the biggest immigrant group in these areas.

Using the survey method, residents from the State of New York ( $N = 500$ ) responded to their level of agreement or likeness to further elaborate on the relation between the variables previously mentioned: Hostile media bias, perceptions about immigrants and immigration, and the influence of the news coverage on these topics. It was found that those with anti-immigrant sentiment will perceive a hostile media bias in the media towards the pro-immigrant side. Also, people holding anti-immigrant sentiment believe that media does not have an effect on them, but it does on others, more specifically a negative effect. Lastly, results showed that time spent watching or reading news and knowledge about immigrants and immigration issues does not mitigate perception or biases.

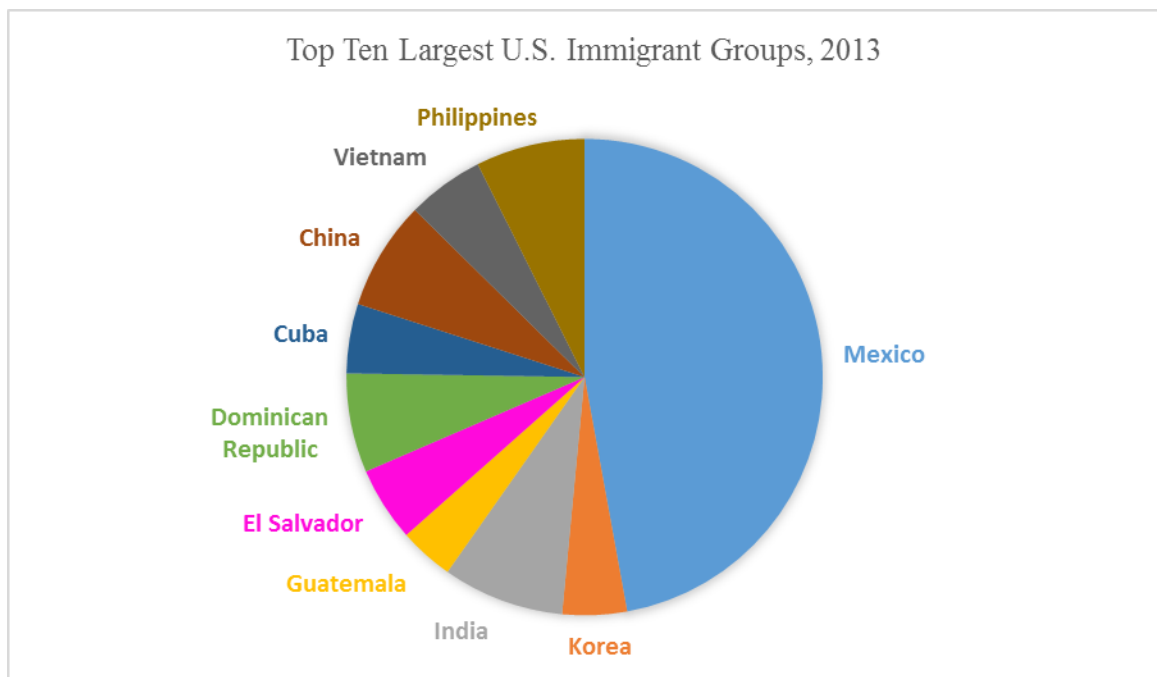
### **Review of Literature**

In this study the literature review serves to define the key concepts in which the research is based and the variables used to conduct the investigation. First, it offers background information and statistics on the immigrant population that lives in the State of New York,

alongside the depiction of this minority group. The theoretical foundation of the hypotheses pertaining to this study are then presented: Hostile media bias and third-person effect.

### **Immigrants and the Media**

According to the Congressional Budget Office (2013), more than 20% of the population in the New York State is foreign born. Five out of the top ten countries from which immigrants come to the United States are from Latin America, and out of those the vast majority (28%) comes specifically from Mexico (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Largest U.S. immigrant groups 2013. Migration Policy Institute (2013).

In the last 40 years the Hispanic proportion of the U.S. population has grown more than the proportion of non-Hispanic White people. Even though non-Hispanic Whites represent approximately 65% of the population, they represented only a 34% of the growth in the last 40 years, whereas immigrants in that same 40 year period represent 55% of the population growth (Valdivia, 2010). Therefore, it can be said that the immigrant population is growing at a higher

rate than the native born population, becoming more and more important for the economy of the country.

Because immigrants' presence is part of the American culture, media news sources give them coverage regularly. This coverage immigrants receive do not reflect this group's realities and needs, which is believed to be related to the lack of minorities as part of the editorial process (Waldman, 2011). In addition, media reinforce stereotypes by constantly highlighting negative behavior and framing content in a way in which anti-social attitudes are the only ones known about immigrants. Lehrman (2005) found that even though Latinos constitute 15% of the United States population less than 1% of national television news coverage focuses on this ethnic group. Moreover, he discovered that the coverage Latinos receive on the news was biased. More than a third of the sample the author found was news about immigration, whereas news regarding Latino's concerns, social issues, culture, or business were rarely published.

Kim et al. (2011) found that media commonly frame news related to the issue by presenting the question of immigration as a problem. Also, when referring to the consequences of illegal immigration, media outlets were most likely to refer to crime, always linking immigration with crime. Since crime is one of the most reported aspects of Latino immigration, people consequently believe that Latinos are more likely to be involved in crime. Because of this, perceived immigrant involvement in crime is one of the variables used to measure anti-immigrant sentiment in the present study.

Other researchers have found that immigrants' coverage in the news is commonly related to bad behavior, with common reports in news about violence, and in other cases they are referred to in news respecting immigration policies (Coutin & Chock, 1997; King, 2001; Lehrman, 2005). Certainly, this depiction of immigrants in the press has been going on since

immigrant's population started to have a significant presence in the U.S. with the Immigration Act of 1990. Even though one of the purposes of the press is to educate, print media has not been helpful towards the construction of a real immigrant profile, leading to a more difficult process of adaptation for this group.

Depending on their immigration views, people can be identified as pro-immigrant if they are favorable towards immigration or anti-immigrant if unfavorable towards it. From this, the first part of the theoretical framework will be assumed, relating sentiment with media coverage: Hostile media bias. For the second part third-person effect is presented relating media coverage and effects on others. These theoretical framework was used in McKeever et al.'s (2012) because even though distinct these processes are related, and suggest that "strong opinions about an issue affect one's view of favorableness of coverage and belief about its potential influence on others".

### **Hostile Media Bias: Effects and Influence**

Hostile media bias is defined in Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) as the perception of the news being biased against someone's side of an issue or argument. The researchers looked into how pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans valued the coverage network television gave to the Beirut massacre. They found that both the pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans believed that coverage was significantly biased against their side, and when recollecting the facts each side also reported on more negative references to their side than for the other side.

Hastorf and Cantril (1954) found the same effects on a group of students who were used as a sample to watch a Princeton versus Dartmouth football game. After watching the game the students from both schools were asked to recall the number of infractions committed by each team, and in what later became known as the hostile media phenomenon, they perceived more infractions committed from the other side than from their team.

Some researchers have opted to look into the cause as to why people hold hostile media bias. For instance, Kinnally (2008) used the theory of reactance as the basis to explain that the hostile media bias was positively related to involvement, but not to the other elements of the theory such as personality and social power. Perloff (1989) re-tested hostile media bias and did his own study in which he replicated Vallone et al.'s (1985) methodology, showing nonpartisan students the same clips from the original study. He discovered that the footage did not change the student's perceptions towards any of the parties. Another study that replicated the hostile media effect was Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994). The subject of the study was the U.S. abortion controversy, but once again the hostile media bias hypothesis did not hold, producing inconsistent results. It is assumed that the results are related to the findings of Kinnally (2008) of involvement being essential to understand hostile media bias. Because the subjects were not ego-involved with the subject, hostile media bias was not confirmed.

The hostile media bias hypothesis did not hold in some studies, and because of this researchers keep testing the variables that might condition hostile media bias. Studies indicate that hostile media bias is present in most people's perceptions of media when it refers to a topic to which they feel ego-involved. More recent studies like Gunther and Schmitt (2004) went further looking at the issue, and found that hostile media bias is contradictory to what assimilation bias research had found. While assimilation bias incline for people looking for supportive information on the issue they stand for, hostile media bias suggests an inclination to believe the coverage is negative or biased against their belief.

In order to make an argument that could allow for both possibilities, Gunther and Smith (2004) exposed groups supporting and opposing genetically modified food to information presented in mass media and student essays. The results were different than past hostile media

bias studies. The source came to be an essential variable to take into account when studying the hostile media effect and assimilation biases, while the mass media coverage confirmed their hostile media bias hypothesis, the student essays provoked biased assimilation.

All things considered, hostile media bias has been re-tested many times and most of the research indicates that it has been proven not to change attitudes, but to reveal how people's consumption of media and especially news is by fragments. In other words, people only recall selective information convenient to their side of an argument or preferences.

For this study the hostile media bias is studied in light of those with anti-immigrant sentiments and those with pro-immigrant sentiments perception of media coverage on news about immigrants and immigration. Another process acknowledged in this study is third-person effect and biased assimilation following McKeever et al.'s (2012) approach to understand if a relation exists despite the change of geographic location.

Hostile media bias literature suggests that partisans will see media coverage as opposed to their beliefs. If supportive of an issue you will see media covering unfavorably your issue and vice-versa; from this the following hypothesis is posed:

H1: Pro- or anti-immigrant sentiment will be negatively correlated to perception of media coverage, with those holding anti-immigrant sentiment judging coverage as favorable to immigrants, and those holding pro-immigrant sentiment judging coverage as negative toward immigrants.

Also, a research question relating the independent variables to hostile media bias is posed:

RQ: What factors contribute most strongly to hostile media bias of those holding anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant sentiment?

### **Third-Person Effect**

It is common for people to perceive they are more resilient to media effects than everybody else, that others might be at risk and that they are not affected to the same extent. Davison (1983) called this phenomenon the third-person effect. He elaborated his thesis in which he explained how people have a tendency to “overestimate the influence mass communication have on the attitude and behavior of others” (p.3). The researcher also explained the relationship between the third-person effect and media bias. The author often explains that often a media bias is perceived where most of the time it is absent. With this perceived media bias, it is possible for people on each side of an issue to see the media being favorable to the other side. Moreover, the study explains that the topics discussed in the media tend to be most misperceived than topics that are mostly treated in “primary groups” such as family or friends (p. 12). The previous affirmation confirms the possibility of immigration and immigrants topics being misperceived, since they are common topics in the press.

Another process that can also be seen in third-person effect was Collins, Taylor, Wood, and Thompson’s (1988) experimental study where they acknowledge how people perceived messages influencing others and not them. Past research has also elaborated on people’s tendencies to believe in media effects having greater impact on others (Perloff et al., 1987; Mutz, 1987).

Furthermore, researchers have studied extensively the third-person effect in relation to media consumption and effects, alongside the portrayals of stereotypes and perception of others. Scharrer (2002) looks into the perception of television violence, and most of the respondents to her surveyed believed that the groups to which they did not belong were more likely to be negatively influenced by the content. Other researchers who looked up into the media,

specifically product commercials and its relation to the third-person effect were Gunther and Thorson (1992). The results were consistent with the third-person effect hypothesis, with the difference that emotion or sentiments seemed to be a variable that altered the results. This finding is important because in the present study anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant sentiment are going to be tested to see how it can or cannot alter the results.

Third person effect literature suggests that people will not see media having an effect on them but in others, which leads to the next hypothesis:

H2: Anti-immigrant sentiment will be positively correlated to presumed influence of media coverage on favorability of others' views of immigrants, with those holding anti-immigrant sentiment seeing coverage influencing others to have favorable views of immigrants.

The previous analysis of sentiments about immigrants will shed some light onto the perception New Yorkers have towards this minority group, but the correlation with other variables is what can give answers into the variation of levels or causes as to why there is a certain perception.

Moreover, the following research question is posed:

RQ: What factors contribute most strongly to presumed influence on others of news coverage of immigrants?

The present study is based on McKeever et al.'s (2012) theoretical foundation and approach. It is expected that in states like New York, where immigration movements have always existed, citizens will have a better idea of the immigrant persona, and see them beyond the stereotypes that surrounds this group. Moreover, New York is one of the states where there is the biggest immigrant concentration in comparison to the rest of the states. The study that is



replicated was done in North Carolina, a state where the immigrant population has grown exponentially but just in the last decade (LearnNC, 2015) which can lead to the assumption that the perception about immigrants will be more negative compared to New York (Singer, 2004).

The present study uses people from the state of New York to examine the anti-immigrant sentiment and pro-immigrant sentiment to re-test and improve McKeever et al.'s (2012) findings. In addition, geographic location, political ideology, immigrant status, and the reasons for migrants movements are going to be studied to determine which scenario or what elements suggest higher pro or anti-immigrant sentiment, and if hostile media bias and the third person effect are present.

First, geographic location more specifically if people come from a rural or urban place could tell us if this influences perceptions given population density or number of news outlets. Second, political ideology was added under the assumption that those who identify as Liberals or Democrats would have more open views, while Conservatives and Republicans would show more resistance towards immigrant's reception. The immigrant status of the respondents was also assessed and they were asked if they saw themselves as immigrants or not too evaluate if the responses were going to be biased. Lastly, respondents were also questioned about the reasons as to why immigrants come to the U.S. to look at the beliefs of the respondents versus the reality. From the literature review and the previous assumptions two hypotheses and two research questions are formulated.

### **Method**

A survey containing eight beliefs or opinion statements and two open-ended questions was distributed through the news and entertainment social media site Reddit. The invitation to fill out the survey was posted on ten sub-reddits related to New York State: /LongIsland, /Ithaca,

/RIT, /Rochester, /Buffalo, /Albany, /NYC, /UpstateNewYork, /College, and /NewYork. The post invited people from New York State to fill out the questionnaire, and a final sample of 500 completed surveys was collected in the month of September 2015.

### **Dependent Variables**

#### **Perception of favorableness of news coverage.**

Hostile media bias, or the perception of news coverage of immigrant and immigration topics, was measured on a 5 point scale (1 = *very unfavorable*, 5 = *very favorably*) with the statement “How could you describe the way New York immigrants are treated in the news stories you see about immigrants?.”  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .750$ . Forty-eight percent of the respondents to this question answered that media coverage treats immigrants unfavorably, while 38% maintained a neutral view, and 7% of the respondents described coverage as favorable.

#### **Presumed influence of media coverage on others.**

Assimilation bias was assessed by asking respondents about the consequences they believed news coverage of immigrants and immigration topics had on third-persons. They answered on a 5 point scale to the question: “Based on everything you have seen in the news about New York immigrants, do you think most people who see the news would have a very negative, somewhat negative, neither negative nor positive, somewhat positive, or very positive view of immigrants?”,  $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = .729$ . The majority of the respondents (57%) reported that media coverage of immigrants will have a “somewhat negative” effect on others, while for 29% of the respondents coverage was “neither negative nor positive,” and for the remaining 6% the answer was “somewhat positive.”

**Attention to immigration news.**

The attention respondents pay to immigration news was evaluated on a 5 point scale from “never” to “always,” by answering the following question: “Do you pay attention to news about immigrants?”,  $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = .799$ . The majority of the respondents acknowledged “sometimes” paying attention to them (57%), while 19% said they “rarely” do, and 16% of the sample do very often.

**Perceived amount of media attention paid to immigration.**

Also, the respondents answered the question “the amount of attention that New York television news and newspapers give to immigrant issues in New York”,  $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .753$ ; by qualifying it from “far too little” to “far too much”. The most common answer was that NY television gave “about the right amount” of coverage to immigrant issues (47%), while 34% reported that the amount of attention was “too little”.

**Independent Variables****Demographic variables.**

The demographic variables included gender, race, level of education, household income, and city of residence. Moreover, the demographic variables also asked for the type of location where people come from, city or non-city environment. These demographic factors were used to evaluate the possible impact on people’s perception and attitudes. About 71% of the sample were males, 88% identified themselves as Whites, and 95% of the respondents were not immigrants.

With a very educated population sample of 62% reporting that they graduated from college and 25% done with graduate studies, the average household income was evenly distributed throughout each category (see Table 1). Liberal or Democrat was the political

ideology with most prominence (58%), followed by those who identified as Independents with 28% of the sample, and the Republican or Conservatives with 9%.

Table 1

*Average Household Income*

| Category              | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Less than \$24,999.00 | 70        | 11.9    |
| \$25,000 to \$49,999  | 93        | 15.8    |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999  | 108       | 18.3    |
| \$75,000 to 99,999    | 76        | 12.9    |
| \$100,000 to 124,999  | 69        | 11.7    |
| \$125,000 or more     | 84        | 14.3    |

**Anti-immigrant sentiment.**

Three belief statements listed on the survey served as the basis to categorize people on each side of the anti-immigrant or pro-immigrant argument. The respondents answered with their level of agreement using the Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The statements selected to be evaluated were constructed following the perceived threat to society studied in Burns & Gimple (2000) and Wilson (2001): “Immigrants are becoming too demanding in the push of their rights,”  $M = 2.24$ ;  $SD = .987$ ; “The growing number of immigrants threatens traditional American customs and values,”  $M = 1.85$ ;  $SD = .985$ ; and “Immigrants bring crime to America,”  $M = 2.22$ ;  $SD = 1.001$ . Because these three items were correlated, the score was added together and recoded as a new overall variable: “sentiment”,  $M = 6.31$ ;  $SD = 2.527$ .

**Subjective knowledge about immigration.**

For this variable respondents were asked their level of agreement to the following statement: “I consider myself knowledgeable about immigration issues”, on a 5 point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*),  $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .918$ ; resulting in a 47% agreeing to the statement. Knowledge was included because it was assumed it might mitigate perception or correlate with sentiment.

**News exposure.**

In order to measure this variable, it was evaluated through an open ended question that invited the respondents to specify the minutes per day they spend watching or reading news about New York State,  $M = 26.87$ ,  $SD = 23.734$ . Most of the respondents reported watching/reading under 30 minutes per day of news, with 8% of this group not watching/reading anything (Min. = 0 minutes) and just 1% of the sample reporting the maximum value (120 minutes).

**Results**

*H1: Pro- or anti-immigrant sentiment will be negatively correlated to perception of media coverage, with those holding anti-immigrant sentiment judging coverage as favorable to immigrants, and those holding pro-immigrant sentiment judging coverage as negative toward immigrants.*

For this hypothesis the average of the statements regarding pro- and anti-immigrant sentiment were re-coded on a new variable called sentiment. This average was used in combination with the dependent variable “coverage of immigrant news” in a one-way ANOVA test that resulted in the confirmation of the prediction ( $F(1, 498) = 19.061$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Those with pro-immigrant views believed that coverage given to news about immigrants was “very

unfavorably” or “unfavorably”; and those with anti-immigrant views agreed to news coverage given to immigrants being “very favorably” or “favorably”.

*H2: Anti-immigrant sentiment will be positively correlated to presumed influence of media coverage on favorability of others’ views of immigrants, with those holding anti-immigrant sentiment seeing coverage influencing others to have favorable views of immigrants.*

For this hypothesis, the re-coded variable sentiment was run on a one-way ANOVA test comparing it with the dependent variable “views others would have about immigrants based on the news”. The assumption was confirmed, and a significant difference was found predicting the influence news coverage about immigrants would have on others (third-persons) ( $F(1, 498) = 16.229, p < .05$ ). In other words those who have anti-immigrant views believed that news have on others a “very positive” or “positive” influence making them have more favorable views on the matter; and those with pro-immigrant views believed that news have a “very negative” or “negative” influence on others.

*RQ1: What factors contribute most strongly to presumed influence on others of news coverage of immigrants?*

After running a Simple Linear Regression predicting the factors that contributed most strongly to the presumed influence respondents believed news coverage has on others, it was found that sentiment was the only variable that influences significantly third-person effect of news coverage ( $B = 0.46; p < .001$ ). The overall model was also significant with an  $R^2$  of 0.46;  $p < .001$ . Also, it was found that knowledge about immigrants and immigration issues, and the time spent exposed to media do not mitigate the presumed influences on others of news coverage about immigrants.

*RQ2: What factors contribute most strongly to hostile media bias of those holding anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant sentiment?*

To answer this RQ a Simple Linear Regression was calculated predicting the factors that contributed most strongly to hostile media bias. The results showed that the strongest variables that contribute to hostile media bias are sentiment ( $B = .045; p < .001$ ) and gender ( $B = -.263; p < .001$ ). The overall model was also significant with an  $R^2$  of 0.75;  $p < .001$ . It was assumed that knowledge about immigrants and immigration, and exposure to media would be mitigating factors but the study indicated that they did not contribute or mitigate hostile media bias.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to look into people with anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant sentiment beliefs and demographics to see what variables would impact the way they think about immigrants and immigration. Another question is whether media consumption had any influence over people's sentiments, or if they perceived that it did not affect them specifically but others. Also, the goal was to see if overall knowledge of immigrants and immigration issues could mitigate perception or biases, and lastly, to re-test McKeever et al.'s (2012) findings in the state of New York, as suggested in their directions for future research.

When it came to the perception of media coverage that people with anti-immigrant views have, the study confirmed that the hostile media bias phenomenon was present. Hostile media bias describes the process in which individuals see media coverage as favorable to other's preferences and unfavorable to their own preferences (Vallone et al., 1985). For this study the preferences are people's sentiment, and just as the phenomenon explains, those holding anti-immigrant sentiment answered that the coverage immigrants and immigration issues received

were favorable, and those holding pro-immigrant views saw coverage as unfavorable to immigrants and immigration issues.

Even though hostile media bias has not always hold strong, Kinnally (2008) found that the reason for the inconsistency is related to involvement of the subjects with the topic. Immigrants and immigration are current subjects on the everyday agenda, so it makes it easier to understand why the phenomenon was present, given that both topics bring an active role to respondents whether they are or are not immigrants.

Also, it was found that knowledge is not a strong factor to mitigate sentiment, demonstrating no relation between the variables. Furthermore, when it came to the opinion people had of the influence coverage has over others (third-person effect) it was also confirmed that even though they did not believe it had a great influence over themselves, it did over others, specifically a “somewhat negative” effect.

After analyzing the demographic variables, the factor that most strongly contributed to the belief that news media coverage of immigrants and immigration had an effect on others was sentiment. This finding contradicts past research of Gunther and Thorson (1992) who found that sentiment was a mitigating variable in third-person effect studies, different from this study where the variable sentiment intensifies the effect. It could be that when Gunther and Thorson (1992) did their media study the focus was product commercials, an artificial creation of stories to evoke actions or emotions, contrary to the subjects at hand (immigrants and immigration) which are more genuine and very unlikely for someone to not have an opinion on the matter. Similarly, it was found that the strongest factor to influence hostile media bias was sentiment, but also gender which corresponds to Kinnally’s (2008) findings of involvement previously discussed.



As it was earlier posited, the state of North Carolina differs from the state of New York in their immigration views and immigrants receptiveness. For those with anti-immigrant sentiment the statement where they scored higher was “Immigrants bring crime to America” which resonates with Kim et al’s. (2011) findings of media commonly relating immigration to crime and framing the immigration topic in the news as a problem. Only 12% of New York respondents agreed to that statement, in contrast to North Carolinians where 60% of the respondents agreed. Dalton and Wilson’s (2008) national polls can be used as a factor to understand these results; according to them 40% of Americans agree that “immigrants bring crime to America”.

Therefore, it can be said that at least in the sense of seeing immigrants as a cause of crime, North Carolinians have more misconceptions about immigrants than New Yorkers. To understand these results it is important to acknowledge the formation of the state of New York and its population which has always being highly populated by immigrants. In contrast, North Carolina is considered one of the states with the highest White American population, which means that it was not common for immigrants to populate that zone until the last ten to fifteen years. In Singer’s (2004) words, New York has been established throughout the years as a destination for immigrants, while North Carolina has emerged in the last decades as a gateway state in which immigrants’ population settlements used to be uncommon. Clearly the results of the study done in North Carolina by McKeever et al. (2012) are proof of resilience when it comes to accepting the immigrant presence in the state, and evidence of the receptiveness of New Yorkers to a common phenomenon for them such as migrant movements.

Another reason for the different results could be that in New York State throughout the years many campaigns promoting acceptance and diversity have been made, while in North

Carolina not much progress has been made towards the acceptance of immigrants. Mathema (2015) argues that unlike New York State, North Carolina cities “lack infrastructure to serve and integrate immigrants” and concludes that instead of creating new policies that support immigrant populations most of the cities do the opposite. In brief, immigrants’ acceptance is important beyond the fact that they contribute much to the U.S. economy. It has more to do with the fact that misconceptions and stereotypes make migrants’ process of adaptation to a new culture more difficult, bringing more struggles for those who come looking for a “better life”, “the American dream”, or more “opportunities” as answered in the survey by most of the respondents.

The sample of this study was balanced in its demographic variables, with the limitation of its respondents being extracted from a bulletin board system such as Reddit. Even though Reddit in its nature offers better respondents quality than paid response services, it has the limitation of being commonly visited by White males which was reflected in the total sample. In the end 71% of the sample was male and 88% identified themselves as White. Also, the news exposure variable was measured by asking the respondents to recall the number of minutes per day which will not be accurate and in the end did not serve its purpose to really measure a correlation between media consumption and immigrant sentiment. It is possible that another type of methodology such as participant observation would have given more rich data of media consumption, but because of time constraints that was not possible.

This study demonstrated how demographics and the place where we come from have a strong influence on people’s views, in this case on immigrants and immigration views, but future research should look into specific stereotypes and how they are formed and learned by society. An important question would be, what does media portray about immigrants and immigration, to understand in depth the way media influences people’s perception. This study could be done

under a more qualitative approach, through content analysis of U.S. mainstream media taking a sample of the newspapers that circulate in the biggest states.

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## Appendix

## Survey with cover letter

**Presumed media influence and opinions about immigrants and immigration**

You are invited to join a research study to look at the opinion people has in the state of New York about immigrants and immigration, it is presumed that media has a strong influence on those opinions and also demographic variables such as the region where you come from, your political ideology, age, race, and so on. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you.

In this research study, we are comparing our results to a study made in North Carolina with the same questionnaire to see how the different variables especially the population and the state itself can make a difference in the results. If you decide to participate you will be asked to fill demographic information such as your age, race, city, gender, political ideology and some background information that we can later use in our results to compare them to the North Carolina study; following their procedure you will be asked to evaluate 8 statements and finally you will be asked 4 open questions. We think this will take you 5 minutes.

You can stop participating at any time. If you stop or don't fill the survey entirely it will be removed from the rest since it will be incomplete data. This study doesn't involve any risks and we can't guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information we find in this study if it gets published in the future.

We will not retain any personal information, this is a complete anonymous survey and there is no need for you to provide your name, phone number or any other type of information that could identify you. Once again, participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. If you have questions about the study, any problems, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, any injuries, or think that something unusual or unexpected is happening you can contact **Leslie Ramirez** at (585) 309-0534 or by email at [lsr4169@rit.edu](mailto:lsr4169@rit.edu); also **Andrea Hickerson** at (585) 475-6129 or by email at [aahgpt@rit.edu](mailto:aahgpt@rit.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant contact **Heather Foti**, Associate Director of the HSRO at (585) 475-7673 or [hmfsrcs@rit.edu](mailto:hmfsrcs@rit.edu).



**Presumed media influence, and opinions about immigrants and immigration**

The present study explores the perceptions of the influence of media coverage of immigrants in the state of New York. Please fill out truthfully this anonymous survey if you have lived for at least the last five years in the state of New York, and do not include your name.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>City:</b>   | <b>Household Income yr.:</b>  |
| <b>Age:</b>  | <b>Grade of education:</b>  |
| <b>Gender:</b>   | <b>Race/Ethnicity:</b>  |
| <b>Political ideology:</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Republican <input type="checkbox"/> Democrat <input type="checkbox"/> Libertarian | <b>Do you consider yourself an immigrant?</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <sup>st</sup> gen. <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. |

Mark with an **X** the box  that best represents your level agreement to each statement or question.

**1- I consider myself knowledgeable about immigration issues**

- Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**2- Immigrants are becoming too demanding in their push for rights**

- Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**3- The growing number of immigrants threatens traditional American customs and values**

- Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**4- Immigrants bring crime to America**

- Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**5- How would you describe the way New York immigrants are portrayed in the news stories?**

- Very unfavorably  Unfavorably  Neutral  Favorably  Very favorably

**6- Based on everything you've seen in the news about New York immigrants, what views do you think people in New York who see the news would have about them?**

- Very negative  Somewhat negative  Neither negative nor positive  Somewhat positive  Very positive

**7- Do you pay attention to news about immigrants?**

- Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Very often  Always

**8- The amount of attention that New York television news and newspapers give to immigrant issues in New York is:**

- Far too little  Too little  About the right amount  Too much  Far too much

*(Continues on next page)*

**Answer the following questions as accurate as possible:**

9- Why do you think immigrants come to the United States?

10- How many minutes per day you spend reading/watching news about New York State?