

“They are humans and humanity comes first”: The function of attitudes towards people seeking asylum by boat in Australia

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Previous research has found that while many Australians are hostile to people seeking asylum in Australia who arrive by boat (hereafter called asylum seekers), others feel that Australia's treatment of asylum seekers is inhumane. Two bodies of research that can help us understand why people think the way that they do are the function of attitudes research and the values framework as per Schwartz (1992). In the present study, we use these frameworks to explore what underpins attitudes (both positive and negative) towards asylum seekers. A total of 164 Australian community members completed a mixed-methods questionnaire in 2017 investigating why they felt the way that they did about asylum seekers. Quantitative analyses indicated that the most frequently reported function of attitudes was value-expressive, followed by experiential-schematic, and then indirect experiential-schematic. Qualitative analyses ($N = 132$) indicated that while both accepting and rejecting participants reported similar values, the most important value reported by accepting participants was Universalism and the most important value reported by rejecting participants was (Un)fairness. Two other values were less reported by both groups: Security and Conformity. Our results take previous findings about attitude function and values further by combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to get a richer picture of Australian attitudes towards people seeking asylum.

The world is currently witnessing unprecedented numbers of people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. At the end of 2016, there were over 22.5 million refugees¹ and 2.8 million people seeking asylum² worldwide: a number that surpasses post-World War II numbers of forcibly displaced people (UNHCR, 2017). While the vast majority of the world's refugees and asylum seekers reside in countries in the Global South (UNHCR, 2017), their arrival to countries in the Global North has become increasingly politicised. Refugees and asylum seekers are often met with intolerance, distrust, and contempt by both political leaders and community members of refugee-hosting states (Verkuyten, 2004). In the present study, we concentrate on attitudes towards asylum seekers who arrived by boat (hereafter called asylum seekers) rather than attitudes to refugees.

There has been an implementation of increasingly restrictive measures by

countries designed to deter the arrival of asylum seekers (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2014). In Australia, where the present study was conducted, such measures include the mandatory detention of asylum seekers; intercepting and turning back asylum seekers' boats from Australian waters; and transferring asylum seekers arriving by boat to offshore detention centres on the Pacific island of Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island with no prospect of being settled in Australia. This is despite the fact that, by global standards, Australia receives relatively few asylum seekers.

In line with these restrictive policies, research has found that many Australians are hostile to people seeking asylum in Australia. However, other Australians feel that Australia's treatment of asylum seekers is inhumane and violates human rights (for a review of this research, see Pedersen & Hartley, 2015). There is a large body of research that highlights several social

psychological factors that may drive negative attitudes such as feelings of fear and threat (e.g., Hartley & Pedersen, 2015; Mancini, Bottura, & Caricati, 2018; Schweitzer, Perkoulidis, Krome, Ludlow, & Ryan, 2005), perceptions of illegitimacy (e.g., asylum seekers are 'illegal immigrants' or 'queue jumpers') (e.g., McKay, Thomas, & Kneebone, 2012; Pedersen, Watt, & Griffiths, 2008), demographic and ideological variables (Anderson, Stuart, & Rossen, 2015), and holding false-beliefs about asylum seekers (e.g., Pedersen & Hartley, 2017; Pedersen, Watt, & Hansen, 2006). Another body of research that can help us understand why people think the way that they do is the function of attitudes research. In the present study, we use the function of attitudes framework to explore the question of what underpins attitudes (both positive and negative) towards asylum seekers.

The Function of Attitudes

It has been argued that people hold and express certain attitudes because doing so meets the psychological needs of the individual (Herek, 1987). In ground-breaking work undertaken in the 1990s, Shavitt (1990) argued that there are four primary functions: value expressive (attitudes that involve one's beliefs and values), experiential schematic (attitudes which involve our direct experience with the target group in question), social adjustive (attitudes which involve memberships with important groups or friendships), and ego-defensive (attitudes that help enhance or maintain our self-esteem) (also see Herek, 1986). Other function of attitudes literature has used different coding; for example, Katz (1960). While Katz included the value-expressive and ego-defensive functions, he also included a utilitarian function (relating to maximising positivity in one's life) and knowledge (giving structure to our environment) (see also Watt, Maio, Rees, & Hewstone, 2006). In another study, it was found that value-expressive attitudes predicted donation to charity intention; this was not the case for the utilitarian function which indicates the importance of attitude

functions when attempting to predict attitudes and behaviour (Maio & Olson, 1995).

Pedersen, Contos, Griffiths, Bishop, and Walker (2000) adapted Herek's (1987) Attitude Function Inventory to assess the function of attitudes towards Indigenous Australians in two locations: Perth (the capital city in Western Australia) and Kalgoorlie (a country location). These authors found that the two main functions were value-expressive and direct-experiential schematic (other functions were seldom reported). Interestingly, for the Perth participants, the major function was value-expressive while for the Kalgoorlie participants, the major function was experiential schematic most likely due to the large population of Indigenous Australians in Kalgoorlie. Thus, context can be very important when it comes to the function of attitudes. In another Perth study, Griffiths and Pedersen (2009) introduced another function – the "indirect experiential function" which involves information that people garner through acquaintances and the media with the target groups being Indigenous and Muslim Australians. The major function of attitudes for both target groups was value-expressive; however, both direct and indirect experiential schematic functions were seen as important to the participants in that study. Similar results were found in another Perth study regarding the function of attitudes towards people seeking asylum in Australia (Pedersen et al., 2008).

There are two things that we believe are missing from the literature in this area. The first is that the research that we have cited tends to come from one location. It would be useful to have a representative sample across Australia. What is also missing in the literature is an in-depth analysis of the values involved in attitudes towards asylum seekers and that is what we aim to achieve. This brings us to the next body of literature: "values". Values are integral to people's personality, behaviour, and motivation (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005); thus, we believe that it is important

that they are taken into account when examining attitudes towards different minority groups.

Values

A major theorist in this field, Schwartz (1992), hypothesised that there are 11 important values that people rely on: self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, and spirituality. Spirituality has not been shown to have the same universality as the other 10 values which is not surprising given its context-specificity (e.g., Australia is a more secular nation compared with other countries such as the US). These values have been found in representative samples in 13 different cultures (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Schwartz and Bardi (2001) found that the three most important values were benevolence, self-direction, and universalism followed by security, conformity, achievement, and hedonism. The least important values were power, tradition, and stimulation. There is a great deal of work confirming the validity of these findings (e.g., Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995). The Schwartz values have been useful in understanding a number of diverse fields. For example, student decisions as to what they should study (Qureshi, 2016), political orientation (Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010), consumer power (Labrecque, von dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013), personal goals and attitudes/sociality (Boer & Fischer, 2013), and values and prejudice (Heaven, Organ, Supavadeeprasit, & Leeson, 2006).

In another study, the present authors (Pedersen & Hartley, 2012), investigated qualitatively the role of values with respect to attitudes towards Muslim Australians. They found five values to be particularly relevant. The most prevalent value was universalism (including broadmindedness, equality generally, and a world at peace), followed by self-direction (involving freedom of speech), conformity (to Australia or to Islam), extremism/anti-fundamentalism, and benevolence (helping others). The only

value that was not anticipated by the work of Schwartz (1992) was extremism/anti-fundamentalism which is not surprising given the context-specific nature of the target group.

In another study by Greenhalgh and Watt (2015), it was found that prejudice was linked with a perception of dissimilarity towards asylum seekers, as well as self-enhancement values (e.g., achievement or power) and self-transcendence values (e.g., universalism; benevolence) (Schwartz, 1992). What is not known, at this stage, is the specific content of these values; for example, what do people spontaneously list as important to them with regard to their attitudes towards asylum seekers? This knowledge could be useful for anti-prejudice strategists.

Overview of the Present Study

Aims and hypotheses. There was one overarching aim of the present study which was to investigate how attitudes towards asylum seekers related to the function of attitudes and values literature. As the current study involved a mixed-methods questionnaire, there were two aims based on the quantitative and qualitative data. Based on previous research (e.g. Pedersen et al., 2008), the first quantitative hypothesis predicted that the most important function of attitude would be value-expressive, although the experiential schematic and indirect experiential schematic functions should also be relevant. In the present study, we separate out participants who were high in prejudice (rejecting participants) vs participants who scored low in prejudice (accepting participants) to examine the similarities and/or differences in the values they espoused. We then link these themes to the values espoused by Schwartz (1992). Thus, our aim in the present study is to investigate quantitatively the most prevalent function of attitude and to qualitatively investigate the most relevant values of both accepting and rejecting participants.

Regarding our qualitative analysis, we used a “theoretical thematic analysis” rather than in inductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8) as our interest lay in both the

function of attitude literature and the values literature. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, themes may be refined as the analysis progresses and it may be that there is an inductive element to our analysis. To achieve this aim, we used NVivo Version 11.

As noted, we have used both *quantitative* and *qualitative data*. We have done so because we believe that both forms of analyses can make a study stronger. As Cohen (2007) argues, all methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Here, we hope to minimise weakness and maximise strength. We note that the categories we used were not mutually exclusive: in the “real world” people can often have overlapping opinions; sometimes contradictory ones. We acknowledge that some of the themes identified overlap, leaving non-mutually exclusive categories. As noted by Pedersen and Fozdar (2010), there is overlap in the “real world”.

We would like to put our political position upfront before going any further. As noted by Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, and Siddiquee (2011), critical community psychology is “a moral project”. We are community/social psychologists (and see no inconsistency with this label) and have been refugee advocates and activists for approximately 15 years. As such, all our findings should be seen through that lens of social justice research. We agree with many community psychologists before us (e.g., Elias, Neigher, & Johnson-Hakim, 2014) that social justice is an important value, or guiding principle, which should be taken into account before any community research is carried out.

Method

Materials and Procedure.

Data in an online questionnaire were collected between 8th and 13th November 2017. The Qualtrics database contacts panel members throughout Australia by email and gives them the opportunity to engage with research via online questionnaires. Participants entered their age in numerals, and indicated their gender (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*, 3 = *gender diverse/other*), ethnic background (1 = *Aboriginal and/or Torres*

Strait Islander, 2 = *African*, 3 = *Asian*, 4 = *Caucasian/European*, 5 = *Indian*, 6 = *Middle Eastern*, 7 = *Pacific Islander*), religious affiliation (1 = *Buddhist*, 2 = *Christian*, 3 = *Hindu*, 4 = *Jewish*, 5 = *Muslim*, 6 = *No religion*), level of education (1 = *did not complete secondary school*, 6 = *part or completed higher degree – Masters or PhD*). Participants also reported their general political orientation on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly left*, 5 = *strongly right*). It was explained that “right or right-wing” views means a conservative political viewpoint; and ‘Left or left-wing’ means a progressive viewpoint”. Participants were also provided with the option of selecting Other to enter text in the ethnic background and religious affiliation questions.

Qualitative question about attitudes towards asylum seekers. First, we gave the following definition of what an asylum seeker was for the purposes of the present study, followed by a question:

A person seeking asylum, or an asylum seeker, is someone who arrives at another country and asks to be accepted as a refugee. A refugee is someone who fled their home and country and cannot return to it due a well-founded fear of persecution. There are also asylum seekers who arrive by plane but we are only looking at those who try to arrive by boat in this study. In the space provided below, we would like you to describe what you feel about people who seek asylum in Australia and arrive by boat, and then why you feel the way you do. That is, please describe and explain your attitude towards asylum seekers.

Function of Attitudes towards asylum seekers. Directly after the qualitative question, respondents were asked quantitatively about their function of their attitudes towards asylum seekers. We chose to measure the three most prevalent functions as per a past research study (Pedersen et al., 2000); thus, the defensive or social-expressive functions were not measured here. We used the following

functions: value expressive (e.g., 'my moral beliefs about the way things should be', experiential schematic (e.g., 'my acquaintance with asylum seekers'), and indirect experiential schematic (e.g., 'the things other people have told me about their experiences with asylum seekers') as per previous Australian research (e.g., Griffiths & Pedersen, 2009). The items were adapted from the Attitude Function Inventory developed by Herek (1987). Responses varied from 'This is an extremely important reason for me holding my views' (5) to 'This is not at all important to me' (1).

Respondents were classified as 'value expressive' if their score on this function was higher than their score on the other two functions. Respondents were similarly classified in the other two categories. Attitudes toward Asylum Seekers (the "ATAS" scale). This was measured by a 14-item scale (Pedersen, Attwell, & Heveli, 2005); originally the scale consisted of 18 items; however, because of changes in the political landscape, four items were discarded. Items were responded to on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = 'disagree strongly' to 7 = 'agree strongly'). Reverse coding was used on positively worded items so that the higher the score, the higher the negativity. An example from the ATAS scale is 'If asylum seekers are not happy, send them home'.

Participants.

The sample was comprised of 164 Australian adult participants recruited using the online Qualtrics software platform. The sample contained 49.4% males and 50.6% females and ranged in age between 18 and 81 years with an average of 45.07 years ($SD = 16.14$).

Regarding political orientation, 48% of participants indicated a centred political preference, followed by 20.7% indicating they were somewhat left, 18% indicating they were somewhat right, 4.7% indicating that they were strongly left, and the remaining 8.7% indicating that they were strongly right. Regarding education levels, 10% had completed a postgraduate degree, 5.3% had completed a graduate diploma or

graduate certificate; 22% had completed a bachelor's degree; 13.3% had completed an advanced diploma, 18% had completed a Certificate III/IV, 14.7% completed Year 12, and 16.7% completed Year 11 or below. Regarding ethnic background, almost half the participants (46.7%) indicated that they were of Caucasian/European background, with the next largest group (20.7%) indicating that they were of Asian descent.

Of the remaining participants, 5.3% indicated Indian, 4.7% indicated Middle Eastern, 4% indicated Indigenous Australians, and 1.3% indicated Pacific Islander. A total of 17.3% reported being "other" (being American Indian/South African/Australia, Australian, European, Mixed Aboriginal/Chinese/Scottish; New Zealand/Egyptian/Italian; or white). In terms of participants' religious background, 53.3% of people identified as Christian, followed by 30.7% indicating no religious affiliation. Of the remaining participants, 5.3% indicated Muslim, 2.7% indicated Hindu, 4% indicated Buddhist, 0.7% indicated Jewish, and the remaining 3.3% reported that they were Anglican, Christadelphian, or Uniting Church.

Regarding location, 1.3% of participants came from the Australian Capital Territory, 32.7% from New South Wales, 0.7% came from the Northern Territory, 19.3% came from Queensland, 8.7% came from South Australia, 3.3% came from Tasmania, 24% came from Victoria, and 10% came from Western Australia.

Results

Quantitative Data

Reliability was satisfactory for all three function scales as well as the ATAS ranging from between $\alpha = .81$ and $\alpha = .93$ (see Table 1). In support of the study's prediction, the most frequently reported function of attitudes was value-expressive (81.3%), followed by the experiential-schematic function (10.7%), and the indirect experiential-schematic (8.2%). However, respondents reported more than one value as being important. Using scores between 2 and 5 inclusive (values being important to these participants), 92.7% of respondents reported that their values

were important, 68% reported that indirect experience was important to them, and 66% reported that personal experience was important to them. However, for the purposes of this study, we concentrate on the most important function: the value-expressive function.

According to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Refugee Convention), a refugee is any person who owing to 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/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country

A person seeking asylum, or an asylum seeker, is someone who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee protection has not yet been finalised. A 2x9 MANOVA was then conducted to ascertain whether differences occurred with the three function of attitudes variables by way of the ATAS. The analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the value-expressive function ($F(1,133) = 2.90$; $p = .08$), the indirect experiential function ($F(1,133) = 3.75$; $p = .10$), or the experiential

function ($F(1,133) = 2.95$; $p = .09$). In other words, according to the quantitative data, there was no difference between rejecting and accepting participants on which function they used.

Qualitative Data

For the thematic analysis, we only included data from participants who saw values as being important (that is, they did not say that values “just doesn’t apply to me”; the other four categories showed varying degrees of importance). Seven participants were excluded because they reported that their values did not affect their views. We also excluded 15 participants who were neither accepting nor rejecting by way of the ATAS. This left 132 participants (86.3% of the original sample) who were included in analyses.

We then separated the participants into two categories “rejecting” and “accepting” using the midpoint of 4 on the ATAS as the separation point (as noted previously, 15 participants were excluded as their score lay on the separation point). With the remaining data, 50 participants (37.8%) were classified as accepting and 82 (62.1%) were classified as rejecting.

In an attempt to enhance rigour, both authors analysed the data. We were in agreement about how to categorise the vast

Table 1. **Descriptive Characteristics of Scales**

Function Scales	Mean	SD	No of items	α	Range
Value-expressive	3.47	1.06	5	.81	1-5
Experiential Schematic	2.54	1.27	3	.86	1-5
Indirect Experiential Schematic	2.60	1.18	3	.83	1-5
ATAS	4.31	1.29	14	.93	1-7

majority of participant comments. However, there were nine comments which needed deeper analysis which we proceeded to do. By the end of the process, both authors were in agreement about all items.

Most themes did relate to values as might be expected by the results of the quantitative data. Three themes were found that related to the Schwartz (1992) values with respect to both the accepting and

Table 2. Examples of themes in qualitative data

Theme	Example	Percentage of participants espousing theme
Universalism (as per Schwartz, 1992) Accepting Group	They are people in need who should be helped on humanitarian grounds (Participant No 6)	$N = 42$ out of 50 84%
Universalism (as per Schwartz, 1992) Rejecting Group	I have no qualms on taking in people who genuinely need to leave the country they are born into (BUT I do tend to question those that come here illegally.) (Participant No 7)	$N = 11$ out of 82 13.4%
(Un)fairness (as per Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, & de Vera Park, 1993) Accepting Group	(They should be given safe haven in Australia, because they haven't got anywhere else to go). They should not be given jobs in preference to Australians (Participant No 134).	$N = 8$ out of 50 16%
(Un)fairness (as per Lind, et al., 1993) Rejecting Group	Strongly oppose anyone coming here by either boat, or not having gone through the proper channels to be here legally (Participant No 132)	$N = 36$ out of 82 43.9%
Security (as per Schwartz, 1992) Accepting Group	I accept them as long as they are not going to be terrorising our country (Participant No 14)	$N = 6$ out of 50 12%
Security (as per Schwartz, 1992) Rejecting Group	Australia is spending too much to help asylum seekers who may not be real and pretending to be under persecution. Many of them can be terrorists (Participant No 80).	$N = 11$ out of 82 14.4%
Conformity (as per Schwartz, 1992) Accepting Group	I believe they need to be critically evaluated to ensure they are not terrorists, are conducive to accepting our values and way of life and are genuine refugees. (In these cases I believe we should accept and support them. All others should be rejected and returned to their country of origin) (Participant No 54).	$N = 2$ out of 50 4%
Conformity (as per Schwartz, 1992) Rejecting Group	I think they should be sent back to their country of origin and they never seem to integrate in Australia (Participant 37)	$N = 6$ out of 82 7.3%

Note: $N = 132$ (Accepting $N = 50$; Rejecting $N = 82$). Because there are overlapping themes, the percentages do not add up to 100%

rejecting group. The first was Universalism, which involves protecting the welfare of all of society - within Schwartz's category of self-transcendence. The second was Security, which involves the safety and stability of oneself, one's relationships, and society in general, and the third was Conformity, which involves actions that could hurt ingroup members or violate cultural norms. One other theme relating to values was found that was not hypothesised by Schwartz (1992): Fairness or (Un)fairness. Often underlying this theme was the belief that it was unfair that asylum seekers who arrived by boat rather than through, say, humanitarian camps overseas, were given visas.

With the accepting group, the most prevalent theme was Universalism (84%), followed by (Un)fairness (16%), Security (12%), and Conformity (4%). With the rejecting group, the most prevalent theme was (Un)fairness (43.9%), followed by Security (14.4%), Universalism (13.4%), and Conformity (7.3%). The prevalence of some themes was quite similar in two instances: Conformity and Security. But Universalism was more relevant to the accepting group and (Un)fairness was more relevant to the rejecting group. See Table 2 for an example of each theme.

Discussion

The findings of our mixed-method study offer a number of important contributions. As hypothesised, and in line with previous research (Pedersen et al., 2008), it was found that values were the most prevalent function of participants' attitudes. While the direct and indirect experiential schematic functions were relevant, they were not at the forefront of participants' minds when completing the questionnaire. It is worth noting that the present study found very similar results with respect to the importance of values with previous work.

Given that approximately ten years exists between the present study and the Pedersen et al. (2008) study, especially the amount of debate that has taken place, this may indicate the intractability of attitudes once formed. Having said this, attitude change is possible and is discussed later in

the paper.

With respect to the qualitative data, there were three major themes which support the theorising of Schwartz (1992). These were Universalism, Security, and Conformity. Schwartz et al. defined Universalism as "Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature", Security as "Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self", and Conformity as "Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms" (p. 664). However, there were differences between the accepting and rejecting participants in the importance of two themes: Universalism was the most prevalent value for accepting participants and (Un)fairness was the most prevalent value for Rejectors.

With respect to Universalism, themes in the present study revolved around the protection of all people – not just our Australian ingroup. As Participant No 105, an accepting participant, noted: "They are humans and humanity comes first. They have a right to live peacefully as equally as all of us do. They should be provided shelter and jobs so they can feed their families". The Universalism theme was also found by Greenhalgh and Watt, (2015) under Schwartz's category of Self-Transcendence.

One unexpected theme that came up frequently in our data was (Un)fairness which was not explicitly contained in the Schwartz et al. (2012) list of values. Having said that, this theme could potentially be incorporated into the Universalism category. However, we chose not to do this because even though this involves principles of justice, Universalism as defined by Schwartz is subsumed within the category of Self-Transcendence and as can be seen by the example given below, this is not always related. For example, Participant No 19 (a rejecting participant) stated: "they get the best treatment, Australian people should get the best treatment as this is our country". However, this value supports other research such as Anderson et al. (2015). Another

study found that the “fairness heuristic” related to whether fair procedures are involved (Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, & de Vera Park, 1993). In their study, the fairness heuristic was strongly related to judgments of procedural justice with respect to the process relating to lawsuits and their outcomes (also see Peterson, 1994). It is not surprising, in retrospect, that Fairness was such a prevalent theme. As found by Bongiorno and Pennay (2018), the concept of (Un)fairness (or as they put it the “fair go”) is alive and well in Australia. These authors cited research by the Social Research Centre that asked respondents to rate the most significant events in their lifetimes in Australia. Results indicated that 45% of participants cited events concerned with human rights (e.g., marriage equality) which the authors argue is linked with “a fair go”.

We now turn to the more minor themes. With respect to Security, themes revolved around feelings of threat or terrorism. As Participant No. 57 (a rejecting participant) noted, “We have enough terrorism happening now due to the government letting them onto our country”.

With respect to Conformity, themes revolved around actions by an outgroup that could hurt the Australian society. As Participant No. 45 (a rejecting participant) argued: “I do not believe in multiculturalism I believe that integration into the Australian way of life is more important than bending to their beliefs”. It is likely that giving corrective information will change perceptions of unfairness. For example, it has been found that the giving of accurate information, together with other strategies, reduced prejudice against Indigenous Australians, false beliefs regarding them, and the perception that they receive preferential treatment (Pedersen & Barlow, 2008).

Interestingly, the two themes discussed in the preceding paragraph were also found in another Australian study examining values underlying attitudes towards Muslim Australians (Pedersen & Hartley, 2012). However, there were two themes not frequently mentioned in the present study that were present in the Pedersen and Hartley

study – Benevolence and Self-Direction. It should be noted that Self-Direction often related to the perception of Muslim women, and Benevolence was not mentioned as frequently as the three common themes.

Interestingly, a high number of the (Un)fairness comments could also be classified as false beliefs. For example, Participant 7, a rejecting participant, stated: “There are ways and means of entering Australia, it is a pity that most of them tend to do it illegally”. This supports a great deal of research linking asylum seekers with false beliefs (e.g., Pedersen & Hartley, 2017). This latter study found a significant relationship between prejudice against asylum seekers and false beliefs. If we are looking for a cohesive society, prejudice against any group is negative.

Some respondents reported both negative and positive thoughts. For example, Participant No. 4 (an accepting participant) said: “I am sympathetic to asylum seekers but I feel they need to arrive in Australia by official channels. They are an issue of public safety, are terrorists & [and bring] illness, diseases that are not found in Australia as we have eradicated them.” He showed sympathy towards them (Universalism), the belief that they should arrive by official channels ((Un)fairness), and the fear of terrorism and infection (Security). This finding supports Braithwaite (1997) who found that Security and Harmony (which could be seen to relate to Universalism) significantly correlated with one another even though they were independent. This holding of different views on the same topic could also relate to the cognitive dissonance research; or, more accurately, to the limitations of cognitive dissonance theory.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962) posits that people strive to have their cognitions consistent. As he put it, cognitive dissonance is “the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions” (p. 3). This does not seem to be the case in the present study. However, as Welles (2017) notes, people can be quite comfortable with diverse and contradictory views. These findings augur well for anti-prejudice

interventions: there is something for conveners to work with. While the attitudes of some participants in such an intervention might be almost impossible to change; for example, Participant No. 8, a Rejecting participant, stated that: “they are all chicken shit lying pricks”, there was a sizeable minority of participants with attitudes that might be open to change.

Limitations, positives, and future research. Our findings support previous research; for example, Braithwaite (1997) found that two values were influential in predicting political attitudes: Security and Harmony. Our study was also valuable in that – unlike many psychological studies – it measured the attitudes of the Australian community; not university students – and unlike many studies, education levels were not uniformly high. As noted by Schwartz (1992), there is a need to explore the theory of values with people with lower levels of formal education. Indeed, we – the authors – have fallen into this trap of confining our research to university students in previous studies. Also, by providing qualitative data as well as quantitative data, our participants gave us a rich understanding of why they thought the way they did. It is interesting to note that while quantitative analyses found no difference on the three functions with regard to the ATAS, the qualitative data showed a more nuanced pattern of the accepting participants’ most prevalent value being Universalism and the rejecting participants’ most prevalent value being (Un) fairness. As argued previously in this paper, both quantitative and qualitative data have their place in psychological enquiry. Future research could investigate what underlies direct and indirect experiential schematic functions with regard to asylum seekers. As noted in the Results section, it wasn’t that those functions were unimportant, it was simply that the value-expressive function was the most important.

Also, given the importance of values in the present study, it would be interesting to investigate the antecedents of other marginalised groups (e.g., Indigenous Australians; LGBTI+ people; disabled

people; other marginalised groups) in a similar manner – perhaps investigating the intention to take social action in support of the marginalised group being investigated.

As noted by Boer and Fischer (2013), we cannot look at the relationship between values and social attitudes outside their environmental and cultural context. Similarly, as Kagan et al. (2011) note, critical community psychology emphasises power and values in an ecological setting. What might apply in the present study regarding asylum seekers might not apply to other marginalised groups even though power and values are involved with all research. Furthermore, the present study was a cross-sectional study – we cannot establish cause-and-effect here. For example, do people who value Universalism accept other cultures more readily, or does the dire situation of asylum seekers (say) in offshore detention spark Universalism? Only future research can unravel this question.

We also note that believing that comments about “unfairness” could well be simply a justification for negative attitudes that existed before. In other words, it could be to avoid appearing to be immoral or holding socially undesirable views. Future research could also attempt to untangle this issue.

Conclusions

In the context of unprecedented numbers of people being forcibly displaced, and the implementation of increasingly restrictive measures by countries designed to deter the arrival of asylum seekers, understanding the social psychological factors that drive both positive and negative reaction to asylum seekers is important.

Although there is a large body of literature that has explored the factors that underpin negative attitudes to asylum seekers (for a review, see Pedersen & Hartley, 2015), there has been less focus on understanding what might underpin positive compared with negative attitudes. Understanding positive attitudes is important in the context of an anti-prejudice strategy. For example, if the positivity stemmed in part with the acknowledgement of privilege, it might be

useful to bring this into any strategy. The present study investigated the under-researched role of values in attitudes towards asylum seekers, both negative and positive. Given the emphasis given to values by our participants, our findings are important. Not only do they provide a significant contribution to the social/community psychology of attitudes towards asylum seekers, there are practical implications as well. As noted by Heaven et al., (2006), “values are important in setting the framework within which our social and political attitudes are expressed” (p. 606). Knowing how values can drive attitudes can help in fostering social action in support of people seeking asylum.

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Notes

¹According to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Refugee Convention), a refugee is any person who owing to 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/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country

²A person seeking asylum, or an asylum seeker, is someone who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee protection has not yet been finalised.

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