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Hannah Fleischmann April 7, 2020

Gender-Based Asylum: Public Perceptions of Asylum Seekers and the Role of Gender

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Abstract

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With over 70 million people displaced worldwide, states struggle to uphold international asylum law, while also creating publicly supported domestic policies. The influence of public opinion is evident in the Trump administration's restrictive asylum policies, but little research has been done on U.S. public perceptions of asylum seekers and the impact of different claims of asylum. Gendered claims of asylum in particular have experienced a history of discriminatory practices and barriers to establishing legitimacy, yet there is a significant gap in the literature on gender-based asylum. Utilizing an Amazon Mechanical Turk experimental design, this study examines the factors that influence attitudes toward asylum seekers, as well as the specific roles of gender and gendered claims of asylum. The primary findings of the study are not significant, but may imply that individual attitudes toward asylum seekers are based more on the demographic makeup of the individual than asylum seekers themselves. Republican, Conservative, and male respondents had more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers, with Republican respondents significantly more likely to view gender-based asylum seekers as a threat. The limitations of the study and challenges with the survey platform and design are discussed as possible explanations for the overall null findings.

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

With over 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers worldwide, the world is experiencing the highest levels of displacement on record and a global refugee crisis of over 70 million people displaced worldwide (United Nations 2019). In 2018, 67 percent of refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were from Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan, and 80 percent lived in countries neighboring their countries of origin (United Nations 2019). With the crisis continuing to escalate, states are struggling to find effective solutions. Although an ideal solution would be for displaced persons to return home, only 2.9 million out of 70.8 million displaced people were able to return to their countries of origin in 2018 (UNHCR 2019). The next viable option is for refugees to be resettled in other countries, but opportunities for resettlement are slim, with states resettling less than a million refugees in 2018. The top three refugee hosting countries in 2018 were Turkey, Pakistan and Uganda hosting 3.7, 1.4, and 1.2 million refugees respectively (UNHCR 2019). Low- and middle-income countries are the primary recipients of refugees and are generally the countries with the least capacity and resources to handle claims of asylum and resettlement (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher 2017).

Although they are not comparable in terms of number of refugees, high-income countries do play an extremely important role in refugee resettlement. Before 2017, the United States led the world in resettlement, admitting more refugees each year than all other countries combined (Krogstad 2019). But there has been a clear decline in refugee admissions to the U.S. since 2017 when, for the first time since the 1980 U.S. Refugee Act, the U.S. resettled fewer refugees than the rest of the world. The number of resettled refugees in the U.S. in 2017 decreased more than in any other country, from 97,000 in 2016 to 33,000 (Connor & Krogstad 2018). The Trump

administration is only continuing to decrease the number of refugees it takes in, with a plan to admit a mere 18,000 in 2020 (Krogstad 2019). Not only does this policy threaten current refugees around the world, but it also impacts the future of refugee resettlement by cutting the funding necessary to support the integration of refugees. Paradoxically, the number of individuals seeking asylum in the U.S. has increased significantly in recent years, from 82,523 in 2016 to 208,942 as of October 2019 ("Total Asylum Applications"). Although there is no quota for how many asylum seekers can apply for asylum in the U.S., as the number of cases has gone up, so has the denial rate of asylum claims. In 2018, the asylum case denial rate was 41.41 percent, up from 32.76 percent in 2017 ("Asylum Decision Rates").

Asylum seekers who come to the U.S. are primarily nationals of Venezuela, China, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (United States Department of Homeland Security 2019). However, asylum seekers from many of these countries do not have a high rate of approval. Asylum seekers from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean have historically experienced the lowest rates of approval for asylum cases (Evans & Kohrt 2004). More recent research has shed further light on how an individual's country of origin can influence asylum outcomes. Positive asylum outcomes were found for only 40 percent of applicants who came from the Americas, as compared to 60 percent for individuals from Asia and the Pacific, 66.7 percent for those from the Middle East and North Africa, and 78 percent for applicants from Africa (Evans, Donato, Malewezi, Li, Corea, & Mitchell 2015). Clearly, regional bias is a force in determining who is ultimately granted asylum.

The Trump administration has taken a hard-line stance toward asylum, especially in its attempts to limit those arriving at the U.S. southern border. The administration created a third country transit asylum bar which effectively bans asylum applications from individuals who

traveled through another country before reaching the U.S., unless they were denied asylum in that country, severely limiting asylum possibilities for Central Americans (Liptak 2019). It also ended the past U.S. policy of "catch and release," wherein migrant families at the U.S. border would be allowed to live freely in the U.S. rather than in detention or returned to their home countries while they awaited their immigration hearings (Gonzales 2019). As its replacement, the current administration introduced what it calls the Migrant Protection Protocol, or "remain in Mexico" policy, through which the U.S. government now sends asylum seekers to Mexico while they wait for their U.S. court dates. This policy fails to protect asylum seekers' fears of returning to their countries of origin and directly violates the international humanitarian principle of *non-refoulement* which prevents states from sending individuals back to places where their safety or freedom is threatened (UN General Assembly 1951). These are just a few of the many policies that the Trump administration has implemented to severely limit the ability of asylum seekers to be recognized and protected in the U.S.

Recent polls indicate that the public is divided globally with regard to their views on asylum seekers and refugees. An Ipsos MORI poll conducted in 2016 in 22 different countries documented negative perceptions of refugees in many Western countries: 40 percent of all survey respondents, but 54 percent of U.S. respondents stated that they believed their country's borders should be closed completely to refugees (Ipsos MORI 2016). These negative perceptions have continued over time with a 2019 Ipsos MORI poll finding that again 40 percent of all respondents supported closing the border entirely. The poll also showed concerns of credibility with 54 percent of people doubting that the claims of refugees are genuine (Ipsos MORI 2019).

According to the UNHCR, asylum seekers are individuals who have crossed an international border and made a claim of asylum, but are awaiting a decision on their refugee

status ("Asylum-Seekers"). A refugee, as defined by the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees - the principal legal document outlining the rights of displaced persons and the obligations of states - has a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UN General Assembly 1951). Although the definition is explicitly related to persecution, the concept of a refugee has broadened over time. States and policymakers now widely accept that refugees can include those fleeing general violence or conflict as well (Salehyan 2007; Esses et al. 2017). Thus, accepted claims of asylum are those related to the five grounds of persecution, or to widespread conflict. The Convention grounds do not include gender, despite the unique needs and persecutions of women asylum seekers and refugees, making it especially difficult to establish a gendered claim of asylum (Freedman 2015).

But how is gender thought of as a basis for asylum claims? Gender is the "social construction of power relations between women and men, and the implications of these relations for women's (and men's) identity, status, roles and responsibilities" (Crawley 2001, 7). Gender is not merely an identity but rather the consequence of unequal power relations and inequities that leads to two main types of gender-related persecution as outlined by Musalo (2010, 46):

> (1) claims in which the form of persecution is unique to, or disproportionately inflicted on women (for example, female genital cutting (FGC), domestic violence, rape, forced marriage) regardless of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) ground for which it is inflicted and (2) claims in which the harm may or may not be gendered, but the reason (nexus) it is imposed is because of the victim's gender. A woman raped for political activism has suffered a gendered form of harm, imposed for non-gender reasons (political opinion), whereas a woman prohibited from attending school or working has suffered non-gendered forms of harm, which are imposed for gender reasons.

FGC is often considered to be both types, as it is a gendered harm and one that is inflicted for gendered reasons (Musalo 2010). Other examples of gendered claims of asylum include repressive social norms, human trafficking, and forced prostitution (Musalo and Knight 2003). Curtis and Evans refer to this distinction as gender-based versus gender-biased violence (Curtis and Evans 2019). Gender-biased harms involve ethnic or political persecution committed by a state or military group that have consequences specific to women, while gender-based harms are primarily interpersonal harms - such as sexual violence or FGC - that occur on the basis of the individual being a woman (Curtis and Evans 2019).

II. Research Questions

My overarching research question is as follows: what influences attitudes toward asylum seekers? With the current global refugee crisis, states struggle with how to accept claims as outlined by international law, while at the same time creating policies that are supported by the public (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016). This question is important because attitudes toward asylum seekers and public support influence policies that benefit asylum seekers and refugees. Past studies have well established that public opinion influences policies in democratic societies (Page and Shapiro 1983; Wright Jr, Erikson, and Mclver 1987; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Burstein 2003; Lax and Phillips 2009). Thus, for refugee resettlement to succeed as a viable and effective response to the current refugee crisis, more favorable attitudes of host societies toward asylum seekers and refugees are required (Esses et al. 2017). Furthermore, although there is no quota for the approval of asylum claims in the U.S., there are public concerns of "floodgates opening" if it becomes too easy to enter states (Musalo 2014). These concerns have the potential to impact policies toward asylum seekers, such as making it easier or harder for individuals to seek asylum on the basis of gender. We are already seeing dangerous changes to asylum policy with the Trump administration and its hardline stance on immigration, which is influenced by voters' opinions about asylum and immigration.

Although past studies have sought to answer what influences attitudes toward asylum seekers and refugees, there has been a significant lack of empirical research both on the specific role of gender and gendered claims of asylum. If attitudes affect which policies are created and supported, it is also useful to look at attitudes toward specific types of asylum seekers and asylum claims. This study seeks to provide insight into two questions in particular: What is the impact of gendered claims of asylum on attitudes toward asylum seekers? Does the gender of the

asylum seeker influence support for the claim of asylum? Attitudes toward specific asylum seekers inform which types of asylum seekers are accepted and which claims are seen as more or less legitimate.

III. Literature Review

Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers

There is a vast amount of research on attitudes toward immigrants, as outlined in the Annual Review of Political Science by Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014). Research on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration more broadly has found that attitudes are primarily driven by economic and cultural concerns about the nation as a whole. Attitudes toward immigrants are strongly correlated with perceptions of immigrants' economic impact on the nation, with high-skilled immigrants preferred (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). But researchers have also found support for the dominance of cultural threats - such as threats toward national identity - over economic threats in predicting anti-immigrant sentiment (e.g., Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior 2004). The literature is mixed with regard to the impact of contact with immigrants on attitudes, with some studies finding support for the theory that increased contact with immigrants leads to more positive immigrant sentiment (e.g., Jolly & DiGiusto 2014), and others finding that sudden changes in a community's foreign-born population can contribute to more negative immigrant sentiment (Hopkins 2010).

Despite the large literature on attitudes toward immigrants more generally, there is significantly less research on attitudes toward asylum seekers in particular. What little there is has primarily been conducted in Australia, likely due to the unique exclusionary treatment of asylum seekers who arrive there (Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller, & Lalonde 2007). Research in this area also often overlaps with research on immigration. Logically we would expect to find similarities between factors that influence attitudes toward immigrants and those that affect attitudes toward asylum seekers, but the differences in attitudes are also important to note and have yet to be fully uncovered. Additionally, despite clearly laid out definitions of "asylum

seekers" and "refugees" in international law, many studies have obfuscated these terms, often conflating "economic migrants" with asylum seekers and refugees who have fled persecution. This confusion in terminology and lack of consistency makes it difficult to draw conclusions from the available research. However, it is still useful to outline past findings with regard to attitudes toward asylum seekers, while keeping these limitations in mind, in order to establish a foundation to build on as well as areas that require more research.

Past studies have demonstrated certain individual correlates of anti-asylum seeker sentiment that are very similar to correlates of anti-immigrant sentiment. Drawing on Anderson and Ferguson's (2018) review of the literature on attitudes toward asylum seekers, negative attitudes are related to individual characteristics such as lower levels of education (Greenhalgh & Watt 2015), high levels of national identification (Stephan, Renfro, Esses, White, & Martin 2005; Esses et al. 2017; Verkuyten 2004; Pedersen, Attwell, & Heveli 2005; Pehrson & Green 2010; Nickerson & Louis 2008), being more politically conservative (e.g., Perry, Paradies, & Pedersen 2014; Nickerson & Louis 2008; Pedersen et al. 2005), identifying as Christian (e.g., Perry et al. 2014; Deslandes & Anderson 2019), and being an older male (Pedersen et al. 2005; Schweitzer, Perkoulidis, Krome, Ludlow, & Ryan 2005). The study by Pedersen, Attwell, and Heveli (2005) is particularly important as it created a quantitative scale to measure attitudes toward asylum seekers, consisting of nine negative and nine positive statements about asylum seekers, that are answered on a 7-point Likert scale (Pedersen et al. 2005).

The impact of prejudice on attitudes toward asylum seekers and immigrants more generally has also found support in a number of studies (e.g., Hartley & Pederson 2015; Anderson & Ferguson 2018; Louis et al. 2008; Nickerson & Louis 2008; McKay et al. 2012). Studies have found right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO)

to be related to attitudes toward asylum seekers (Nickerson & Louis 2008). Individuals with high right-wing authoritarianism are likely to favor social conformity and a view of the world as threatening, especially with regard to groups that threaten the status quo. Individuals with high social dominance orientation likely prefer clear social hierarchies and a view of the world as competitive (Anderson & Ferguson 2018). Duckitt and Sibley (2010) link RWA and SDO in a dual process model of prejudice (DPM) which dictates that RWA and SDO work together to drive prejudice. Past studies have found support for the relationship between DPM and anti-asylum seeker sentiment, with higher levels associated with more negative perceptions (Louis et al. 2007; Nickerson & Louis 2008; Tartakovsky and Walsh 2015).

Characteristics of asylum seekers themselves have also been found to affect attitudes toward asylum seekers. In a study on which types of asylum seekers Europeans are most willing to accept, Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner (2016) utilized correlates of anti-asylum seeker sentiment from past studies to theorize and find that Europeans preferred asylum seekers with higher employability, more consistent asylum testimonies, and more severe vulnerabilities, who were Christian not Muslim. This study is particularly useful as it was conducted across fifteen European countries, during the current global refugee crisis, and the researchers designed a survey experiment that was embedded in a large-scale online public opinion survey which enabled them to identify causality. Their conjoint experiment clearly isolated attributes of asylum seekers that Europeans preferred, which provided a significant contribution to a literature built mostly from analysis of the attributes of participants themselves. Despite including economic migrants in their definition of asylum seekers, the implications of the Bansak et al. study are important in the context of the U.S. as well, as far more Christian than Muslim refugees have been admitted into the U.S. in recent years (Krogstad 2019). The Trump administration's

response to migrants necessitates more and updated research in this area, in order to track changes in public perceptions. But it also underscores the idea that, for the Trump administration and many U.S. voters, the U.S. is and should remain a predominantly white and Christian country.

Additionally, attitudes have been found to differ depending on the type of migrant (Verkuyten 2004; Murray & Marx 2013; Verkuyten, Kieran, & Kros 2018; Bansak et al. 2016). Distinctions between "real refugees" and "bogus refugees" or "fortune seekers" have recently become more prominent in national rhetoric and the media, with a particular focus on the level of choice or responsibility attributed to the migrant for leaving (Verkuyten 2004; Verkuyten et al. 2018). "Real refugees" or involuntary migrants are typically associated with sympathy, whereas "bogus refugees" or voluntary migrants are associated with anger (Verkuyten et al. 2018). Right-wing ideologies in particular have been found to relate to the claim that only a minority of refugees are "real refugees" (Verkuyten 2004) and the rise of right-wing political ideologies and representations of refugees as threats to host society have been associated with negative attitudes and a decline in the acceptance of refugees (Leach 2003, Wike et al. 2016, Esses et al. 2017). National identification in particular has been found to interact with perceived national norms about asylum seekers and migrants, - i.e. national norms that either support hostility or acceptance of these groups - wherein those with high national identification who perceive national norms as negative, exhibit more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers. Importantly, the contribution of hostile national norms on negative attitudes was only present for individuals who also had high levels of national identification (Nickerson & Louis 2008), further suggesting the significance of political and national rhetoric and norms on attitudes toward asylum seekers.

The division of "real refugees" and "bogus refugees" also implies a public concern for choice when developing attitudes toward migrants. Attitudes toward different types of asylum seekers have been found to vary by the level of responsibility attributed to asylum seekers for leaving, suggesting that perceptions of migrants' choices or the lack thereof influence attitudes toward asylum seekers. Lack of choice has been associated with sympathy or concern, while perceptions of choice and responsibility have been associated with anger (Verkuyten, 2004; Verkuyten et al. 2018). Bansak et al. (2016) found that more voluntary migration - for economic reasons - was associated with more negative attitudes toward the migrant than involuntary migration - for political or religious persecution. This implies a humanitarian concern toward refugees and asylum seekers who credibly face forms of persecution. Greater levels of threat and anxiety have also been identified toward unauthorized immigrants compared to authorized immigrants (Murray & Marx 2013), however the study's definition of unauthorized immigrants was not adequately outlined. The previous research discussed implies asylum seekers or involuntary migrants incite greater sympathy, yet when included within "unauthorized immigrants," attitudes and feelings are muddled by perceptions of choice and credibility.

Concerns of credibility and legitimacy also connect to the finding that greater sympathy is felt toward asylum seekers and refugees, than immigrants more generally, due to humanitarian concerns of respondents (Verkuyten 2004; Verkuyten et al. 2018; Murray & Marx 2013). Although some studies have suggested generally negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees (e.g. Wike et al. 2016; Schweitzer et al. 2005), many have cited that the public tends to feel more positively about asylum seekers and refugees who are perceived to have migrated involuntarily than immigrants more generally (e.g. Murray & Marx 2013; Verkuyten 2004; Verkuyten et al. 2018). This area of the literature is lacking and more attention must be paid to

the differences in perceptions and levels of sympathy associated with various groups of immigrants. More generally, those considered not responsible for their challenging situations are typically viewed with sympathy by the public (Verkuyten et al. 2018).

Attitudes toward different types of asylum seekers have also been linked to policies, with the way in which asylum seekers are defined influencing support for policies on immigration (Verkuyten 2004; Verkuyten et al. 2018). When asylum seekers were defined as having no choice in leaving their home countries, framed as "political refugees," participants' level of policy support was related to feelings of sympathy. Whereas, when asylum seekers were defined as making an active decision to leave their country and find a better life elsewhere, framed as "economic refugees," participants' level of policy support was related to anger and not sympathy (Verkuyten, 2004). Although still presenting problems with conflating economic migrants with asylum seekers fleeing persecution, Verkuyten's research provides further evidence for the influence of attitudes on support for policies and that the type of migrant impacts perceptions. Moreover, Verkuyten et al. (2018) found that when respondents believe that most migrants have no other choice but to leave, they have higher levels of empathy which then contribute to more support for assistance to migrants and respect for their cultural rights. However, when respondents believe migrants are responsible for leaving, they have higher levels of anger which then contribute to less support for policies that assist migrants (Verkuyten et al. 2018).

In terms of attitudes toward refugees and resettlement more generally, the literature is inconclusive, and more research is needed to determine attitudes and factors of influence. As was previously discussed, public opinion polling in 2019 found that a majority of U.S. respondents were concerned with the credibility of refugee claims and many supported closing the border entirely (Ipsos MORI 2019). In Europe, a Pew Research Center poll in 2016 found that almost 60

percent of respondents believed accepting refugees would increase terrorism and half cited refugees as an economic burden because they take away jobs and social benefits (Wike et al. 2016). Schweitzer et al. (2005) found that there was a high prevalence of prejudicial attitudes toward refugees overall in Australia, consistent with previous research and public opinion polls in Australia. However, other research has found support for generally positive attitudes toward refugees and the resettlement program in the U.S. in particular (Murray & Marx 2013). Furthermore, some research has found evidence that the public feels higher levels of anger, fear, threat, and prejudice toward asylum seekers than toward resettled refugees (Hartley & Pedersen 2015). Not only have there been a very limited number of studies on attitudes toward refugees and resettlement conducted at all, much less in the U.S, but the research in this area has also primarily been conducted before the Trump administration took office. Thus, public opinion toward refugees and asylum seekers is likely changing and more research is needed to determine general attitudes, as well as to differentiate between types of persecution.

Gendered claims of asylum

With a discussion of past studies on attitudes toward asylum seekers in mind, including their limitations, we will now take a deeper look at the literature on gendered claims of asylum. There is very little empirical research on gendered claims of asylum, in part because gender has not been commonly linked to refugees and migration, nor has enough attention been paid to the unique needs of women as asylum seekers and refugees (Crawley 2001). But gendered claims of asylum are in fact protected by international law; the UNHCR has recognized that women and girls require special protections in asylum procedures (UNHCR Asylum Lawyers Project 2016). In 1991, the UNHCR published Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, formally detailing these special protections and specifying that women fearing persecution on the basis of

gender constitute a social group upon which an asylum claim can be based (UNHCR 1991). In 2002, the UNHCR specified its guidelines on gender-related persecution in alignment with the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR Asylum Lawyers Project 2016).

The research that does exist in this area is primarily of a legal nature, analyzing how gendered claims of asylum are received in domestic courts. U.S. case law has established that gender can be among the defining characteristics of a social group (Musalo and Knight 2003) or of political asylum (Crawley 2001). In 1995, the U.S. established guidelines on gendered claims of asylum for asylum officers, the principal decision-makers of asylum claims accepted in the U.S. system (Musalo 2010). The guidelines provide specific examples of gendered forms of persecution, such as "sexual abuse, rape, infanticide, genital mutilation, forced marriage, slavery, domestic violence and forced abortion" (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 1995, 9). However, these guidelines are only binding on U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services asylum officers, not on immigration or appellate court judges who deal with many asylum applications and can overturn judges' determinations (Fletcher 2006).

Furthermore, despite international and past U.S. legal protections for gendered claims of asylum, including domestic violence, the Trump administration has sought to end the recognition of domestic violence as a legitimate claim of asylum. In 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions reversed the groundbreaking decision in Matter of A-R-C-G, which granted asylum to a woman from El Salvador who fled brutal domestic violence, and created the legal precedent that domestic violence is a nationally accepted claim of asylum (Center for Gender and Refugee Studies 2018). Sessions established that "private violence" - inclusive of domestic violence and gang violence - would not constitute grounds for asylum. In Sessions' own words, "claims by

aliens pertaining to domestic violence or gang violence perpetrated by non-governmental actors will not qualify for asylum" (A.G. 2018, 320).

There is a clear disconnect between the international and domestic protections of gendered claims of asylum and how these claims are received by states in practice due to many obstacles facing gender-based asylum seekers (Boyd 2018). One such documented barrier is the emphasis on credibility in the adjudication of asylum claims. Past studies have analyzed credibility in the context of gender-based asylum seekers, but have been generally limited to a small number of cases (Fletcher 2006; McKinnon 2009). Although assessment of credibility is a common part of the immigration adjudication system, without consideration of bias by immigration officials, its impact is detrimental for asylum claimants whose persecution claims do not fit easily into one of the convention categories (McKinnon 2009). Asylum seekers are assessed by judges based on "their individual ideas of how refugees should psychologically respond to persecution" (Fletcher 2006, 121). These ideas are often grounded in sexist and nationalist biases that have nothing to do with the claims themselves (McKinnon 2009). Thus, gender-based asylum seekers are "audienced" based on individual conceptions of how a woman should respond to gender-related persecution (Fletcher 2006).

But not all individuals experience and react to persecution, especially that of a gendered or sexual nature, in the same way (Fletcher 2006). Some decision makers even seem to assume that all women say they have experienced sexual violence, due to the rise of gender-based asylum seekers (Freedman 2008). Women's accounts of sexual violence may be deemed less credible if they leave out specific details when their asylum claim is first made, despite the social and psychological challenges of recounting such traumatic and sensitive experiences (Freedman 2015). Moreover, the emphasis on proof of asylum claims is especially difficult for those who

have faced persecution due to sexual violence as it is more difficult to prove, and individuals may be less willing to share details or provide medical examinations (Freedman 2008). The barrier of credibility informs which claims are viewed as legitimate, but more research is needed on the influence of gender norms and individual perceptions of asylum seekers and their claims.

Another barrier presented to gender-based asylum seekers is the challenge of cultural difference arguments (Crawley 2001; Freedman 2008; Fletcher 2006). Harms and persecutions that may occur in "third world" countries are relegated to cultural differences and thus not deemed worthy of protection (Freedman 2008). Freedman argues, "These conflicts between women's individual rights and those who seek to impose 'traditional' or 'cultural' practices upon them can easily lead to persecutions of women, but claims for asylum based on these persecutions may not be recognised as legitimate if the imperative of recognising cultural difference prevails" (2008). Gendered harms, such as FGC and repressive social norms, have often not been considered to be forms of persecution as they are condoned by culture or religion (Fletcher 2006).

However, this is contrary to more recent evidence that finds more exoticized forms of violence, such as FGC or forced marriage, were more likely to be granted asylum than normalized forms of violence, such as domestic or sexual violence (Curtis and Evans 2019). This is also supported by evidence showing that the U.S. asylum system favors these exotic claims over more normalized interpersonal violence (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017). The dismissal of gender-related harms as cultural differences serves to delegitimize gendered claims of asylum, but more research is needed on what exactly this relationship entails and whether public perception is also influenced by justifications of cultural differences.

My research will not only work to strengthen the literature on attitudes toward asylum seekers, but will also contribute to a gap in understanding of perceptions in the U.S in particular. It will look deeper into how attitudes may differ by type of asylum claim, which has yet to be well established in the literature. Additionally, I will be able to contribute to the gap in research on the role of gender and gendered claims of asylum more specifically and how they may change public perceptions of asylum seekers. Due to a lack of research especially on gendered claims of asylum, I will be able to contribute a new theoretical framework to inform the relationship between gendered claims of asylum and attitudes toward asylum seekers, which is outlined in the next section of this paper. Overall, I am interested in comparing four different types of asylum claims: political persecution, widespread violence, rape by an armed group, and domestic violence, while also varying the gender of the asylum seeker in order to investigate the roles of gender and gendered claims of asylum on attitudes toward asylum seekers.

IV. Theories and Hypotheses

Building off of Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher's (2017) comprehensive analysis of attitudes toward asylum seekers, I will begin with the prominent baseline theory that credibility influences negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees, which explains why the type of asylum claim matters for public perceptions. I will then discuss why gender, especially the gendered nature of the claim, is important, which feeds into perceptions of credibility and influences attitudes toward asylum seekers. I will end with an explanation of how the interaction between both gender and the type of asylum claim influences attitudes toward asylum seekers.

The baseline theory of credibility argues that attitudes toward asylum seekers are influenced by public concerns with the legitimacy and credibility of asylum seekers and their claims, suggesting that perceptions of asylum seekers as less credible and legitimate contribute to more negative attitudes (Louis et al. 2007; Verkuyten 2004; Esses, Medianu, & Lawson 2013). The public is clearly concerned with the legitimacy of asylum claims and there exists a "climate of disbelief" that surrounds asylum seekers, which requires them to work harder to provide proof of their asylum claims (Freedman 2008, 422). As outlined above, distinctions between "real refugees" and "bogus refugees" have become more pronounced in the national rhetoric and media, with more negative attitudes implicated by asylum seekers and claims viewed as less legitimate (Verkuyten 2004; Verkuyten et al. 2018). Evidence from an experiment conducted in Canada has shown that media depictions of "bogus refugees," that highlight illegitimacy and threats to the integrity of the refugee system, lead to more negative attitudes toward refugees and refugee policies (Esses et al. 2013). Representations of refugee claimants as frequently illegitimate have also been found to contribute to the dehumanization of refugees (Esses et al. 2013). Furthermore, perceptions of economic migrants exploiting the asylum system have been

associated with anger toward asylum seekers, while perceptions of "genuine refugees" were associated with sympathy (Verkuyten 2004). The rise of more restrictive policies toward asylum seekers and refugees have also been linked to host nations' arguments that asylum programs are abused by illegitimate claims and economic migrants (Louis et al. 2007).

Thus, weaker perceptions of credibility - as influenced by the media and national rhetoric - imply more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers. As a result, we might expect asylum claims that are more traditionally accepted as legitimate to contribute to more positive attitudes. Additionally, we can infer that when respondents are provided with information detailing a specific asylum seeker and claim, they would likely associate that with more credibility than having no information at all. In order to test this theory of the importance of legitimacy and credibility of asylum seekers and their claims, my first two hypotheses are:

H1: Respondents with more information about a specific asylum seeker and that individual's claim of asylum will result in more positive attitudes toward asylum seekers.

H2: Respondents will have more positive attitudes toward a male asylum seeker fleeing a more traditional claim of political persecution than a male asylum seeker fleeing widespread violence.

Along with the type of asylum claim, gender, especially in terms of the gendered nature of the claim, also plays a role in feeding into perceptions of credibility and impacting public attitudes toward asylum seekers. A wide variety of theoretical perspectives suggest that respondents will exhibit more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers with gendered claims of asylum. One such theoretical explanation for the illegitimacy of gendered claims of asylum is that gendered claims are considered to exist in the private, versus public, sphere of life. Scholars have long analyzed the use of the public and private dichotomy to divide "State and society" and

"non-domestic and domestic life" (Crawley 2001, 17). The State is regarded as public, political and male-dominated and stands in stark contrast to the private, personal and female domain (Crawley 2001). The public-private division of harms has many implications for gendered claims of asylum. Harms that occur in the private sphere are not considered relevant to asylum law, making gendered forms of persecution legally invisible (Freedman 2015). This presents yet another barrier to gender-based asylum seekers as they are not simply required to link their persecution to a Convention ground, but rather to "overcome the institutional tendency to dismiss the harms they suffer as private and personal" (Fletcher 2006, 113).

These domains serve to reinforce traditional gender norms and inequities by relegating women to the private sphere of domestic life and allowing the public to ignore the political nature of the family (Crawley 2001). The ideological use of the public-private divide serves to structure gendered experiences of persecution, with respect to "access, agency, and interest" (Crawley 2001, 20). Gendered harms, such as domestic violence or sexual violence, are considered private affairs (Musalo and Knight 2003), while public sphere issues - such as human rights - are associated with the concerns of men, which dismisses the violations and persecutions that arise from private concerns (Indra 1999).

The public-private divide may present a particular challenge with regard to domestic violence, which is a harm that is not often considered relevant to asylum law, even when individuals cannot expect help from law enforcement or the State (Freedman 2015). Domestic violence serves as an example of the powerlessness of women in the private sphere, thus weakening its ability to be considered a legitimate claim of asylum (McKinnon 2009). Furthermore, countries struggle to accept domestic violence as a claim of asylum, as this private harm is also prevalent in their own societies (Boyd 2018). Rape and sexual violence more

generally are often normalized and argued to be purely a private affair, part of the universal relations between men and women (Freedman 2008). Evidence has indeed shown that claims of "private violence" are less likely to be accepted than structural violence in which the state is primarily responsible (Curtis and Evans 2019). If domestic and sexual violence, and other gendered forms of persecution, are generally viewed as existing within the private sphere and not deserving of public recognition, asylum claims of this nature will be seen as less legitimate.

Furthermore, the literature on gender roles and norms can also explain more negative attitudes toward gendered claims of asylum. One theoretical understanding argues that stronger views on traditional gender norms and roles contribute to less sympathetic attitudes toward violence against women, which has strong implications for gendered claims of asylum that often involve some form of violence. Views on the traditional roles of men and women in the household, and with power, have been evidenced to be strong predictors of greater acceptance of violence against women (Flood & Pease 2009; White & Kurpius, 2002; Davis & Liddell 2002). White & Kurpius (2002) found that traditional gender role attitudes predicted greater blame attribution to rape victims and that a greater perceived expectation for men to have status also increased the blame assigned to rape victims. Gender role attitudes have been shown to be a strong predictor of beliefs about domestic violence specifically, particularly for men (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004). Traditional gender role attitudes have also been associated with less perceived seriousness of interpersonal aggression (Hilton, Harris, & Rice 2003), as well as greater acceptance of common myths about rape - for example, "A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex" (Davis & Liddell 2002, 40).

Attitudes toward violence against women are also greatly influenced by societal gender norms and inequalities, such as perceptions of male dominance, men's uncontrollable sexual urges, women's deception, and marriage as providing implicit sexual consent (Flood & Pease 2009). However, the research is inconclusive about the extent to which female victim responsibility is related to more acceptance of domestic violence. Some research shows that greater responsibility is attributed to female victims of domestic violence when they are perceived to provoke the male perpetrator's aggression, such as through verbal aggression or inciting jealousy (Pavlou & Knowles 2001). Another study found that participants were more likely to blame the victim of domestic violence when no cause of the aggression was mentioned, suggesting people tend to be suspicious of women and lean toward believing male perpetrators about possible causes of abuse. This study also found support for the impact of sexist beliefs on blaming domestic violence victims and exonerating aggressors (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Miguel Moya 2011). However, other studies have found that a small minority of people attribute women's provocation as a reason for abuse (Gracia, & Tomás 2014). Results suggest perceptions of traditional gender norms and attitudes toward domestic violence may be changing or that social desirability bias is present and more research is needed to determine the true effects (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Miguel Moya 2011).

Attitudes toward violence against women play a significant role in the perpetration of violence against women, as well as institutional responses to violence against women (Flood & Pease 2009). These institutional responses have been found to include judges (Flood & Pease 2009), which is particularly relevant to gender-based asylum claims which are subject to these specific decision-makers. Furthermore, the factors that influence negative attitudes toward violence against women are also likely to affect attitudes toward gendered claims of asylum.

Thus, my third hypothesis is:

> *H3: Respondents will have more negative attitudes toward a female with a gendered claim of asylum than asylum seekers of either gender with claims of widespread violence or political persecution.*

Furthermore, the theory of gender roles and norms feeds into the public's concern with the legitimacy and credibility of asylum claims. If gendered claims of asylum are not seen as legitimate, compared to claims of widespread violence or political persecution, attitudes will likely be more negative.

Due to the significant lack of research on perceptions of gendered claims of asylum, it is also useful to consider an opposing theory that may explain more positive attitudes toward gender-based asylum seekers. One theory that could plausibly explain this effect is that of benevolent sexism, which "relies on kinder and gentler justifications of male dominance and prescribed gender roles; it recognizes men's dependence on women (i.e., women's dyadic power) and embraces a romanticized view of sexual relationships with women" (Glick & Fiske 1997, 121). Benevolent sexism implies feelings of protectiveness and affection for women who conform to their gender roles, by characterizing them as "wonderful though weak" (Becker & Swim 2012). Thus, these feelings of protectiveness toward women could explain more positive attitudes toward gender-based asylum seekers. My fourth hypothesis is:

> *H4: Respondents will have more positive attitudes toward a female with a gendered claim of asylum than asylum seekers of either gender with claims of widespread violence or political persecution.*

Furthermore, previous research has found that individuals with higher levels of benevolent sexism, also attribute less blame to rape perpetrators who are acquaintances of the

victim, rather than strangers (Viki, Abrams, & Masser 2004). Individuals with higher levels of benevolent sexism hold the belief that women are responsible for maintaining sexual morality. Under these circumstances, more focus is often placed on the behavior of the victim rather than the perpetrator. Victims of acquaintance rape could be viewed as violating their traditional gender role expectation of sexual morality because the victim had already consented to "sexual familiarity (if not specifically sexual intercourse)" (Viki, Abrams, & Masser 2004, 302). This implies that individuals may be more supportive of the asylum claim of sexual violence by a gang rather than domestic violence, as the rape was committed by a stranger not the asylum seeker's partner. Since I included two different types of gender-based persecution in my study, domestic violence and rape by an armed group, I would also like to compare whether attitudes are different depending on who the perpetrator is. Thus, I hypothesize:

> *H5: Respondents will have more positive attitudes toward a female asylum seeker with a claim of rape by an armed group than female asylum seekers with a claim of domestic violence.*

This is also supported by the public-private division theory, as domestic violence is more clearly associated with the "home" or private sphere, than sexual violence when the perpetrator is a gang and not an intimate partner.

Finally, I will now move to a discussion of how the interaction between both the gender of the asylum seeker and the type of asylum claim influences attitudes toward asylum seekers. The theoretical understanding of gender roles and norms also informs the interaction between these variables, especially with regard to female asylum seekers fleeing political persecution. This form of persecution often involves political leadership and actions against a government regime or policies. The theoretical understanding of gender roles and norms, specifically related

to attitudes toward women in politics and leadership roles, implies more negative attitudes toward female asylum seekers fleeing political persecution. A Pew Research Center poll on women in leadership positions found that there is a significant gender gap in support for women in political offices and top executive positions, with women being much more supportive. There is also a clear ideological divide, with Democrats being more than twice as likely than Republicans to say there are not enough women in political offices (Horowitz, Igielnik, & Parker 2018). Other researchers have found further evidence that there is a gender gap in support for female political candidates (Dolan 2010). In terms of women in leadership positions more generally, research has found that attitudes toward women in positions of authority were more negative than attitudes toward men for both men and women (Rudman & Kilianski 2000).

According to role congruity theory, "people are evaluated positively when their characteristics are consistent with their social roles" (Gervais & Hillard 2011, 223). Men are more typically associated with roles of power and authority, whereas women are more generally associated with roles that involve caring and human interaction (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra 2006). This theory implies that attitudes toward female leaders may be more negative, as the female gender role goes against the leader role (Gervais & Hillard 2011; Eagly & Karau 2002). Consistent with role congruity theory, researchers have found evidence that participants favor male candidates for leadership positions (Dolan 2010; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra 2006) and female candidates experience greater prejudice, especially when occupying a position seen as incongruent with her gender role (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra 2006). Eagly and Karau (2002) expanded the theory and found evidence that perceptions can even differ toward two female political candidates, when one is perceived to uphold less stereotypically female gender norms than the other.

Extended to political persecution, women fleeing political persecution would likely be seen as taking a political leadership role, which directly conflicts with the traditional female gender role. Thus, role congruity theory would predict more negative attitudes toward female asylum seekers fleeing political persecution. I further hypothesize:

H6: Respondents will have more positive attitudes toward a female asylum seeker with a claim of rape by an armed group than a female asylum seeker with a claim of domestic violence.

Additionally, the theory of benevolent sexism could inform the interaction between gender and the type of claim. Looking at a different type of asylum claim of widespread violence, the theory of benevolent sexism implies that the public would have more positive attitudes toward a female asylum seeker fleeing widespread violence than a male. If the public exhibits feelings of protectiveness toward women victims, characteristic of those high in benevolent sexism (Becker & Swim 2012), they would likely feel more sympathetic to female victims. My final hypothesis is:

H7: Respondents will have more positive attitudes toward a female asylum seeker fleeing widespread violence than a male asylum seeker fleeing widespread violence.

V. Research Design

Survey Experiment Overview

Due to a significant lack of data on attitudes toward asylum seekers and gendered claims of asylum, as well as confusion in terminology in past studies, I was limited in terms of options for testing my hypotheses. In order to better contribute to the wide gap in the literature, I ultimately decided to pursue a survey experimental design to test the effects of different types of asylum claims on public perceptions of asylum seekers. I specifically chose a survey experiment over a traditional survey or public opinion poll in order to avoid greater social desirability bias, as well as to be able to clearly establish causality. Regular surveys rely on observational data, which require specific methods for determining causality and minimizing endogeneity problems. Traditional survey research is also much more susceptible to common causes of both the independent and dependent variables, which must be controlled for more directly than in randomized experiments (Blalock Jr. 2018).

The Bansak et al. (2016) study discussed above utilized a conjoint design that provided participants with two different asylum seekers and asked them to choose which one they would prefer to enter their country. Thus, concerns of social desirability would likely be even greater for this type of design, wherein participants had to specifically choose one asylum seeker over another. In contrast, in a survey experimental design, participants' overall attitudes are simply recorded without them necessarily knowing that they have been primed with a specific type of asylum seeker. Furthermore, experimental research has been used in past studies on attitudes toward immigrants and asylum seekers, which have provided valuable insight into specific causal mechanisms of attitudes toward these populations (e.g., Brader, Valentino & Suhay 2008; Bansak et al. 2016; Esses et al. 2013). The use of survey experiments in particular has grown

substantially in recent years and have had important contributions to the field of Political Science and public opinion more specifically (Barabas & Jerit 2010).

I have chosen to utilize Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform, an online tool that enables researchers or "requesters" to design surveys or tasks that they pay MTurk participants or "workers" to complete. The benefits of MTurk include the supportive nature of the online platform itself in aiding experimental randomization, the creation and distribution of surveys, the ability to choose participants that have received higher qualifications for the successful completion of past surveys, and the demographic diversity of MTurk "workers" (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis 2010). MTurk is also relatively inexpensive compared to other experimental research designs and provides a convenient and easy way to recruit subjects (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz 2012). The most commonly cited concerns with MTurk experiments are threats to the internal and external validity of data. MTurk subjects are generally younger and more ideologically liberal than the public (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz 2012). However, scholars have found that U.S. MTurk participants may actually be more representative of the U.S. population as a whole than participants in university subject pools (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis 2010; Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz 2012).

Concerns with data quality have to do with fears that participants will simply rush through surveys or not be motivated to thoughtfully answer questions. Due to the lack of a present experimenter with MTurk, online participants may be less attentive than in a lab. But little evidence has shown that subject pool data is of greater quality than online data collection and concerns with attentiveness of participants can be addressed with comprehension checks built into surveys (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis 2010). Finally, focusing on response bias in

terms of payment of subjects, MTurk participant compensation has been found to impact the number of responses but not the quality (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis 2010).

Sample

Using Mechanical Turk, I recruited a sample of 1,574 U.S. "workers," who will be fairly representative of the general U.S. population as compared to other convenience samples (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis 2010; Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz 2012). "Workers" were paid a set wage, well above the average payment for MTurk, and recruited via a job ad on the online platform. The relative external validity of my MTurk experiment, through the use of a more representative convenience sample of U.S. individuals, will allow me to make certain claims about the U.S. public's attitudes toward asylum seekers and the influence of gender. The internal validity of my experiment was established through a combination of randomization in treatment assignment and the demographic information I collected through my survey that was used to ensure there are no significant differences between experimental groups and between the control and to find specific influences of demographic variables on participants' attitudes.

Variables

My main dependent variable is "attitude toward asylum seekers," which I measured through a scale I constructed based on the Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers (ATAS) scale created by Pedersen, Attwell, and Heveli (2005). As the original ATAS scale was created in the very specific Australian context using qualitative data from Australian citizens, I was not able to use the exact scale; many of the original statements were not appropriate for use in the U.S. context. Utilizing the format and certain statements of the ATAS scale, as well as other U.S. opinion polls, common public concerns, and media and political rhetoric, I created nine statements about asylum seekers relevant to the U.S. context, divided into four categories of

public concern: U.S. Policy, Impact on Society, Legitimacy, and Moral Responsibility. I chose these categories as I felt they could effectively represent common themes of concern about asylum seekers expressed by the U.S. public and policymakers. Participants responded on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). See Appendix B for the full attitude scale. I also had a dependent variable of "policy support," adopted from Hartley and Pedersen (2015), which will allow me to differentiate between general public attitudes and policy specific attitudes. This variable is measured by a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) for two statements about asylum seekers' access to social services and the ability to work (see Appendix C). My main independent variables are the type of asylum claim and the gender of the asylum seeker.

Due to the lack of data on attitudes toward asylum seekers, especially in the context of the U.S., I had to create my own measures of these dependent variables. I am primarily concerned with the content validity of my main independent variable of "attitude toward asylum seekers," as I created it myself and want to ensure it is fully representative of the concept it aims to measure. I tried to address my concern by utilizing many other similar U.S. opinion polls and media wording to construct the scale, as well as the ATAS scale created by Pedersen and Heveli, (2005) in order to fully capture the content. I think my measure is strong in face validity and I also attempted to address content validity by including the four categories I felt best encompassed the entire concept of public perceptions of and concerns with asylum seekers. I included a measure to assess support for immigration more generally as well that will be coded on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). I included this measure to help me determine the criterion validity of my "attitude toward asylum seekers" measure, as I would expect it to correlate with immigration attitudes more generally if it is indeed valid. I am also

concerned with the test-retest and inter-rater reliability of my measures, as each respondent will only take the survey once. I will be able to address these concerns through pilot tests of the survey before it is distributed on MTurk. The pilot tests will not only help determine if my measures have inter-rater reliability, but also whether the questions and format are clear. I also expect my independent variables to be reliable, in terms of internal consistency, as each statement is supposed to reflect the same underlying concept.

Although experimental randomization eliminates the need for control variables as there should be no significant differences between experimental groups, I decided to include certain control variables both to ensure the groups are comparable and to determine if there are relationships between my dependent variables and the controls. My control variables are age (e.g., Pedersen et al. 2005; Schweitzer et al. 2005), racial identity (e.g., Murray & Marx 2013), gender identity (e.g., Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007; Amuedo-Dorantes & Puttitanun 2011), partisan identification (e.g., Perry, Paradies, & Pedersen 2014; Nickerson & Louis 2008; Pedersen et al. 2005), religion (e.g., Perry et al. 2014; Deslandes & Anderson 2019), education level (e.g., Greenhalgh & Watt 2015), income (e.g., Hainmueller & Hiscox 2010; Facchini & Mayda 2009), urban-rural classification (e.g., Garcia and Davidson 2013), American identity (e.g., Stephan et al. 2005; Esses et al. 2017; Verkuyten 2004), contact with immigrants (e.g., Jolly & DiGiusto 2014), and being native born (e.g. Bansak et al. 2016). For a summary of how I plan to measure these control variables in the survey, see Appendix A. As all of these variables have been measured and utilized in similar studies, I have reason to believe they are both reliable and valid. These controls will not only allow me to isolate the causal effect of my treatment, but they will also enable me to look closely at the influence of specific demographic variables. I am

particularly interested in identifying whether there is a gender gap in attitudes toward asylum seekers, as this has not been adequately investigated previously.

Overall, I think the strengths of my variables are that they sufficiently encompass many different aspects of the concepts I am intending to test. The "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale is also especially relevant to today's U.S. context, which is important for an issue as widely contested and politically significant as asylum. I think the main weaknesses of my measurement strategies are the reliability and validity of my variables. However, according to Gerry (2011), best practices in research design include what is known as cumulation, or the standardization of research designs based on past studies. Although I could not directly standardize past measurements, I was able to model my measurements based on previous studies and polls that tested similar concepts, which leads me to believe my measures will be effective for my own study. Furthermore, even standardized designs must include original elements (Gerry 2011), which provides support for my alterations to pre-existing measurements.

Methods

I designed a survey experiment using Qualtrics - a popular online survey tool that allows researchers to conveniently design surveys - that was distributed to participants through MTurk. The survey began by providing information about the survey itself, to ensure respondents had all the information needed to make an informed decision on consenting to participate (See Appendix A). For those who gave their consent to participate, the survey continued by asking various demographic questions in order to measure my control variables as outlined above (see Appendix B). Participants were randomly assigned to one of seven groups: one control and six experimental groups. The control group was given the following information:

> Asylum seekers are fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution and are awaiting an official decision on their request to be granted asylum. Refugees are individuals who

> have been granted asylum. Immigrants are individuals who move from one country to another. Undocumented immigrants are individuals who move from one country to another without completing the formal legal process and being granted legal status. Please answer some questions about policies related to immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

The experimental groups were all shown the following information:

> Asylum seekers are fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution and are awaiting an official decision on their request to be granted asylum. Refugees are individuals who have been granted asylum. Immigrants are individuals who move from one country to another. Undocumented immigrants are individuals who move from one country to another without completing the formal legal process and being granted legal status. Please answer some questions about policies related to immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

The experimental groups were also shown a vignette detailing an asylum seeker from a country in Central America with varying claims of asylum: domestic violence, rape by an armed group, widespread armed group violence, and political persecution. The widespread violence and political persecution claims also varied in the gender of the asylum seeker, resulting in six experimental groups in total. Race was held constant to isolate the effect of gender, with all asylum seekers fleeing from Central America, an area known to have low rates of asylum acceptance and high rates of gender-based violence. The first vignette detailing "domestic violence" was:

> Isabella is a 23-year-old woman from a country in Central America. Her husband, Santiago, was abusive and controlling from the start of their relationship. He would not allow Isabella to go anywhere without him and frequently physically assaulted her. Eventually, Isabella refused to be intimate with her husband and Santiago brutally raped her as a punishment. Isabella repeatedly tried to run away and sought help from the police, but the police did nothing and Santiago found her each time and forced her to return. Isabella is afraid she will be assaulted or raped by her husband again if she remains in her home country. With the help of a few friends, Isabella was able to flee to the U.S. where she filed an application for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to domestic violence.

The second vignette detailing "rape by an armed group" was:

> Isabella is a 23-year-old woman from a country in Central America. A powerful armed group recently took control over the area where Isabella lives. Isabella refused to declare

> her loyalty to the armed group and was brutally raped by one of the members as a punishment. She sought help from the police, but the police did nothing. Isabella is afraid she will be raped by members of the armed group again if she remains in her home country. With the help of a few friends, Isabella was able to flee to the U.S. where she filed an application for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to sexual violence.

The third vignette detailing a *female* asylum seeker fleeing "widespread violence" was:

> Isabella is a 23-year-old woman from a country in Central America. Her sister and nephew were recently killed by one of the violent attacks against civilians that are often carried out by armed groups in her country. A powerful armed group took control over the area where Isabella lives and she was forced to leave her home. She is afraid that if she remains in her home country, she too will be caught in the widespread violence between armed groups. With the help of a few friends, Isabella was able to flee to the U.S. where she filed an application for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to widespread violence.

The fourth vignette detailing a *male* asylum seeker fleeing "widespread violence" was:

> Santiago is a 23-year-old man from a country in Central America. His sister and nephew were recently killed by one of the violent attacks against civilians that are often carried out by armed groups in his country. A powerful armed group took control over the area where Santiago lives and he was forced to leave his home. He is afraid that if he remains in his home country, he too will be caught in the widespread violence between armed groups. With the help of a few friends, Santiago was able to flee to the U.S. where he filed an application for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to widespread violence.

The fifth vignette detailing a *male* asylum seeker fleeing "political persecution" was:

> Santiago is a 23-year-old man from a country in Central America. He is a local university student who has organized numerous pro-democracy student protests against his country's current regime. He has recently received threats to his physical safety as a result of his political views and is afraid of what will happen to him if he remains in his home country. With the help of a few friends, Santiago was able to flee to the U.S. where he filed an application for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to political opinion.

The final vignette detailing a *female* asylum seeker fleeing "political persecution" was:

> Isabella is a 23-year-old woman from a country in Central America. She is a local university student who has organized numerous student protests against her country's current regime. She has recently received threats to her physical safety as a result of her political views and is afraid of what will happen to her if she remains in her home country. With the help of a few friends, Isabella was able to flee to the U.S. where she filed an application for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to political opinion.

After reading the assigned vignette, each participant was asked to answer a series of questions. The first two questions were simply comprehension checks to ensure that participants read the definitions and vignettes. The first question asked respondents to choose the term for individuals who are requesting protection from persecution: guest workers, undocumented immigrants, immigrants, or asylum seekers, with asylum seekers as the correct answer. The second comprehension check asked respondents to select what form of persecution the asylum seeker was fleeing: domestic violence, widespread armed group violence, rape by an armed group, or political opinion. The comprehension checks were followed by the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale (see Appendix D). Next, respondents answered a question about immigration more generally: We've asked you to think about the contribution of asylum seekers fleeing persecution. Now, do you think immigrants more generally have made a positive contribution to U.S. society? Responses were recorded on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree). Finally, respondents were asked about their support for policies that benefit asylum seekers. They responded on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree) to the following statements: Asylum seekers should have immediate access to all social services such as education and healthcare. Asylum seekers should be given the chance to work to provide for themselves as soon as possible (Hartley & Pedersen 2015).

The main benefit of survey experimental research is its experimental nature, with high internal validity that allows researchers to make causal claims due to randomized treatment assignments. Survey experiments are easy to implement and, due to the establishment of cause and effect, if "used with representative samples, therefore, survey experiments can provide firmly grounded inferences about real-world political attitudes and behavior," as compared to conventional survey research (Gaines, Kuklinski, Quirk 2006, 2). The survey component also

allows researchers to more easily recruit larger numbers of participants and incorporate experimental manipulations into larger national surveys, contributing to greater generalizability (Atkeson, Alvarez, Krupnikov & Findley 2018).

There are certainly limitations to experimental surveys that researchers must consider and accommodate for. My main concerns with the validity of my experimental research design are the extent to which generalizations can be made and the effect of social desirability bias. First, although greater potential for generalizability is obtained through the use of more representative samples and hidden experiments in national surveys, some evidence has been found that effects found in experimental survey manipulations may not endure for long in real life (Barabas & Jerit 2010). However, for the purpose of this first experiment on a largely under researched topic, I am more concerned with whether or not an effect exists at all and less with the duration of that possible effect.

Social desirability bias is another concern in survey research, wherein participants are not always honest about their true attitudes or actions when asked about sensitive topics, such as sexual activities and racism (Krumpal 2011). However, the nature of my experimental conditions imply that social desirability will likely be present for all participants, but I will be more interested in whether there are meaningful differences across treatment groups. I would also expect social desirability bias to be less present in my survey experimental design, than a conjoint design, as participants are not asked to directly choose preferences for one asylum seeker over another. Social desirability bias will be a significant component of my limitations discussion, as it is difficult to avoid the presence of social desirability bias in experimental research. This will have implications for the external validity of my experiment, but I expect that even if social desirability is present, it will not hinder me from making certain generalizations.

VI. Results

In this section, I will present the results of my findings on the impact of gender and gendered claims of asylum on public perceptions of asylum seekers.

Table 1. Key of Attitude Statement Abbreviations

Attitude Statement	**Table Abbreviation**
False claims of asylum are a problem	False Claims
The U.S. has a responsibility to accept asylum seekers	US Responsible
If asylum seekers can prove the need for refuge, they should be granted asylum	Prove Need
It should be easier for asylum seekers to be granted legal status in the U.S. than it is now	Be Easier
Asylum seekers should be held in custody until their claims are approved or denied	Be Held
Asylum seekers take jobs away from Americans	Take Jobs
Asylum seekers threaten the safety of people in the U.S.	Threaten US
Asylum seekers have the potential to make a positive contribution to U.S. culture	Have Potential

Asylum seekers are often claiming persecution to qualify but only fleeing poor economic conditions	Econ. Migrant

Table 1 displays a key for matching each dependent variable statement of the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale with its abbreviation in the following data tables. In general, a multitude of different analyses reveal puzzling results that are not supportive of any of my initial hypotheses. The following nine tables (2.A. - 2.I.) present the means of attitudes for all treatment groups and the results of a difference in means test for each treatment compared to the control.

Table 2.A. Difference of Means Test: Domestic Violence (F) vs. Control

	Treatment Mean	**Control Mean**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.605381	4.456067	0.15	.9068723
US Responsibility	5.107623	5.046025	0.06	.4282466
Prove Need	5.529148	5.443515	0.09	.6515903
Be Easier	4.93722	4.878661	0.06	.3667881
Be Held	4.336323	4.079498	0.26	1.466619
Take Jobs	3.690583	3.65272	0.04	.2023602
Have Potential	5.318386	5.426778	-0.11	-.8149064
Econ. Migrant	4.349776	4.267782	0.08	.4826343
Threaten US	3.748879	3.794979	-0.05	-.2430643
Observations	462			

Table 2.B. Difference of Means Test: Rape by an Armed Group (F) vs. Control

	Treatment Mean	**Control Mean**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.471616	4.456067	0.02	.0970676

US Responsibility	5.030568	5.046025	-0.02	-.1045483
Prove Need	5.344978	5.443515	-0.10	-.7144142
Be Easier	4.659389	4.878661	-0.22	-1.413786
Be Held	4.650655	4.079498	0.57	3.357004
Take Jobs	3.877729	3.65272	0.23	1.263343
Have Potential	5.262009	5.426778	-0.16	-1.206304
Econ. Migrant	4.39738	4.267782	0.13	.7849061
Threaten US	3.908297	3.794979	0.11	.6273585
Observations	468			

Table 2.C. Difference of Means Test: Widespread Violence (F) vs. Control

	Treatment Mean	**Control Mean**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.258621	4.456067	-0.20	-1.260012
US Responsibility	4.991379	5.046025	-0.05	-.3822341
Prove Need	5.405172	5.443515	-0.04	-.288843
Be Easier	4.775862	4.878661	-0.10	-.6414996
Be Held	4.383621	4.079498	0.30	1.757993
Take Jobs	3.62069	3.65272	-0.03	-.1711918
Have Potential	5.560345	5.426778	0.13	1.0429
Econ. Migrant	4.086207	4.267782	-0.18	-1.080523
Threaten US	3.625	3.794979	-0.17	-.9312894
Observations	471			

Table 2.D. Difference of Means Test: Widespread Violence (M) vs. Control

	Treatment Mean	**Control Mean**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.245833	4.456067	-0.21	-1.29227

US Responsibility	5.0125	5.046025	-0.03	-.2379928
Prove Need	5.429167	5.443515	-0.01	-.106756
Be Easier	4.754167	4.878661	-0.12	-.8214531
Be Held	4.316667	4.079498	0.24	1.390636
Take Jobs	3.6625	3.65272	0.01	.0538838
Have Potential	5.366667	5.426778	-0.06	-.4660646
Econ. Migrant	4.108333	4.267782	-0.16	-.9673104
Threaten US	3.708333	3.794979	-0.09	-.4762671
Observations	479			

Table 2.E. Difference of Means Test: Political Persecution (M) vs. Control

	Treatment Mean	**Control Mean**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.441048	4.456067	-0.02	-.0925954
US Responsibility	4.960699	5.046025	-0.09	-.5845584
Prove Need	5.331878	5.443515	-0.11	-.8242247
Be Easier	4.751092	4.878661	-0.13	-.8316479
Be Held	4.353712	4.079498	0.27	1.576953
Take Jobs	3.707424	3.65272	0.05	.3000387
Have Potential	5.222707	5.426778	-0.20	-1.524818
Econ. Migrant	4.31441	4.267782	0.05	.2745217
Threaten US	3.786026	3.794979	-0.01	-.0492968
Observations	468			

Table 2.F. Difference of Means Test: Political Persecution (F) vs. Control

	Treatment Mean	**Control Mean**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.406926	4.456067	-0.05	-.3075985

US Responsibility	4.896104	5.046025	-0.15	-1.022429
Prove Need	5.441558	5.443515	-0.00	-.0146969
Be Easier	4.645022	4.878661	-0.23	-1.481974
Be Held	4.350649	4.079498	0.27	1.56319
Take Jobs	3.593074	3.65272	-0.06	-.3296352
Have Potential	5.398268	5.426778	-0.03	-.2153149
Econ. Migrant	4.225108	4.267782	-0.04	-.2553689
Threaten US	3.61039	3.794979	-0.18	-1.019016
Observations	470			

Overall, tables 2.A - 2.F show that there were no significant differences in the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale across the groups. The statements, "Asylum seekers threaten the safety of people in the U.S.," and "Asylum seekers take jobs away from Americans," had the lowest means with all treatments averaging under 4. The two statements with the highest means, all above 5, were "If asylum seekers can prove the need for refuge, they should be granted asylum" and "Asylum seekers have the potential to make a positive contribution to U.S. culture." The statement, "Asylum seekers should be held in custody until their claims are approved or denied" is the only part of the dependent variable scale that was significant for one treatment, the rape by an armed group treatment, but this is likely due to experimental noise and not a genuine experimental effect. No experimental effect was found for the general support for immigrants question nor the policy support questions either.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Treatment Effects

VARIABLES	False Claims	US Responsible	Prove Need	Be Easier	Be Held	Take Jobs	Have Potential	Econ. Migrant	Threaten US
Dom. Violence (F)	0.175	0.0734	0.0600	0.0931	0.289*	0.0778	-0.123	0.118	0.00240
	(0.150)	(0.145)	(0.133)	(0.150)	(0.157)	(0.153)	(0.132)	(0.148)	(0.148)
Rape Arm. Group (F)	-0.0289	0.000387	-0.102	-0.208	0.511***	0.171	-0.161	0.0716	0.0694
	(0.149)	(0.144)	(0.132)	(0.149)	(0.155)	(0.151)	(0.131)	(0.147)	(0.147)
Widespread Viol. (F)	-0.142	-0.108	-0.0670	-0.130	0.375**	0.0228	0.110	-0.109	-0.0951
	(0.148)	(0.143)	(0.131)	(0.149)	(0.155)	(0.151)	(0.131)	(0.146)	(0.146)
Widespread Viol. (M)	-0.182	-0.0131	-0.0261	-0.0845	0.270*	0.0839	-0.0883	-0.0762	0.0152
	(0.147)	(0.142)	(0.131)	(0.148)	(0.154)	(0.150)	(0.130)	(0.145)	(0.145)
Political Pers. (M)	-0.153	0.0440	-0.0564	0.0160	0.149	-0.0153	-0.139	-0.0805	-0.0723
	(0.149)	(0.144)	(0.132)	(0.150)	(0.156)	(0.152)	(0.131)	(0.147)	(0.147)
Political Pers. (F)	-0.0342	-0.121	0.0211	-0.196	0.302*	-0.0478	-0.0163	-0.0188	-0.154
	(0.148)	(0.143)	(0.131)	(0.149)	(0.155)	(0.151)	(0.131)	(0.146)	(0.146)
Observations	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574
R-squared	0.179	0.106	0.074	0.137	0.195	0.341	0.074	0.272	0.384
Standard errors in parentheses									
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1									

Table 3 presents the findings of a regression analysis across all six treatments as compared to the control group. The analysis showed that treatments 1 (domestic violence), 2 (rape by an armed group), 3 (widespread violence female), 4 (widespread violence male) and 6 (political persecution female) had significant effects on the statement, “Asylum seekers should be held in custody until their claims are approved or denied” in the scale. The only treatment not to have an effect on this statement was treatment 5 (political persecution male). There were no significant treatment effects on any of the other attitude statements.

There were also no significant differences even when participants were grouped by the gender of the asylum seeker or the type of asylum claim. Difference of means tests comparing all participants who received a vignette detailing a female asylum seeker, with all participants who received a vignette detailing a male asylum seeker, did not reveal any significant differences with regard to the “attitude toward asylum seekers” scale. Difference of means tests comparing all participants who received the domestic violence vignette, with participants who received the rape by an armed group vignette, also did not reveal any significant differences. Additionally, no significant differences were found when participants were grouped by those who received a

political persecution vignette and those who received a widespread violence vignette. Finally, no significant differences were found when comparing participants who received a male asylum seeker, with participants who received a female asylum seeker with the same claim - male political persecution versus female political persecution and male widespread violence versus female widespread violence.

One possible explanation for this lack of experimental effect is that a large proportion of participants may not have adequately read the experimental vignettes. The purpose of the two comprehension checks included in the survey experiment was to assess whether or not participants read and understood the vignettes. Less than half of participants accurately answered both comprehension checks, with 51 percent incorrectly answering at least one. 78 percent correctly answered the first comprehension check, but only 63 percent correctly answered the second one.

Table 4. Difference of Means Test - Both Comprehension Checks Correct vs. Both Incorrect

	Mean-Both Incorrect	**Mean-Both Correct**	**Difference**	**Significance**
False Claims	4.85	4.18	0.67	6.23
US Responsible	5.22	5	0.22	2.21
Prove Need	5.26	5.57	-0.31	-3.44
Be Easier	5.13	4.59	0.54	5.17
Be Held	4.88	4.08	0.79	7
Take Jobs	4.78	3.11	1.67	14.31
Have Potential	5.28	5.48	-0.2	-2.21
Econ. Migrant	4.87	3.91	0.96	8.56

Threaten US	4.9	3.11	1.79	15.64

Table 4 presents the results of a difference in means test comparing participants who answered both comprehension checks correctly with those who answered none correctly. The difference is very significant for all the statements in the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale. Although the comprehension checks could be considered slightly more difficult than other studies, participants should have been able to find the answer if they carefully read both the definitions of different types of migrants, and the vignettes themselves. Thus, incorrect answers to the comprehension checks could well indicate many participants were not reading the vignettes thoroughly enough to be affected by the treatment.

Despite a lack of experimental treatment effect, there was interesting variation with regard to the survey demographic variables, implying the treatment vignettes might have influenced attitudes in some groups but not others.

Table 5. Regression Analysis with Demographic Covariates

VARIABLES	False Claims	US Responsible	Prove Need	Be Easier	Be Held	Take Jobs	Have Potential	Econ. Migrant	Threaten US
Party ID	0.179***	-0.0311	-0.00740	-0.0487**	0.204***	0.205***	0.193***	-0.0119	0.220***
	(0.0224)	(0.0216)	(0.0198)	(0.0224)	(0.0234)	(0.0228)	(0.0221)	(0.0197)	(0.0221)
Lib. Con.	0.173***	-0.228***	-0.178***	-0.241***	0.173***	0.154***	0.179***	-0.182***	0.194***
	(0.0253)	(0.0244)	(0.0224)	(0.0254)	(0.0264)	(0.0257)	(0.0249)	(0.0223)	(0.0250)
Recent Cont.	-0.171***	-0.110***	0.151***	-0.217***	-0.260***	-0.585***	-0.669***	0.0745**	-0.343***
	(0.0416)	(0.0402)	(0.0369)	(0.0417)	(0.0435)	(0.0423)	(0.0410)	(0.0367)	(0.0411)
Female	-0.125	0.102	0.0832	0.0582	-0.111	-0.287***	-0.239***	0.0331	-0.187**
	(0.0850)	(0.0821)	(0.0753)	(0.0853)	(0.0888)	(0.0865)	(0.0838)	(0.0750)	(0.0839)
Urban	-0.318***	-0.262***	0.0214	-0.327***	-0.227**	-0.738***	-0.739***	0.0914	-0.422***
	(0.0913)	(0.0881)	(0.0809)	(0.0916)	(0.0954)	(0.0929)	(0.0900)	(0.0805)	(0.0901)
Constant	4.264***	6.449***	5.561***	6.792***	3.877***	5.291***	5.517***	5.741***	4.519***
	(0.208)	(0.201)	(0.184)	(0.208)	(0.217)	(0.211)	(0.205)	(0.183)	(0.205)
Observations	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574	1,574
R-squared	0.179	0.106	0.074	0.137	0.195	0.341	0.384	0.074	0.272
Standard errors in parentheses									
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1									

Table 5 presents the findings of a regression analysis across five of the survey demographic variables: party identification, political ideology, contact with immigrants, gender, and urban. The regression analysis did indeed reveal significant differences in the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale across most of these variables. I will continue this section by analyzing the differences in each demographic subset of the sample.

Table 6: Attitude Means by Party Identification

	False Claims	**US Responsible**	**Prove Need**	**Be Easier**	**Be Held**	**Take Jobs**	**Have Potential**	**Econ. Migrant**	**Threaten US**
Dem.	3.83	5.34	5.65	5.11	3.74	3.02	5.59	3.54	3.08
Ind.	4.61	4.70	5.31	4.54	4.56	3.86	5.31	4.49	3.84
Rep.	5.18	4.66	5.12	4.39	5.17	4.59	5.06	5.19	4.68

Table 6 presents the mean attitudes, sorting by party identification, after condensing the seven-point party identification scale into just three categories: Democrat, Independent, and Republican. Table 6 looks at whether or not the treatments worked differently for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. The descriptive analysis provides support for the assumption that participants who identified as Democrats were generally more sympathetic toward asylum seekers based on the nine statements in the scale, than participants who identified as Republicans. In sum, Democrats saw false claims of asylum as less of a problem, believed the U.S. has more of a responsibility to accept asylum seekers, agreed that if asylum seekers can prove their need for asylum they should be granted asylum, that it should be easier to get asylum, agreed less with asylum seekers being held in detention, agreed less with the view that asylum

seekers take jobs, saw asylum seekers as having more potential to contribute to U.S. culture, are not often only fleeing poor economic conditions, and agreed less that they threaten U.S. safety. In all cases, the mean for the Independent group of participants was between Democrats and Republicans.

Another interesting finding within party identification was that a difference of means test between participants who received a gendered claim of asylum (domestic violence or rape by an armed group), sorting by the three-point scale for party identification, revealed that there were statistically significant differences within Republicans about whether or not these types of asylum seekers threaten the safety of people within the U.S. Within the Republican group, participants viewed non-gendered claims of asylum as significantly less threatening to U.S. safety than gendered claims of asylum. This finding implies that, among Republicans, knowing that the person seeking asylum was fleeing a gendered claim of asylum led them to be viewed as more threatening. There were no significant differences found for Republicans for any other grouping of claims of asylum nor any other statement in the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale.

Table 7. Attitude Means by Political Ideology

	False Claims	**US Responsible**	**Prove Need**	**Be Easier**	**Be Held**	**Take Jobs**	**Have Potential**	**Econ. Migrant**	**Threaten US**
Liberal	3.95	5.44	5.71	5.23	3.90	3.30	5.67	3.74	3.30
Moder.	4.55	4.51	5.20	4.30	4.45	3.51	5.12	4.28	3.67
Cons.	5.20	4.46	4.98	4.16	5.16	4.51	4.94	5.19	4.61

Table 7 presents the mean attitudes, sorting by political ideology, after condensing the seven-point scale into three categories: Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative. In line with party identification, participants who identified as Liberals were similarly more sympathetic toward asylum seekers based on the nine statements in the scale, than participants who identified as Conservative. In sum, Liberals saw false claims of asylum as less of a problem, believed the U.S. has more of a responsibility to accept asylum seekers, agreed that if asylum seekers can prove their need for asylum they should be granted asylum, thought it should be easier to get asylum, agreed less with asylum seekers being held in detention, agreed less with the view that asylum seekers take jobs, saw asylum seekers as having more potential to contribute to U.S. culture, thought asylum seekers are not often only fleeing poor economic conditions, and agreed less that they threaten U.S. safety. In all cases, the mean for the Moderate group of participants was also between Liberals and Conservatives.

Table 8. Attitude Means by Gender

	False Claims	**US Responsible**	**Prove Need**	**Be Easier**	**Be Held**	**Take Jobs**	**Have Potential**	**Econ. Migrant**	**Threaten US**
Male	**4.51**	**4.98**	**5.36**	**4.77**	**4.45**	**3.91**	**5.34**	**4.40**	**3.95**
Female	**4.22**	**5.06**	**5.52**	**4.77**	**4.16**	**3.28**	**5.42**	**3.96**	**3.34**

Table 8 shows the mean attitudes, sorting by gender, for all statements on the scale. Table 8 presents evidence that participants who identified as female were more sympathetic toward asylum seekers based on most of the statements in the scale. Females were more sympathetic with regard to every statement, except “It should be easier for asylum seekers to be granted legal status in the U.S. than it is now,” for which the average for male and female respondents was

equal at 4.77. Interestingly, the largest variation appeared with the statement, “Asylum seekers take jobs away from Americans,” with females disagreeing much more strongly than males.

Table 9. Attitude Means by Recent Contact

	False Claims	**US Responsible**	**Prove Need**	**Be Easier**	**Be Held**	**Take Jobs**	**Have Potential**	**Econ. Migrant**	**Threaten US**
A great deal	4.96	5.42	5.40	5.36	5.09	5.04	5.46	5.10	5.23
Moder. amount	4.45	4.91	5.05	4.74	4.43	4.13	5.03	4.48	4.24
Not much	4.19	4.93	5.60	4.65	3.97	2.90	5.52	3.82	2.88
None at all	4.12	4.85	5.68	4.45	4.02	2.82	5.53	3.69	2.77

Table 9 presents the mean attitudes, sorting by the variable “contact with immigrants,” wherein participants were asked how much recent personal contact they had had with asylum seekers or immigrants more generally. The answer choices were: “a great deal,” “a moderate amount,” “not much,” or “none at all.” The “contact with immigrants” variable significantly affected the data in the regression analyses and there is clearly variation when looking at the means of the dependent variables, but the direction was not always consistent. Participants who had “a great deal” of personal contact believed that asylum seekers have more false claims, take more jobs, and are often just fleeing poor economic conditions than all the other groups. At the same time, this group also thought the U.S. has more of a responsibility to accept asylum seekers and that it should be easier to get asylum, than all other groups. Participants who chose “none at all” were at the opposite end in each case. The statements that asylum seekers take jobs and are often only fleeing poor economic conditions triggered the largest variation. The means for

participants in the "a great deal" group were 5.04 and 5.10 respectively, with the opposite end occupied by the "none at all" group with means of 2.82 and 3.69 respectively.

Table 10. Attitude Means by Urban vs. Non-Urban

	False Claims	US Responsible	Prove Need	Be Easier	Be Held	Take Jobs	Have Potential	Econ. Migrant	Threaten US
Urban	4.64	5.16	5.35	4.99	4.59	4.28	5.30	4.61	4.36
Non-Urban	4.06	4.82	5.54	4.49	4.01	2.84	5.48	3.73	2.84

Finally, Table 10 depicts the mean attitudes, sorting by the variable "urban," which asked participants whether or not they lived in a metropolitan area with a population over one million. The sample is divided into participants who live in what I designated as an urban area (population over one million) and participants who lived in non-urban areas. Much like "contact with immigrants," a sort by the "urban" variable showed variation that was not in a clear nor consistent direction. Participants in urban areas believed there are more false claims, that asylum seekers should not be granted asylum if they can prove their need, they should be held in detention, they do take jobs, they have less potential, are more often fleeing poor economic conditions, and do threaten U.S. safety. Curiously, this group also believed the U.S. has more of a responsibility to accept asylum seekers. The statements that asylum seekers take jobs and do threaten U.S. safety revealed the largest variation. The means for participants in urban areas were 4.3 and 4.4 respectively, with means of participants in the non-urban group at 2.8 for both statements.

As with the party identification variable, a difference of means test between participants who received a gendered claim of asylum (domestic violence or rape by a gang), sorting by the

urban variable, revealed that there were statistically significant differences within the group of people who do not live in urban areas about whether or not these types of asylum seekers have more false claims of asylum. Within the non-urban group, participants who received a vignette detailing a non-gendered claim of asylum viewed false claims of asylum as significantly less of a problem than participants who received a gendered claim of asylum. Again, there were no significant differences found for urban participants for any other grouping of claims of asylum, nor any other statement in the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale.

VII. Discussion

There are a number of survey experiment findings and demographic differences worth discussing. To begin, treatments one, two, three, four, and six had a significant effect on the dependent variable statement "Asylum seekers should be held in custody until their claims are approved or denied." Notably, all the treatments that affected this statement are primarily those with either a gendered claim of asylum or a female asylum seeker. The treatment that had no effect was the political persecution male asylum seeker vignette. This finding would imply that participants think female asylum seekers and gender-based asylum seekers should be held in custody more than male asylum seekers with a traditional asylum claim of political persecution. More research is clearly needed on public attitudes toward detention for migrants and the underlying concerns, as this was the only dependent variable that was significantly affected by any of the treatments.

The statements that had the highest and lowest means overall are also worth mentioning, as they suggest respondents may have had generally stronger attitudes toward certain components of the scale without regard to different types of asylum seekers. Once again, the statement "Asylum seekers threaten the safety of people in the U.S.," had the lowest means, and the two statements with the highest means were "If asylum seekers can prove the need for refuge, they should be granted asylum" and "Asylum seekers have the potential to make a positive contribution to U.S. culture." Participant responses toward these specific statements could imply that variation in attitudes might be further investigated by breaking down attitudes in terms of statements that target different aspects of public concern.

Additionally, there was some variation within the group of participants who identified as Republican, with respondents viewing gendered claims of asylum as significantly more

threatening to U.S. safety than non-gendered claims. This finding is particularly interesting as it suggests attitudes toward gendered claims of asylum may be predicted by political affiliation over other factors. As outlined in the Theories and Hypotheses section of the paper, attitudes toward violence against women, as well as female political leadership, are influenced by individual views on traditional gender roles and norms. This finding implies that individuals who identify as Republicans may hold more traditional gender roles and norms values, thus viewing gender-based asylum seekers as a threat. More research is needed on the extent to which Republicans hold traditional gender norm values that may influence their attitudes toward asylum seekers, especially gender-based asylum seekers.

Furthermore, the variation within demographic variables provides valuable contributions to the literature. Consistent with previous studies, participants who identified as Republicans and Conservatives held more anti-asylum seeker sentiment than participants who identified as Democrats and Liberals, with the Independent and Moderate group in the middle. Clearly, political affiliations and ideologies have strong influences on attitudes toward asylum seekers. The survey findings suggest that Republicans and Conservatives may be more opposed to all types of asylum and Democrats and Liberals may be more supportive of all types of asylum, rather than support varying by the asylum claim. Thus, the variation may occur less within parties and ideologies themselves and more across the political affiliation spectrum. Moreover, there is clearly a strong middle ground occupied by Independents and Moderates, which is worth further exploration to determine the extent to which that group feels differently than the two sides.

Importantly, few studies have looked at the role of respondent gender in predicting anti-asylum seeker or anti-immigrant sentiment. This study informs that relationship by documenting

more sympathetic attitudes toward asylum seekers by participants who identified as female, on eight out of nine of the statements in the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale. This finding informs the literature on attitudes toward asylum seekers, but also likely has implications for attitudes toward immigrants more generally. As the impact of respondent gender on attitudes toward immigrants and asylum seekers has not been well established, this finding paves the way for more research on determining the extent to which females are more sympathetic than males.

This finding also relates to asylum and immigration decision makers, who may be more or less likely to grant asylum or permanent status based on the decision maker's own gender. Other studies have explored the gender disparities in judgments of asylum claims (e.g. Menkel-Meadow 2009 and Evans et al. 2015), which have found that female judges generally grant asylum at a higher rate than male judges. This survey experiment provides some evidence that greater support for asylum among females is not unique to immigration judges and may be representative of the general public as well. Future studies should expand upon these findings to determine the strength of the relationship between gender and support for asylum, as well as the extent to which that relationship connects to immigrant and immigration attitudes.

Finally, the variables "contact with immigrants" and "urban" had a significant impact on the dependent variables, but not in a consistent nor clear direction. According to the contact theory of immigration, more contact with immigrants leads to more positive attitudes toward immigrants (e.g. Jolly & DiGiusto 2014). Participants in the survey sample were only consistent with previous literature for two dependent variable statements. Participants who reported having "a great deal" of personal contact believed that the U.S. has more of a responsibility to accept asylum seekers and that it should be easier to get asylum. However, for all the other statements

in the dependent variable, participant responses went against the contact theory and reported more negative asylum seeker sentiment.

Similarly, living in an urban area had a significant effect on the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale, but cannot conclusively be designated as more positive or negative. Participants in urban areas generally had more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers, however, they simultaneously believed the U.S. has more of a responsibility to accept asylum seekers than those in the non-urban group. These findings are puzzling, not only due to the inconsistency, but also as studies have found that people in urban areas tend to lean more Democratic (e.g. Gimpel & Karnes 2006). Consistent with past studies, the survey experiment findings on political affiliation and ideology cited Democratic and Liberal people as having more positive attitudes toward asylum seekers, which is contrary to the "urban" variable findings that suggest people in urban areas - who are generally more Democratic and liberal - have more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers.

Continuing on with the overall null findings of the survey, there are five possible explanations for the lack of treatment effects on the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale. The questions we must consider are as follows: did the experiment sufficiently prime participants? Did respondents accurately read and comprehend the survey experiment? Are MTurk workers different from the rest of the population? Was the "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale an appropriate way to measure the dependent variable? If true, what do the null findings imply? This section will outline possible answers to these questions that would explain the null findings of the survey experiment, concluding with the implications that arise if the null findings are accurate.

To begin, one explanation for the null findings could be that the treatments may have insufficiently primed participants or were not strong enough to evoke an effect. As opposed to a conjoint experiment that would ask participants to choose one asylum seeker over another, the vignette design is a slightly more subtle treatment effect. The vignettes could also have been too similar across the various asylum seeker scenarios to evoke any variation. Furthermore, the survey experiment did not ask respondents specific questions about the asylum seeker in their vignette, perhaps weakening the effect of the different types of asylum seekers and claims. Future studies should consider strengthening the treatment design or adopting an alternative methodology in order to test attitudes toward gendered claims of asylum.

Second, the MTurk workers may not have taken the survey experiment seriously or read the treatment vignettes carefully enough. A large proportion of people filled out the survey in less than four minutes, despite predictions that the survey would take around ten minutes to complete. Furthermore, as was outlined in the Results section, less than half of participants accurately answered both comprehension checks. As these checks were included specifically to assess whether participants read and understood the vignettes, incorrect answers suggest that a large proportion of participants did not read the vignettes well enough to be fully affected by the treatment. Further analyses of the data could utilize only data of participants who answered both comprehension checks correctly, to determine if there are treatment effects within that group. Future research should also consider creating minimum time requirements to avoid having a large proportion of participants fill out the survey too quickly.

Third, MTurk workers themselves could be different in some way from the rest of the U.S. population. MTurk workers are generally very experienced in filling out surveys and most workers try to fill them out as quickly as possible, in order to maximize the number of surveys

they are able to do per day. Perhaps, the nature of their work in the gig economy for very low pay makes MTurk workers more or less sympathetic toward asylum seekers altogether. If MTurk workers are different from the rest of the population in some way, they would not be able to represent what other people may have felt about asylum seekers.

Next, there could be issues of measurement with regard to the dependent variables. The "attitude toward asylum seekers" scale may be an invalid measure of public perceptions of asylum seekers. There may be certain statements within the scale that do not resonate with most respondents, thus not eliciting strong responses, or the statements themselves could be confusing to participants. Overall, the scale might not be able to comprehensively and accurately capture respondents' opinions about asylum seekers. Researchers may want to consider utilizing interviews with U.S. participants about their attitudes, in order to construct a more representative way to measure attitudes toward asylum seekers (See Pedersen, Attwell, & Heveli 2005).

Finally, the null findings of the survey experiment could be valid and contrary to political rhetoric and the theoretical framework outlined above, gender and gendered claims of asylum might merely have no influence on public perceptions of asylum seekers. What this really means is that additional information, such as knowing the gender and type of asylum claim of the asylum seeker, would not really affect people's attitudes. Attitudes would be determined solely by other characteristics, namely by participant demographics. If public perceptions are truly not influenced by the type of asylum claim, this means that the public's views actually differ from many policymakers and judges who determine which claims are accepted as legitimate. As was previously discussed, there is a clear disconnect between international protections for gendered claims of asylum and how states accept them in practice. These types of claims are often not viewed as legitimate due to issues of credibility, the public-private division, and cultural

concerns. However, the null findings of this survey would imply that public attitudes differ from domestic decision makers and that more emphasis should be placed on U.S. public opinion.

If accurate, these findings would imply that concerns of credibility relate more generally to all asylum seekers, rather than specific types of asylum claims. As was previously discussed in the Literature Review of this paper, public opinion polls in 2019 found that a majority of U.S. respondents were concerned with the credibility of refugee claims and many felt border closures were necessary (Ipsos MORI 2019). If public perceptions are not influenced by the type of asylum claim, these negative attitudes and fears of "floodgates opening" would be targeted at all types of asylum seekers and refugees.

There were several limitations and areas where this study could be improved. First and foremost, this study may be more effectively implemented through a different survey experiment platform. This study was certainly limited by cost and feasibility, which made MTurk an ideal platform to utilize. However, after analyzing the results of the MTurk experiment, I found that the time many respondents took to complete the questions presented a threat to the validity of the data. Participants were expected to take about ten minutes to complete the survey, but a large proportion of respondents took under four minutes. The short amount of time combined with many incorrect answers to the comprehension checks, led to concern over the validity of the demographic and survey data.

Additionally, the MTurk sample recruited cannot be accurately generalized to the U.S. public, as it is not a true random sample. Thus, future studies would benefit from using a different survey experiment platform with a true random sample, in order to minimize threats to the internal and external validity of the study. Lastly, the problem of the strength of the treatment itself should be addressed in other studies. Researchers may want to adjust the vignettes

themselves or use a completely different approach to continue to investigate the true effect of gender and gendered claims of asylum on attitudes toward asylum seekers.

VIII. Conclusion

The current global refugee crisis exhibits no signs of slowing down, as war, gender-based violence, and human rights abuses remain as major threats to countries around the world. States will continue to struggle to uphold international asylum law, while also creating publicly supported domestic policies. Attitudes toward asylum seekers influence which policies are adopted and the extent to which they will benefit or harm asylum seekers and refugees. The significance of public opinion is evident in the Trump administration's harsh and punitive response to immigration, which has already made past asylum policies more restrictive. In order to fully understand public perceptions of asylum seekers, it is important to also understand attitudes toward specific types of asylum seekers and claims. Gendered claims of asylum in particular have experienced a history of challenges and discriminatory domestic practices that make it very difficult for gender-based asylum seekers to find refuge. This study sought to contribute to the gap in the literature on how U.S public attitudes toward asylum seekers may differ by type of asylum claim, and the specific roles of gender and gendered claims of asylum.

However, the survey experiment data ultimately did not reveal significant differences in attitudes based on the type of asylum claim, the gender of the asylum seeker, or the gendered nature of the claim. The data suggest that attitudes had more to do with the demographic makeup of the respondent, than the asylum seeker and the asylum claims themselves. Political affiliation and ideology in particular had very strong effects on the “attitude toward asylum seekers” scale. Democrats and Liberals held more positive attitudes toward asylum seekers than Republicans and Conservatives. This finding implies that the concern may lie with asylum seekers and refugees in general, rather than specific claims over others. Democrats may support asylum

seekers of all types, while Republicans may hold more negative attitudes toward gender-based asylum seekers.

Additionally, the gender of the participant had a significant impact on public attitudes, with females being more sympathetic toward asylum seekers than males. This finding is particularly useful due to the limited research on the influence of respondent gender on attitudes toward asylum seekers or immigrants more generally. The survey experiment provides some evidence that females in the general public may align with immigration and asylum judges in greater support for granting asylum and permanent status. More research is needed to expand upon these findings to better understand the relationship between respondent gender and asylum seeker and immigrant attitudes. Although not the original intention of the survey, this experiment will be able to contribute to the literature on demographic variables that influence anti-asylum seeker sentiment, an area of research that has not been well established.

The null findings of the survey experiment are puzzling and inconsistent with public and political rhetoric on asylum seekers and refugees that cite major concerns with the credibility of claims and "floodgates opening." Future studies should look deeper into the relationship between gender, gendered claims of asylum, and attitudes toward asylum seekers, in order to determine if there is indeed no effect or if this study was unable to identify one. If the findings of this study are valid and public perceptions are truly not influenced by the type of asylum claim, it would mean that the public's views actually differ from many policymakers and judges who determine which claims are accepted as legitimate. Furthermore, more research is needed on U.S. public opinion on asylum seekers and refugees, as most of the research has been done in other countries or on immigrants in general. Additionally, due to the limitations of this experiment, the race of

the asylum seeker was unable to be included as a factor. Future studies would benefit from looking at the influence of race and different countries of origin on public perceptions.

This study ultimately identified a large gap in the literature on gender-based asylum and public perceptions of asylum seekers, which deserves further exploration. Researchers have a responsibility to provide insight into the challenges of gender-based asylum - issues of credibility, the public-private division of life, and cultural concerns - and how they are received in practice, in order to inform future asylum policies and decisions.

Appendix A.

Q1 Survey Consent

Thank you for your interest in our political attitudes research study. We would like to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide whether or not to join the study. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study.

1) The purpose of this study is to look at political attitudes in response to different types of information. 2) The study is funded by Emory University. 3) This study will take about (10) minutes to complete. 4) If you join, you will be asked to answer demographic questions, read a pair of stories, and provide opinions on topics related to politics. These topics may touch on sensitive issues such as sexual violence, domestic violence, and armed violence. These stories are fictional, though they do reflect challenges that many people face. 5) You will be compensated for your time, and we hope this research will benefit people in the future. 6) Your privacy is very important to us. A breach of confidentiality is a potential risk of participation. However, all responses are anonymous and no identifying information will be collected. See (8) and (9) about mTurk IDs. 7) A complete debrief of the research question will be provided at the end of the survey. 8) All responses will be anonymous - mTurk IDs are only collected for the purposes of distributing compensation and will not be associated with survey responses. 9) Note that any work performed on mTurk can be linked to the user's public profile page. Thus, workers may wish to restrict information that they choose to share in their public profile. On this topic, Amazon provides the following information to workers: https://www.mturk.com/mturk/contact Contact Information: If you have questions about this study, your part in it, your rights as a research participant, or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research you may contact the following:

Hannah Fleischmann and David R. Davis
Research Team
Department of Political Science, Emory University poldd@emory.edu

Emory Institutional Review Board: 404-712-0720 or toll-free at 877-503-9797 or by email at irb@emory.edu By checking the box below, you acknowledge information above, and consent to these terms in taking this survey.

I acknowledge the information above and consent to these terms in taking the survey.
Yes
No

Appendix B.

Demographic Questions:

1. Which category below includes your age?
Under 18
18-26
27-42
43-54
55 and over

2. What is your racial identity? (select all that apply)
White
Black/African American
Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native
Asian
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
Latinx/Hispanic

3. What is your gender identity?
Woman
Man
Other

4. Which of the following best describes your political affiliation?
Strong Democrat
Lean Democrat
Independent Democrat
Independent
Independent Republican
Lean Republican
Strong Republican

5. In general, how do you define yourself?
Extremely Liberal
Liberal
Slightly Liberal
Moderate
Slightly conservative
Conservative
Extremely Conservative

6. Did you vote in the last presidential election?

Yes
No

7. What is your present religion, if any?
Protestant (for example, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian)
Roman Catholic
Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS)
Orthodox (such as Greek, Russian, or some other Orthodox church)
Jewish
Muslim
Buddhist
Hindu
Atheist
Agnostic
Something else (please specify) _____
Nothing in particular

8. Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services?
Every day
More than once a week
Once a week
At least once a month
Only on special holy days
Rarely or never

9. What was your annual household income in 2018 from all sources before taxes?
$19,999 or less
$20,000 to $49,999
$50,000 to $999,999
$100,000 to $199,999
$200,000 or over

10. Do you live in a metropolitan area with a population over one million?
Yes
No
Don’t know

11. Education
Some high school
High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
Some college

Bachelor's degree
Advanced/professional degree

12. Were you born in the United States or another country?
United States
Another Country

13. Do you have children?
Yes
No

14. American Identification
7-point Likert scale on three statements (Schwartz et al. 2012):
“I have a clear sense of the United States and what being American means for me.”
“I am happy that I am an American.”
“I have a strong sense of belonging to the United States.”

15. Contact with immigrants
How much recent personal contact have you had with asylum seekers or immigrants more generally?
A great deal
A moderate amount
Not much
None at all

Appendix C.

Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers Scale (adopted from Pedersen, Attwell, & Heveli 2005):

Responses from 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree)

8 statements divided into four categories:

U.S. policy:

- It should be easier for asylum seekers to be granted legal status in the U.S. than it is now
- Asylum seekers should be held in custody until their claims are approved or denied

Impact on society:

- Asylum seekers take jobs away from Americans
- Asylum seekers have the potential to make a positive contribution to U.S. culture
- Asylum seekers threaten the safety of people in the U.S.

Legitimacy and credibility:

- Asylum seekers are often claiming persecution to qualify but only fleeing poor economic conditions
- False claims of asylum are a problem

Morality

- The U.S. has a responsibility to accept asylum seekers
- If asylum seekers can prove the need for refuge, they should be granted asylum

Appendix D.

Policy Support

Do you agree or disagree with the following two statements:

(Adopted from Hartley and Pedersen, 2015 measure adapted from Verkuyten, 2004)

Asylum seekers should have immediate access to all social services such as education and healthcare.

Asylum seekers should be given the chance to work to provide for themselves as soon as possible

Responses from 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree)

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