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Can we make a difference? Prejudice towards asylum seekers in Australia and the effectiveness of antiprejudice interventions

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Abstract.

Over the last few decades, Australia has implemented increasingly restrictive measures to try and deter the arrival of asylum seekers. In our article, we review what is known in the literature about the antecedents of prejudice against asylum seekers. We outline 11 mechanisms, or variables, as being particularly important. We then draw out the practical implications as they relate to antiprejudice interventions. Within the research and implications, we discuss our own experiences of working directly with asylum seekers over the last decade and in running antiprejudice interventions. We conclude that even though the situation is bleak in Australia at the time of writing this article (at the end of 2014), we must continue with attempts to combat the demonisation of asylum seekers both on an individual level and a structural level.

Although there is a great deal of negativity about asylum seekers in the Australian community (Markus, 2013), not all Australians are feel this way (Gosden, 2012; Pedersen & Fozdar, 2010). For example, there are a small band of asylum-seeker advocates and activists who have fought against the harsh regime – some for years (Godsen, 2012). This is the case even given the fact that the stressors involved in this movement are great (Surawski, Pedersen, & Briskman, 2008). We argue that that the community – or elements of it – *can* change the system (e.g., Pedersen, Kenny, Briskman, & Hoffman, 2008) and some advocates have tackled this by way of antiprejudice interventions believing that a bottom-up approach may be useful. However, we believe that it is important to base any interventions on research. Community psychology researchers argue that community action is more effective when it is integrated with and informed by research (e.g., Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

In our paper, we look at how attitudes towards asylum seekers might be changed more positively. To do this, we look at the research – both domestic and international - examining the correlates of prejudice against asylum seekers. We extend the excellent Australian review conducted by Haslam and Holland (2012) by updating the research and focusing on antiprejudice interventions and the general guidelines of antiprejudice by Pedersen, Walker, Paradies and Guerin (2011). We also incorporate our experience working with asylum seekers and on asylum-seeker issues. Both authors have been working with asylum seekers in and out detention for over a decade, and have been researching issues relating to asylum-seeker during that time. We hope that this review may help antiprejudice practitioners in their efforts to reduce prejudice towards asylum seekers. We outline 11 major mechanisms; specifically, rebutting false beliefs, not automatically assuming that participants who are negative about asylum seekers are simply racist, choosing emotions wisely, noting the importance of values, acknowledging similarity and difference between asylum seekers and

the wider Australian community, the importance of consensus or social norms, the perception of threat, high levels of nationalism, dehumanisation, Islamophobia and contact.

Australian political context

As touched on above, Australia has a troubling history when it comes to people seeking asylum in Australia. For more than twenty years, Australia has implemented increasingly restrictive measures to try to deter the arrival of asylum seekers. Since 1992, this has included a policy of mandatorily detaining all asylum seekers who arrive without a valid visa. The vast majority of such arrivals were asylum seekers arriving by boat. Between1996 and 2007, under the Coalition Government, further policies designed to deter and punish the arrival of asylum seekers by boat were implemented (see Fleay, 2010). These included the expansion of detention centres in remote locations within Australia, and offshore on Nauru and Manus Island, and the introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) to all asylum seekers who could access Australia's refugee protection procedures and were found to be refugees (Briskman, Latham, & Goddard, 2008; Hartley, Pedersen, Fleay, & Hoffman. 2013). The then Prime Minister John Howard's quote "we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come" (Howard, 2001) became the catch-cry of the conservative government.

When the Labor Government were elected late in 2007, they adopted a National Platform that included a call for asylum-seeker policies that were more humane (Fleay, 2010) and soon after the election they removed TPVs (Hartley et al., 2013). However, as increasing (albeit relatively small compared to other countries) numbers of boats of asylum seekers began to reach Australian shores in mid-2012, the Labor Government began to abandon its commitment to more humane asylum-seeker policies and brought back more punitive policies such as offshore processing and the continued use of immigration detention in Australia.

This was despite the fact that offshore processing, even more than onshore processing, involves refugee human rights violations (Briskman, 2012; Isaacs, 2014).

Since the Coalition Government regained power in 2013, asylum-seeker policy has become progressively more punitive. This has included the implementation of a militarised operation called "Operation Sovereign Borders" (Cameron, 2013; Weber, 2013) which has involved Australian naval personnel turning back 429 asylum seekers on fifteen boats, mostly to Indonesia (Medhora & Doherty, 2015) and prevented the arrival of 45 other boats with the assistance of authorities in Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka (Griffith, 2014). Other measures include denying access to family reunion for refugees who arrived by boat until they become Australian citizens, and denying asylum seekers who arrived by boat access to government funded legal assistance. Most recently, the Government passed a controversial bill which includes the reintroduction of TPVs, the removal of asylum seeker's access independent reviews of their refugee claims, and the stripping of references to the United Nations Refugee Convention in domestic law (Morton, 2014). Australia has been recently criticised for human rights violations with regard to asylum seekers (Human Rights Watch, 2015). As they said, the Australian Government has failed to "respect international standards protecting asylum seekers and refugees" (p. 75).

There is strong evidence that punitive-based policies harm asylum seekers. For example, research indicates that TPVs are extremely damaging for people's mental health (e.g., Davidson, Murray, & Schweitzer, 2008). Furthermore, the negative impact of immigration detention on the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers is well-established (e.g., Silove, Phillips, & Steel, 2010). Other research highlights this (Briskman, Latham, & Goddard, 2008; Coffey, Kaplan, Sampson & Tucci, 2010). In essence, the implementation of punitive policies mean punishing asylum seekers who have already reached Australia by boat

in an attempt to prevent others reaching our shores. As noted by Hartley and Fleay (2014), this constitutes policy as punishment rather than an attempt to deal with asylum seekers in line with our obligations under international law.

There has also been a great deal of negative media coverage of asylum seekers who attempt to arrive to Australia by boat (McKay, Thomas & Blood, 2011; Sulaiman-Hill, Thompson, Afsar, & Hodliffe, 2011). Linked to this, political discourse is also often harsh (Rowe & O'Brien, 2014). Some research finds a link between prejudice against asylum seekers and political rhetoric especially by conservative governments (Pedersen, Watt & Hansen, 2006; Suhnan, Pedersen, & Hartley, 2012). Indeed, evidence suggests that many people in the Australian community are prejudiced towards asylum seekers and support the implementation of even harsher asylum policy (Dorling, 2014). A recent study by Markus (2013) found that less than one in five respondents agreed that asylum seekers arriving by boat who are found to be refugees should be eligible for permanent settlement. He notes that this represents an increase in negative sentiment since 2011. He also found that there was little understanding of why asylum seekers try to come to Australia by boat; the most common reason given was that they were coming "for a better life" (p. 40). This belief is in direct contrast to the figures provided by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) on protection claims finalised over the past five years which highlight that the vast majority of asylum seekers who arrived by boat have been found to be refugees (DIBP, 2013).

Antiprejudice intervention mechanisms

Before commencing any antiprejudice intervention, there needs to be a very clear definition of terms by practitioners. Our research indicates that participants very often do not know the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker. This needs to be elucidated at

the very beginning of any intervention and is something that is invariably re-examined throughout. Then, throughout the intervention, we attempt to consider the following 11 major mechanisms.

1. Information or Rebutting False Beliefs. There are a large number of false beliefs, or myths, about asylum seekers to Australia. We describe three very common myths; specifically, the illegality of seeking asylum, asylum seekers are queue jumpers, and that asylum seekers are safe in countries such as Indonesia[1].

The '*illegality*' of seeking asylum is a common myth. In fact, Markus (2013) found that it was the most common theme in his survey of Australian community members. A number of other research studies have similarly found this belief to be common among community attitudes (e.g., McKay, Thomas & Kneebone, 2012). Yet it is not illegal to seek asylum; in fact, most "illegals" are British and US visa overstayers (Wilson, 2012). As argued by Cameron (2013), asylum seekers are portrayed as the aggressor rather than people desperately needing asylum. The political rhetoric reported through the media has played on this myth (Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Pedersen et al., 2006).

Another very common myth is that asylum seekers are *queue jumpers* (Pedersen, Attwell, & Heveli, 2005; Pedersen, Watt & Hanson, 2006). The notion of a queue jumper rests of the idea that there is 'the right way' to come to Australia: to join in a 'queue' in a refugee camp and waiting to be resettled to a third country. However, this idea does not reflect the reality of refugee movements or international law. First, international law does not require refugees to seek asylum in the first country they reach (McAdam, 2013a). Second, when one looks at the countries in Australia's region, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, and the travel routes that asylum seekers take, it is readily apparent that those en route from countries such as Iraq, Sri Lanka or Afghanistan cannot claim protection in a country that has ratified the

United Nations Refugee Convention unless and until they reach Australia (McAdam, 2013). Third, the number of refugees awaiting resettlement far exceeds the very few resettlement places are available globally. This means the resettlement system works much more like a lottery than a queue (Refugee Council of Australia, n.b.). This perception of queue jumping also contributes to Australians feeling that the system is unfair. Language such as "illegal" and "queue jumpers" is important as it can influence the perception of asylum seekers as negative or positive (e.g., Augoustinos & Quinn, 2003; Van Gorp, Vettehen, & Beentjes, 2009).

Another myth is that *asylum seekers are safe when they arrive in Indonesia or Malaysia so travelling to Australia is unnecessary* (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 2014; Hoffman, 2010, 2012). As highlighted above, unlike Australia, these countries are not signatories to the United Nations Refugee Convention and as such do not have the legal or administrative framework to provide for the protection of refugees (Mathew & Harley, 2014.) This means that refugees are constantly vulnerable to being arrested and detained by authorities as they are considered to be "undocumented" migrants. Detained refugees can be imprisoned and punished through whipping and deportation. They are also vulnerable to extortion (Mathew & Harley, 2014).

Accepting such myths as true is problematic on a range of levels. One very disturbing element of them is that the more prejudiced people are, the more they accept false information as being true (Suhnan et al., 2012). This relationship is likely to be bi-directional; if people are prejudiced, they are more likely to believe negative reports about asylum seekers. Yet somebody who does not have strong prejudiced attitudes to begin with can be influenced by what is seen by them as unfair. Thus, in any antiprejudice intervention, false beliefs must be dealt with. It is worth noting, however, that it is unlikely that simply

giving information will turn around prejudice. As found by Gringart, Helmes, and Speelman (2008) giving people accurate information about older people did not decrease negative attitudes towards them. Thus, giving information alone is not enough.

Indeed, as Guerin (2003) argues, attempts to establish the "truth" of a situation may be ineffective in itself as the "truth" is not what the person in question is really interested in. In the asylum seeker context, it may simply be part of a bigger resentment about asylum seekers and the myths simply back up their position. And as found by Croston and Pedersen (2012), people who disagree with your view are likely to discredit the source of the information. But that does not mean that false beliefs should not be challenged.

There are so many myths which are outlined in numerous online publications (e.g., Parliament of Australia, 2013). It is not possible to outline them all so it is best for practitioners to give a few pertinent examples based on past research such as those outlined in Croston and Pedersen (2013). It is also important to make the points as simple as possible; however, if somebody would like more information, point them in that direction. For example, the facts surrounding the myth of asylum seekers being "illegal immigrants" is extremely complex. Asylum seekers are in fact "unlawful non-citizens" which is not a criminal offence; it is often difficult for participants to differentiate between the two concepts. We find it more useful to concentrate on why many conservative politicians feel the need to call them this. One quote that we find useful is that of Jane McAdam (2013b) who says: "The opposition's use of the term "illegal" is designed to tarnish people's perceptions about the legitimacy of asylum seekers' claims. It is language that dehumanises and criminalises. Invoking it is either ignorant or deliberately mischievous, since the act of seeking asylum is not a crime, but the right of every individual" (n.p.).

Furthermore, when giving the information, it would be helpful to do so gently so as not to make people defensive about their position (see point 3, Emotion). In our experience, a

significant number of people firmly believe the myths and it is difficult to let go of these beliefs. We find it beneficial to stress that the false beliefs are in the common language of our country and it is not surprising that many people are not aware of the true facts.

Given the complexity of the issues surrounding this area, and the fact that many anti-prejudice practitioners may not have all the information at their fingertips, do not be afraid to say "I don't know – can I get back to you on that point". We have found that intervention participants do not have a problem with this approach; however, they do have a problem with workshop leaders trying to bluff their way out of a difficult question.

Finally, our participants have informed us that it would be useful to be able to practise responses to myth busting and/or racist talk. Contradicting the people that you care about is often not easy to do so; it can be very disruptive to social relations (Guerin, 2003; Nelson, Paradies, & Dunn, 2011). Guerin further argues that when a person is combatting myths, it is helpful to frame replies in such a way that they incorporate stories instead of simply giving facts as this often stops the conversation. Thus, having the tools to deal with addressing false beliefs – or prejudice/racism for that matter – would be very useful.

2. Negative attitudes towards asylum seekers do not equate to racism alone.

Community surveys indicate that there is a difference between how humanitarian (resettled) refugees and asylum seekers are perceived (Hartley & Pedersen, 2014; Markus, 2013). Not only do Australians react with more prejudice to asylum seekers than humanitarian refugees; they also report higher levels of anger against asylum seekers, fear of them, and feelings of threat from them (Hartley & Pedersen, 2014). Similarly, Murray and Marx (2013) found that American participants reported more perceived threat from 'unauthorized immigrants' (in our words, asylum seekers) compared with authorised immigrants. Verkuyten (2004) similarly found a difference between asylum seekers who were either political or economic asylum

seekers. He found that sympathy affected more lenient policy support for political asylum

seekers while anger predicted more harsh policy support for economic asylum seekers.

Thus, to say that the negativity of many Australian people is down to "racism" is not the

full picture. If this was the case, there would have been no significant difference between the

two groups in the above studies. Haslam and Holland (2012) note that people supportive of

asylum seekers may rebuke the Australian community for racism or xenophobia. Even

though there is a kernel of truth in the "racism hypothesis", alone it is an unsatisfactory and

simplistic explanation when examining individual attitudes. This does not, however, mean

that there is no individual or structural racism involved in the treatment of asylum seekers.

There undoubtedly is (see Pedersen, Clarke, Dudgeon & Griffiths, 2005).

As will be elaborated upon below, we have found in our antiprejudice interventions that it

is less than useful to accuse participants of being racist. People often switch off in these

circumstances and do not absorb what is being discussed. Other authors have made a similar

point. For example, Guerin (2005, p. 49) argues that talking about "racists" and "racism" is

essentialistic just like racist talk. That is, it involves positing that there are particular

characteristics of an individual or a group ("blacks are violent"; "racists are bad"). Indeed, as

he suggests, "racists" are a diverse group too. Instead, Guerin suggests that people look at

the context of racist behaviour. Furthermore, the vast majority of people do not see

themselves as being racist. Research from the Challenging Racism Project found that across

Australian states/territories, 8% of approximately 12,000 respondents in phone surveys

reported themselves as racist compared with 83% who acknowledged that racism exists in

Australia (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald, 2004).

3. Emotion. The emotions that practitioners attempt to tap into and attend to during the

intervention need critical thought. There are a number of different emotions linked with

prejudice against asylum seekers and we discuss four which we have found to be important in antiprejudice interventions (guilt, empathy, fear and anger).

Collective guilt about asylum seekers has been found to correlate with support for a more lenient asylum-seeker policy (Hartley & Pedersen, 2007). However, this does not mean that setting out to make participants in an intervention feel guilty will work. Indeed, previous research suggests that guilt is a self-focused emotion (Leach, Snider, and Iyer (2002). It is further argued (Iyer, Leach & Crosby, 2003) that guilt only works with restitution policies (e.g., monetary compensation) as this restores feelings of decency for the outgroup's predicament. We also argue that guilt can be counterproductive in trying to shift opinions (Pedersen, Walker, Paradies & Guerin, 2011); similarly, shaming people is likely to be ineffective (e.g., Every, 2013).

Research finds that *empathy* (both dispositional empathy and specific to asylum seekers) is linked with decreased prejudice (Pedersen & Thomas, 2013). Empathy is also related to support for more lenient policy regarding asylum seekers (Hartley & Pedersen, 2007). Thus, it would be beneficial for antiprejudice practitioners to show the human face of asylum seekers in any intervention. It is likely that longer interventions are more useful than short ones. As found by Spiteri (2013), empathy for asylum seekers did not develop immediately. This is the authors' experience also.

Much thoughtful discussion is often necessary for empathy to grow. One powerful way in which this can be done is through sharing asylum-seeker stories (also see Point No 11 Contact below). As Malin (1999) puts it, have participants "walk in somebody else's shoes". Our preference would be – linked to the preceding paragraph – would be to take a relatively "gently-gently" approach; in other words, not shaming or humiliating people in an attempt to make them "walk in the shoes" of marginalised groups. We are aware that other people use

other approaches (e.g., Jane Elliot's famous blue-eye/brown eye experiments). We are simply saying this is our preference based on both the existing research and our experience.

Linked with the previous section on false beliefs, it is important to deal with people's *fears* about asylum seekers: real or perceived. For example, when a number of asylum seekers were first housed at South Australian Inverbrackie Alternative Place of Detention, there were grave concerns by many of the residents at Inverbrackie. However, researchers found that with the detention centre came an increase in employment and an increase in local expenditure. Furthermore, there was no reduction to either access health care or the services themselves, and prejudice levels decreased (Every, Whetton, Rainbird, Abdul-Halim, Procter, Thompson, & Sebben, 2013).

In another study, people who were more prejudiced against asylum seekers also had a higher fear of terrorism (Pedersen, Watt, & Griffiths, 2007). However, no asylum seeker has ever been convicted of terrorism charges although at the end of 2014 there were approximately 40 primarily Tamil refugees being held in indefinite detention suspected of involvement with a terrorist organisation without any terrorism charges being brought against them (see Saul, 2012). With respect to the relationship between prejudice and the fear of terrorism, asylum seekers are not given protection if they do not pass rigorous security checks (DIBP, 2013).

Information to address perceptions such as these may help to allay people's fears. As a result, attitudes may become more positive.

Anger against what is seen as a "lenient" asylum-seeker system has been found to relate to support for restrictive policy regarding asylum seekers (Hartley & Pedersen, 2014). Thus, antiprejudice interventions need to be aware in advance that levels of anger may be relatively high (on both sides of the political fence). As many practitioners know, having hecklers in the audience or classroom setting can be disruptive and this is worse when one is

unprepared. It is a challenge indeed to achieve a balance in this regard as free speech is also important. If the practitioner if unaware of the grievances of participants, they cannot be dealt with. However, in our experience, most interventions involve participants from all walks of life; not simply the mainstream "white" population". Too much "free speech" has the potential of being extremely hurtful to participants of marginalised groups.

In short, a number of emotions are important predictors of both prejudice and support for restrictive asylum seeker policy. It is our view that it is better to concentrate on emotions such as empathy; as noted, attacking people who have a prejudiced view is likely to backfire (Pedersen, Walker, Paradies & Guerin, 2011). Similarly, Every (2008) believes that it is more beneficial to be reasonable and moderate. We acknowledge that this is sometimes easier said than done.

4. Values. Research finds that one's personal values play a very large role in attitudes towards asylum seekers. For example, one study using the function of attitude literature found that values was the most important reason people gave as to why they held the attitudes that they held about asylum seekers – both positive and negative attitudes (Pedersen, Watt & Griffiths, 2008). In other words, their attitudes were linked with deeply held values and beliefs such as how they believed people should behave towards one another and/or their beliefs upholding principles of justice in Australia.

It may be useful for anti-prejudice strategists to target people's more positive values. For example, with respect to taking action against prejudice, Plous (2000) suggests that you could target the offender's egalitarian self-image where possible. For example, *'I'm surprised to hear you say that, because I've always thought of you as someone who is very open-minded'*. In a recent Australian study (Pedersen & Thomas, 2013), there were two primary themes noted by participants which we suggest that antiprejudice strategists could use in interventions. The first was an acknowledgement of Australians' privilege: we are able to

walk down the street without being bombed and to generally keep our families safe. The second theme related to our common humanity (also see Nickerson & Louis, 2008) and the importance given to family. Regardless of our cultural background, love of family is universal (also see Goodman, 2007).

5. Emphasising similarity and difference. Related to the previous mechanism, as Pedersen and Thomas (2013) note, it is important to discuss *differences* between different social groups as well as *similarities* (also see Pedersen, Walker, Paradies & Guerin, 2011). In a British study, it was found that emphasising both similarities between groups as well as differences was influential in an increase in positive attitudes (Cameron, Rutland, Brown & Douch, 2006). Trying to assume that "we are all the same" is impractical as well as factually problematic. For example, people from a refugee background are often subject to particular traumas in their pre and post-migration journeys that many people in the mainstream community are not subject to. While, of course, some Australians will suffer traumas such as these, these are not the usual experience of most Australians. We believe that it is important that these differences are acknowledged.

6. Consensus. Research finds that prejudice is significantly linked with perceived levels of consensus – the higher the prejudice against asylum seekers, the more people believe that other people share their views. These views are not accurate; research finds that non-prejudiced people are more likely to able to accurately estimate the level of support of their opinion in the community (Pedersen, Griffiths & Watt, 2008). This finding has been replicated across other cultural groups; for example, Indigenous Australians (Watt & Larkin, 2010) and with regard to asylum seeker policy (Hartley & Pedersen, 2006). Another study found a positive relationship between prejudice and perceived cultural norms to reduce the number of asylum seekers (Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller & Lalonde, 2007).

We have found in our interventions that a relatively common criticism directed at antiprejudice practitioners is "*You academics are stuck in your ivory tower – the rest of the community doesn't agree with you*". It is worth mentioning to participants who espouse this view that the research finds that people highly negative about asylum seekers are likely to over-estimate the prevalence of their views. As found by Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006), when racist people are confronted with their views, this successfully reduces the likelihood of prejudiced and stereotypic responses at a later date. In short, giving intervention participants the correct consensus information may prove beneficial. Indeed, one participant in one of our projects said that the consensus information given was the most powerful information that she took away from the unit. Having said that, we find that different information affects people in different ways. This stresses the need not to use one strategy or tap into one mechanism alone.

7. Threat. A number of studies have shown the relationship between the perception of threat and prejudice towards asylum seekers. For example, both perceived realistic threat (such as threat to the economy) and perceived symbolic threat (such as threat to community values) related to prejudice against asylum seekers, although realistic threat was the stronger predictor of the two (Schweitzer, Perkoulidis, Krome, Ludlow, & Ryan, 2005). Another study found a significant relationship between instrumental and structural threat with three measures. Specifically, the perception of threat was linked with behavioural intentions to reduce the number of asylum seekers, prejudice against asylum seekers, and willingness to speak out about asylum seeker issues and vote with that issue in mind (Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller & Lalonde, 2007). Murray and Marx (2013) found that realistic, symbolic threat and anxiety predicted prejudice against asylum seekers. Suhnan et al. (2012) found that symbolic and realistic threat factored into one threat scale, and this scale correlated positively with prejudice against asylum seekers (Suhnan et al., 2012).

The perception of threat is a vexing and contradicting issue. Asylum seekers are often perceived as being in competition for scarce resources (Schuster, 2003) which relates to perceptions that they are a 'realistic' threat. On the one hand, asylum seekers and refugees have been accused of taking the jobs of ordinary Australians (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.). Yet evidence suggests that asylum seekers and refugees are less likely to secure 'good jobs' (Junankarand & Mahuteau, 2005) with one third of employed refugees working as labourers which is three times the rate of the general population (Hugo, 2012). Other low-paid, low-skilled, and low-status labour markets that refugees tend to gain employment in include security and meat processing (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). One such example was the meatworks in Young, New South Wales. Here, the regional economy boomed as a result of the arrival of Afghan refugees from the Hazara ethnic group (Stilwell, 2003). It is true that newly-arrived refugees have higher unemployment rates and lower earning rate that other immigrants, it is important to note that second generation refugees have higher levels of labour market participation than the general population (Hugo, 2011). This aside, there are many reasons for higher unemployment rates in the initial period (see Fozdar & Hartley, 2013 for a review) and they need to be discussed in any antiprejudice intervention. As noted by Hugo (2011), a lack of work experience and referees, a lack of English proficiency, and mental health issues relating to pre and post migration experiences can impede employment prospects. Furthermore, prejudice and discrimination faced by employers is another significant barrier (see Colic Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2006). Of course, these economic issues are a simplified analysis of the issue; they are all linked with ideology.

In contradiction of the above, another common misperception relating to perceptions of 'realistic' threat is that refugees receive more welfare support than Australian pensioners. This is factually incorrect and should be discussed in an anti-prejudice intervention.

Currently, asylum seekers who have been released from immigration detention and live in the Australian community while they wait for their refugee claims to be proceeded, receive minimal financial support, equivalent to 89% the lowest rate of unemployment benefits. This rate is only 55% of the amount calculated as the Henderson Poverty Line (Hartley & Fleay, 2013). For some 24,000 asylum seekers who arrived to Australia by boat since 13 August 2012 and before July 2013 and now live in the Australian community, up until December 2014, they are also denied the right to work, fostering a life of poverty and despair (Hartley & Fleay, 2013)[2]. In this regard, highlighting the extremely difficult financial and mental hardships asylum seekers face while living in the Australian community would be important to integrate into an intervention.

It is worth mentioning the exorbitant cost of Australia's deterrent-based policies. According to the 2014 Report of the National Commission of Audit, it costs $239,000 a year to keep one asylum seeker detained in mainland detention centres and more than $400,000 to detain an asylum seeker in offshore detention. By contrast, it costs less than $100,000 a year to hold an asylum seeker in community detention and less than $50,000 for them to live in the community on a bridging visa while they wait for their claims to be processed. While there is no research that investigates discussion about the costs associated with punitive policies as a way of shifting attitudes, it may be an important point to make, as appealing to people's compassion alone does not appear to have worked.

With respect to the relationship between symbolic threat and prejudice, how to deal with this is multifaceted. One place to start may be to provide accurate information on this point. For example, many people believe that Australia receives many more asylum seekers compared to other Western nations (Croston & Pedersen, 2013). This is not the case and may add to people's fears about losing Australia's identity. Furthermore, as noted previously, it is

important not only to discuss the differences between people seeking asylum and settled Australians, but the similarities of all people. The issue of perceived threat is clearly a complicated issue to deal with in any antiprejudice intervention and again links in with the giving the accurate information. It is clearly a source of great concern to many Australians – regardless of the accuracy of such fear.

8. **Nationalism.** Research indicates that people who have very high levels of Australian nationalism are more prejudiced against asylum seekers. However, there are some exceptions with respect to other marginalised groups; for example, one study found that nationalism correlated with modern prejudice against Indigenous Australians but not with old-fashioned prejudice (Pedersen & Walker, 1997). Another study found no bivariate correlation between nationalism and attitudes towards immigrants; instead the relationship was indirect through other variables (e.g., the belief that a group can only benefit at the expense of other groups; dehumanisation; contempt and lack of admiration) (Louis, Esses & Lalonde, 2013).

However, other research finds that people who report being high in nationalism also score high on prejudice against asylum seekers (e.g., Pedersen, Attwell & Heveli, 2005). In another study, it was found that support for harsh policy about asylum seekers was related to high levels of nationalism (Verkuyten, 2004). Fozdar, Spittles and Hartley (2014) recently found that nationalism significantly linked to flying the Australian flag on one's car on Australia Day. Furthermore, flag-flyers also scored high on prejudice against asylum seekers, Muslim Australians, and Indigenous Australians. The relationship between prejudice and nationalism is stronger when people believe that the community feels the outgroup is a hostile force (Nickerson & Louis, 2008) which links in with the 'consensus' section outlined above.

What this implies with regard to antiprejudice interventions is that the issue of nationalism is complicated and that a full discussion about what it means to be Australian

would be beneficial. There are many ways that nationalism can be looked at. For example, some research differentiates between nationalism (the belief that one's county is superior) and patriotism (pride in country without the need to derogate outgroups) (Li & Brewer, 2004). Similarly, other research differentiates between nationalist attachment (this involves being attached to ingroup members but can involve criticism of such) and glorification (this involves rejecting outgroups) (Roccas et al., 2006). Bernden, Thomas and Pedersen (2014) found that while attachment did not relate to prejudice against asylum seekers, there was a significant positive relationship between glorification and prejudice. A similar pattern was found with the two forms of nationalism and collective action intention on behalf of asylum seekers. In short, there are a number of different "nationalisms" which can be exclusive of asylum seekers or inclusive (Every & Augoustinos, 2007) so the baby – nationalism - should not be thrown out with the bathwater. Having pride in one's country does not need to exclude other groups and this should be discussed within any intervention.

9. **Islamophobia**. Asylum seekers come from a range of nationalities and religions. While some recent asylum seekers are Muslim; for example, the Hazaras from Afghanistan, many are not. Many asylum seekers who have arrived in recent years are Tamils from Sri Lanka – they tend to be Hindu or Christian rather than Muslim. Yet asylum seekers are often perceived to be Muslim (Holland & Haslam, 2012) so Islamophobia is another vexing related issue. Indeed, there is a significant correlation between prejudice towards asylum seekers and prejudice towards Muslim Australians (e.g., Pedersen, 2010). Similar to the problem that many people over-estimate the amount of asylum seekers that Australia receives, there is a misconception about how many Muslim Australians there are. Safi (2014) reports that Australians think there are nine times more Muslims in Australia than is really the case.

We once again return to the issues of providing correct information - this time about Muslims (see Edmund Rice Centre, 2006). It is well documented that a significant proportion of Australians have negative views about Muslims (e.g., Dunn, Klocker ,& Salabay, 2007) and this number has increased since 9/11 (Sheridan, 2006). However, some Australians limit these views to *extremist* Muslims (and non-Muslims, for that matter) (Pedersen & Hartley, 2012). Thus, in an antiprejudice intervention, it would be helpful to talk about what it means to be Muslim, the diversity of Muslims in Australia, and the myths associated with Islam.

10. Dehumanisation. Asylum seekers are often seen as less than human **(**Haslam & Pedersen, 2007) and this is encouraged by a great deal of the political rhetoric in the media (Rowe & O'Brien, 2014) (also see Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; Esses, Veenvliet & Hodson, 2008 with regard to media representations of asylum seekers). For example, in an analysis of representations of asylum seekers in Australia, media was found to regularly show asylum seekers as large groups with a focus on boats as opposed to individuals (Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison & Nicholson, 2013). Similarly, newspapers have been found to actively dehumanise asylum seekers, frequently referring to them as 'illegals' and the like (Klocker & Dunn, 2003).

A powerful example of political leaders and the media dehumanising asylum seekers is the Children Overboard scandal where the Howard Government asserted (falsely) that there was evidence that asylum seekers to Australia threw their children over the side of the boat just before the 2001 election. An example of a media headlines was "OVERBOARD: BOAT PEOPLE THROWN CHILDREN INTO OCEAN" and John Howard was quoted as saying "I don't want people like that in Australia. Genuine refugees don't do that" (Marr & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 189). In these two sentences, asylum seekers are collectively demonised and dehumanised: no decent human being would do such an act which in fact they did not. There are many examples of statements by Howard government ministers framing asylum seekers

as "not one of us", and thus dehumanised. For example, alongside Howard portraying asylum seekers as being people who throw their children overboard, they were people that we did not want here as Australians were compassionate and humane people (Papastergiadis, 2004). This government was perceived as being a strong government and it could be argued that this helped them win the federal election. There was also a policy which involved keeping the human face of asylum seekers from the press (Marr & Wilkinson, 2003).

Unfortunately, this dehumanisation did not end with the previous Coalition government. As Cameron (2013) argues, there are significant similarities between the two major political parties when examining their rhetoric about asylum seekers. This process of dehumanisation has also been found to be involved in organisations which work with asylum seekers in detention. For example, some of the guards at offshore detention centres call asylum seekers by their number rather than their name (Isaacs, 2014). Images of World War II concentration camps come to mind. Following on from this, often the press does not show asylum seekers as human beings needing assistance (there are exceptions, of course, for example journalists such as Phillip Adams and David Marr). Given that the press often cites government sources, this is not surprising. Haslam and Holland (2012) explains the psychological purpose of dehumanisation thus:

Dehumanisation can serve a number of psychological functions, such as legitimating harsh policies and distancing the self from other people's misery. By perceiving asylum seekers as lacking human qualities, morally questionable behaviour towards them can be seen as justified and appropriate. If they are less human than us, then normal moral restraints do not apply and the sorts of punitive and coercive treatment that we usually reserve for animals can be meted out without compunction. In addition to rationalising harsh treatment, by dehumanising asylum seekers we can protect ourselves from the full empathic comprehension of their suffering (p. 117).

Indeed, research does find a relationship between dehumanisation and prejudice (Esses, Veenvliet & Hodson, 2008). Other research finds that prejudice against asylum seekers is linked with moral disengagement which could link with dehumanisation. Bartlett (2014) found that moral disengagement was significantly related to prejudice and harsh policy stance. Greenhalgh, Watt and Schutte (2014) found a significant correlation between moral disengagement and prejudice. The relationship between moral disengagement and prejudice in these two Australian studies are strong and consistent.

So how does this affect antiprejudice interventions? We would suggest that it is very important to humanise asylum seekers. This links in with the emotion section above (Point 3); in particular, empathy. In our experience, although providing accurate information is part of the challenge, attitude change appears more profound when people can relate to the personal stories. As refugee advocates for some time, both of the authors often use humanising stories and where appropriate, invite former asylum seekers to talk with the participants. However, we note that many people who have gone through the detention process simply want to get on with their lives rather than re-live it in antiprejudice interventions. We have also found that some refugees would prefer the general public not to know that they came by boat: they know how harsh community attitudes often are about asylum seekers, and they do not want the stress involved in explaining themselves or their decisions. There are other options rather than refugees speaking to participants directly, and we cover this in more detail in the following section.

11. Contact. We have suggested that humanising asylum seekers is essential in antiprejudice interventions and one way of doing that is intergroup contact. The importance of contact has been known for at least 60 years. Allport's (1954) original contact hypothesis posited that there are four conditions necessary for contact between groups to reduce prejudice: equal status between groups, common goals, cooperation between the groups and

contact should be sanctioned by authorities. Indeed, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) in their meta-analysis of prejudice/contact studies found that most studies (94%) showed a negative relationship between prejudice and contact; in other words, the more contact people had with "outgroups", the less prejudice they reported.

As can be seen in the asylum seeker situation, some conditions for attitudes to become more positive are simply not there. As noted above, successive Australian governments have sanctioned negative attitudes rather than positive ones through policy and political discourse. Also, unfortunately, recent research indicates that even though positive intergroup contact was three times more prevalent in the community than negative contact, negative contact was more influential (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014).

These issues aside, contact can be helpful both in the school and community situation. Every, Thompson, Rainbird, Whetton, Procter, Abdul-Halim, & Sebben (2014) investigated the impact of detention facilities in South Australia. They found that asylum seekers in the community, regardless of the hostile reaction when they first moved to the Adelaide Hills, created an enriched environment for school learning as well as positive experiences. Contact with an ex-asylum seeker also produced positive outcomes in a university educational intervention.

But there are other "contact" options if the antiprejudice practitioner cannot introduce an asylum seeker, or ex-asylum seeker, to participants. One alternative is to show DVDs to the participants. For example, we have used the DVD "Mary and Mohammad" which was a ½ hour Compass story which was screened on 13th October 2013. This deals with an older Australian woman who at the outset is antagonistic towards asylum seekers and who meets a Hazara refugee (Mohammad) from Afghanistan. Her views turn around completely (Compass, 2013).

Are antiprejudice interventions effective?

We have noted what we consider to be 11 important factors, or mechanisms, relating to prejudice against asylum seekers to Australia. However, little research has been conducted on the efficacy of interventions based on these antecedents of prejudice towards asylum seekers. This highlights the need for further research to evaluate the effectiveness of particular mechanisms and strategies. Nevertheless, is some tentative evidence that interventions work – at least in the short term.

First, we consider some research on attitude change and children. In a British study, it was found that when children were told a story which involved extended contact with a refugee, and were also encouraged to focus on a common ingroup identity (in this case, their school) as well as characters' memberships in subgroups (in this case, refugee and English), positivity to refugees increased (Cameron et al., 2006). In other study conducted, school children who attended a school in Malta were introduced to a group of asylum-seeker children from Africa (Spitera, 2013). Before the intervention, many students were hostile to asylum seekers. During the intervention which involved meeting African asylum seekers, all students applied critical thought to the issue, expressed empathy for the asylum seekers, and appeared to be looking for "universal truths" – not just comparing Malta with other countries (p. 53).

Positive results have also been found with adults. For example, asylum seeker attitude change has been found in the university setting. Specifically, after a semester of teaching cross-cultural issues, one study found a significant increase in positivity towards asylum seekers (Pedersen, Paradies, Hartley & Dunn, 2011). Also, participants were significantly more likely to speak out against prejudice; in particular, inaccurate information about refugees in the community (i.e., that refugees get more government largess than

pensioners). Positive outcomes have also been found in the community. For example, in one study, attitudes towards asylum seekers were assessed after a five-week weekly seminar with a group of older Australians (their average age was 72 years) (Hartley, Pedersen & Dandy, 2012). Results indicated an increase in positivity towards asylum seekers after an antiprejudice intervention using many of the principles outlined in this paper. Furthermore, participants were asked whether the teaching principles (similar to those outlined in the present study) were seen as important. The participants said that all the principles were important and that they were followed by the lecturers. In one study outlined above (Pedersen, et al., 2011), it was also found that positive attitudes relating to Muslim Australians can be increased through antiprejudice interventions; as noted previously, there is a conflation between "asylum seeker" and "Muslim".

Conclusion

Bringing together the above, we argue that there are benefits of basing interventions on research rather than what seems intuitive. Furthermore, it is not helpful to use just one strategy (e.g., giving information). As noted above, quite often the different strategies work in conjunction with one another (e.g., empathy with contact). In short, we need more than one strategy. Also, practitioners need to be strategic. Even though there are times when one feels the urge to confront participants with what we perceive are racist attitudes, the research indicates that this is less than helpful. We note, however, that it is sometimes very difficult to do this and we will not always be successful. We also suggest that short interventions are not as helpful as longer ones. There are times when the information is new and almost shocking to participants. We remember one student who seemed upset saying at the end of an intervention "but why didn't I know?" These interventions are difficult for many students and the more time they have to process the information, the better. There are also questions that they may have as they are contemplating the issues and having the option to ask the

workshop leader this question in person can only be helpful. Changing prejudiced attitudes is not an easy task.

Another issue could be whether we have the right to try to change attitudes. Again, this is a vexed issue. However, as found by Habtegiorgis, Paradies, and Dunn (2014), there is a direct relationship between racist attitudes and racial discrimination. Thus, we believe that any attempts to change prejudiced and racist attitudes for the better are morally sound. But what we would also argue is that it is not right, or constructive, to try to *force* attitude change ("you must think as I think"). All we can do is to present an *alternative* to mainstream (often prejudiced) information to the participants and tell them that is what you are doing.

We acknowledge that we have concentrated on individual psychological attitude change. And that is important – especially if one believes as we do that not only do social structures affect individuals, but individuals can affect social structures (also see Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, it is very important to note that governments are implicated with regard to negative social norms about asylum seekers (Nickerson & Louis, 2008; Pedersen et al., 2006). Indeed, a common thread through this review is the rhetoric of the government reported through the media which is often negative and espouses false beliefs (e.g., Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Having said that, there are journalists who speak out in support of asylum seekers; for example, Phillip Adams (see Pedersen & Fozdar, 2010).

A large degree of power clearly rests with people with vested interests in keeping the asylum-seeker issues alive. For example, it is argued that asylum-seeker information, and misinformation, are fed into electoral campaigns (Marr & Wilkinson, 2003). However, we are not completely powerless although we may feel this way at times. We can use alternative social media, twitter, face book etc. While this is dismissed by some people like Prime Minister Tony Abbott to be "electronic graffiti" (Snowden, 2015), this will go some way in

balancing anti asylum seeker media differentials. One could join social networks such as church and faith groups as well as larger organisations such as Amnesty International and NGOs. In essence, social change is needed, and individual attitude change is important. However, the asylum-seeker issue needs to be tackled from a number of angles.

Refugees contribute greatly to Australia (Refugee Council of Australia, n.d.; Hugo, 2011; Stilwell, 2003). And this is more possible when they are welcomed by other Australians. The situation is somewhat bleak in Australia at the time of writing this article (at the end of 2014). However, we argue that we must continue with attempts to combat the demonisation of asylum seekers both on an individual level and a structural level. Indeed, the only other option is to do nothing and that situation is even more untenable than fighting the seemingly impossible.

We would like to end with this quote by Schuster (2003): "At a time when 'common sense' dictates that borders must be controlled, it is incumbent on those who know how futile the exercise is, and the damage that is does, to speak out against these controls, to engage with the spurious arguments of governments and the—sometimes—genuine but ill-founded fears of the public" (p.255).

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Endnotes

[1] For more information about myths, see Andrew Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law (nd) and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (2014).

[2]. Legislative changes made on 5 December 2014 now make it possible for the Minister to grant work rights to asylum seekers living in the community while they await the outcome of their case. However the process for obtaining work rights is administratively difficult and thousands of asylum seekers are still yet to have had their bridging visa renewed which would formally grant the right to work.