“I take it with a pinch of salt”: Discursive responses to news representations of asylum seekers among Western Australian media audiences

Ashleigh L Haw
BAPsych, GradDipForSc, MEd

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology from The University of Western Australia

School of Social Sciences
2018

Coordinating Supervisor: Associate Professor Farida Fozdar
Co-Supervisor: Associate Professor Rob Cover
Thesis Declaration

I, Ashleigh Haw, certify that:

This thesis has been substantially accomplished during enrolment in the degree. This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution.

No part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of The University of Western Australia and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

This thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

The work(s) are not in any way a violation or infringement of any copyright, trademark, patent, or other rights whatsoever of any person.

The research involving human data reported in this thesis was assessed and approved by The University of Western Australia Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval # RA/4/1/7387

The work described in this thesis was funded by the Australian Postgraduate Award (APA), Research Training Program Stipend (RTPS), and UWA Safety Net Top-Up Scholarship.

Technical assistance was kindly provided by Candice Bydder for interview transcription, which is described in Chapter 5 (Methodology).

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

Signature:

Date: 2 November 2018
Abstract

The media is a critical source of information on people seeking asylum and therefore, plays an important role in shaping and reinforcing public conceptions of the issue. In Australia, few studies have investigated how media audiences respond to news discourses about asylum seekers, and no research has utilised a combination of discursive and audience reception approaches. This research employed Fairclough’s (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alongside an Audience Reception framework (Hall, 1980) to explore how Australian media audiences conceptualise and evaluate news representations of asylum seekers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 residents of Western Australia (WA), who discussed their general views about asylum seekers, their media engagement preferences and habits, and their perspectives regarding Australian news discourses about seeking asylum.

Participants discussed the following perspectives about asylum seekers: they are ‘illegal immigrants’; they must follow the ‘right processes’ to be settled in Australia; and they are ‘economic migrants.’ Participants also demonstrated mixed perspectives about Australia’s refugee policies, raising issues involving mandatory detention and off-shore processing, Australia’s annual intake of refugees and international legal obligations, and the impact of refugee migration on Australia. By combining aspects of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1974), Rhetorical Analysis (Billig, 1991), and a Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 2001), findings revealed that participants often voiced their perspectives while challenging alternative views, aligning with Fleras’ (1998) concept of ‘duelling discourses’ and Billig’s (1988) notion of ‘ideological dilemmas.’
Most participants cited news coverage as their main exposure to information about asylum seekers, with many adding that they choose to engage with content that aligns with their political views. Some reported regularly engaging with news content despite critiquing its reliability, suggesting a complex relationship with the media. The sample also voiced mixed perspectives about the influence of news content on their asylum seeker stance - some felt that their views are shaped by news discourses, while others denied any impact. All participants critiqued how the Australian media represents asylum seekers, emphasising the following key concerns: negative and dehumanising representations; bias, sensationalism; limited transparency; and bureaucratic influences on news content. These perspectives were often constructed as recommendations for how news representations can be improved to more adequately inform the public. Furthermore, participants demonstrated a combination of dominant-hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated readings of media texts, demonstrating the value of Hall’s (1980) ‘encoding/decoding’ model of communication in explorations of discursive responses to media texts, particularly when adapted for use alongside CDA.

While these findings suggest considerable disenchantment with news discourses about asylum seekers, participants offered more than mere critique of Australian media depictions. Rather, they actively engaged with the debate about asylum seekers, often using their critique of media as a means of legitimising their own positions on the topic. These findings carry important implications for the communications and sociological fields, highlighting the importance of transparent, compassionate, and inclusive approaches to reporting asylum issues in Australia.

**Key words:** Asylum seekers, Australia, media, news, discourse, critical discourse analysis, audience reception, audiences
Acknowledgements

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

I would like to thank the following people who were instrumental in the successful completion of this project:

Firstly, this research would not have been possible without the twenty-four participants who donated their valuable time, ideas, reflections, and recommendations. Your candour and generosity is very much appreciated.

To my coordinating supervisor, Farida Fozdar, after admiring your work for years, choosing you as my PhD supervisor was a no-brainer. You not only shared thoughtful feedback, support, and immense expertise to guide this project, but your wisdom, patience, and at times, brutal honesty, made this experience truly invaluable for me. I believe that the skills you helped me refine have made me a stronger researcher, writer and critical thinker, and I hope I have made the most of the opportunities you have provided for me. The same goes for my co-supervisor, Rob Cover, whose insightful advice enabled me to widen my understanding of various critical media theories and pivotal work in this field, which encouraged me to consider and apply highly diverse perspectives to my research.

The wonderful staff at the University of Western Australia (UWA) for taking the pain out of the many administrative processes that accompany the completion of a PhD. Special thanks to the School of Social Sciences’ Graduate Research Coordinator, Steven Maras, and the incredible team at the Graduate Research School – you are all superstars!

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Candice Bydder, who assisted with the transcription of my participant interviews. You did an incredible job and I cannot recommend your work highly enough.

Sybil and the professional services team at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, whom I’ve had the privilege to work with over the past year. Your continued encouragement, humour and flexibility has made me feel immensely supported,
particularly during those final stressful weeks of my candidature when my thesis was virtually the only thing I was capable of talking about!

I have also been lucky enough to be surrounded by some incredible peers and mentors at UWA, the Australian Sociological Association, and the Australia and New Zealand Communications Association – thank you for the countless (and always timely) reminders that the self-doubt, bouts of imposter syndrome, and general “why am I doing this” moments are widely shared and understood. I know I still have so much more to learn from you and I hope I get the chance to do so.

**On a more personal note:**

My splendid friends, notably Anna, Alex, Suzi, Laura, and Eleanor (and your ever-expanding families), thank you for always understanding when I flew off the radar during the particularly hectic periods, and for inexplicably knowing how to make me laugh and forget about the set-backs and more challenging times. You have allowed me to focus on the best parts of life, with the best people.

*Mum and Dad,* aside from your unwavering support, both morally and fiscally, during my decade of study (or to quote mum, my “are you almost done yet?” years), the most significant thing that stands out for me is that I have never felt discouraged from my choices (with respect to both my career and my slightly non-conventional hobbies and world-views). You have both consistently emphasised the importance of me forging my own path and pushing against the status quo – for this I am eternally grateful, even if I don’t say it enough.

Last, but certainly not least, my amazing partner *Dean.* It has been a long haul, but we made it! I feel like anything I say is going to be woefully inadequate as it is impossible to articulate just how grateful I am for your love, support, pep-talks, spontaneous date-nights, and pulling me back down to earth when my anxiety was getting the better of me. Anyone who has lived through the PhD experience will say that the process has its ups and downs, but you reminded me to celebrate the ‘ups’ whilst helping make the ‘downs’ more bearable. We really do make the best team and I cannot wait to tackle the next challenge with you by my side.
# Table of Contents

Thesis Declaration                                      i  
Abstract                                      ii  
Acknowledgements                                    iv  
Table of Contents                                    vi  
List of Tables                                      x  

## 1 Introduction  
1.1 Background & Context: Seeking Asylum in Australia  
1.2 Background & Context: Understanding Media Audiences  
1.3 The Current Study – Research Questions & Rationale  
1.4 Thesis Overview                                   9  

## 2 Literature Review Part 1: Public Opinion on Seeking Asylum  
2.1 Introduction                                 14  
2.2 Individual Factors for Community Perspectives about Asylum Seekers  
2.3 Community Constructions of Asylum Seekers: Key Discourses  
2.3.1 ‘Illegal immigrants’   18  
2.3.2 ‘Genuine refugees’                                19  
2.3.3 ‘Economic migrants’                               21  
2.3.4 ‘Compassion’ & ‘charity’                         22  
2.4 Community Discourses about Settling Asylum Seekers in Australia  
2.4.1 Impact & consequences for Australia  
2.4.2 Assimilation & nationalism                                26  
2.4.3 Islamophobia                     29  
2.5 Australia’s Asylum Seeker Policies & International Law  
2.6 Summary                                  35  

## 3 Literature Review Part 2: Asylum Seekers in News Discourse  
3.1 Introduction                                  37  
3.2 News Representations of People Seeking Asylum  
3.2.1 Deviancy & threat                                38  
3.2.2 Control & restriction                               41  
3.2.3 Humanity & compassion                              43  
3.3 Summary                                 45  

## 4 Literature Review Part 3: News Engagement & Reception  
4.1 Introduction                                  47  
4.2 News Engagement  
4.2.1 News as a key source of information about asylum seekers  
4.2.2 General news engagement trends  
4.2.3 The changing nature of news consumption  
4.3 News Engagement – Demographic Factors & Political Views  
4.3.1 Gender                                    53  
4.3.2 Age                                     54  
4.3.3 Political views                             55  
4.4 Audience Reception Research                   57
4.4.1 General audience reception literature 58
4.4.2 Audience responses to news discourses about asylum seekers 64
4.5 Summary & Rationale for the Current Research 68

5 Methodology 70
5.1 Introduction 70
5.2 Objectives & Research Questions 70
5.3 Research Design & Theoretical Framework 73
  5.3.1 Discourse analysis & critical discourse analysis 74
  5.3.2 Conversation analysis, rhetorical analysis & the discourse-historical approach 79
  5.3.3 Audience reception analysis: Encoding & decoding 91
  5.3.4 Encoding & decoding: Critiques & poststructuralist approaches 95
  5.3.5 Encoding & decoding: Applicability to the current research 100
5.4 Data Collection 102
  5.4.1 Sampling 102
  5.4.2 Interviews 107
  5.4.3 Materials 112
5.5 Participants 112
  5.5.1 Sample size 112
  5.5.2 Demographics 113
  5.5.3 Asylum-seeking views by demographics 116
  5.5.4 News engagement by demographics 118
  5.5.5 News engagement by political & asylum seeker stance 123
5.6 Analysis 127
5.7 Ethical Considerations & Challenges Encountered 130
  5.7.1 Critically discussing participants’ perspectives on race 131
  5.7.2 Power imbalances between the researcher and participants 135
  5.7.3 The topical nature of the research topic 137
5.8 Summary 138

6 Results & Discussion Part 1: Participants’ Views on Asylum Seekers 139
6.1 Chapter Overview 139
6.2 Views on Seeking Asylum: Key Discourses 139
  6.2.1 ‘Illegal immigrants’: Perceptions of criminality 141
  6.2.2 ‘The right processes’: Asylum seekers’ mode of entry 147
  6.2.3 ‘All about money’: The ‘economic migrants’ discourse 153
6.3 Summary 158

7 Results & Discussion Part 2: Participants’ Perspectives on Settling 160
Asylum Seekers in Australia
7.1 Chapter Overview 160
7.2 Views on Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers 161
  7.2.1 ‘A melting pot’: Outcomes of migration for Australia 161
  7.2.2 ‘Religion of hate’ vs. ‘moral panic’: Muslim asylum seekers 170
  7.2.3 ‘Deliberate cruelty’: Australia’s asylum seeker policies 178
**List of Tables**

**Table 1:** Participants’ demographic details & stance on seeking asylum 115  
**Table 2:** Participants’ asylum seeker discourses 141  
**Table 3:** Participants’ news engagement - Media types (Appendix F) 338  
**Table 4:** Participants’ news engagement - Specific news sources (Appendix F) 340
1 Introduction

1.1 Background & Context: Seeking Asylum in Australia

Australia is highly polarised about people seeking asylum, with the nation’s immigration and humanitarian policies attracting considerable debate at a national level. Australia is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol and in turn, allocates approximately 13,750 places each year to refugees under the Government’s Humanitarian Program (Refugee Council of Australia, 2018). Most of these places are granted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to those who have sought asylum offshore, however some asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by plane or boat are granted protection visas onshore (Phillips, 2015). Even though Australia has a long history of providing permanent protection for refugees, the Australian government routinely constructs the arrival of asylum seekers as an unwelcome challenge to national security and sovereignty (Higgins, 2017). The challenges associated with accepting refugees create a paradox between maintaining control over national borders and protecting those escaping persecution (Phillips, 2015).

Most members of the Australian public are not exposed to direct information about people seeking asylum and as a result, media and political discourses play a pivotal role in the construction of the issue (Lynn & Lea, 2003; Henry & Tator, 2002). As Cottle (2000) stated, “the media occupy a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power” (p. 2). According to Markham and Cover (2018), discourse is central to how the mediated public sphere understands and debates the exclusion of asylum seekers. For instance, media constructions of asylum seekers as ‘invaders’ alert the public to perceived physical, economic, and cultural threats posed by the asylum seeker.
‘other’ (Lynn & Lea, 2003). The resultant dehumanisation of asylum seekers can facilitate their continued exclusion from the host society (Haslam, 2006). Additionally, Australian policies such as mandatory detention result in many asylum seekers being removed from public view, diminishing their capacity to share their stories in the public sphere (Higgins, 2016). This is especially pertinent given that the Australian government has heavily restricted journalists from accessing asylum seekers detained in off-shore facilities (Ellis, et al, 2016; Murphy, 2016). Consequently, asylum seekers may find themselves framed in media discourses as a homogenous and distant group, which can diminish empathy and understanding amongst Australian news audiences (Higgins, 2016).

Prior discursive studies have found that news representations of asylum seekers have typically characterised them as criminal and/or deviant, a threat to the host society, unwanted invaders, economic migrants, burdensome, and passive victims (Goodman, Sirriyeh & McMahon, 2017; Ellis, Fulton & Scott, 2016; Lippi, McKay & McKenzie, 2017; McKay, Thomas & Blood, 2011; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Pickering, 2001). There is also evidence of a lack of inclusion of asylum seekers’ voices and perspectives in media coverage about their own plight (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Cooper, Olejniczak & Lenette, 2017; Michael, 2018).

Collectively, the existing body of literature indicates that people seeking asylum have been subjected to dehumanising narratives in news discourses, both within Australia and internationally. While there is ample evidence of troublesome depictions of asylum seekers in news content, very few studies have examined audience responses to media representations of the issue, and no Australian studies have discursively explored how audiences engage with, interpret, and evaluate news discourses about the topic. This thesis discusses research that sought to address this
evident literature gap through a discursive exploration of how Australian media audiences engage with and perceive news coverage of asylum seekers.

1.2 Background & Context: Understanding Media Audiences

Various competing ideas on what constitutes the media ‘audience’ have been proposed by scholars interested in media engagement and effects. In Ang’s *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (1991) audiences are conceptualised across two paradigms: *audience-as-public* and *audience-as-market*. For Ang, when understanding the audience through the lens of the ‘public’, they are understood as ‘receivers’ of the meaning communicated to them by media creators. Conversely, when viewed through a market lens, audiences are seen to have a more active role whereby media processes are determined, at least to some degree, by audiences’ engagement and responses to content (Ang, 1991). In other words, an *audience-as-public* paradigm views media consumers as passive receivers of content whereas an *audience-as-market* paradigm regards them as active participants in media production.

Cover (2006) acknowledged that a push-pull relationship exists between authorial control and audience interactivity, which in Cover’s view, is particularly salient in the digital media age as audiences navigate a wide range of online products, programmes, sites and texts to access information. Given the growing body of evidence indicating that Australian audiences are gravitating toward digital media platforms over traditional news (e.g. broadcast, print, and radio) (see Park, Fisher, Fuller & Lee, 2018; Vidali, 2010; Young, 2009), the current research operated under the view that audiences are active as opposed to passive media consumers. However, this research also recognises the important influence of ideology on media content, whereby the positions of news creators inevitably feature in their media texts (van
Dijk, 2011). Thus, this research adopts Cover’s (2006) view, simultaneously regarding audiences as diverse and autonomous in their media selection and interpretation, whilst also acknowledging the continued impact of ideological structures on news discourse along with its potential to affect audiences’ perspectives on the topic presented.

To situate the emerging findings in historical context, this thesis consulted with five different models concerned with media effects that have received significant scholarly attention. These were framing, agenda-setting, priming, uses and gratifications theory, and the encoding/decoding model of communication. Agenda-setting is concerned with how audiences assign importance to a given topic or event on the basis of the degree of emphasis placed on the topic via mainstream media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). One example is the relative placement of an issue (i.e. the first story in a news bulletin or the front-page story of a newspaper). Agenda-setting can also be observed in the amount of coverage allocated to a particular event (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) defined priming as “changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations” (p. 63). It occurs when the media presents a given issue or event in a manner that connects it to the conduct of certain political figures or structures (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Some scholars consider priming to be an extension of agenda-setting as both are regarded as memory-based models of information processing, whereby the information most accessible to audiences is said to have the strongest impact on their attitudes (Hastie & Park, 1986). According to Tversky & Kahneman (1973) audiences’ perspectives on a given topic are directly related to “the ease in which instances or associations could be brought to mind” (p. 208). In turn, while agenda-setting can lead to certain issues becoming more salient
for audiences, priming enables media content to shape how their audiences make judgments about political issues and players.

Building on the accessibility-based models of priming and agenda-setting, **framing** is based on the assumption that audiences’ understanding of a given issue or event is a product of how the issue is characterised in media coverage (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The sociological foundations of framing emerged following the work of Goffman (1974), who posited that people classify information and assign meanings to it by applying ‘interpretive schemas’, whereby they draw upon their existing understandings of related issues to form impressions about the content presented to them. Framing is therefore both a macro-level and a micro-level construct (Scheufele, 1999). As a micro-construct, framing describes how people engage with media information to form impressions about the issues presented to them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). As a macro-construct, framing enables media organisations to present information in a manner that relies upon audiences’ existing underlying schemas (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This does not mean that the media intentionally set out to manipulate their audiences. Rather, framing offers a means of simplifying an issue to make it more accessible and intelligible to audiences, which is important given the constraints media organisations (such as the requirement to present information on complex and multifaceted topics in a restricted amount of time) (Gans, 1979). As McCombs (2004) asserted, because framing makes aspects of an issue more salient through different modes of presentation, it can be instrumental in shifting people’s attitudes. One key way this is manifested is through drawing connections between two concepts (e.g. seeking asylum and Australia’s economy). In this example, a news message may suggest that the best way to think about whether Australia should increase or decrease their intake of refugees is through a consideration of how increased refugee resettlement may impact Australia’s
economic development. Thus, the media message here has framed the issue of seeking asylum in Australia in a way that links considerations about the nation’s economy to questions about asylum policy.

When understanding media engagement through a uses and gratifications framework, audiences are seen as active agents who select media to serve particular needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Aligning with Ang’s (1991) ‘audience-as-market’ paradigm, uses and gratifications theory holds that media organisations make decisions about how to present content based on the need to attract and retain audiences on the basis of their perceived preferences (Rubin, 2002). As such, media content is said to be driven primarily by the needs of audiences. Thus, while uses and gratifications scholars believe that media can be persuasive, they also believe that audiences’ choices play an important role. For example, Rubin (2002) argued that people engage with media to fulfil certain needs or interests, with a variety of social and psychological factors shaping how these decisions are made. These factors include personality traits, demographics, and interpersonal interactions (Rubin, 2002). Some scholars have applied a uses and gratifications model to study how audiences respond to political communication, by attempting to link media exposure to tangible political outcomes (including voting behaviour and awareness of policies gaining attention in certain media outlets). For instance, Kitchens, Powell, and Williams (2003) found that seeking information on political issues affected audiences’ political knowledge, however political knowledge did not influence audiences’ opinion formation or voting decisions. In line with ‘echo chamber’ notions of media consumption (e.g. Lazarsfeld, et al, 1944 - see further discussion on page 202), these findings suggest that audiences do not seek out political information, to aid their decision-making, but rather, they do so to either reinforce their pre-existing views or surveil the current political climate.
The encoding/decoding model of communication is concerned with exploring audiences’ active choices, uses and interpretations of news content, and is based on the premise that existing knowledge and ideologies impact the selection and interpretation of media messages (Hall, 1980). The key premise of this model is that media content cannot determine how audiences will ascribe meaning to a given text. In turn, encoding/decoding proposes three central ideas: 1) the same event can be encoded in more than one way; 2) a given message contains more than one possible reading; and 3) understanding the message can be a problematic process. According to this model, the ‘encoding’ phase of communication occurs when media producers construct an intended message and present this to their audiences, who then participate in the ‘decoding’ phase, whereby they attempt to make sense of the message by applying their own meaning to it (Hall, 1980). Hall asserted that there is some degree of reciprocity between the encoding and decoding phases, however, the resulting meaning is constructed according to individual context as opposed to occurring ‘naturally’. In other words, the meaning generated during the ‘decoding’ stage can differ considerably from the message constructed during ‘encoding’. Hall (1980) argued that if it were possible to apply a singular, universal meaning to media messages, communication would be a “perfectly equivalent circuit, with every message serving as an example of perfectly transparent communication” (p. 171).

This research adopted aspects of the encoding/decoding model alongside critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) as both approaches recognise the essential role of discourse in media texts. According to Hall (1980), the production of news messages requires the framing of meanings and ideas. Thus, there is a discursive aspect to this process, in Hall’s view, involves the incorporation of knowledge and assumptions concerning: production routines; historically-defined technical skills; professional ideologies; and the experience, knowledge and
characteristics of audiences. Viewing media production through this lens means recognising that encoded messages are representations of discourse (Hall, 1980). Therefore, the key goals of the current research align with many of the key principles of Hall’s model - both are concerned with active media choices, the importance of personal context during evaluations of news messages, and audience perspectives about the value of the media as an informative tool (refer to the Methodology chapter for a more exhaustive description and justification for the current study’s adaptation of the encoding/decoding model).

1.3 The Current Study: Research Questions & Rationale

As noted, little is known about how Australian news audiences conceptualise news depictions of people who seek asylum. The current research therefore sought to shed light on the views of a sample of Western Australian community members concerning news discourses they have encountered about asylum seekers. To meet this objective, two key research questions were formulated:

1. What key discourses about seeking asylum did this sample voice?

2. What sources of Australian news content have this sample engaged with, and what are their perspectives concerning how these sources portray asylum seekers?

By first establishing participants’ stance on asylum seekers, the first research question was focused on providing important context for participants’ discussions of media depictions of the issue. As asylum seekers are a frequently oppressed minority group in Australia, it was essential to consider emerging discourses with respect to how they relate to wider power structures. Therefore, this research employed Fairclough’s (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the data collected. CDA recognises that meanings conveyed in language can be ideological and that the
relationship between society and discourse is often bidirectional (i.e. both can influence one another) (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000). Fairclough (1989) proposed that CDA is particularly useful in research concerned with depictions of minority groups as it provides a means of examining how inequality is manifested in discourse. CDA was therefore considered ideal for this research due to its capacity to facilitate the meaningful exploration of how media depictions of asylum seekers are discursively evaluated by the Australian community.

To address the second research question, this study adopted the notion that audiences are active rather than passive consumers of media information (Hall, 1973). Several communications scholars have rejected the view that news audiences accept the dominant-hegemonic discourses presented to them, arguing instead that people apply their own meanings to media messages, which are shaped by numerous individual factors (Madianou, 2007; Livingstone, 1998; Liebes, 1997; Kitzinger, 1993; Bird, 1992; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Hall, 1973). Audience Reception Theory (Hall, 1980) is rooted in these premises, positing that there is considerable variance with respect to how people interpret news discourses. The current research is therefore grounded in the notion that audiences are active participants in the communication of ideas, drawing upon their own ideologies and experiences to make sense of media discourses. The combination of an Audience Reception epistemology with a Critical Discourse approach enabled this research to explore in-depth how people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds interpret and evaluate Australian news discourses about people seeking asylum.

1.4 Thesis Overview

This thesis begins by framing and contextualising the issue of Australian media representations of asylum seekers. This is achieved through a systematic
review of the relevant literature and background with respect to Australia’s media and community conceptualisations of asylum seekers. Collectively, the existing literature has revealed highly nuanced and polarising perspectives about asylum seekers in both public and media discourse. However, to date, little is known about how Australian media audiences interpret and conceptualise news discourses about the topic. The literature review outlines these prior findings, highlighting the evident research gap this thesis has sought to address, and provides important contextual grounding for the chosen methods and subsequent results emerging from this research.

The Methodology chapter outlines the procedures applied to this study, starting with a re-iteration of the central research questions and rationale. This is followed by a discussion and justification of the theoretical framework, sampling, data collection, and analytical methods employed. This chapter provides a case for the use of a qualitative approach, whereby semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 Western Australians with varying backgrounds and perspectives about news representations concerning asylum seekers. The theoretical lens and analytical methods employed are also outlined, demonstrating that a combination of Fairclough’s (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis with aspects of Hall’s (1980) Audience Reception Analysis is ideally suited to research examining how audiences engage with media discourses. Hence, the current research utilised both analytical approaches. The Methodology chapter also discusses some key ethical issues and methodological challenges faced and how these were addressed, including: the potential harm caused to participants resulting from critical discussions of their perspectives; possible power imbalances between the researcher and participants; and the topical and ever-changing nature of the subject matter.
The Results and Discussion are segmented into four chapters. The first of these details the findings pertaining to participants’ views about asylum seekers, whereby varied perspectives were voiced with respect to: the legality of seeking asylum; the idea of ‘genuine’ versus ‘non-genuine’ refugees; and the concept of ‘economic migrants.’ This is followed by a discussion of participants’ perspectives about the impact of accepting asylum seekers in Australia, whereby participants voiced mixed perspectives about Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers, with some viewing it as having a positive impact on the nation and others raising concerns. These concerns related to: the nation’s capacity to manage high numbers of asylum seekers; issues relating to settlement outcomes for asylum seekers; and the impact of accepting Muslim asylum seekers in Australia. Opposing perspectives about Australia’s asylum seeker policies were also voiced, with participants indicating both support for and opposition to mandatory detention, as well as mixed views about the country’s refugee intake and legal obligations to assess asylum claims.

The third Results and Discussion chapter is concerned with participants’ self-reported media engagement preferences, whereby most stated that they utilise multiple news mediums, including television, print, online, social media, and radio news. Participants also provided some critique of news they consume, indicating that they often engage with news sources despite mistrusting the content. Most participants cited news as their main source of information about asylum seekers, however mixed perspectives were provided concerning the perceived impact of media discourses on their beliefs. The Results and Discussion concludes with a discussion of participants’ perspectives on news depictions of asylum seekers, which demonstrates that most participants did not feel that the Australian media adequately informs the public about the issue.
Common perspectives arising were that news discourses about people seeking asylum are: negative; sensationalist; unreliable and biased; lacking in balance; de-humanising; non-transparent; and driven by bureaucratic factors. It is important to note that these findings may partially result from the sample containing a higher proportion of people who voiced ‘accepting’ views toward asylum seekers than the figures reported in previous literature (e.g. Haslam & Holland, 2012; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008a; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, Watt & Hansen, 2006; Pickering, 2004). Nonetheless, in the current research, the observed criticism of media representations was voiced by participants who demonstrated ‘accepting’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘non-accepting’ perspectives, indicating that mistrust and/or dislike of news discourses about asylum seekers was not limited to participants with an accepting stance on the topic.

The application of Fairclough’s (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis, including components of a Discourse Historical Approach (Wodak, 2001), Rhetorical Analysis (Billig, 1991) and Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1974), enabled some additional findings to be derived with respect to how participants discursively constructed their views. Firstly, participants often demonstrated the concept of ‘duelling discourses’ (Fozdar, 2008; Fleras, 1998), whereby their arguments were constructed in a dialogic fashion by either directly or indirectly challenging alternative perspectives on the issues raised. Participants also used numerous ‘rhetorical devices’, which are features of language utilised either consciously or unconsciously to communicate one’s perspective in a convincing way (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Augoustinos & Every, 2007). Each of these devices is explained in the Results and Discussion component of this thesis as they relate to the emerging findings, with emphasis on their discursive effects.
The Conclusion chapter summarises all key findings, with emphasis on their implications from both a policy and empirical perspective. Overall, findings revealed considerable disenchantment among this sample with respect to how asylum seekers are represented in news discourses, highlighting the importance of Australian media organisations adopting more transparent, compassionate, and inclusive mechanisms for reporting on key issues that impact asylum seekers. Some potential limitations of the research are also discussed with recommendations provided to signify how critical discourse and audience reception scholars could build upon the current findings to shed further light on how media audiences perceive news representations of asylum seekers in Australia.
2 Literature Review Part 1: Public Opinion on Seeking Asylum

2.1 Introduction

While there is ample evidence to show that people are highly polarised about asylum seekers, little is known about how Australians interpret and conceptualise publicly-communicated information about the issue. As noted, this evident literature gap has served as the rationale for the current research. To provide important context and background, this review of the literature begins by discussing what is currently known about public perceptions of asylum seekers, both in Australia and internationally. The following key findings have been identified: the framing of asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants’ (Laughland-Booý, et al, 2014; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008a; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Pickering, 2004), ‘queue jumpers’ (McKay et al, 2012; McKay, et al, 2011; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Gelber, 2003), ‘bogus’ versus ‘genuine refugees’ (McKay, et al, 2012; Pedersen, et a, 2006; Clyne, 2005; van Dijk, 1997), and ‘economic migrants’ (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Goodman & Speer, 2007; Saxton, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Jones, 2000).

Prior findings have also revealed: references to ‘compassion’ and ‘fairness’ in debates about people seeking asylum (Austin & Fozdar, 2018; Anderson, et al, 2015; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b); discussions of the impact of settling asylum seekers on the host nation, including views on multiculturalism, assimilation, national identity, and Islamophobia (Muller, 2016; Nolan, Burgin, Farquharson & Marjoribanks, 2016; Morgan & Poynting, 2016; Fozdar & Low, 2015; Noble, et al, 2012; Pedersen & Hartley, 2012; Brett & Moran, 2011; Goodman & Burke, 2011; Dunn, Klocker & Salabay, 2007; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Poynting & Mason, 2006; Dreher, 2005); and expressions of
concern about Australia’s asylum seeker policies (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Klocke, 2004; Betts, 2001) and obligations under international law (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b).

Much of the prior literature (and subsequent discussion in this thesis) refers to public conceptualisations of asylum seekers as ‘attitudes’, ‘opinions’, or ‘perspectives.’ For the purposes of this thesis, these concepts are defined as thoughts about a given group, issue or concept that are constructed and articulated through discourse to preserve a given identity position (Cover, 2013). According to Cover (2013), conceptualising attitudes in this manner enables researchers to “understand attitude as related to the maintenance of the cultural conditions that frame and/or prevent the capacity for ethical responsiveness to others” (p. 409). Applying these concepts to the current research, one can see that public attitudes have often been framed in discussions around potential consequences of accepting asylum seekers in Australia. Thus, certain attitudes have often been associated with discourses surrounding the impact of asylum seekers on the host country and in turn, debate, discussion and policy in Australia is shaped by how these discourses are articulated as ‘attitudes’ (Cover, 2013).

This chapter begins by summarising key literature surrounding demographic and ideological factors for perspectives on people seeking asylum. This is followed by a discussion of common discursive constructions of asylum seekers identified in previous research. Prior findings pertaining to community discourses about the impact of settling asylum seekers in Australia are also discussed, including perspectives on Australia’s asylum seeker policies and international legal obligations. This chapter concludes that while the literature has provided valuable insight into the nuanced nature of public perceptions, it also highlights the need to understand how these perspectives are constructed, influenced, maintained and
challenged. This requires some examination of how people are exposed to discursive constructions of asylum seekers, and how they understand and respond to these discourses. As noted, discussing and further investigating these general views is necessary to provide important context for this thesis because critical analysis of how the sample discussed media coverage of asylum seekers requires some understanding of their own positions on the topic - this is particularly important given that this research applied an Audience Reception epistemology (Hall, 1980), which posits that participants’ existing views may impact how they perceive and discuss news constructions of the issue.

2.2 Individual Factors for Community Perspectives about Asylum Seekers


With respect to demographics, the general consensus of the Australian literature to date is that welcoming perspectives toward asylum seekers are commonly expressed by people who are young (Markus & Arunachalam, 2018; McKay, et al, 2012), female (Markus & Arunachalam, 2018; Anderson & Ferguson, 2017; Anderson, 2016; Laughland-Booø, et al, 2014; McKay, et al, 2012;

In addition to demographic, ideological and religious factors, some research has suggested that prior contact with people from refugee backgrounds can impact views about asylum seekers (McKay, et al, 2012), providing some support for Allport’s (1954) ‘contact hypothesis’. Allport proposed that direct intergroup contact can predict higher levels of positive attitudes toward out-groups, which has been supported by some studies (Barlow, Louis, & Hewstone, 2009; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For instance, Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2006) meta-analysis of 515 studies
revealed a correlation between intergroup contact and the reduction of intergroup prejudice. More recently, McKay, et al (2012) found that many of their participants who had spent time with refugees expressed welcoming views toward asylum seekers, while some reported unfavourable experiences with refugees, attributing these incidents to their less accepting stance. A similar complexity was revealed in research by Fozdar (2011), who challenged the notion of the contact hypothesis. Fozdar’s interviews with Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders revealed some contradictory constructions of intergroup relationships, whereby racial differences were depicted as unimportant in close friendships, yet such differences also formed the basis for which ‘relationship management’ took place. Collectively, the findings discussed here highlight that there are multiple individual differences with respect to background, ideological and political position, and personal experience that may account for the polarising nature of asylum seeker discourse in Australia. These findings are important to acknowledge as they provide further support for the ideas of Morley (1980) and Hall (1980) that are central to this thesis: that people draw upon a range of individual factors to interpret information and subsequently form, adapt and/or maintain their perspectives on a given topic. It is therefore important to consider the research and ideas discussed in subsequent sections of this literature review with these prior findings in mind.

2.3 Community Constructions of Asylum Seekers: Key Discourses

2.3.1 ‘Illegal immigrants’

Pedersen, et al, 2006; Klocker 2004; Pickering, 2004; Pickering, 2001; Betts, 2001). For instance, McKay, et al (2012) found that in the context of discussing asylum seekers’ methods of arrival to Australia, many participants used terminology such as ‘illega’ and ‘illegal asylum seeker’. Similar findings were uncovered by Klocker (2004), who found that 82 percent of her participants constructed people seeking asylum as 'illegal immigrants' and 79 percent described their conduct as 'unlawful'. More recently, Laughland-Booŷ, et al (2014) found that viewing the conduct of asylum seekers as illegal was common among participants who opposed seeking asylum.

Historically, the illegal immigrant trope has been applied to deny Australia’s responsibility to settle asylum seekers (Pickering, 2001). Many scholars have theorised that framing asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants’ serves to legitimise exclusionary policies, including mandatory detention, offshore processing and restrictive visa conditions (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007; Mares, 2002). For example, in their analysis of media texts, O’Doherty and Lecouteur (2007) found that the term was almost universally applied during arguments in support of “sending them home” (p. 6). In this context, the illegality principle provides a means of emphasising that asylum seekers have no right to be settled in Australia.

2.3.2 ‘Genuine refugees’

Another pervasive feature of discussions about seeking asylum in Australia is the pitting of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ refugees against one other (Peterie, 2017). As a discursive strategy, the differentiation between ‘genuine’ and ‘bogus’ refugees enables one’s opposition to asylum seekers to appear ‘reasonable’ (van Dijk, 1997). The notion of ‘bogus refugees’ first arose in 1985 in response to large
numbers of Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka’s civil war to seek asylum in a number of European countries (van Dijk, 1997). According to van Dijk, the ‘bogus’ trope served to justify restricting the numbers of Tamil asylum seekers settled during this period. In the years since, this discourse has been widely applied in hegemonic, ‘common sense’ depictions of people seeking asylum, resulting in the widespread adoption of this position to legitimise unfavourable attitudes toward those regarded as ‘non-genuine’ (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Lynn & Lea, 2003).

The available literature has revealed that people often refer to a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek asylum (Markus & Arunachalam, 2018, 2013; McKay, et al, 2011; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Lynn & Lea, 2003). In Australia, participants of the Scanlon Foundation’s Social Cohesion Survey (Markus & Arunachalam, 2013) were more inclined to voice welcoming views about asylum seekers if they saw them as ‘genuine’ refugees’. In research by McKay, et al (2012), some participants posited that ‘genuine’ refugees do not use people smugglers to seek asylum in Australia, with some arguing that asylum seekers should be treated with fairness if they follow the ‘proper processes’ (McKay, et al, 2012). This notion of ‘proper processes’ was also reported by Pedersen, et al (2005), who found that many participants drew upon their own migration experiences during discussions about asylum seekers, citing themselves as examples of people who followed the ‘right procedures’ for coming to Australia. In international research, Lynn and Lea (2003) examined letters to the editor of a UK newspaper, finding that many of their participants believed that ‘genuine refugees’ deserve to be resettled, whilst ‘bogus’ refugees do not. In a European study by Bansak, et al (2016), asylum-seekers were seen to have a more genuine case for seeking protection if they came across as severely vulnerable.
The ‘genuine’ versus ‘bogus’ refugees discourse often occurs in conjunction with discussions of asylum seekers as ‘queue jumpers’ (Clyne, 2005). ‘Queue jumper’ is a term widely applied by those who oppose the acceptance of asylum seekers on the grounds that they have used the ‘back door’ to come to Australia (Clyne, 2005). Several studies have found that people who utilise the ‘genuine’ versus ‘bogus’ discourse often refer to asylum seekers as ‘queue jumpers’ (McKay et al, 2012; McKay, et al, 2011; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Gelber, 2003). For example, Pedersen, et al (2006) found that many participants viewed people who seek asylum by boat as ‘queue jumpers’ who take the places of ‘genuine refugees.’ Critical discourse scholars have argued that framing refugees using a ‘genuine’ or ‘non-genuine’ binary serves to justify harsh policy responses (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; van Dijk, 1997). Therefore, the findings discussed here can have dangerous consequences for the safety and wellbeing of people seeking asylum.

2.3.3 ‘Economic migrants’

The concept of ‘economic migrants’ is often raised during debates about seeking asylum. Economic migration refers to migration that is motivated by a desire to improve one’s standard of living by gaining a higher-paying job (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). According to van Dijk (1997), the term originated during political discourse that sought to justify strict immigration policies in the mid-1980s in response to Tamil asylum seekers arriving in Europe. Both national and international studies have reported the ‘economic migrants’ discourse as a feature of community and political discussions about seeking asylum (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Goodman & Speer, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005; Saxton, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Jones, 2000; Kaye, 1998; van Dijk, 1997). For example, some research has shown a
tendency for people to conflate seeking asylum with economic migration (Verkuyten, 2005; Goodman & Speer, 2007; van Dijk, 1997). Additionally, some research has reported unfavourable attitudes about economic migration (Bansak, et al, 2016; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). For instance, Bansak, et al (2016) found that people were more likely to hold hostile views toward asylum seekers if they perceived them to be motivated by financial gain.

Prior research has also highlighted that people with positive views about seeking asylum often challenge the ‘economic migrants’ discourse (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Verkuyten, 2005). Every and Augoustinos (2008b) observed that people who opposed the notion of asylum seekers as ‘economic migrants’ tended to place emphasis on Australia’s responsibility to provide protection. Similarly, Verkuyten (2005) found that people often emphasised the obligations of recipient countries when opposing the ‘economic migrants’ viewpoint, drawing upon discourses of the ‘lack of choice’ faced by people seeking asylum. These participants often drew upon notions of ‘compassion’ and ‘humanity’ while making these arguments – these discourses are explored further in the following discussion.

2.3.4 ‘Compassion’ & ‘charity’

Although numerous studies to date have reported negative discourses concerning people seeking asylum, there is some evidence to suggest that many Australians hold perspectives that focus on issues of compassion, humanity, charity, and social justice (Austin & Fozdar, 2018; Anderson, et al, 2015; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). The discourse of ‘compassion’ has been found to be strongly voiced as an argument against harsh asylum seeker policies (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Every, 2008). In Fozdar and Pedersen’s (2013) research, those who challenged
oppositional views toward asylum seekers often drew upon notions of compassion whilst arguing for more humane policy approaches. McKay, et al (2012) also found that some of their participants talked about the need for more ‘humanitarian’ responses to people seeking asylum. During these discussions, terms such as ‘compassion’, ‘respect’, ‘dignity’ and ‘fairness’ were used to describe people seeking asylum (McKay, et al, 2012).

Discourses concerned with compassion and fairness were also uncovered by Laughland-Booŷ, et al (2014), who found that participants often constructed fairness in terms of a need for Australians to recognise their privileged position in society and therefore, Australia should share its ‘good fortune’ with those in need. Belief in social justice principles has also been found to be associated with positive views about seeking asylum (Anderson, 2016; Anderson, et al, 2015). According to Anderson (2015), macro social justice perspectives are predicated on the need to restore equality by maximising positive outcomes for a society’s most disadvantaged people. In Anderson’s (2015) research exploring community attitudes toward asylum seekers in Australia, most participants who expressed welcoming perspectives also voiced beliefs in the equal distribution of resources across all members of society.

Prior studies have also indicated that the concept of ‘charity’ is often framed as an argument for fair and humane asylum seeker policies (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b), however, depictions of Australia as a charitable nation have also been associated with a need to restrict refugee migration on the basis that charity must ‘begin at home first’ (Hebbani & Angus, 2016). Hence, the charity discourse has been used in arguments both for and against accepting asylum seekers. In Every’s (2008) analysis of parliamentary discourses about asylum seekers, humanitarianism was constructed in two opposing ways: as an exercise of generosity Australia has bestowed upon asylum seekers; and as a threat to national identity and security.
Every argued that when the concept of humanitarianism is co-opted for use in exclusionary terms, objection to asylum seekers and support for punitive policies are constructed as natural and reasonable. Such endorsement and justification of these policies can jeopardise the wellbeing of people who seek asylum in Australia, and therefore, further exploration is warranted with respect to how these conflicting notions of humanitarianism are constructed, reinforced, and challenged.

2.4 Community Discourses about Settling Asylum Seekers in Australia

2.4.1 Impact & consequences for Australia

Prior literature has identified varied community perspectives on the potential outcomes of settling asylum seekers in Australia. These findings have encompassed a broad range of areas, including discussions of the impact of multiculturalism (Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018; Brett & Moran, 2011; Moran, 2011; Purdie & Wilss, 2007; Laughland-Booý, et al, 2017; Markus, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010; Spry & Hornsey, 2007; Betts, 2005, 2002; Bulbeck, 2004; Dunn, et al, 2004; Ho, et al, 1994; Ho, 1990), views concerning the host country’s capacity to accept asylum seekers (including the nation’s current intake of refugees) (Laughland-Booý, et al, 2017; Fozdar & Low, 2015; Laughland-Booý, et al, 2014; O’Doherty & Augoustinos; 2008a; Louis, et al, 2007; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Chiswick & Miller, 1999; Ho, et al, 1994), and perceived consequences of settling asylum seekers for the host country (Bansak, et al, 2016). Some studies have uncovered discourses that view multiculturalism as a beneficial aspect of life in first-world western civilisations, indicating a widely-held appreciation of the positive effects of a culturally diverse nation (Brett & Moran, 2011; Moran, 2011; Purdie & Wilss, 2007). By contrast, other findings have highlighted perspectives that either oppose or raise concerns about multiculturalism.
and cultural diversity (Laughland-Booÿ, et al, 2017; Markus, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010; Spry & Hornsey, 2007; Betts, 2005, 2002; Bulbeck, 2004; Dunn, et al, 2004; Ho, et al, 1994; Ho, 1990). For example, Yitmen and Verkuyten (2018) found that high levels of support for multiculturalism were correlated with positive views about asylum seekers, and those who opposed multiculturalism were more likely to also demonstrate unwelcoming views about asylum seekers.

Prior research concerned with perspectives about Australia’s capacity to settle asylum seekers has revealed mixed findings - while some people believe the nation’s refugee intake is too high, others have advocated for an increase of the number accepted (Louis, et al, 2007; Ho, et al, 1994). Studies have shown that discussions of this issue have often included discursive themes about the need to ‘look after our own people first’ (Laughland-Booÿ, et al, 2017; Fozdar & Low, 2015; Laughland-Booÿ, et al, 2014; O’Doherty & Augoustinos; 2008b; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Chiswick & Miller, 1999). For example, in research by Laughland-Booÿ, et al (2014), some participants argued that resources currently used for assessing asylum claims should be redirected to policies that look after Australia’s ‘own citizens.’ In later research, Laughland-Booÿ, et al (2017) found that many participants voiced the view that ‘boat people’ pose an economic threat to the country. For some of these participants, the costs associated with supporting asylum seekers were viewed as unfair to Australians.

Prior research has also revealed that views concerning the impact of accepting asylum seekers are sometimes constructed in terms of how refugees can contribute to the host country from an economic standpoint. For example, Bansak, et al (2016) presented 18,000 eligible voters across 15 European countries with varied demographic profiles of asylum-seekers, asking them to evaluate each profile.
Results revealed that asylum seeker profiles containing attributes that suggest high employability were met with the most favourable responses. Participants were therefore more likely to voice welcoming attitudes toward asylum seekers with experience in high-skill occupations than those who were unemployed (Bansak, et al, 2016). These findings indicate that community acceptance of asylum-seekers may be contingent upon the perceived value of their economic contributions to the host nation, rather than a humanitarian impulse.

2.4.2 Assimilation & nationalism

Worldwide, the concept of nationalism has permeated discussions about migration and seeking asylum. Billig (1995) pointed out that nationalist rhetoric often underlies prejudicial attitudes, serving to validate positions that favour the exclusion of out-groups. Some Australian scholars have suggested that even in discussions that endorse migrants holding onto their cultural values and practices, they are still often constructed as threats to national identity (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010; Dandy, 2009; Dunn, et al, 2004). Asylum seekers, for example, have often been framed as threats to national sovereignty within political, public and community discourse (Lueck et al., 2015; Louis, et al, 2013; Every & Augoustinos, 2008a, 2008b; Nickerson & Louis, 2008; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Some prior research has found that those who identify strongly as ‘Australian’ typically express less favourable views than those with a weaker connection to Australian national identity (Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018; Anderson & Ferguson, 2017; Louis, et al, 2013; Nickerson & Louis, 2008; Pedersen, et al, 2005). The literature has also revealed assimilation as a strong theme, with discussions routinely referencing a desire for migrants and/or asylum seekers to ‘fit in’ with the host nation’s customs and beliefs (Laughland-Booŷ, et al, 2017; Nolan, et al, 2016;
Fozdar & Low, 2015; Goodman & Burke, 2011; Pember, 2008; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 1999). For instance, Nolan, et al (2016) used textual analysis to examine letters to the editor in response to Victorian newspaper stories about Sudanese Australians published in 2007. These letters were found to reiterate and extend discourses of ‘integrationism’ that framed effective multiculturalism as contingent upon assimilation. For instance, it was reported that many of the letters problematised Sudanese Australians for failing to ‘integrate’ into Australian society (Nolan, et al, 2016).

Laughland-Booû, et al (2014) also identified a prevalence of concerns regarding assimilation of new arrivals in Australia, reporting that many of their participants believed asylum seekers bring cultural practices to Australia that do not align with the ‘Australian way of life’. These participants were more inclined to identify strongly as ‘being Australian’ that those who did not express such concerns. Similarly, in research by McKay, et al (2012), some participants argued that asylum seekers are reluctant to change various aspects of their culture (e.g. their traditional dress and religious beliefs), which poses a serious threat to Australia’s national identity. Some of these participants talked about ‘basic standards’ that people seeking refuge in Australia should adhere to, including learning to speak English, and possessing employment skills that could advance Australia’s economy (McKay, et al, 2012). McKay, et al also found that some of their sample referred to refugees forming ‘enclaves’ in certain areas - this was offered as evidence to support the notion that people seeking asylum may not be willing to integrate into Australian society. In their analysis of Australian focus group data, Fozdar and Low (2015) found that opposition to Muslims settling in Australia was often framed as arguments that Muslims must adapt their values and cultural practices to “become
Australian” (p. 539). This supports findings from Pedersen and Hartley (2011), that negative attitudes about Islamic migration are often discussed in the context of Muslims failing to ‘conform’ to Australian values.

In contrast to studies that have uncovered nationalist discourse in discussions that oppose people seeking asylum in Australia, some research has shown conceptions of Australia’s national identity as open and culturally diverse (Cheng, 2017; Laughland-Booÿ, et al, 2017; Cheng, 2013b; Brett & Moran, 2011; Moran, 2011; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Purdie & Wilss, 2007). For instance, Laughland-Booÿ, et al (2017) found that nationalist discourse about seeking asylum can serve vastly different purposes. For instance, some of their participants drew upon strong themes of assimilation, arguing the need for newcomers to ‘fit in’ and respect ‘the Australian way’, whilst others maintained that being Australian requires one to value multiculturalism and cultural diversity. For the latter group, inclusion was seen as a key feature of ‘Australianness’, and terms such as ‘open’ and ‘accepting’ were often used during these discussions (Laughland-Booÿ, et al, 2017).

Likewise, Purdie and Wilss (2007) found that many of their participants framed Australia’s national identity in terms of inclusivity, espousing a more welcoming perspective on multiculturalism than traditional themes of nationalism documented in prior research (Austin & Fozdar, 2018; Fozdar & Low, 2015; Brett & Moran, 2011; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Saxton, 2003).

Every and Augoustinos (2008b) also reported mixed findings regarding the application of nationalism in discussions about asylum seekers. Their research showed that arguments drawing upon notions of Australian national identity were voiced by those who demonstrated both welcoming and oppositional perspectives about seeking asylum. Furthermore, the popular Australian notion of the ‘fair go’
2.4.3 Islamophobia

There is a growing body of research revealing hostility toward Muslims as a key feature of the national discourse regarding migration and refugee resettlement in Australia (Morgan & Poynting, 2016; McKay, et al, 2012; Noble, et al, 2012; Pedersen & Hartley, 2012; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Dunn, at al, 2007; Ho, 2007; Humphrey, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Poynting, 2006; Clyne, 2005; Dreher, 2005; Dreher, 2003; Dunn, et al, 2004; Poynting, et al, 2004; Turner, 2003; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Pickering, 2001). Since September 11, 2001, Muslims residing in western nations have been subjected to increasingly hostile treatment and intensive ‘othering’ (Briskman, 2015; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Perry & Poynting, 2006; Poynting & Mason, 2006; Clyne, 2015; Turner, 2003). Akbarzadeh (2016) argued that this ‘othering’ has resulted from a distinct failure of Australia’s political leaders to model inclusive and respectful discourse about Muslims. According to Akbarzadeh, this has facilitated the growing prevalence of Islamophobia, further polarising community relations and deepening feelings of exclusion amongst Muslims living in Australia. Likewise, Turner (2003) posited that the treatment that
Muslims have been subjected to in Australia is typical of a desire to legitimise their exclusion rather than to manage their assimilation:

We are characterising them as a treacherous and primitive gene pool, demonising their religion and cultural practices, refusing our commonality with them as human beings, accepting their placement in detention centres, and turning a blind eye to breaches of their civil liberties in the name of a spurious national emergency (p. 414).

Islamophobia has also manifested itself in violence toward Muslims in Australia. For example, Dreher (2003) documented racially-motivated physical and verbal attacks on Muslim women following 9/11. Another key example of hostility toward Muslims in Australia is the Cronulla riot of December 2005. On this day, approximately 5000 white Australians congregated at Cronulla beach in Sydney, New South Wales and violently attacked people of Middle Eastern appearance (Poynting, 2006). Poynting described the riot as an alcohol-fuelled attempt by members of the dominant ethnic group to ‘reclaim their beach’ by physically and verbally abusing Lebanese Australians. The event was promoted with a text message campaign initiated by far-right white supremacists, which contained racially vilifying language (Poynting, 2006). The Daily Telegraph reprinted one of the text messages in the lead up to the riot: “bring your mates and let’s show them that this is our beach and they are never welcome. Let’s kill these boys” (Poynting, 2006, p. 87). Racist slogans were chanted during the riot and any person suspected of having a Middle Eastern ethnicity was physically attacked.

Opinion-polling in Australia has revealed strong anti-Muslim sentiments dating back to the 1980s (McAllister & Moore, 1989). For example, the results of McAllister and Moore’s (1989) Social Distance Surveys indicated that Muslims and Arabs were more frequently constructed as ‘out-groups’ than any other racial minority in Australia. Recent literature and responses to world events in the years since these surveys suggest that little has changed. It has been argued that 9/11
occurred at a critical time as it provided a new context for the exclusion of asylum seekers in Australia, with the concept of ‘border protection’ becoming synonymous with exclusion of the Muslim ‘other’ (Colic-Peisker, et al, 2016; Clyne, 2005). Consequently, asylum seeker policies became embedded within the ‘war on terror’ discourse (Osuri & Banerjee, 2004). Numerous scholars have suggested that such discourse can be explained by ‘moral panic’ and Australia’s ‘fear of the other’ (Morgan & Poynting, 2016; Martin, 2015; Marr, 2013; Humphrey, 2007; Devetak, 2004; Gale, 2004; Slattery, 2003; McMaster, 2002; Cohen, 2002; Pickering, 2001).

Marr (2013) argued that Australia’s ‘fear of the other’ has resulted in Muslims becoming scapegoats for a host of social, economic, legal, and political problems facing the country. Similarly, Martin (2015) emphasised that moral panics are largely a function of Australia’s pervasive ‘war on terror’ discourse, which constructs Muslims as terrorists, or ‘transnational folk devils’. According to Poynting (2006), the ‘folk demon’ of the Muslim ‘other’ is a social construct that enables people to regard followers of the Muslim faith as a terror threat who wish to inflict backward, uncivilised, and criminal principles on Australian society. Many studies have uncovered a tendency for Muslim migrants and refugees to be labelled as ‘terrorists’ (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Klocker & Dunn, 2003), ‘criminals’ (Poynting, 2006; Pickering, 2001), and generally having values that are at odds with those of the Australian population (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007; Dunn, et al, 2004).

In 2007, a poll was conducted both before and after a conference run by Issues Deliberation Australia entitled *Australia Deliberates*, which was focused on Muslims living in the Australian community. This poll revealed that 49% of survey respondents believe that terrorism is a result of Muslim values being incompatible with those of western cultures (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007). Following the
conference, this figure decreased to 22%. Furthermore, prior to the deliberations, 44% of participants believed that national security in Australia is negatively impacted by Muslim immigration and this figure dropped to 23% after the conference (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007). These findings indicated that while many Australians expressed the belief that Muslims pose a security threat to the Australian community, such beliefs reduced significantly after the presentation of information about Islam.

In research by Dunn, et al (2007), the Attitudes towards Islam Survey measured the extent of community fear of Islam in Australia. Results indicated that 41% of participants believed that Islam posed a minor threat to Australia, with 15% perceiving a major threat (Dunn, et al, 2007). In earlier research, Dunn, et al (2004) conducted a telephone survey with NSW and Queensland residents, finding that many respondents believed that Muslims and migrants from the Middle East have no place in Australian society. Conceptions of Islam as ‘taking over Australia’ were also prevalent, with some participants expressing fears that Muslims wish to convert non-Muslim Australians to abandon their existing values in favour of following Islamic practices.

Interestingly, while prior research has identified concerns about assimilation and integration as key components of anti-Muslim discourse in Australia (e.g. Fozdar & Low, 2015), there is some evidence to suggest that negative discourses about Muslims actually impact their ability to integrate into Australian society in the first place. For example, Sohrabi & Farquharson’s (2016) interviews with 30 Muslim community leaders revealed that negative media coverage of Muslims was seen as a major impediment to their effective integration in Australia. These participants argued that the implementation of more positive media representations of Muslims is crucial for addressing this problem. This is an important finding as it not only connects the successful integration of Muslim Australians to negative views about
Islam, but it also suggests that their integration is impacted by media representations. In sum, the available research suggests that discussions about seeking asylum (and migration more generally) have frequently centred around concerns about Islam, with such concerns often prioritised over the potentially harmful outcomes of Islamophobia on Muslim populations (Dreher, 2018), and potentially exacerbating these negative outcomes (Sohrabi & Farquharson, 2016).

2.5 Australia’s Asylum Seeker Policies & International Law

Despite being a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951), the matter of Australia’s international legal obligations to accept refugees remains a contentious issue in national discourse (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). Every and Augoustinos (2008b) found that, when challenging anti-asylum seeker sentiments, people often refer to Australia’s legal obligations to assess refugee claims. Many of these discourses were voiced during discussions of Australia’s refugee policies, often with respect to the feasibility of the nation’s mandatory detention regime for asylum seekers who arrive by boat (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b).

Mandatory detention has received considerable attention in research, policy, and debate in Australia. Prior findings have indicated a combination of community support and opposition to the policy (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Klocker, 2004; Betts, 2001). Welch and Schuster (2005) argued that support for exclusionary policies such as mandatory detention often occurs in conjunction with societal categorisations of asylum seekers as threats to social order. The ‘threat’ discourse has been found to feature heavily in Australian discussions about mandatory detention. For example, in a study by Louis, et al (2007), people tended to advocate for harsh policy approaches when they felt asylum seekers posed a threat to Australia. A similar finding was reported by Hartley and
Pedersen (2007), who found that those who saw asylum seekers as a threat to the stability of Australian society were more likely to support harsh policies than those who perceived no such threat.

The notion of ‘control’ has also been identified as a common discourse among Australians who hold reservations about asylum seekers (McKenzie & Hasmath, 2013; Every, 2008; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Cronin, 1993). Marr and Wilkinson (2003) proposed that the ‘control’ idea is born out of a widespread fear of asylum seekers and their perceived threat. This need for ‘control’ in the face of a perceived threat was a common perspective uncovered in research by McKay, et al (2012), who found that almost half of their sample referred to Australia’s mandatory detention policy as ‘too soft’. In addition to detention, several of these participants advocated for more stringent security and health checks, and reduced access to welfare for people seeking asylum (McKay, et al, 2012).

In addition to the ‘control’ and ‘threat’ discourses, support for deterrent policies for people seeking asylum has often been grounded in the ‘safety at sea’ principle. According to Grewcock (2014), a series of mass drowning incidents between 2009 and 2012 led to public discourse about Australia’s refugee policies being centred around a need to ‘stop the boats’ and thwart the people smuggling trade. These arguments served to rationalise increasingly harsh policies for boat arrivals by drawing upon notions of ‘humanity’ to drive the ‘safety at sea’ message to justify the securitisation of the nation’s borders (Austin & Fozdar, 2018). Suhnan, et al (2012) found that this focus on safety served as a common strategy for justifying support for harsh asylum seeker policies.

It is important to note that some studies have found strong community opposition to the Australian government’s policy of mandatory detention (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). In most
instances, detention has been framed as inhumane, with discourses most commonly
drawing upon themes of ‘compassion’ as opposed to ‘control’ or ‘deterrence’ (Fozdar
& Pedersen, 2013; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). However, in McKay’s (2012)
research, some participants who opposed mandatory detention did not express
concerns from a humanitarian standpoint. Instead, these participants suggested that
all asylum seekers should be ‘sent back’ to their countries of origin. A number of
these participants argued that detention was a waste of resources, mirroring Klocker’s
(2004) finding that people often hold concerns about Australian tax payers being
burdened with the costs of detaining asylum seekers. Collectively, these findings
suggest that people with both welcoming and non-welcoming views toward asylum
seekers often oppose mandatory detention, as such opposition can stem from vastly
different concerns (i.e. the humanity and compassion frame versus the ‘turn them
back’ perspective).

2.6 Summary

The research discussed in this chapter provides important contextual
information about how asylum seekers have been constructed in community
discourse. Prior literature has shown that negative perspectives about asylum seekers
have been a pervasive feature of discussions about Australia’s refugee policies and
obligations over the past three decades. These findings also suggest that such views
are commonly expressed while voicing support for policies that punish or exclude
people seeking asylum. Given the policy consequences of community perspectives
about seeking asylum, it is crucial to understand how these perspectives may be
formed, reinforced, challenged, or transformed. One way to shed more light on this is
to explore how people interpret and evaluate information they are exposed to about
asylum seekers. As limited Australian research to date has sought to explore this, it is
difficult to identify and implement potential mechanisms for addressing how seeking asylum is understood, evaluated and responded to by the Australian population. However, some Australian research has examined media discourses about asylum seekers, and some international research has investigated audience responses to news coverage on the topic. The following two chapters therefore discuss what is currently known about news constructions of asylum seekers, and audience perceptions of these discourses.
3 Literature Review Part 2: Asylum Seekers in News Discourse

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed some commonly observed views about asylum seekers, however it is important to consider how people arrive at these perspectives. The news is an influential tool in the construction of public opinion and in turn, plays an important role in the framing of public discourse, including attitudes about people seeking asylum (Croston & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Fleras & Kunz, 2001). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Australia is highly polarised about the issue of people seeking asylum (Martin, 2015; McDonald, 2011; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2006). This polarisation can be further exacerbated by news discourses that paint asylum seekers in a negative light. A consequence of these discourses is their potential to shape and reinforce public perspectives, resulting in widespread support for harsh and exclusionary policies that place vulnerable people in danger. Numerous scholars have addressed this issue, with a growing body of research examining media discourses about asylum seekers.

Findings to date have revealed the following prevalent discourses in news coverage about asylum seekers: illegality and deviancy (McKay, et al, 2011; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007; Gale, 2004; Mares, 2002; Pickering, 2001); threat (Lippi, et al, 2017; Goodman, Sirriyeh & McMahon, 2017; Lueck, Due & Augoustinos, 2015; Nolan, Farquharson, Politoff & Marjoribanks, 2011; Young, 2011; Dreher, 2010; Dreher, 2003; Saxton, 2003); control and restriction (Sulaiman-Hill, et al, 2011; Donald, 2011; KhosraviNik, 2010; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Nickels, 2007; Speers, 2001); and humanitarian concerns (Cooper, et al, 2017; Ellis, Fulton & Scott, 2016; Nolan, et al, 2011; Gale, 2004). Prior research has also found...
that asylum seekers are rarely given the opportunity to contribute to news coverage about their experiences (Cock, et al, 2018; Cooper, et al, 2017; Buchanan & Grillo, 2004). Collectively, the literature has demonstrated that people seeking asylum have been subjected to dehumanisation in news discourse, both through the manner with which they are described, and their exclusion from the news-making process. This chapter discusses the existing research in more detail. It is concluded that while these findings provide useful contextual information about how asylum seekers have been constructed in the media, the literature to date has not discursively explored how Australian news discourses are interpreted, conceptualised and evaluated by audiences.

3.2 News Representations of People Seeking Asylum

3.2.1 Deviancy & threat

As discussed in the previous chapter, perspectives about the perceived illegality of seeking asylum have been found to feature heavily in public discourse about this topic. There is some evidence to suggest that similar constructions of asylum seekers are also common in media discourse. For example, Saxton (2003) looked at how asylum seekers have been constructed by Australian newspapers, finding dominant discourses of illegality and threat. According to Saxton, these discourses were commonly employed within nationalist rhetoric, whereby punitive policy direction was constructed as a necessary means of preserving ‘national identity’. Similarly, in their analysis of extracts from Australian newspaper clippings, television reports, radio broadcasts, and online news content, O’Doherty and Lecouteur (2007) found that asylum seekers were often categorised as ‘illegal immigrants’. O’Doherty and Lecouteur reported that this term was universally applied during arguments in support of “sending them home” (p. 6).
the illegality principle provided a means of emphasising that asylum seekers have no right to be settled in Australia.

Every (2006) argued that the threat discourse serves to minimise the fact that many asylum seekers are escaping life-threatening situations themselves, and therefore serves as a useful discursive strategy for achieving public support for exclusionary asylum seeker policies. Pickering voiced a similar perspective following her analysis of two Australian news publications (i.e. *The Brisbane Courier Mail* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*), which revealed that asylum seekers were routinely criminalised and constructed as a threat to Australia. Similar findings were uncovered by Klocker and Dunn (2003) in their content analysis of government statements and newspaper articles published in *The Advertiser* and *The Sunday Mail*. Both publications echoed the negative sentiments that had dominated political discourse from the Howard Government, with 90% of the political commentary and 76% of the newspaper articles framing asylum seekers with dominant themes of ‘threat’ and ‘criminality’ (Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Research by Lippi, et al (2017) revealed similar findings, showing that in 162 Australian newspapers, asylum seekers were often portrayed as ‘threats’ that Australia needs to be protected from.

In more recent research, Ellis, et al (2016) investigated the framing of asylum seekers by Australian newspapers during their coverage of the 2014 Manus Island detention centre riots, which resulted in the death of 24-year-old Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati (and injuries to 77 other detainees). Results revealed that *The Australian* predominantly framed asylum seekers as a threat to the nation. In McLaren and Patil’s (2016) research, a critical discourse approach was used to examine 100 Australian print articles focused on the plight of asylum seeker children. Findings revealed a dominant discourse of deviancy, usually when discussing the conduct of the children’s parents/guardians. Furthermore, most of the
reports framed Australia’s policy of mandatory detention as a response to the risk asylum seekers pose to the community, constructing them as undeserving, illegal, and prone to disease (McLaren & Patil, 2016). Similar findings were reported by Mares’ (2002), whose research also revealed dominant discourses of refugees carrying ‘infectious diseases.’

Many of these Australian findings mirror those of international research. For example, in Canadian research, Henry and Tator (2002) examined 61 news articles, identifying the following recurring themes: that Canada is receiving floods of ‘boat people’ who want to take advantage of the country’s lenient refugee policies; that Canada’s lax refugee policies increase the risk of terrorism; and that there is insufficient screening for immigrants and asylum seekers at Canada’s borders, resulting in citizens facing increased exposure to diseases. More recently, Lawlor and Tolley (2017) reported that Canadian print media coverage often constructed asylum seekers as ‘taking advantage’ of social programs. In the UK, Baker and McEnery (2005) found that newspapers commonly framed asylum seekers as ‘invaders’ and ‘pests’, and Gabrielatos and Baker (2008), found that asylum seekers were often described by British tabloid publications as ‘illegal’. Similarly, research by Donald (2011) found that national UK news content predominantly associated seeking asylum with criminality.

In Europe, van Dijk’s analysis of 1980s media representations of Tamil asylum seekers revealed that media commentary portrayed them as potential terror threats (van Dijk, 1991). More recently, in Finland, Pantti and Ojala (2018) found that while journalists often sympathised with asylum seekers, they routinely constructed them as suspicious and untrustworthy. Similarly, in their analysis of German press coverage, Holzberg, Kolbe & Zabarowski (2018) found that press discourses often drew upon themes of security and threat to construct a figure of the
‘undeserving’ refugee. On the whole, the findings discussed here indicate that discourses of threat and deviancy are common features of both Australian and international news constructions of asylum seekers. Given the plethora of studies concerned with public attitudes that have reported similar discourses (Laughland-Boo'y, et al, 2014; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Pickering, 2004), these findings further illustrate the need to examine how members of the public interpret, conceptualise, and evaluate these news discourses.

3.2.2 Control & restriction

Another key discourse identified during examinations of Australian media representations of asylum seekers is the discourse of ‘control’, whereby the issue is discussed either in terms of the nation’s ability to restrict arrivals, or by the potential ‘burden’ that asylum seekers place on host countries. For instance, in Pickering’s (2001) analysis of Australian newspapers, most discussions of the issue were framed in the context of managing numbers and maintaining control over Australia’s borders, rather than focusing on the plight of asylum seekers. Similarly, in research by Sulaiman-Hill, et al (2011), news discourses were found to focus primarily on the ‘burden’ of managing asylum seeker arrivals.

International research has painted a similar picture. In her analysis of Welsh coverage, Speers (2001) found the debate around asylum seekers was typically framed as an ‘official’ issue requiring ‘management’ by the government. Thus, rather than focusing on the experiences and humanitarian needs of asylum seekers, the issue was constructed as a problem that required intervention. In Luxembourg, Nickels (2007) examined asylum seeker discourses published by media outlets between 1993 and 2000, finding that frames of ‘control and ‘restriction’ were the most prominent. More recently, an analysis of Danish print media revealed that most
reports focused on the negative economic impact of seeking asylum (Hovden, Mjelde & Gripsrud, 2018).

In the UK, Donald (2011) found that the media often frame asylum seekers in terms of a need to ‘control’ immigration numbers. Furthermore, in research by Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) the UK’s capacity to manage refugee numbers was a dominant theme, as evidenced by the frequent use of terminology such as ‘flooding’ and ‘streaming’, implying that the nation was experiencing an inundation of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers were also routinely framed as an economic burden via repeated references to their perceived welfare entitlements and competition with UK citizens for jobs. The ‘burden’ discourse was also uncovered by KhosraviNik (2010), whose critical discourse analysis of British newspapers revealed dominant constructions of asylum seekers as a strain on the country’s resources. Similarly, Philo, et al (2013) found that UK television reports about asylum seekers routinely constructed them as a welfare burden.

It is worth noting that some research has suggested that certain events have impacted media discourses of control and restriction, causing them to shift to a more compassionate and humanitarian framing of asylum seekers. For instance, Wallace’s (2018) examination of Canadian news coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis revealed that asylum seekers were constructed within frames of ‘conflict’ and ‘threat’ in coverage prior to Aylan Kurdi’s death, however use of these frames significant decreased in the weeks following the incident:

The emergence of the Kurdi photo and the ensuing efforts to increase refugee intake stimulated news stories that more closely examined refugees’ families, children, hardships and the services provided them (p. 209).

A similar finding was recently reported by Parker, Naper and Goodman (2018), who compared British, Norwegian and Australian news representations of the Syrian
refugee crisis both before and after the photographs of Aylan Kurdi surfaced. Findings revealed that the photographs led to a more sympathetic portrayal of asylum seekers that drew upon frames of humanitarianism and compassion (Parker, et al, 2018). Goodman, et al (2017) reported a similar shift, finding that after Aylan Kurdi’s story was reported, the UK media’s framing of the Syrian crisis shifted from focusing on concerns about the impact of migration to more humanitarian concerns about the plight of refugees. Interestingly however, this humanitarian frame reverted to a control and restriction frame after the Paris attacks in November 2015.

These findings indicate that Australian and international news representations of asylum seekers have routinely constructed the issue in terms of a need to control and restrict arrivals. As with the deviancy and threat discourses, similar discourses have also been found to be prevalent in public discussions of the issue (Laughland-Booý, et al, 2017; O’Doherty & Augoustinos; 2008b; Louis, et al, 2007; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005). This further highlights the importance of exploring how members of the public respond to these kinds of discourses when presented by the media.

### 3.2.3 Humanity & compassion

In addition to research describing predominantly negative asylum seeker news discourses, some studies have found positive news portrayals of people seeking asylum that draw upon more compassionate frames to construct the issue. For example, Gale’s (2004) critical discourse analysis of content published by national and regional newspapers during the 2001 Federal Election revealed that Australia was often conceptualised as nation with a shared humanity with the ‘other’. This discourse was often present in arguments that called for more humane asylum seeker policies. Similar themes were uncovered by Nolan, et al (2011), whose analysis of
Australian newspaper coverage of Sudanese refugees revealed that the nation’s obligation to accept and support these refugees was commonly featured.

Frames of compassion and humanity were also evident in research by Ellis, et al (2016), who found that The Guardian Australia’s coverage of the Manus Island riots focused mostly on asylum seekers’ safety in the detention centre, depicting them through a humanitarian frame. According to Every (2008), this kind of frame occurs when asylum seekers are constructed as victims as opposed to threats. This was also supported by Lippi, et al (2017), who found that Australian newspapers often constructed asylum seekers as ‘victims’ in need of protection. Some Australian research has also found that news depictions that draw upon similar themes of compassion and humanity often frame asylum seekers in terms of their positive impact on the nation. For example, Cooper, et al (2017) found that many newspaper articles focused on asylum seekers’ personal stories and potential contributions to Australia. In a New Zealand study, Sulaiman-Hill, et al (2011) found that refugees and asylum seekers were often portrayed in a way that celebrated their contributions to society. Similarly, Hoyden, et al (2018) found that Swedish media often focused on the positive outcomes of accepting asylum seekers.

Despite the more compassionate and humanising news representations of asylum seekers discussed above, some scholars have emphasised the absence of asylum seekers’ inclusion in news coverage about their plight (Cock, et al, 2018; Cooper, et al, 2017; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). For example, Cooper, et al (2017) pointed out that in the Australian coverage they analysed, very few asylum seekers had a ‘voice’ in these representations, indicating “a lack of agency for refugees to frame their own depictions” (p. 83). A similar finding was also uncovered by Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017), whose examination of European press coverage of refugees revealed that very few of the reports included refugees’
names or any information about their backgrounds and experiences. As a result, refugees emerged from these narratives as anonymous and unskilled ‘others.’ Additionally, as the representations of the refugees were dictated by official, Western sources, they were not able to speak for themselves in the coverage (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).

The research discussed in this section has yielded nuanced and complex findings. One the one hand, these findings are promising as they indicate instances of news coverage that depict asylum seekers within more compassionate and humanising frames (i.e. by focusing on their needs and rights from a humanitarian standpoint and discussing the potential for their acceptance to result in positive outcomes for the host nation). However, the literature has also highlighted that asylum seekers’ voices are frequently absent from news representations. Such omission of their lived experiences and perspectives may result in dehumanisation for asylum seekers by way of their exclusion from news-making processes.

3.3 Summary

The research discussed in this chapter has shown that while some news discourses about people seeking asylum have represented them in a negative manner, others have presented the issue using more sympathetic frames. The lack of asylum-seeker voices in news representations has also been highlighted, indicating that the group most affected by asylum seeker policies have been excluded from contributing to information about their own plight. While the existing findings have provided valuable insight into some prevalent news discourses about asylum seekers, research concerned with the public’s engagement and perspectives concerning news representations of the issue remains limited. To understand the potential impact of news discourses reported by prior literature, one must examine public engagement
with, and responses to, these news discourses. The following chapter therefore
discusses prior findings concerned with how media consumers access, interpret, and
evaluate news content. This final component of the literature review also summarises
what is known thus far about how Australian media audiences conceptualise news
coverage about asylum seekers, highlighting the evident research gaps in this area.
4 Literature Review Part 3: News Engagement & Reception

4.1 Introduction

The findings discussed in the previous chapter have shed some light on how issues relating to asylum seekers are communicated to the public via mass communications, however, little is known about how media audiences engage with, interpret, and subsequently evaluate news discourses about people seeking asylum. Understanding news audiences is of critical importance, especially in research concerned with how audiences conceptualise news representations of important social issues. To investigate how news content is perceived, it is important to first identify the types of news people engage with, the motivating factors driving their news consumption, and whether individual differences may account for certain preferences and habits. This chapter therefore begins by summarising existing literature concerned with how people engage with news content, before discussing how audiences perceive news discourses, including those about asylum seekers.

With respect to audiences’ engagement with news content, prior literature suggests that most people: receive information about asylum seekers predominantly from news sources (Donald, 2011; Pedersen, et al, 2005); engage with news content on a regular basis (Park, Fisher, Fuller & Lee, 2018; Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017; ACMA, 2011; Phillips, et al, 2008); consult with a variety of sources and different mediums, including television broadcasts, print publications, radio, online news, and social media (Park, et al, 2018; Szostek, 2018; Young, 2011; ACMA, 2011); and are autonomous and selective when engaging with the news (Park, et al, 2018; Peralta, 2014; Ewart, 2014; Wonneberger, et al, 2011). While few studies have focused specifically on audience perspectives regarding news content about asylum seekers, some research has shed light on this. The key findings reported to date are: many
people do not trust the media yet regularly engage with news content (Park, et al, 2018; Swart, et al, 2016; Lancaster, et al, 2012; Vidali, 2010); audiences routinely cite negative content and a lack of reliability as issues impacting their trust in the news (McCollough, et al, 2017; Lancaster, 2012; Vidali, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2004; Philo, 2002); political views and pre-existing beliefs can affect how news messages are perceived (Coe, Tewksbury & Bond, et al, 2008; Morris, 2007); and some Australian news content has incited ‘moral panic’ and further exacerbated unwelcoming attitudes toward people seeking asylum (McKay, et al, 2011; van Dijk, 1991). This chapter discusses these findings to highlight what is known thus far and point out aspects in need of further enquiry, concluding that limited attention has been paid to how audiences respond to news discourses focused on asylum seekers in Australia. This evident gap in the existing literature highlights the need to further investigate Australian community discourses concerning media representations of asylum seekers from an audience reception and critical discourse perspective.

4.2 News Engagement

4.2.1 News as a key source of information about asylum seekers

News discourses constitute a major source of information in Australia (Denemark, 2005). A 2007 survey by the Australian Press Council (APC) found that the majority of respondents identified news as their main source of information about current events and issues. There is evidence to suggest that this finding extends to information about people seeking asylum (Donald, 2011; Pedersen, et al, 2005). For instance, in Donald’s (2011) research in the UK, most participants cited television news as a primary source of information about asylum seekers. In Australia, Pedersen, et al, (2005) found that many of their participants reported that their exposure to information about people seeking asylum came solely from news
representations. Given these findings, it is important to ascertain what kinds of news sources Australians are engaging with, especially with respect to their stance on seeking asylum. Doing so enables the consideration of important contextual factors during any subsequent analyses of audiences’ perspectives regarding news discourses about the topic.

4.2.2 General news engagement trends

In the 2007 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Phillips, et al (2008) found that over 80 percent of their sample stated that ‘catching up’ with news and current affairs was a key part of their daily routine. More recently, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford conducted an online questionnaire with media audiences from 37 countries, who provided their news consumption preferences and views regarding the trustworthiness of news content (Park, et al, 2018). Results indicated that 56% of respondents accessed news content more than once a day, showing an increase of 15% from 2016. In Australia, the frequency of news consumption had increased significantly since 2016 (Park, et al, 2018). Australians have been found to use a combination of digital and traditional media platforms to access news (Park, et al, 2018; Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017; ACMA, 2011; APC, 2007).

Survey and focus group data collected by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in 2011 revealed that audiences reported regular engagement with news content via multiple news mediums and organisations (ACMA, 2011). This use of multiple sources has been coined ‘news grazing’ (Morris & Forgette, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2004). In US research, news grazing behaviour has been linked to a desire to find the best news source on a given issue and to avoid exposure to unfavourable content, such as advertisements and
perspectives the person disagrees with (Walker & Bellamy, 1991; Walker, Bellamy & Traudt, 1993; Wenner & Dennehy, 1993). In Russia, Szostek (2018) found that ‘news grazing’ often resulted from dissatisfaction with the 'propagandistic' nature of news content and thus, audiences tended to switch between media types and sources to gain a more accurate understanding of a given event or topic.

### 4.2.3 The changing nature of news consumption

Quantitative studies and ratings data indicate that news engagement preferences in Australia have changed significantly since the 1990s (Park, et al, 2018; Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017; Turner, 2001; Casimir, 1998). While some findings have suggested that television news engagement has been steadily declining (Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017; Turner, 2001; Casimir, 1998), 2018 survey data indicated that television constituted the main news source for 36% of Australian respondents (Park, et al, 2018). The most popular news channels were Channel 7 (41%), ABC (40%) and Channel 9 (36%). A similar finding has been observed for newspapers, with the Australian Press Council (APC) (2007) reporting that whilst readership of most Australian newspaper publications declined between 2006 and 2007, rates increased for four newspapers (i.e. *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *The Courier-Mail*). More recently, Park, et al (2018) reported that only one quarter (23%) of their respondents reported using newspapers. Additionally, respondents in rural areas were almost twice as likely to access print news (32%) than those residing in urban areas (17%). With respect to radio news, 2008 survey data from Commercial Radio Australia (2018) found that 80% of Australians engage with commercial radio every week, compared with only 10% who engage with talkback radio.
In recent years, the internet has been found to be a popular news source worldwide (Szostek, 2018; Vidali, 2010; APC, 2007; Nguyen & Western, 2007; Pew Research Center, 1998). According to Webster (2011), digital technologies enable access to an unlimited amount of media information, allowing people to move quickly and seamlessly from one source of news to another. Furthermore, users have greater control over their engagement with online news than other mediums as they can be selective about when they receive information online and choose the specific topics they wish to be informed about (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). The available Australian data indicates that online news engagement is increasing (Park, et al, 2018; Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017). For instance, Park, et al (2018) found that access to online news (82%) has overtaken use of traditional, offline sources (79%). However, more Australians (53%) claimed that traditional media was still their primary source of news as opposed to online sources, which accounted for 47% of respondents.

In terms of how online news content is accessed and selected, a number of studies have found that social media serves as a common mechanism (Nelson & Webster, 2017; McCollough, Crowell & Napoli, 2017; Mitchell, Gottfried, Guskin, & Holcomb, 2013; Vidali, 2010; Costera Meijer, 2007). It has been posited that a person’s online and offline social networks create an opportunity for them to view news content as meaningful (Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015). In the US, Mitchell, et al (2013) demonstrated that people who spend more than one hour per day using Facebook are exposed to more news content (67%) than people who use the platform less often (47%). More recently, focus groups conducted by McCollough, et al (2017) found that many people rely on social networks to obtain news, citing social media as common means of gathering and filtering information from numerous sources. Similarly, Nelson and Webster (2017) observed that online news sites were
frequently navigated to from Facebook, indicating that Facebook acts as a ‘front page’ for many people who engage with online news. In Australia, mixed results have been observed. For example, Park, et al (2018) found that 52% of their sample reported using social media to access news content, with 17% citing social media as their main source of news – for these, Facebook was the most popular platform (accounting for 41% of these respondents), followed by YouTube (20%). However, despite the evident popularity of social media as a means of accessing news content, most respondents cited social media as their least trusted form of news, with many respondents claiming that social media has often led them to ‘fake news’. This apparent mistrust of social media as a source of news was also reflected in Alcorn and Buchanan’s 2017 survey of 2000 Australian media consumers, which reported a marked decrease in the use of social media to access news from the previous year.

The findings summarised above paint a picture of an active audience that engages with numerous types of news media on a regular basis to gain an accurate understanding of current events. The literature also shows how the emergence of ‘new media’ has marked a significant shift in news consumption habits, both in Australia and internationally, with more people opting to utilise digital platforms to access news content. However, these findings also suggest that this surge of digital news media engagement, including via social media platforms, has resulted in an increase in concerns about ‘fake news’, with many people expressing concerns about the trustworthiness of online news content, particularly when accessed via social media. This suggests a complex and nuanced relationship with ‘new media’, whereby audiences are often consuming news content despite mistrusting its source. This complex relationship with the media is unpacked further in section 4.4 of this chapter where Audience Reception research is explored in more detail.
4.3 News Engagement – Demographic Factors & Political Views

According to Morley (1980), audiences draw upon their personal experiences and backgrounds in order to interpret news content. In his famous study, The Nationwide Audience (1980), some of audience members’ demographic factors were found to influence whether they took a ‘dominant’, ‘negotiated; or ‘oppositional’ reading to the news texts they were exposed to. Morley utilised Hall’s (1980) Audience Reception framework, which is discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter of this thesis. Examining the demographic features of news audiences allows researchers to gain a clearer understanding of who is engaging with particular sources of news and what factors may be leading to their chosen sources of news media (Young, 2009). The following discussion outlines prior research findings with respect to news preferences as they relate to audiences’ gender, age, and political views.

4.3.1 Gender

Some notable trends have been observed by Australian researchers with regard to gender and news engagement. Park, et al (2018) found that general news access was considerably lower among women, with 65% of men compared with 48% of women reporting regular engagement with the news. Women were more likely to use social media to access news than males, and more inclined to regard social media as their main source of news, whereas males were more inclined to nominate newspapers and online content as their main source of news (Park, et al, 2018). However, Park, et al also reported that men are more prone than women to demonstrate active engagement with online news, such as sharing or commenting on articles via social media. In earlier research, the 2005 AuSSA survey indicated that women were more likely than men to engage with commercial television as a source
of news (Denemark, 2005). This was supported by Bean (2005), whose results showed that a disproportionate number of commercial television news viewers were women, whereas public broadcast viewers were more likely to identify as male.

4.3.2 Age

Prior research has uncovered some age-related differences with respect to audiences’ news engagement preferences and behaviours. For example, Park, et al (2018) found that younger respondents (aged 18-24 years) were the lightest news consumers in their sample, however, their engagement with news had markedly increased since 2016. Furthermore, some research has suggested that younger audiences’ engagement with traditional forms of news (i.e. television, print, and radio) is declining (Park, et al, 2018; Sternberg, 2006). For instance, Park, et al (2018) reported that a small minority of Australians under 35 utilise traditional media platforms as their main source of news. Instead, social media was found to be the main source of news for respondents aged 18-25 years. Younger audiences were also found to share online news content (via social media) more often than those aged over 35 (Park, et al, 2018). By contrast, news consumers aged over 55 years tended to stick to more traditional methods of news consumption. These findings have been supported by other studies that have found younger Australians to be heavier users of online news than people over the age of 55, who are instead more prone to engage with television news (Screen Australia, 2012; ACMA, 2011).

Young Australian audiences have also been reported to show a great deal of variation in their choices of news content. For instance, Lancaster, et al (2012) found that Australians aged 16–24 years engaged with multiple news sources at least once per week. In terms of the specific sources of media preferred by different age groups, Bennett, Gayo & Rowe’s (2018) analysis of TV news preferences revealed that older
Australians preferred to engage with commercial networks (i.e. Seven, Nine and Ten) than public broadcasters (i.e. SBS and ABC). This contrasts with findings reported by Young (2011), who found that ABC generally attracted older audiences.

4.3.3 Political views

In addition to age and gender differences, there is some evidence to suggest that audiences’ political views may impact their news engagement choices. Firstly, Park, et al (2018) found that news consumers in Australia are typically more politically polarised than other nations. Park, et al (2018) also found that those who identified as left-wing showed more interest in political news sources than centre-oriented audiences, who demonstrated the lowest interest in news and accessed it less often than both their left and right-wing counterparts. These findings align with earlier research by Bean (2005), who found that viewers of commercial television networks (e.g. Seven, Nine and Ten), which have also been found to contain less political content than public broadcasters (e.g. ABC and SBS), demonstrated mostly centre-right leaning views. Conversely, those who preferred public broadcast news demonstrated more left-wing viewpoints. Young’s (2011) analysis of data from Roy Morgan Research (collected between 2007 and 2008), revealed similar findings - Australians who supported left-wing political parties were more likely to engage with the ABC, whereas supporters of right-wing parties were more inclined to choose Channel Nine for news and current affairs programs (Young, 2011).

Regarding newspaper engagement, Young’s (2011) analysis revealed that the majority of Australian broadsheet readers identified as centre-left wing, and the proportion of left-wing audiences across all broadsheets was greater than in the general population. By contrast, Young (2011) found that tabloid publications
attracted predominantly conservative audiences, with a higher proportion of right-wing readers than in the general population. More recently, Park, et al (2018) found that some newspaper readers were more polarised than others. For instance, there was a high proportion of left-wing readers of the Australian Financial Review, The Age, Sydney Morning Herald, Courier Mail and The Advertiser. By contrast, local newspapers, the Herald Sun and The Australian were more likely to be accessed by right-wing news consumers (Park, et al, 2018).

Some prior research has also reported political differences with respect to audiences’ engagement with online news sources. For instance, Park, et al (2018) found that those who engage with online and social media to access news are more inclined to have left-wing views than those who prefer more traditional sources, who were more likely to demonstrate either centre or right-wing perspectives. However, for online newspapers, audiences were more evenly spread across the political spectrum with the exception of the ABC, whose online platforms attracted a more left-leaning audience (Park, et al, 2018). Online news websites News.com.au, nine.com.au and Yahoo 7 were found to be consumed by predominantly right-wing audiences. With respect to print newspapers, The Australian attracted more right-wing and centre audiences, whereas the views of its online readers were more varied, demonstrating an even spread across the political spectrum (Park, et al, 2018).

Limited Australian research has examined the political preferences of radio news audiences. In Young’s (2011) analysis, ABC talkback programs had a higher proportion of left-leaning audience members than commercial radio listeners. This finding may result from talkback radio being seen to present more political content than commercial radio (Ward, 2002). According to Tranter (2007), people with left-leaning political preferences are generally more politically interested than those on the right, which may account for Young’s (2011) finding that those on the left were
more inclined to engage with political news content (i.e. talkback radio, broadsheets and public broadcasting).

While many studies have suggested that political views are a central motivating factor for news engagement and preferences, some research has found that other factors, notably convenience, are stronger predictors (Perala, 2014; Ewart, 2014; Wonneberger, et al, 2011). For instance, Australian research by Ewart (2014) revealed that talkback radio programs were a preferred source of news for a large proportion of participants, many of whom stated that they engage with such programs due to convenience and mobility. However, some participants also cited trustworthiness as a key motivator for their news engagement (Ewart, 2014). Collectively, the findings discussed in this section show that audiences differ considerably with respect to their media engagement choices and habits, further supporting a key principle guiding this thesis: that news audiences are not a homogenous group who engage with media content in universal ways. Rather, their engagement with the news can vary considerably according to their backgrounds, experiences, pre-existing ideological views, and perspectives about the convenience and reliability of media information. The following section will further build on this discussion by exploring what is known thus far about how audiences perceive news content, including representations of asylum seekers.

4.4 Audience Reception Research

To understand public perceptions concerning news discourses about asylum seekers, one must first become familiar with the general audience reception literature. According to Silverstone (1994), when audiences attempt to make sense of news messages, they engage in two practices: interpretation and criticism. During interpretation, audience members apply specific personal and cultural frameworks
for making sense of the claims presented, which requires some consideration of the explicit and implicit meanings of content (Morley 1992). This process constitutes the ‘encoding’ phase of Stuart Hall’s (1980) ‘encoding/decoding’ model of communication, whereby audience members attempt to make sense of the media’s intended (or ‘encoded’) message by applying their own meaning to it. Thus, the audience’s interpretation is constructed according to their individual context, which means that the same text can be interpreted in various ways.

Shedding light on the different ways in which news information is interpreted and appraised by audiences allows for a more in-depth understanding of the complex relationship between public and media discourse on polarising topics. To date, audience research has attempted to analyse how news content helps to draw audiences’ attention to important issues in their world (Couldry, et al. 2007), and has highlighted the importance of news as a key mechanism for orienting one’s position within a given society (Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015). The following discussion begins by summarising the key findings of prior audience reception research. As Australian research employing an audience reception approach is scarce, this section covers predominantly international studies.

4.4.1 General audience reception literature

While considerable evidence has shown high levels of regular news consumption worldwide, audience reception research has yielded mixed results about how audiences perceive and evaluate news content they have been exposed to. Some reception studies have revealed that audiences are often sceptical about the reliability of news information (Park, et al, 2018; Szostek, 2018; Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015; Schröder, 2011; Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Philo, 2002), with bias, sensationalism, and negativity commonly brought up as
issues affecting perceptions of reliability (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2004). By contrast, other studies have painted a more nuanced picture, indicating conditional views regarding the trustworthiness of news content (Park, et al, 2018; Clarke, 2015; Hoijer, 2004; Philo, 1990).

In Australia, Lancaster, et al (2012) examined how youth audiences perceive news reports focused on the issue of illicit drug use, finding that only 36.2 per cent of participants regarded the news as a reliable source of information on the topic. Instead, the majority (59%) stated that they do not trust the media to produce accurate and honest representations of illicit drugs, with a further 58% believing that the dangers are largely exaggerated in the news. Nonetheless, most of the sample reported that they regularly engaged with news content, with many stating that they believe the news can impact their own attitudes and behaviours toward drugs as well as government policy (Lancaster, et al, 2012). These findings reveal a complex relationship between young people’s preferences for news content and their views on its capacity to inform the public, providing further weight to the dichotomy proposed by Denemark (2005), who posited that Australian audiences have a ‘love-hate relationship’ with the media (p. 237).

More recently, Park, et al (2018) found that Australian news audiences express more general trust in news than in most other countries. Established news brands, public broadcasters, and print newspapers were more likely to be considered trustworthy, with ABC News most frequently cited as a trusted news source and online news site Junkee ranked as the least trustworthy. Park, et al (2018) also found that common concerns voiced with respect to trust in news were factual mistakes, misleading or ‘click bait’ headlines, stories that appear to push an agenda, and fabricated content (i.e. fake news). This aligned with research by Alcorn and Buchanan (2017), who found that 65% of their respondents were concerned about
news accuracy and 77% believed they have been exposed to fake news (Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017).

In the UK, focus group data collected by Philo (2002) showed that participants often felt that news coverage was not able to adequately inform them about key events and issues occurring in the developing world and as a result, they had trouble understanding the content presented to them. Similar findings have been reported in US research, with Tsfati and Cappella (2003) finding that people routinely cited accuracy as a key factor for both their levels of trust in the media and choice to engage with news sources in the future. This was supported by US survey data, which reported a common expectation among audiences that news outlets represent issues in an unbiased and accurate manner (Heider, et al, 2005). This desire for accuracy in news was also reported by Schröder (2011), who found that Danish news organisations were deemed more trustworthy when they presented factual accounts of issues/events as opposed to entertainment, satire, or opinion.

In addition to views concerning reliability and accuracy, the issue of ‘bias’ has also been observed by audience researchers. Despite its degree of condemnation in the public sphere, bias has received minimal empirical attention and appears to be defined in varied, and sometimes conflicting, ways. Entman (2007) discussed three leading ideas of what constitutes bias: distortion bias, which is applied to content that deliberately falsifies or distorts reality; content bias, understood as the favouring of one perspective at the expense of providing equivalent treatment to alternative views); and decision-making bias, which refers to “the inevitable influence of news workers’ belief systems on the texts they produce” (p. 166). Much of the literature to date concerned with perceptions of bias suggests that audiences conceptualise the term as either ‘content’ or ‘decision-making’ bias, or a combination of the two. For example, in the US, the Pew Research Center (2004) found that 69 percent of
respondents regarded news content as containing a large degree of political ‘one-sidedness’ (i.e. ‘content bias’). In Vidali’s (2010) research, many participants argued that news coverage is more reliable when presented in an impartial manner, implying that organisations engage in ‘decision-making’ bias. Entman (2007) argued that scholars can “make bias a robust, rigorous, theory-driven, and productive research concept” (p. 163) by combining both ‘content’ and ‘decision-making’ notions of bias to understand how audiences conceptualise and apply the term.

It is important to consider the ‘hostile media phenomenon’ when interpreting audience constructions of bias. First documented by Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985), the hostile media phenomenon theorises that audiences regard neutral media messages as biased and will therefore only consider media content as reliable if it mirrors their own position. More recently, scholars have expanded on this theory by proposing a ‘relative hostile media’ phenomenon, which accounts for perceptions of bias that occur when audiences are exposed to legitimately biased media messages (Gunther & Christen, 2002; Gunther & Chia, 2001). When this occurs, audiences perceive media coverage as biased against their position, irrespective of the stance presented to them. Some research has supported the ‘relative hostile media’ phenomenon, finding that for many people who perceive news coverages as biased, they regard the content as biased against their own beliefs (Coe, et al, 2008; Perloff, 1989; Vallone, et al, 1985). It is therefore rare for audiences to believe news coverage is biased in favour of their views. For example, in US research, Coe, et al (2008) found that audience members perceived a greater degree of bias in news programs when the messages presented did not support their own political views. Coe, et al (2008) also found that when media messages aligned with their pre-existing views, participants were more likely to describe the content as interesting and informative. These findings supported those of Morris (2007), who found that
US audiences who identified as Democrats tended to view media content as biased toward the Republican agenda, whereas those who identified as Republicans regarded the same content as having a Democratic bias. Additionally, Morris found that both Democrats and Republicans were highly unlikely to perceive media content as biased when it supported their perspectives. On the whole, these findings suggest that research discussing audience perspectives of biased news content must take into account the propensity for the relative hostile media phenomenon to account for some of the perspectives. Hence, research findings that audiences perceive news information as biased should be interpreted with caution and not be taken as evidence that such biases exist.

In addition to perceptions of bias, research has also uncovered negativity as an issue raised by news audiences. For instance, Vidali (2010) found that negativity was often raised as an issue among US news audiences, with many stating that they disengage from the news if they become overwhelmed by the negativity of the content. Similarly, McCollough, et al (2017) found that participants often cited negativity as a reason for mistrusting news coverage focused on minority communities. These findings have important implications given that some research has found that viewers are more inclined to remember stories about negative events than positive stories (Kepplinger & Daschmann, 1997; Donsbach, 1991; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987). Collectively these studies indicate that audience perceptions of negativity in news content are common, more likely to be remembered than positive stories, and cause people to disengage from the news. It is therefore possible that audiences exposed to equal quantities of positive and negative news content may disregard the positive stories and elect to disengage from the news altogether.
More recently, Heikkilä and Ahva (2015) observed that Finnish audiences often recommend that news organisations strive to produce content that is neutral, topical and relevant to the interests of the general public. Most of these participants provided these recommendations whilst arguing that many news organisations do not appear to uphold these values (Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015). Furthermore, Szostek’s (2018) research in Russia uncovered high levels of scepticism about the trustworthiness of news content and all participants indicated that they do not take televised news broadcasts at face value. These findings contrast with that of Hoijer (2004), whose research in Sweden led to the conclusion that most news consumers regard media content as truthful depictions of reality:

To see pictures of streams of refugees and to hear a reporter talk about them is to believe that people are forced, by others or by circumstances, to flee from their homes in order to escape terror or other disasters (p. 524).

Hoijer also found that many participants criticised news content for being sensationalist. Similarly, Clarke’s (2015) research in Canada yielded mixed findings, uncovering that the majority of participants agreed with the statement: “I feel that the news sources available to me keep me well-informed about major developments.” However, many also indicated some discontent with the reliability of news information. A common issue raised was that media ownership and bureaucracy placed constraints on the information provided by news outlets. Many talked more broadly about ‘big business’ and ‘government’ when discussing these production constraints and how they may negatively impact the reliability of news content (Clarke, 2015). Clarke’s findings suggest that while audiences may criticise news coverage, they can also simultaneously demonstrate “an ultimate conformity with the hegemonic cycles of daily news production and reception” (Clarke, 2015, p. 28).

This kind of nuanced audience response has been noted by other audience reception
scholars. For instance, Szostek (2018) pointed out that one can accept the dominant hegemonic discourse presented in news content, whilst also critiquing the source or organisation responsible for the message. Additionally, Swart, et al (2016) argued that it is common for audiences to continue to engage with news content despite viewing it as negative, boring, unreliable, or complicated. These positions were supported by Vidali’s (2010) US findings, which revealed that some participants demonstrated awareness that their regular engagement with news sources often contradicted their critiques of the content presented.

4.4.2 Audience responses to news discourses about asylum seekers

Whilst some research has examined audience responses to news depictions of people seeking asylum in Australia, (Lynch, et al, 2015; McKay, et al, 2011; Mummery & Rodan, 2007) and internationally (Coninck, et al, 2018; Donald, 2011), the literature in this area is scarce. However, some prior findings suggest that the views of the Australian public have been affected by their exposure to news discourses. For instance, Lynch, et al (2015) exposed participants to one of two stories concerning Australian government policies toward asylum seekers. The first story took a war journalism perspective, which regards conflict as a news value and is often characterised by vague and sensationalist language. The second story presented a peace journalism stance, which is characterised by an advocacy approach to reporting conflict that downplays ethnic and/or religious differences in favour of promoting conflict resolution and reconciliation (Galtung, 1986, 1998). Participants exposed to the war journalism story were more inclined to believe that Australia’s asylum seeker policies primarily focus on expanding the population to increase migrants’ labour market participation in order to benefit the economy (Lynch, McGoldrick & Heathers, 2015). For these viewers, their support for asylum seeker
policies was often framed in ‘selfish’ terms, with a focus on “what’s in it for Australia?” (Lynch, et al, 2015, p. 210). Conversely, those who were exposed to the peace journalism story were significantly more likely to empathise with asylum seekers (Lynch, et al, 2015). These findings suggest that perspectives on people seeking asylum can be influenced by how news outlets choose to frame the topic.

In earlier research, Price and Nethery (2012) interviewed viewers of the Australian reality television series *Border Security*. Viewers were more likely to engage with the program if they felt its content was realistic, whereas those who believed it was not depicting the truth were less likely to trust the information presented. These findings challenge the notion that audiences receive media information in a passive manner, merely accepting whatever political or social perspectives are presented to them (Price & Nethery, 2012).

With regard to print media depictions, McKay, et al (2011) analysed letters to the editor and online comments responding to a collection of media reports about asylum seekers. Results indicated that almost half of the articles had incited some degree of ‘moral panic’, which was most pronounced in response to editorials and commentary by conservative *Herald Sun* writer Andrew Bolt (McKay, et al, 2011). Bolt’s pieces often portrayed asylum seekers as economic opportunists out to exploit hard-working Australians. He also referred to asylum seekers as ‘illegals’ seven times in one opinion piece (Bolt, 2009). Similar language use was evident in the majority of the *Herald Sun* readers’ responses to Bolt’s piece, as illustrated by remarks such as “I for one don’t want our country over run by illegal queue jumpers” (McKay, et al, 2011, p. 621). In their analysis of letters to the editor in *The Australian* and *The West Australian*, Mummery and Rodan (2007) found that notions of ‘Australianness’ were commonly employed to support arguments that both accepted and opposed asylum seeking. For example, some letters argued that asylum
seekers are ‘un-Australian’ whereas others posited that it is ‘un-Australian’ not to accept asylum seekers in Australia (Mummery & Rodan, 2007). The same finding was also reported by Fozdar and Pedersen (2013), and Fozdar (2018).

Like Australia, the international literature concerned with audience responses to news representations of people seeking asylum is limited. However, some scholars in the UK and Europe have investigated the issue. For example, Lynn and Lea (2003) examined letters to the editor of a UK newspaper, finding that many readers believed that ‘genuine refugees’ deserve to be resettled, whilst ‘bogus’ refugees should not receive assistance. Following his examination of media texts reporting the arrival of Tamil asylum seekers, van Dijk (1991) concluded that the texts had incited moral panic, leading to a widespread fear of the Tamil arrivals among the European population:

Official panic of the political elites about what they saw as a deluge of poor Third World peoples arriving at their doorsteps soon led to a corresponding media panic. Before long, this barrage of negative media coverage also affected large parts of the public, which was easily persuaded to resent the ‘threatening’ presence (p. 2).

In the UK, Donald (2011) explored the recollections of audiences regarding television news coverage about people seeking asylum, focusing on their perceptions of the reliability and accuracy of the news discourses they recalled. The key aspects of news representations that participants discussed were: statistics concerning people seeking asylum; the negativity of news discourses; and the framing of asylum seekers as a burden to the UK’s resources. Many participants described television coverage of the issue as ‘negative’ or ‘inaccurate’ (Donald, 2011). Additionally, participants with direct experience with people seeking asylum were more critical of news representations than those with no such exposure. Thus, participants with direct experience were more inclined to reject or challenge news representations of the issue (Donald, 2011). Furthermore, participants without direct exposure to asylum
seekers were more likely to voice hostile views about seeking asylum. These participants were also more inclined to regard news content that depicted asylum seekers as ‘coming here for benefits’ as accurate and reliable. More recently, Coninck, et al (2018) examined news media trust among Belgian audiences with respect to their views on refugees. Results indicated that positive attitudes toward refugees were correlated with trust in television and radio news content. Conversely, engagement with commercial and tabloid news sources, coupled with a fear of terrorism, typically aligned with more negative attitudes (Coninck, et al, 2018).

An important consideration to note when interpreting the findings discussed in this section is the difference between studies of the news audience and ‘letters to the editor’. While the latter are often treated as audience data, letters to the editor are selected for publication by news organisations on the basis of their adherence ‘news values’- this raises the issue of whether they should be regarded as audience data, examples of media texts, or both. The author acknowledges this ambiguity, given the mediated manner with which letters to the editor are selected for publication. Nonetheless, data derived from letters to the editor are situated in this literature review as empirical examples of audiences’ responses to media content on the basis that they present the responses and perspectives of media consumers and in turn, are useful for aiding scholars to understand how given texts are received by some audience members.

Overall, prior research indicates that public responses to people seeking asylum often bear striking similarities to news depictions of the issue, suggesting that community attitudes may influence, or be influenced by, news discourse. Despite this, the available literature focused on audience perceptions of news coverage about asylum seekers is limited, with few studies applying discursive analysis or situating their audience reception findings within a wider context by including a critical
examination of audiences’ views on the topic at hand. It is therefore difficult to obtain a clear picture of how news discourses are engaged with, interpreted and evaluated, particularly with respect to audiences’ own perspectives on the topic.

4.5 Summary & Rationale for the Current Research

This literature review has summarised the existing body of research concerned with community and news constructions of people seeking asylum, and how audiences respond to these news depictions. Prior literature that paves the way for the current research indicates that Australians engage with news media content on a regular basis, with most consulting with a variety of news sources, and while many people voice a strong distrust in the news, some continue to engage with it regularly. Another key finding evident from the existing literature is that most people receive information about people seeking asylum either solely or predominantly from news sources. This is important given that research examining news coverage of people seeking asylum has found that the news has often characterised this group using discourses of deviancy, threat, control, and dehumanisation. Findings have also highlighted that asylum seekers are rarely provided with the opportunity to contribute to news representations of their experiences. Collectively, the existing research suggests that to understand how community members understand and evaluate the plight of people seeking asylum, one must also consider how the issue is represented in news coverage, and how these messages are perceived by audiences.

To date, little is known about how Australian community discourses are constructed, reinforced, challenged, and transformed, with consideration of the sources of information people engage with concerning asylum seekers. Furthermore, no research to date has utilised a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework in conjunction with Audience Reception Analysis (ARA) to investigate community
perspectives about people seeking asylum in Australia, with respect to their views on how the issue is represented via news discourses. In turn, the current research has sought to build on the prior literature to address this gap through the application of a CDA framework combined with ARA to investigate how a sample of the Australian population perceive news representations about seeking asylum, with consideration of their own perspectives on the issue.
5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This research sought to address a notable gap in the sociological and communications literature: the limited attention paid to how Australian community members conceptualise and evaluate news coverage of asylum seekers. In this qualitative study, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 Western Australians who provided their perspectives about news representations they have encountered about people seeking asylum in Australia. This chapter outlines the procedures applied, starting with a discussion of the key research questions and rationale for the study, followed by the theoretical framework, sampling, data collection and analysis methods employed. Some important ethical issues and challenges are also discussed, with emphasis on how these were addressed and the broad considerations they pose for social research. The chapter concludes that the combination of an Audience Reception epistemology with a Critical Discourse Analytical approach paved the way for a meaningful and in-depth understanding of how people with diverse perspectives make sense of news discourses about asylum seekers.

5.2 Objectives & Research Questions

As demonstrated in the Literature Review, a substantial gap exists in the available literature concerning Australian community perspectives about seeking asylum. To date, no Australian research has critically examined how media audiences discursively construct their perceptions on how asylum seekers are represented in news discourse. Addressing this research gap is important as the issue attracts considerable discussion and polarisation among the Australian public, with
some research suggesting that media discourses play a key role in shaping and reinforcing perspectives on the nation’s asylum seeker policies (McKay, et al, 2011; Saxton, 2003; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Pickering, 2001). While both community and news discourses about seeking asylum have received considerable empirical attention individually, little is known about how the two may intersect. The current research therefore sought to shed light on the views of a sample of Australian media consumers regarding news discourses focused on people seeking asylum. To meet this objective, two questions were addressed:

1. What key discourses about seeking asylum did this sample voice?
2. What sources of Australian news content have this sample engaged with, and what are their perspectives concerning how these sources portray asylum seekers?

Research question 1 was necessary to ascertain participants’ existing perspectives on the issue. With respect to research question 2, this research was guided by the notion that audiences are active participants in the mass communication of information and ideas, drawing upon their own ideologies and experiences to make sense of media discourse (Hall, 1980). Audience reception and critical discourse scholars have often argued that consumers of news content are not merely passive recipients of media messages who accept the hegemonic discourses presented to them (Madianou, 2007; Liebes, 1997; Kitzinger, 1993; Bird, 1992; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). Rather, they are said to be active agents who apply their own meanings, which are shaped by individual factors. These include pre-existing values (Liebes, 1997; Kitzinger, 1993; Bird, 1992; Hall, 1980); personal experience (Madianou, 2007); and demographic determinants such as social class and education (Morley, 1980). Situating participants’ views on media discourses within the wider context of their own ideological positions on people seeking asylum was essential for this research. The
study sought to go beyond merely ascertaining participants’ responses to media representations by also examining how their perceptions were articulated and whether their own stances on asylum seekers aligned or impacted how they perceived news coverage on the topic. Critically analysing participants’ views on media discourses about seeking asylum therefore required some consideration of each participant’s stance on the broader topic.

Research question 2 was central to meeting the key objective of this research. It was also necessary to ascertain what kinds of news sources participants engaged with, including their reasons for doing so. This was important given the marked diversity of political ideologies espoused by different Australian media organisations. For example, publications owned by the Murdoch press have been argued to publish content aligned with a right-wing political stance (Hobbs & McKnight, 2014; Greenwald, 2004; McKnight, 2003). In addition, prior research has indicated that some media sources owned by News Corp Australia (e.g. The Australian, The Daily Telegraph, The Herald Sun, and The Courier Mail) and Fairfax Media (e.g. The Australian Financial Review, The Sydney Morning Herald, and The Age) have published misleading material on asylum seekers (Lueck, et al, 2015; McKay, et al, 2011; O’Doherty and LeCouteur, 2007; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Saxton, 2003; Pickering, 2001). There is also some evidence that Australians with hostile attitudes toward asylum seekers are more likely to accept misinformation on the topic (Suhnan & Pedersen, 2012; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Pedersen, 2004). Examining participants’ news engagement therefore enabled this research to expand on previous literature whilst investigating how Australian news audiences regard media portrayals of asylum seekers.
5.3 Research Design & Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a qualitative research design. As Willig (2012) explained, “qualitative research is concerned with the quality and texture of human experience and with the ways in which people construct and communicate meaning in social contexts” (p. 22). This can be achieved via the following methods: interviews or focus groups that capture direct quotations from participants; case studies; ethnographic inquiry; or the careful review of documents (Patton, 2002). One advantage of qualitative approaches in social research is the use of open-ended questions and probing, which enable participants to use their own words rather than choosing from fixed responses that may not accurately represent their views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allows researchers to elicit responses that are rich and explanatory, resulting in a more in-depth understanding of the perspectives provided. It also enables participants to provide responses that are meaningful to them and in many cases, unanticipated by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another advantage of qualitative approaches to data collection is that they give researchers the ability to probe initial responses to gain further clarity on the perspectives communicated (King, 1994).

As this research was concerned with uncovering and analysing participants’ perspectives, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. A quantitative approach would not have uncovered data of sufficient depth to answer the research questions guiding this thesis. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to go beyond merely identifying participants’ perspectives by also examining how they were communicated. This approach also enabled the identification of various nuances in the data (such as contradictions and rhetorical devices), providing a more holistic sense of how participants conceptualised media coverage on asylum seekers.
As previously outlined, this research was concerned with uncovering participants’ views about seeking asylum and their views on how Australian news outlets have framed the issue. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992) was considered ideally suited for meeting this objective. The following discussion outlines how CDA was applied, including a discussion of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (DA) (1972) to provide further context and background. Whilst CDA was considered an effective method for analysing participants’ perspectives, this research was also concerned with how these views were communicated. To achieve this, aspects of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1974), Rhetorical Analysis (Billig, 1991), and a Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 2001) were also utilised.

5.3.1 Discourse analysis & critical discourse analysis

The identification and examination of discourse was central to this research. According to Hall (1992), “discourses, in the context of their rules and conceptualisations, provide the space in which things can be talked about” (p. 291). Because discourses represent the language used to discuss phenomena and present perspectives, experiences, and knowledge, they are essential for constructing one’s lived reality (Hall, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). To ascertain the most appropriate method for the current study, it was important to gain a comprehensive understanding of different methods and perspectives associated with discourse analysis. Discourse analysis (DA) was theorised by French philosopher Michel Foucault in 1972. Foucault's work primarily addressed the relationship between knowledge and power, with emphasis on how both serve as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining social control. DA is concerned with how everyday discourse interacts with, and shapes, ideological positions that maintain the status quo (Wooffitt, 2005). In turn, DA enables one to evaluate the practical consequences
of approaching a topic in varied ways by highlighting how discourses can produce and transform social realities (Talja, 1999). According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), DA is rooted in the premise that “the constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves become a central topic of study” (p. 35). They proposed that DA is guided by the following principles: the language employed to communicate one’s perspective serves a variety of functions, with varying consequences; there are numerous ways to describe a single phenomenon; and everyday discourse serves an ideological purpose, allowing the reproduction of certain positions through language. Potter and Wetherell’s assertion that DA can unveil how ideology is shaped and reinforced through everyday discourse emerged from their analysis of racism among a sample of white New Zealanders. Their findings led them to argue that DA could more adequately explore the construction of racist ideologies than traditional Marxist approaches (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) also posited that unlike ‘realist’ models of understanding language, DA recognises that it is neither possible nor necessary to separate ‘literal’ and ‘rhetorical’ accounts as both are considered valuable sources of insight into discursive constructions of ideology. Hence, DA researchers reject the notion that only one accurate account of a given event or issue exists (Talja, 1999). Instead, discourse is viewed as interpretative, reflexive and contextual. In DA research, such variability is not viewed as a limitation as it is not an indication of irregularity or error in participants’ discourse - it merely signifies that individuals can present conflicting and often contradictory perspectives (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). This was observed in the current research, which is discussed further in the Results and Discussion component of this thesis.

The first research question guiding this thesis was concerned with examining participants’ views on people seeking asylum. As asylum seekers form part of a
racial minority group in Australia, the application of DA in race-relations research is important to explore. Prior race-relations research employing DA has focused on how language is used to legitimise the vilification of ethnic minorities (Potter & Wetherell, 1988), and the discursive tools, known as ‘interpretative repertoires’, people draw upon to enable racism (Nairn & McCleanor, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Whilst the current research was interested in exploring these aspects of participants’ views, another key objective was to position these discourses in a wider social and political context. This required the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Like DA, CDA is concerned with how meanings conveyed in language can be ideological, however, CDA extends its focus by exploring broader features of the production and interpretation of discourse, with emphasis on its relationship to wider social structures (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000). It was developed by social linguist Norman Fairclough in 1992, who recognised that the relationship between society and discourse is dialectical, which means that society can influence discourse and discourse can influence society. Recognising this relationship is critical in research focused on discursive constructions of social issues (Titscher, et al, 2000). Fairclough (1995) proposed three key components of CDA research: the specific language used to describe the issue at hand; the interpretation of the meaning being conveyed by such language; and the relationship between uncovered discourses and wider social structures. Fairclough’s approach to CDA was guided by neo-Marxism, which posits that societal constructions regarding power relations are driven by collective, cultural factors as opposed to economic dimensions (Fairclough, 1989). He proposed that CDA can reveal how social inequalities are manifested in discourse. CDA therefore examines the role of discourse in the production and reinforcement of such inequalities. Fairclough (1995) argued that any
attempt to understand discourse should aim to uncover how oppressed groups are disadvantaged through discourse.

To further understand how social inequality informs, and is informed by, discourse, Van Dijk (1993) emphasised the importance of understanding the role of social cognition (i.e. ways of thinking about the world, as influenced by social interaction). He viewed cognition as a pivotal component of the construction of discourse (van Dijk, 1993, 1996, 2001). Conversely, Wodak (2001) emphasised the need to account for the role of social and political context and sought to identify how power is manifested in discourse. She proposed four levels of context applicable to CDA: the use of language as a means of communicating discourse; the relationship between different discourses pertaining to the same phenomenon; the institutional context; and the socio-political context. Whilst Fairclough, van Dijk, and Wodak contributed varying approaches and perspectives to the application of CDA, the common thread evident across CDA scholarship is its focus on discourse as a means of producing and reproducing power relations. CDA also emphasises how inequalities are shaped and reinforced through discourse, and the subsequent implications of the resulting power imbalances.

As noted, ideology is a central component of CDA, especially in research concerned with how people form, articulate, and defend certain arguments (Billig, 1987, 1991). Ideology is defined as the organisation of beliefs that result in action that sustains inequalities across a given society (van Dijk, 1998). Thus, ideologies represent the interests of dominant groups, and therefore, power is manifested through the communication of ideological positions. This can occur in subtle ways that appear as reasonable or appropriate responses to issues or events. For example, beliefs that justify discriminatory legislation on the basis of sexuality (for instance, the historical illegality of same-sex marriage, which was overturned in Australia in
have routinely been rooted in the belief that heterosexuality is ‘natural’ and therefore the marriage of two homosexual people is ‘unnatural’. The manner with which such phenomena are discussed is a reflection of ideological positions held and expressed at a wider, societal level. Ideologies are therefore central to the social construction of in-groups and out-groups (e.g. asylum seekers), resulting in power relations and social equality being heavily impacted by discourse (van Dijk, 1998). The current research adopted this position by applying a CDA approach that recognises how ideology can be socially shaped. In turn, this research was conducted with careful consideration of how discourse inevitably draws upon collective norms and values. A distinctive facet of CDA that makes it ideally suited to race-relations research is its focus on understanding inequalities faced by oppressed groups (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In turn, CDA researchers openly declare the political interests motivating their examination of the topic in question (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This means that such research aims to identify injustices and elicit social change through analysis. The researcher’s own position is therefore relevant to their methodological approach and selection of the research topic.

Whilst it was not anticipated that this thesis (or subsequent publications) would result in widespread social change, the key motivation was to gain insight and draw attention to recent public constructions of the impact, management and treatment of people seeking asylum. Thus, the central goal was to identify and critically discuss the wider implications of the discourses uncovered, from both a policy and empirical perspective. This topic is highly politicised, receiving substantial media coverage on both a national and international scale. Furthermore, public discourses on asylum seekers can have significant policy implications, reinforcing social inequalities that directly impact the wellbeing of asylum seekers in Australia. Hence, CDA was deemed the most appropriate method for attempting to
gain a critical understanding of how this issue, and its depiction by media sources, is constructed and conceptualised by Australian news audiences.

5.3.2 Conversation analysis, rhetorical analysis & the discourse-historical approach

In addition to CDA, this research employed elements of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1974; Potter, 1996; Silverman, 1993; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), Rhetorical Analysis (Billig, 1991), and the Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 2001). People perform a range of actions through various linguistic resources and rhetorical devices, and therefore, in addition to the content of discourse itself, their construction of discourse is important (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). This research recognised that a principal aim of discourse studies is to uncover how these processes function, which, according to Potter and Wetherell, adds further clarity to the variable nature of how a given issue is described by different people. When individuals discuss people seeking asylum, various perspectives on the same aspect of the topic are typically voiced. For example, to analyse discourse in support of mandatory detention for asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat, the current research was interested in exploring the various mechanisms used to justify such a viewpoint. In other words, how was this perspective communicated in a way that made it appear reasonable and unproblematic to participants? Such a question required some examination of the conversational patterns, argumentation strategies and rhetorical devices participants used to support or reject certain positions. According to Billig (1987), this allows researchers to describe in detail how various positions are constructed in an argumentative manner as well as how such views are situated in a wider social context.
Conversation Analysis (CA) emerged during the 1960s as a result of doctoral research and lectures by sociologist Harvey Sacks (Whalen & Raymond, 2000). It was developed as a systematic approach for analysing talk-in-interaction, by examining both verbal and non-verbal conduct in everyday conversations (Potter, 1996). A key assumption guiding CA is that talk is a form of action (Heritage, 1984). Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2008) argued that by conceptualising talk as a form of action, one can develop a more robust understanding of what people achieve through talk, as opposed to focusing solely on what they say. Furthermore, by understanding talk-as-action as a structurally organised phenomenon, one can identify the various rules and practices that govern social interaction, including how certain actions are permitted and/or constrained through conversation (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008). CA therefore allows researchers to gain insight into how aspects of social interaction, that may otherwise appear to be mundane or trivial, permeate everyday discussions of social issues.

CA is common in sociological research that utilises other methods of discourse analysis, enabling a single research project to examine what participants say and how they say it whilst also analysing issues of social and political concern more broadly (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2008). The data collection process in CA research typically involves video or audio-recorded discussions, from which a verbatim transcription is carried out to capture seemingly innocuous utterances, pauses, and patterns with respect to tone of voice and sentence structuring (Peräkylä, 2008). Numerous critical discourse scholars have advocated for verbatim transcription to enable researchers to capture the ‘messiness’ of everyday interaction more accurately than data that has not been transcribed in full (Wooffitt, 2005; Edwards, 2005; Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997; Potter, 1996). Once transcribed, CA researchers analyse the material inductively, with the aim of locating interesting
features of the interaction, such as recurring patterns of speech, and rhetorical devices (Heritage, 1998). For example, prior CA studies have examined both the opening (Schegloff, 1968) and closing remarks (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) of sentences used within conversation and interview settings. CA researchers have also looked at the ways in which people voice either agreement or disagreement with certain statements (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Pomerantz, 1984). Following analysis, CA researchers can draw conclusions and describe the purposes and outcomes of conversational features, situating these in a wider social context, which enables the identification and discussion of notable implications (Potter, 1996).

As noted, the current research was not only interested in exploring participants’ views, but how they communicated their perspectives. To accommodate this, a combination of both CA and CDA approaches was deemed most appropriate. Potter (1996) asserted that CA can be valuable tool in CDA research as it provides a further means of understanding interaction by paying specific attention to how discourse is constructed and how actions are performed through talk. Potter argued that because CA is concerned with the ‘form’ of talk, whereas CDA illuminates its ‘content’, using both can provide researchers with a dual-faceted approach that allows them to delve further into speech, uncovering richer and more meaningful data. Thus, Potter’s stance was that a practical understanding of CA is essential for conducting quality discourse analysis research. The current research endorsed Potter’s perspective, utilising aspects of CA for both data collection and analysis. This was achieved by transcribing participants’ interviews verbatim, so the researcher could identify and discuss various aspects of how perspectives were communicated (including the rhetorical devices participants used).

The identification of rhetorical devices in the current data led to Rhetorical Analysis (RA) being adopted as an additional analytical component. Potter and
Wetherell (1994) posited that the rhetorical organisation of talk is central to CDA research. The study of rhetoric is concerned with the organisation of discourses in an argumentative manner, including how people attempt to persuade others of their position (Perelman & Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1971). Billig (1987) highlighted how rhetorical ideas can be used to reformulate thinking, later proposing that RA may reveal how people construct their own perspectives as a means of countering alternative views (Billig, 1988). According to Billig, RA is a useful analytical approach for highlighting the various ways in which discursive constructions of an issue are oriented as arguments against opposing views, either real or imagined. Thus, RA removes focus from how a given perspective constructs reality and instead asks how this view specifically competes with an alternative (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). RA researchers therefore examine discourse in terms of how it is used to form arguments as well as undermine alternative positions (Billig 1991).

RA has wide-reaching implications for both CA and CDA research because it proposes that social interaction is largely informed by the argumentative nature of discourse (Wooffitt, 2005). As noted, the current study has taken a CDA approach (Fairclough, 1992), utilising features of both CA and RA to examine both the formation and content of participants’ responses. This combination of approaches was deemed valuable to this research as all three are concerned with examining how language can be shaped to signify the authority of one’s perspectives on a given social phenomenon (Wooffitt, 2005). According to Potter (1996), this mixed approach also allows researchers to gain insight into how an individual or group’s interests are discursively constructed, shedding light on how ideological positions (and their counter-discourses) are produced, reproduced, challenged, and transformed through talk.
The positioning of one’s opinion as an argument against a counter position has been identified by previous scholars concerned with anti-racist discourses who have pointed out that attitudes are situated within a wider argumentative context (Fozdar, 2008; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Billig, 1987, 1988, 1991; van Dijk, 1985). It was initially theorised by discourse analysts Billig (1987, 1991) and van Dijk (1985, 1987, 1993), who posited that discourse is always a feature of interaction. According to Billig (1987), human beings “do not possess just one way of looking at, and talking about, the world - Instead, our species is characterised by the existence of contrary views” (p. 49). Similarly, Wetherell and Potter (1992) argued that discourses are constructed as a means of challenging alternative perspectives the speaker disagrees with. This is a phenomenon Fleras (1998) referred to as ‘duelling discourses.’

Prior literature has shown that duelling discourses occur in everyday conversations as well as ideological conceptualisations of race and migration. For instance, in Fozdar’s (2008) research into how Maori and Pakeha populations conceptualise race in New Zealand, participants demonstrated a tendency to frame their perspectives as arguments against an opposing point of view. Fozdar and Pedersen (2013) further explored this concept by examining anti-racist discourses in responses to an online blog about asylum seekers in Australia, finding that that people routinely expressed their opinions as arguments against a counter-position. In the UK, Goodman and Burke (2010) also found evidence of duelling discourses, with some participants arguing that opposition to asylum seekers constitutes racism, whereas others voiced disagreement with this idea. In terms of its implications for societal constructions of race issues, Fozdar (2008) emphasised that duelling discourses can undermine and transform racist ideologies expressed at the conversational level. It is important to note that in the current research, duelling
discourses were not restricted to those who presented counter-hegemonic views (i.e. those who challenged anti-asylum discourses). Rather, participants who voiced both ‘accepting’ and ‘non-accepting’ perspectives demonstrated duelling discourses. This finding suggests that duelling discourses are not unique to anti-racist discussions, as it is possible for perspectives on ‘both sides’ to be communicated in a dialogic manner.

The use of RA in CDA research is rooted in the premise that discourse is inherently argumentative and persuasive, which Billig (1991) argued has implications for social research because “we cannot understand the meaning of a piece of reasoned discourse, unless we know what counter positions are being implicitly or explicitly rejected” (p. 44). Like DA scholars, Billig rejected the notion of cognitivist explanations of social action. He criticised the assumption that people have inner thoughts that are expressed directly through discourse, instead proposing that talk, and its argumentative nature, represent thinking in action. To signify such argumentation, Billig proposed that people use a variety of rhetorical devices, which are defined as features of language used by a speaker to communicate their intended perspective, often as a strategy to convince others of the veracity of their views (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Fozdar, 2008; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), these can take the form of metaphors, exemplars, catch phrases, depictions, and visual images. Rhetorical devices serve to increase the strength and/or clarity of an argument (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Fozdar, 1998; van Dijk, 2000; Augoustinos & Every, 2007) or to minimise the potential negative impact of a statement (Fozdar, 2008; van Dijk, 2000, Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The phenomenon of rhetorical devices was first proposed by Billig (1991) as a component of rhetorical analysis. Numerous critical discourse studies focused on racism and anti-racism have uncovered the use of rhetorical devices (Billig, 1987,

According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), these devices can be articulated as metaphors, exemplars, catch phrases, depictions, and visual images. They are used in communication to increase the strength and/or clarity of an argument (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; van Dijk, 2000; Augoustinos & Every, 2007) or to minimise the impact of a statement when the speaker anticipates that their audience may perceive it as offensive or controversial (van Dijk, 2000). The latter often takes the form of either a disclaimer or justification for a particular statement. This is commonly observed in discourse analysis research concerned with racism and race relations (van Dijk, 2000).

A number of rhetorical devices were utilised by participants in the current research. These fell into ten categories: the use of metaphor (Kittay, 1987); personalisation (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993); disclaimers/justification (van Dijk, 2000); emphasising similarity between self and audience (Fozdar, 2008); direct reported speech (Holt, 1996); designed visibility (Edwards, 1997); claiming special knowledge (Billig, 1991); extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986); rhetorical questions (Fozdar, 2008); and emotion displays (Fozdar, 2008).

Kittay (1987) conceptualised metaphor as “a trope in which one thing is spoken of as if it were some other thing, and it is a ubiquitous feature of natural language” (p. 4). According to Kittay (1987), the use of metaphor is a common feature of the natural, everyday language people use to construct their versions of reality. When using metaphors, speakers create linguistic images based on the similarity between two objects or ideas, which enables them to further communicate...
a complex or unfamiliar concept by drawing upon a secondary concept that is already well-understood by the person they are speaking to (Kittay, 1987).

*Personalisation* occurs when one refers to the topic at hand as it relates to, or is perceived by, the self (e.g. use of ‘I’ statements such as ‘I think’, ‘I feel’ and ‘in my experience’). The use of such personalising language was observed in research by Crismore, et al (1993), whereby participants were found to prefix statements with phrases such as ‘I think’ and ‘in my view’ as a means of “expressing a lack of commitment as to whether what follows is true” (p. 51). According to Crismore, et al (1993), personalisation enables a speaker to convey their personal relationship to the topic, differentiating between articulating established facts and asserting their personal views. Antaki, Billig, Edwards & Potter (2003) also discussed the discursive effects of personalisation:

One might say that the interview situation is one in which the respondent knows that they are expected to engage in the discursive business of 'giving views'. In order to avoid appearing dogmatic and to demonstrate recognition that others have opposing opinions, speakers will use such phrases as 'I believe', 'I think'. Such an analysis of the rhetoric of giving views, then, would look to see how the speaker manages the dilemmas of presenting opinions forcefully but without seeming to be dogmatic (p. 26).

Personalisation was the most commonly observed rhetorical device in the current research and will be discussed further in this chapter as illustrative examples are introduced.

The use of *disclaimers and/or justification* is observed when a person either prefixes a statement with a remark intended to prepare their audience for what they are about to say or ends a discussion with a comment seeking to minimise the impact of their statement. This can occur via remarks relating to the speaker’s qualification
to speak on the topic such as “I’m no expert, but…” or “this is just my opinion…” (van Dijk, 2000). Another example is when a speaker verbally recognises that their perspective may be perceived as problematic, demonstrated by statements such as “this might be an unpopular opinion…” or “I know it’s a terrible thing to say…” (Fozdar, 2008; van Dijk, 2000). In talk that excuses and/or rationalises oppressive attitudes toward minority groups, the use of disclaimers/justification often takes the form of a ‘denial of prejudice’ (Goodman, 2014; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; van Dijk, 2000). As a discursive strategy, denial of prejudice enables one to defend or justify a statement that is blatantly or inherently prejudiced, with the aim of protecting the speaker from resulting criticism (van Dijk, 1992; Billig, 1988).

Emphasising similarity between the self and audience enables one to subtly imply or assume that the person they are communicating with shares the same viewpoint. This often takes the form of phrases such as ‘you know’ or ‘obviously’ (Fozdar, 2008). This device was observed in the current research, suggesting some participants held assumptions or expectations of concurrence between themselves and the researcher, regardless of position.

According to Holt (1996), direct reported speech occurs when a person directly refers to statements or perspectives voiced by others as a means of challenging their point of view. It was later observed by Buttny (1997) who found that college students often use reported speech to criticise alternative perspectives the speaker disagreed with. An example of direct reported speech is “people say ‘they come to our country, they should be like us’, but I disagree” (Benwell, 2012). Buttny (1997) argued that, as a rhetorical device, reported speech is a form of assessment, and thus, occurs in conjunction with the speaker making a judgement about a prejudiced ‘other’ whilst attempting to emphasise their own opposing perspective.
Designed visibility was proposed by Edwards (1997) as a form of ‘commonsense anti-racism’, during which speakers attempt to dispel any possibility of being considered bigoted by highlighting their transition from a problematic ideology to a more positive/accepting one. According to Benwell (2012), this serves as a means of aligning oneself with a view perceived by the speaker as moral and socially accepted (Benwell, 2012).

Billig (1991) identified claiming special knowledge as a rhetorical device widely employed during anti-racist talk. It is often manifested via the use of terms such as ‘actually’ to prefix a statement of fact or through ‘credentialing’, whereby a person emphasises or alludes to their authority to speak on the topic at hand (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). According to Billig (1991), claiming special knowledge often works in opposition to ‘common sense’ constructions of race as the speaker is framing their view as one that is not widely known, rather than speaking as though their stance represents the status quo.

Pomerantz (1986) identified extreme case formulations as expressions that utilise extreme and absolute terms in order to demonstrate and emphasise the position of the speaker. They are typically framed as justifications of a perspective, often as a means of pre-emptively addressing a challenge to one’s view (Pomerantz, 1986). Some examples include using terms such as ‘all’, ‘everyone’, ‘absolutely’ and ‘utterly’. According to Edwards (2000), extreme case formulations are used to communicate a speaker’s degree of investment in the topic at hand (e.g. how much they care about the topic, their certainty regarding the accuracy of their statement, and whether they demonstrate a positive or negative attitude). From a race-relations perspective, ‘extreme case formulations’ can also be manifested as generalisations because they are often used when a speaker assigns a given characteristic or behaviour to an entire population (Edwards, 2000).
The framing of one’s view in the form of *rhetorical questions* was observed in Fozdar’s (2008) interviews with Maori and Pakeha populations in New Zealand. The use of rhetorical questions occurs when a speaker voices their perspectives in the form of a question, with no expectation or intention for the question to be answered by the person they are talking to (Fozdar, 2008). Fozdar (2008) also observed *emotion displays* in the form of emotive language such as ‘it really hacks me off’ as a means of placing emphasis on how strongly one holds a given position (Fozdar, 2008).

Along with rhetorical devices and duelling discourses, a number of argumentation strategies were also apparent in the current study. As such, it was necessary to consult with Ruth Wodak’s (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). DHA is one of many theoretical and methodological approaches used within CDA research. It focuses on argumentative, rhetorical and pragmatic analysis by integrating “multiple layers of socio-political and historical contexts in order to theorize dimensions of social change and identity politics” (Wodak, 2009, p. 1). DHA therefore enables ideology to be understood as an important means to establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. As such, Wodak and Reisigl (1999) proposed that DHA has value in research concerning constructions of the ‘other’ (such as asylum seekers and migrants) as it enables scholars to address two important questions, both of which are relate to the first research question of this thesis: 1) how do people linguistically refer to the ‘other’ (i.e. what traits and qualities do they attribute to them through discourse)?; and 2) what arguments and discursive strategies do people draw upon to justify and/or emphasise these ideas?

Wodak and Reisigl (1999, 2001) identified a number of argumentation strategies that are often present in discussions concerning social and political inclusion or exclusion and thus, can be used to justify both positive and negative
attributions about others. One such strategy is *perspectivation*, whereby speakers involve themselves in discourse by signalling their point of view within their discussion of a given event or topic (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001). This is often manifested through *topoi*, which Reisigl and Wodak (2001) defined as forms of ‘persuasive rhetoric’, which connect a given argument with the central conclusion the speaker wishes to emphasise. Thus, the use of *topoi* enables speakers to justify the transition from their argument to the conclusion.

Wodak (2009) listed the following common *topoi* used when writing or talking about ‘others’ in a manner that seeks to justify their exclusion: uselessness/disadvantage (e.g. ‘they are a burden’); danger and threat (e.g. ‘they pose a security risk’); numbers (e.g. ‘there are too many’); culture (e.g. ‘their culture is incompatible with our society’); and economy (e.g. ‘they cost too much’). They also identified some *topoi* used in arguments that justify inclusion, such as: usefulness/advantage (e.g. ‘they can make positive contributions’) humanitarianism (e.g. ‘they are in need’); and responsibility (e.g. ‘we are obligated to accept them’). These topoi were observed in the current research along with two additional topoi that participants used to legitimise their views on people seeking asylum.

The additional topoi observed in the current study were: a *topos of personal experience*, which was evident when participants drew upon their own experiences with asylum seekers to lend legitimacy to their views on the topic by emphasising that their views have emerged from first-hand knowledge; and a *topos of authority*, which, reminiscent of the rhetorical device ‘claiming special knowledge’ (see Billig, 1991), was observed in instances where interviewees implied that their views are superior to those of others (often on the basis that they have been exposed to information most people would not have access to). All of the topoi observed in this study are discussed in more detail in the Results and Discussion (see chapter 6), with
reference to participant quotes as illustrative examples. The possible factors for these findings and their implications are also highlighted.

5.3.3 Audience reception analysis: Encoding & decoding

To position the current findings within a communications context, Audience Reception Analysis (ARA), notably Hall’s ‘encoding/decoding’ model of communication (1973, 1980), was employed. This approach enabled the second research question, concerned with participants’ views on Australian news discourses about asylum seekers, to be addressed. The following discussion outlines and evaluates the key principles and historical application of Hall’s model, concluding that its combination with a critical discourse framework was the most appropriate approach for addressing the central goals of this project.

Although combining multiple analytical approaches may appear to bring about complexities and challenges resulting from conflicting paradigms, such an approach was necessary in the current study as the researcher opted to take a pragmatic approach. Pragmatic scholars advocate the integration of multiple methods within a single inquiry to enable them to delve further into their data and in turn, gain a more comprehensive understanding of its meaning (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Creswell, 1995). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) emphasised the advantages of pragmatic approaches, arguing that they afford researchers greater flexibility in their analytical techniques, especially given the dynamic nature of qualitative research (whereby the data generated can take a study’s findings to unexpected places). Furthermore, by utilising multiple techniques within the same framework, scholars can incorporate the strengths of each, enabling them to utilise methods that add true value for addressing the research questions guiding their project (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995). In the current study, the use of Critical Discourse Analysis alongside
aspects of an Audience Reception epistemology enabled the emergence of unique, 
interesting and important discussions about the data, which may have been 
unachievable had this research relied on a single paradigm.

Audience Reception Analysis (ARA) was initially conceptualised by British 
Sociologist and cultural studies scholar, Stuart Hall (1973, 1980). Working within 
Marxism, Hall sought to establish a non-reductionist method for examining social 
practices, ideology, and culture (Grossberg, 1986). ARA is concerned with exploring 
audiences’ active choices, uses and interpretations of news content, and is based on 
the premise that existing knowledge and ideologies impact the selection and 
interpretation of media messages (Hall, 1980). Prior to the conception of ARA, 
audiences were construed as passive consumers of media content, vulnerable to the 
ideologies presented to them (Madianou, 2009). For example, Adorno and 
Horkheimer (1979) argued that the communications industry creates ‘dupes’ of the 
masses: “no independent thinking must be expected from the audience. The product 
prescribes every reaction: any logical connection calling for mental effort is 
painstakingly avoided” (p. 137). Fiske (1989) challenged this assertion, arguing that 
individuals apply their own personal meaning to media content, which requires their 
active engagement. Similarly, Grossberg (1992) argued that audiences constantly 
draw upon their own cultural environment and experiences when making sense of 
the messages presented to them and therefore, are not ‘dupes’ – rather, audiences are 
generally aware of their own role in the communication of power structures, 
including the mechanisms with which media messages can manipulate their 
perspectives. Grossberg also argued that the ‘audience’ cannot be regarded as 
homogeneous, as there is considerable variation within and between individuals who 
consume media.
Hall devised a model for understanding the effects of communication entitled ‘encoding/decoding’, which was conceptualised to address whether ideologies are characterised according to class structures, or if they can be communicated to different classes and social groups. He defined ideology as a set of frameworks (i.e. languages, concepts, and systems of representation) that are drawn upon to make sense of how society operates (Hall, 1983). In *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms*, Hall (1981) explained that he examined two sides of the textual/reading process because he was working within two paradigms: the continental structuralism of Althusser (1969, 1971, 1976) and Gramsci (Mouffe, 1979), which focused on how hegemony is reproduced; and the British cultural studies approach of Williams (1961, 1963), Hoggart (1958) and Thompson (1963), which was interested in how the agency and proficiency by the radical working class when determining their own meanings.

The key premise of Hall’s model is that media can serve as a significant social and political force because of its role in presenting “dominant ideological definitions and representations” of a given issue or event (Hall, 1980, p. 118). According to Hall (1974), this process is especially critical during moments of ‘crisis’. This idea was demonstrated in *Policing the Crisis* (1978), whereby Hall and his colleagues investigated how UK media organisations ideologically constructed the issue of ‘mugging’ in the 1970s. Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978) argued that such events need to be defined and related to issues that audiences are already familiar with in order to be “made intelligible” to them. Consequently, all possible directions for future development of the story are impacted causing the media debate to operate within a narrow range. According to Hall, et al, this process enables dominant ideologies to become the “taken-for-granted reality” for audiences (1978, p. 62). Hall's model was viewed as a turning point in communications.
research because it rejected the notion that media messages can directly cause individuals to adopt certain perspectives and behaviours, whilst simultaneously recognising the agenda-setting aspects of the media (Gorton, 2009). His work emphasised that media content could no longer be seen as “some kind of package or ball” (Hall, 1999, p. 3) that is thrown at, and caught by, audiences (Gorton, 2009).

Hall (1980) identified three hypothetical ways in which audiences decode, and subsequently apply their own meaning to, a given news discourse: the dominant-hegemonic position; the negotiated position; and the oppositional position. He posited that although language and reality exist independently of one another, reality is essentially mediated through the crafting of language. In turn, perspectives and knowledge are produced and reproduced through discourse, which is hierarchically organised into ‘dominant’ meanings (Hall, 1980). When audience members’ interpretation of a media message mirrors its intended meaning, they are said to have taken the dominant-hegemonic position. According to Hall (1980), this represents an example of “perfectly transparent communication” (p. 171) as it aligns with the “taken for granted” or “common sense” perspectives.

The second outcome of decoding proposed by Hall was the oppositional position. In contrast to dominant-hegemonic readings, audiences who have taken an oppositional stance actively reject the intended meaning of a given message. When this occurs, audiences apply their own meaning (as determined by their own personal context) to their interpretation of the message presented as opposed to taking it at its literal, face value. According to Hall (1980), a key implication of the oppositional position is that noteworthy political change is driven by social action deriving from these oppositional readings. This is why, as Livingstone (1998) argued, voices that resist or oppose the status quo need to be identified and contextualised in relation to the normative or ‘dominant’ positions that permeate media discourses. Hall’s third
and final proposed means of decoding is the *negotiated* position. When a person decodes within this position, they accept the legitimacy of the dominant-hegemonic reading of a message but respond to it in a manner that contradicts their position (Hall, 1980). Negotiated readings therefore occur when one demonstrates partial agreement with the encoded message.

### 5.3.4 Encoding & decoding: Critiques & poststructuralist approaches

Communications scholar David Morley (1980) applied Hall’s model in *The Nationwide Audience*, reporting that audiences’ own cultural contexts appeared to impact their interpretations of media content. In Morley’s research, 29 focus groups encompassing various ideological and socio-economic positions discussed segments from the UK television news program *Nationwide*. According to Morley, each group demonstrated distinct interpretations of the program that aligned with the shared cultural and social practices and ideologies implied by their class position. For instance, middle to upper class office managers produced mostly ‘dominant’ readings (i.e. their interpretation aligned with the program’s intended messages). By contrast, people of colour, college students and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds often refused to engage with *Nationwide’s* content altogether (Morley, 1980). This led Morley to conclude that an additional reading of media texts was possible, which had not been accounted for in Hall’s model – audiences’ active choice to reject the media messages presented (Morley, 1980). This differs from what Hall had categorised as an ‘oppositional’ reading (i.e. interpreting a media message differently to how it was intended) because it accounts for an individual’s autonomous decision to oppose media messages rather than their interpretation of the meaning conveyed within a given text. On the whole, Morley’s research highlighted two key features of audience reception: social-positioning can affect the
interpretation of media information; and in addition to audiences applying interpretative practices to make sense of media messages, they also demonstrate autonomy by actively evaluating the value of these messages when deciding whether to accept or reject them.

Following Hall and Morley’s contributions of the 1980s, various post-structuralist approaches emerged that called Hall’s model and Morley’s research into question, with both attracting criticism for class determinism and linearity (Madianou, 2009). For instance, a Foucauldian perspective posits that one’s individual characteristics (e.g. class, gender, nationality) cannot determine the meanings they ascribe to a given text (Foucault, 1980). Morley (1999) responded to such critique by pointing out that he and Hall never proposed that the encoding/decoding model be applied in such a rigid and deterministic way. Instead, their work emphasised “a much more complex process, through which structural position might function to set parameters to the acquisition of cultural codes, the availability (or otherwise) of which might then pattern the decoding process” (Morley, 1992, p. 12).

Another critique of Hall’s model is that it assumes one can determine the preferred meaning of a given media text (Wren-Lewis, 1983; Morley, 1981). It was argued that in a poststructuralist setting, one cannot ascertain authorial intention, and therefore any conclusions about what a media text has attempted to communicate are speculative at best. In other words, Hall’s model was deemed problematic because it assumes there is a position in which audiences have interpreted messages incorrectly, even in cases where audiences have actively rejected the ideas presented to them (Wren-Lewis, 1983). This critique acknowledges the polysemy of media messages (i.e. that all texts have multiple meanings from the beginning). As per Roland Barthes’ *Death of the Author*: “we know now that a text is not a line of words
releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). While Barthes sought to question and supersede the author-figure, in What is an Author? Foucault (1977) argued that a text itself cannot signify an author as the author-figure is merely a construct of the reader. These positions emphasise a need to acknowledge that there is no preferred meaning in media texts, and instead, messages are interpreted through ‘available discourses’ or what Tony Bennett (1983) coined ‘reading formations.’ Bennett defined these as “a set of intersecting discourses that productively activate a given body of texts and the relations between them in a specific way” (p. 5). In other words, meanings are created during the reading, as opposed to the production, of a text.

Another notable post-structuralist position that adapted and progressed the work of Hall was proposed by John Fiske (1990) who, like Hall, rejected the idea that audiences accept media messages presented to them without consideration. Fiske posited that audiences encompass various social backgrounds and identities that affect how they interpret and evaluate texts, emphasising that one person’s take on a media message can differ significantly to that of another. In his view, communication cannot take place without a message being created that stimulates audiences to apply their own meaning to it. He also argued that the meanings ascribed to media texts are not absolute and therefore, the process of decoding is as active and creative as encoding – through this lens, Hall’s original model is modified to account for the instability of audience reception and polysemy of meaning. In his later work, Fiske emphasised that all media events are “discourse events” (1994, p. 1). In his view, rather than existing as purely factual representations, media events are socially-constructed and articulated discursively.
Further advancement in audience scholarship that both critiqued and expanded on Stuart Hall’s ideas can be found in the work of Janice Radway. In *Reading the Romance* (1984), she concluded that women who consume romance novels tended to draw upon their own personal experience to interpret the texts (e.g. many were found to preference the message of the heroine’s independence over the triumph of the male hero). Radway (1984) went on to argue that without examining these women’s responses to the texts, their unique interpretations would not have been uncovered and consequently, the assumption would hold that readers apply the same, universal meanings to these texts. Radway’s research led to more widespread recognition of the active role of audiences, shedding light on how consumers of media texts can creatively appropriate the media to serve their own goals and purposes. Her work also paved the way for further empirical consideration of how audiences resist hegemonic media discourses, radically challenging prior scholarship (pre-dating Hall’s model) that overestimated the role and influence of media production on audience responses. Radway (1988) later proposed that constructing audiences primarily in terms of their role as message receivers reduces their power to their ability to reject the message presented or refuse to engage with it altogether. Radway argued that even when audiences exercise that choice, the reliability of the original text is not questioned, nor is the priority of the speaker properly considered. Radway (1988) therefore proposed that media scholars must view audiences as active consumers of media messages, who “take up many different subject positions with respect to the dominant cultural apparatuses” (Radway, 1988, p. 368).

Despite its critiques, Hall’s ‘encoding/decoding’ model appears to be rooted in the same key premises as the post-structuralist work that has followed it: that audiences are not simply free to interpret texts in just any way because media messages are discursively constructed; and audiences encompass various social
Collectively, the central argument presented by post-structural audience scholars is that individuals construct meaning through established systems of representation. As such, much of the criticism levelled at the ‘encoding/decoding’ model points to a need for audience reception researchers to modify Hall’s principles. This thesis proposes that Hall’s work has continuing value in audience reception research because, as meaning is polysemic (i.e. no particular meaning can dominate another), the same can be said about theoretical approaches. However, as poststructuralist work has called some aspects of Hall’s model into question (e.g. by highlighting how meaning is radically diffused during reception), the value of ‘encoding/decoding’ appears to lie within its focus on restoring responsibility to media processes rather than arguing for a universal ‘truth’ of the media and reception process. The current study has therefore adapted Hall’s approach to account for the poststructuralist positions discussed above, and thus, employed the ‘decoding’ phase of Hall’s model to understand participants’ responses to Australian news material.

While one cannot definitively ascertain the meaning prescribed to a given media message during the ‘encoding’ phase, it is possible to acknowledge the authorial intent in news content (e.g. that of journalists and/or particular media outlets) and the important role of available discourses during these processes. Applying these positions to the current research topic, one can consider media representations of asylum seekers to reveal the central discourses attributed to the issue by wider social and power structures. In turn, the value of utilising a version Hall’s approach adapted following consideration of poststructuralist ideas), appears to lie within the model’s central relationship to discourse. In turn, when used alongside critical discourse analysis, applying a modified audience reception
framework was considered an ideal theoretical and analytical approach for the current study.

5.3.5 Encoding & decoding: Applicability to the current research

As noted, the current research adopted the view that combining CDA with components of ARA can further scholarship concerned with the complex and versatile ways in which individuals engage with the ideological meanings inherent in media messages. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault (1980) advocated for discourse over ideological interpretation because ideology implies a fixed meaning. Foucault advanced the field of audience research by pointing out that discourse is a more useful method for understanding how meanings are made in media texts as discourse does not constrain the diversity of meanings. Rather, they provide ways of making meaning within certain constraints. For example, it is possible that two contrary constructions of asylum seekers can operate within the same available discourse (e.g. ‘welcome’ or ‘reject’ - both maintain the idea of national sovereignty and borders as a ‘norm’ even though there are two completely opposite meanings). It is evident that despite the narrow nature of Hall’s initial model, in a polysemic culture, there are very few other ways to understand audience responses without drawing on Hall’s guiding principles and therefore, aspects of the model remain valuable in audience reception scholarship.

While some scholars have utilised discourse analysis principles to study media content (Carpentier & Spinoy, 2008; Dahlberg & Phelan, 2013; De Cleen, 2015; Van Brussel, 2012, 2014), few audience reception studies have been conducted within a discourse analytical framework. In recent work, Van Brussel (2018) advocated for the benefits of combining an audience reception framework with discourse analysis in research concerned with how individuals engage with and
respond to media texts. Such an approach requires scholars to regard audience reception as a process whereby media texts activate discourse and “contribute to the formation, negotiation, and contestation of a social imaginary” (p. 384). These sentiments echoed those of Carpentier and De Cleen (2007) who posited that media organisations essentially function as dispersers of discourses by applying “proper and specific rules of formation” (p. 274).

Combining a discourse-theoretical approach with an audience reception framework, Van Brussel (2018) examined how audiences responded to Belgian press coverage of euthanasia. Her analysis revealed that while the sample shared an understanding of what they considered to be the ‘main messages’ of the texts, they also exercised great variance with respect to how they evaluated these messages. Furthermore, in some instances, respondents actively negotiated the discourses presented in the texts - that is, they resisted aspects of the messages, introducing alternative discourses in response to messages they either disagreed with or did not understand. Van Brussel’s findings are highly relevant to the current research, as both studies demonstrated that news audiences can articulate a diverse range of perspectives about the discourses contained within media texts. Furthermore, Van Brussel’s research provides a recent example of how Hall’s model of ‘encoding/decoding’ can be combined with a discourse analysis approach to gain insight into how audiences conceptualise and evaluate news representations of a polarising topic or event.

In conclusion, the current research sought to build on the contributions of ARA and CDA in the existing cultural, sociological and communications literature by applying key components of both concepts to enhance existing knowledge at the intersection of both cultural and audience research. Livingstone (1998) argued that this intersection is essential for the empirical exploration of media discourses, as the
propensity to gain meaningful insight into the public construction of race-related issues depends on the strength of the relationship between audience research and cultural studies. Similarly, Murdock (1989) posited that an understanding of the discourses inherent within the ‘dominant culture’ is essential for research concerned with ideology and power. To address this, Murdock proposed a research question that such research should seek to address: how can audiences’ discursive constructions of media messages signify their subversion to the dominant-hegemonic ideologies within a given society? The current research sought to address this critical question by examining participants’ perspectives utilising ARA as a starting point, drawing upon Hall’s (1980) model of ‘encoding/decoding’ in addition to a critical discourse framework (including features of Rhetorical Analysis, Conversation Analysis and Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach). For instance, during the analysis phase, it was evident that participants demonstrated some applicability of Hall’s model, with some voicing dominant-hegemonic positions when discussing their perspectives on news discourses, and others demonstrating oppositional or negotiated positions.

It is important to acknowledge that while aspects of Hall’s model were adopted, this study was not concerned with measuring the accuracy of participants’ media interpretations – this aspect could not be addressed without also investigating processes occurring at the ‘encoding’ phase of media production (i.e. to ascertain the ‘preferred’ meanings of the media content in question). Instead, this project sought to inductively investigate audiences’ perspectives about media content they have encountered, allowing them to reflect on how these messages have discursively constructed asylum seekers in Australia. As this study accepted Hall’s position that media messages can be interpreted and appraised in vastly different ways by different people, the ‘decoding’ phase of the model was combined with CDA to
identify instances where participants demonstrated varied interpretations and critical appraisals of media discourse. Exploring the meanings participants attributed to news depictions of people seeking asylum was integral to addressing these questions.

5.4 Data Collection

This section discusses the data-collection procedures of the current research, including: the sampling and recruitment methods employed (i.e. convenience, snowballing and purposive approaches); the treatment of participants, including methods for ensuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent; the processes followed for conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews; and the materials utilised to facilitate the data-collection process. It is argued that these approaches collectively enabled the capturing of rich data from the sample, revealing diverse and insightful perspectives about the topic. This enabled the researcher to conduct a critical, in-depth analysis of the themes and discourses uncovered, which was essential for addressing both research questions guiding the project.

5.4.1 Sampling

To test the efficacy of the interview schedule, two pilot interviews were conducted prior to the recruitment of participants. These two participants were contacted via the researcher’s academic networks in Western Australia. The first of these participants was a fellow researcher and the second was an extended family member of one of the researcher’s colleagues. Data from both pilot interviews was included in the final thesis. Once the pilot interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analysed (and after feedback was obtained from the researcher’s doctoral supervisors), convenience sampling was applied to initiate the recruitment of the remaining participants. In convenience sampling, a potential source of participants is
identified and then invited to take part in the research. Participants are then recruited on a first-come-first-served basis until the researcher is satisfied with the sample size obtained (Robinson, 2014).

The current study utilised convenience sampling via social media. A Facebook event invitation (see Appendix A) was publicly posted and shared on both the researcher’s Facebook profile, and in various WA-based political groups (e.g. The Australian Greens, The Nationals, The Liberal Party of Australia, The Australian Labor Party, and One Nation). These groups were targeted because of the highly polarising and politicised nature of discussions about asylum seekers in Australia, and the resulting prevalence of discussions about the issue on the social media pages of these political parties. The Facebook invitation included the basic details of the research and encouraged those interested in participating to email the researcher to receive further details, including a Participant Information Statement (see Appendix B). The Facebook invitation was open to the public and therefore anyone who saw the event could access the details, invite others, or share the link via their own profiles. A total of 23 people contacted the researcher to express interest in participating upon seeing the Facebook invitation. After receiving a Participant Information Statement via email, sixteen of these prospective participants scheduled interviews with the researcher, five declined to take part, and two did not respond to the email.

The rise of social media makes it easier for researchers to locate and contact a highly diverse range of potential participants (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Ramo, Hall, & Prochaska, 2010; Rosen & Lafontaine, 2011). However, because such an approach involves the recruitment of participants the researcher has not met before, there are important safety considerations the researcher must be aware of and prepare for accordingly (Hirsch, Thompson & Every, 2014). To mitigate this risk in the
current research, the chief investigator ensured that all interviews with participants recruited from social media were held in public places (with the exception of two participants the researcher already knew through social connections – these participants were interviewed in their homes). Additionally, the researcher made arrangements with a colleague, whereby the location of these interviews was disclosed, and the researcher organised to call the colleague upon conclusion of each interview. If the colleague did not hear from the researcher by the specified time (and was unable to get in touch with them via mobile phone), the colleague would then go to the specified location to ensure the researcher was safe. No incidents impacting the safety of either the researcher or participants occurred during the data collection process.

Following the interviews conducted with the sixteen participants recruited via Facebook, eight of these participants approached friends, family members, and co-workers to encourage them to participate. This resulted in the recruitment of a further four participants, an approach known as ‘snowballing’. Snowballing is a method whereby potential participants are accessed via existing members of the sample (Noy, 2008). It is also described as ‘referral’ sampling as it involves new participants being referred to the researcher by existing participants (Noy, 2008). It is widely employed in qualitative research within the social sciences as it allows researchers to access new participants and/or groups when other options for sampling have been exhausted or are not feasible (Noy, 2008). This was a necessary approach for the current research as prior attempts to gain further participation via the initial sampling approach (i.e. convenience sampling) had become stagnant. Furthermore, those who referred friends or family members to the research after taking part themselves indicated that they believed these potential new participants would be able to provide useful perspectives on the topic. One of the key motivations for the application of an
in-depth, qualitative approach was to elicit information-rich data, and therefore the researcher viewed these participant ‘referrals’ as highly valuable opportunities to gain meaningful information for the project.

The remaining two participants were recruited via purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, participants are selected according to certain criteria deemed necessary to answer the research questions (Tongco, 2007; Willig, 2008). It is a non-random form of sampling enabling the researcher to use a wide range of methods to locate participants who may be especially valuable to the research due to their capacity to provide certain perspectives (Creswell, 2007). This step was necessary for the current study as most participants interviewed at that stage had demonstrated either welcoming, mixed, or neutral views concerning people seeking asylum. Thus, there was a lack of representation from people with less accepting views toward asylum seekers. It was important to include data from a sample with varied perspectives about asylum seekers due to the possibility of key findings emerging that highlight how the sample’s differing views about asylum seekers may relate to their perspectives on media constructions of the issue. It has been established by prior research (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Suhnan & Pedersen, 2012; Haslam & Holland, 2012; McKay, et al, 2012; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Klocker, 2004; Betts, 2001) that many Australians hold negative views toward people seeking asylum, yet the available literature about how people with varying stances perceive media content on the topic is limited. The researcher therefore decided that interviewing people with a diverse range of views was of critical importance.

To recruit some participants with less accepting views regarding asylum seekers, the researcher located three Facebook groups affiliated with right-wing political movements in Australia and placed a call-out for WA participants within these groups. The targeted groups were ‘Australia First’, ‘Australians United against
Sharia Law and Islam’, and ‘Aussie Patriots United’. These groups were chosen due to their high numbers of supporters and their public endorsement of far-right policies concerning migration and asylum seekers. All three were therefore considered likely to have members in WA with anti-asylum views who may wish to provide their perspectives to this research. Seven people from these groups contacted the researcher to express interest in participating. Of these, two committed to an interview, three declined to take part after receiving further information via email, and two never responded to the researcher’s request. Utilising various sampling approaches for this research (i.e., convenience, purposive, and snowballing) enabled the inclusion of data from a sample with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. In total, 24 people participated in this research.

5.4.2 Interviews

Interview data is a valuable tool for revealing the interpretative practices utilised by participants when constructing their perspectives on a given issue (Talja, 1999). For the current study, in depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with all participants between May 2015 and April 2016. It is important to keep this time-period in mind when interpreting the results derived - the issue of people seeking asylum in Australia is highly politicised, resulting in key events concerning the issue receiving considerable public attention as they occur, which could in turn impact participants’ discussions. For instance, the first interviews took place five months after the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris and six months following the Lindt Cafe Siege in Sydney. Some later interviews occurred during the aftermath of the Paris shootings of November 2015 and the death of Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi in September 2015. Although some of these events were not directly related to asylum seekers, some participants brought them up in the context of either raising
their concerns about Australia’s acceptance refugees or discussing media responses to these events in terms of their implications for the national conversation about people seeking asylum. Given that the current research utilised a Critical Discourse framework, which views interview discussions as context-dependent applications of participants’ interpretations of a phenomenon (Talja, 1999), the timing of these interviews is an important contextual consideration.

Enabling participants to voice their personal perspectives was key to addressing the central aim of this research: to critically examine the sample’s views concerning Australian news representations of people seeking asylum. Hence, semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate means of data collection. Smith (2008) posited that there are four benefits to the use of the semi-structured interviews in qualitative research: the researcher can establish rapport with participants; the ordering of questions is less important than the content of the interviews, enabling a more inductive approach to data collection; the interviewer is free to probe as interesting points arise; and the interviewer can direct and/or refocus the interview based on the interviewee’s contributions. Semi-structured interviews enable greater flexibility in the data collection process, potentially resulting in richer data than that elicited from more structured forms of data collection (e.g. questionnaires and survey instruments) (Smith, 2008).

During the interview process, it was critical to establish and maintain a strong rapport with participants, enabling them to trust the researcher enough to share their honest views. It was also important to consider that due to the polarising nature of discussions about seeking asylum, many participants may have been emotionally invested in the topic and the information shared was potentially sensitive for them. For these reasons, face to face interviews were deemed the most appropriate and
respectful approach. Interviewing participants in person also allowed the in-depth and flexible discussion necessary to critically examine the emerging discourses.

Smith (2008) noted the following aspects of the semi-structured interview that a researcher should approach with caution: the degree of control the researcher has over the interview situation is somewhat reduced; it can be time-consuming to analyse semi-structured interview transcripts; and there are various (and often conflicting) means by which the data can be interpreted. Smith also pointed out that it is important for research questions to be framed openly, allowing participants to provide their perspectives without being directed to a specific response. Similarly, Willig (2008) emphasised that questions must be non-directive and encourage elaboration, as opposed to leading participants to agree with a given concept. Recognising these challenges, two pilot interviews were conducted and analysed prior to the collection of data for this project. This enabled the researcher to ensure that the questions included in the interview schedule could elicit responses that addressed the research questions. These pilot interview transcripts were analysed independently by an experienced sociological researcher to ensure that the chosen methods of analysis (i.e. Critical Discourse Analysis and Audience Reception Analysis) were applicable to the data and properly applied by the primary researcher.

The interviews took place at various locations chosen by the participants. Most were conducted in either quiet/private sections of cafes or within secured rooms at the University of Western Australia, and two interviews took place in participants’ homes. Each interview began with the researcher giving a brief overview of the purpose of the study and their background and experience with respect to the topic. The researcher then provided some further context about the project, pointing out the knowledge gaps the research sought to address and its potential implications. At this stage, participants were reminded that they may
withdraw at any stage of the research, and they could review their interview transcripts prior to the write-up of the results if desired. None of the participants withdrew or opted to see their transcripts. The confidentiality measures applied were also reiterated to participants at this stage, and the types and structure of the questions was also explained. Participants were asked to comment on various aspects of the asylum seeker issue, including how they have been exposed to information on the topic and their views on how that information has been presented via Australian media sources. These questions included: ‘what comes to mind for you when you hear the term asylum seeker?’; ‘how do you feel about the Australian government’s policies for people seeking asylum?’; ‘what kinds of news sources do you prefer to engage with and why?’; and ‘what do you think about portrayals of asylum seekers in the news?’ - see Appendix E for the full interview schedule.

The majority of participants remained focused closely on the questions, however there was some variance with regard to interview duration - the shortest interview lasted 31 minutes, whilst the longest lasted 58 minutes. This variance was related to how strongly participants felt about the issues being discussed. Occasionally, participants went off on tangents when answering some of the questions, particularly the more broad and multifaceted questions (e.g. ‘what are your thoughts on Australia’s policies for responding to people who seek asylum?’ and ‘what impact do you think accepting seekers can have on Australia?’). Some of these tangents provided interesting and valuable data for the subsequent analyses, however, it was important to keep the discussions focused and relevant to the topic at hand, so participants were lightly guided back to the issues at hand whenever the discussion veered off-topic. The researcher was mindful about appearing neutral on the topic, avoiding any interjections of their own views. Although this was a
challenging facet of the interview process, it was necessary for ensuring that participants felt comfortable expressing their true perspectives.

All questions were open-ended, and participants were prompted to elaborate further on their perspectives where necessary. This allowed participants to further discuss aspects of the topic they felt strongly about, as opposed to being directed toward short, specific answers. All interviews were audio-recorded using a Dictaphone, allowing verbatim transcription. As this research was concerned with examining discourses voiced by participants as well as how these were articulated, it was essential to collect data that enabled a detailed analysis of the precise ways the topic was discussed (van Dijk, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). It was therefore necessary to fully transcribe every interview. The following transcription conventions were adhered to:

… pause in speech;
[word] word included by author for clarity;
???
word or phrase used to mimic statements made by others

Where participants’ direct quotes are referred to in the Results/Discussion section, their pseudonym has been included, along with their self-reported gender, age range, nationality, and their general stance on seeking asylum.

Informal notes were also taken by the researcher during each interview. This enabled the mapping of each interview’s progress, as well as the identification of any interesting features about how the participant communicated their views. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they wanted to raise any additional points, clarify any previous discussion offered, or ask further questions of the researcher. Most did not take up this option, with some asking for more information about the research or asking if they could see a report of the results once completed. All participants offered highly valuable perspectives, encompassing a
diversity of views and experiences. The depth of discussion provided was honest, provocative and generous.

5.4.3 Materials

As noted, a Dictaphone was used to audio-record participants’ responses during the interview process. Smith (2008) asserted that if a researcher does not record interviews, and instead relies solely on note-taking, important nuances are missed, and the data captured will only represent the ‘gist’ of responses. Another benefit of tape-recording interviews is that it allows dialogue between the researcher and participants to run smoothly, increasing the chances of gaining rapport (Smith, 2008). This approach is fundamentally necessary in CDA research, given its concern with accurately examining the construction of language to communicate ideas (Wodak, 2001; Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Interviewees were given hard copies of a Participant Information Statement, detailing the research and outlining their role, a Participant Consent Form to be signed prior to interviews commencing, and a Demographic Questionnaire.

5.5 Participants

5.5.1 Sample size

This research aimed for 20-25 participants to ensure that a range of perspectives could be uncovered. According to Silverman (1993), qualitative researchers need not be concerned about obtaining data from representative samples. Rather, small sample sizes are ideally suited to qualitative studies, particularly those focused on discourse analysis, as the researcher is primarily interested in the mechanisms for employing language and constructing ideological positions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In such research, larger sample sizes can restrict the acquisition
of data of sufficient depth to properly address the research questions (Smith, 2008). According to Talja (1999), it is possible for just one interview to generate a range of meaningful interpretations to answer the research questions in discursive studies. Furthermore, the analysis of discourse is highly laborious, and therefore it is sensible to begin by conducting a thorough analysis of data from small samples (Talja, 1999).

While small sample sizes have been criticised by quantitative and experimental researchers, who argue that they restrict the generalisability of results, qualitative researchers have often contended that generalisability is not necessary in discursive studies. For instance, Schofield (1993) argued that “there is broad agreement that generalisability in the sense of producing laws that apply universally is not a useful standard or goal for qualitative research” (p. 207). However, Goodman (2008) challenged the notion that discursive research involving small samples cannot be generalisable. Based on an analysis of prior research concerning discursive constructions of migrants and asylum seekers, he argued that when such research is replicated with other populations, similar discourses and discursive strategies often emerge. Goodman (2008) therefore concluded that discourse analysts can claim generalisability on the basis that discursive strategies often accomplish similar rhetorical effects across a wide range of contexts. Although generalisability was not essential for addressing the research questions guiding this thesis, the current research adopted Goodman’s position, and has therefore discussed all emerging findings in terms of their possible implications for wider Australian society.

5.5.2 Demographics

Anonymity was assured to all participants during the entire research process. All transcripts, notes, audio-recordings and identifying information were stored in a locked cabinet owned by the researcher. Electronic versions of these documents were
saved to a password-protected computer and backed up on a USB drive accessible only by the researcher. All hard and soft copies of these documents will be destroyed seven years after submission of this thesis. Participants have been de-identified in all publications arising from this research, including the final thesis. Their names were replaced with pseudonyms and any personal information provided during their interviews was omitted from the thesis and all subsequent publications.

Participants provided informed consent prior to the commencement of their interviews. For this process, they were provided with a Participant Information Statement (see Appendix B) outlining the research goals and processes, the participant’s role in the study, and the confidentiality arrangements in place. This document also advised participants that they may withdraw at any stage of the research process. Participants who agreed to proceed were given a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix C), which they signed and returned to the researcher prior to their interviews. Participants were also asked to complete a short Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix D) prior to commencing their interviews. The purpose of this questionnaire was to ascertain each participant’s self-reported gender, level of education, age-range, nationality, and political preferences in order to gain insight into the diversity of the sample (see Table 1, p. 115).

As Table 1 indicates, each participant’s stance on seeking asylum was assigned to one of three loose categories: ‘accepting’ (n = 11); ‘ambivalent’ (n = 8); or ‘non-accepting’ (n = 5). This categorisation occurred after interviews were analysed and was ascertained on the basis of how participants responded to the interview questions (notably those concerned with Australia’s asylum seeker policies). When participants demonstrated mostly favourable attitudes regarding asylum seekers, they were considered to hold ‘accepting’ views. Conversely, when participants demonstrated predominantly negative beliefs, they were classed as
having ‘non-accepting’ views. Participants classified within the ‘ambivalent’ group demonstrated either mixed or ambivalent perspectives on the topic. Some of these participants indicated an equal balance of both ‘accepting’ and ‘non-accepting’ perspectives, whereas others reported that they considered themselves ‘on the fence’.

Table 1: Participants’ demographic details & stance on seeking asylum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Highest Education Level</th>
<th>Political Preference</th>
<th>Stance on Seeking Asylum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Swing Voter - Labor/Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Serbian-Australian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>High School (Year 12)</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Swing Voter</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Swing Voter - Labor/Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patsy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Indigenous-Australian</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>High School (Year 10)</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Non-accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pakistani-Australian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>Islamic (Sunni)</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Non-accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>High School (Year 12)</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High School (Year 12)</td>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High School (Year 12)</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>High School (Year 10)</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>British-Australian</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Non-accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Venezuelan-Australian</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>High School (Year 10)</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Non-accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TAFE Diploma</td>
<td>Swing Voter - Labor/Liberal</td>
<td>Non-accepting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While previous research has identified some notable trends with regard to demographic factors and community perspectives about seeking asylum (Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Hodson & Costello, 2007; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Goot & Watson, 2005; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Schweitzer, et al, 2005; Betts, 2001; Pedersen & Walker, 1997), this was not a major focus of the current research. The methodological approach applied (i.e. qualitative design, in-depth examination of discourse, and small sample size) did not lend itself to a reliable and detailed analysis of any trends relating to participants’ demographics, nor was such analyses necessary to answer the research questions.

5.5.3 Asylum-seeking views by demographics

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to ascertain this sample’s views concerning asylum seekers. This was an important contextual question as a central aim of this research was to explore how different discourses on the issue are developed, adhered to and modified. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, each participant completed a brief demographic questionnaire prior to their interview. This information was collected to gain insight into the diversity of the sample (with regard to their self-reported gender, age range, nationality, education level, religious and political preferences – see Table 1). To preserve anonymity, participants’ real names were replaced with pseudonyms in this thesis and all subsequent publications.

As noted in the literature review, some research has identified trends pertaining to demographic factors and community perspectives about seeking asylum. However, it is important to reiterate that demographic factors were not a major focus of the current research. The small sample size (n = 24), qualitative design, and focus on discursive constructions limited the ability for a reliable and detailed analysis of demographic factors. Nonetheless, some interesting findings
relating to participants’ demographics were worth noting. Firstly, participants’ age ranges were evenly distributed across all three categories. As the majority of participants identified as Australian, no interesting observations could be observed concerning their nationality.

Most participants in the ‘accepting’ category were female (n = 7), and university-educated (n = 7), which is consistent with prior studies (Anderson & Ferguson, 2017; Anderson, 2016; Laughland-Booý, et al, 2014; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Schweitzer, et al, 2005; Betts, 2001; Pedersen & Walker, 1997). Most ‘accepting’ participants were also non-religious (n = 6), and all participants who considered themselves non-religious (i.e. Atheist or Agnostic) voiced ‘accepting’ views. Contrary to prior research (Perry, et al, 2014), the majority of ‘non-accepting’ participants in this study considered themselves religious (n = 4). There were no dominant religions identified across these participants, as there was representation from the Church of England (n = 2), Catholicism (n = 1) and Christianity (n = 1). The remaining participant did not disclose their religion.

The majority of participants in the ‘accepting’ category listed the Australian Greens as their preferred political party (n = 8). Additionally, all participants who identified as Greens voters held ‘accepting’ views. This aligns with previous literature indicating left-wing political ideologies as a predictor of positive attitudes about seeking asylum (Anderson & Ferguson, 2017; Pedersen & Hartley, 2017; Anderson, 2016; Croucamp, et al, 2016; Laughland-Booý, et al, 2014; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Hodson & Costello, 2007; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Goot & Watson, 2005). Most participants in the ‘non-accepting’ category were male (n = 3), and supported the Australian Labor or Liberal parties (n = 2 for each party).
Unlike prior research (Anderson & Ferguson, 2017; Laughland-Booij, et al, 2014; McKay, et al, 2012; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Pedersen & Walker, 1997), there were no notable findings regarding the education levels of participants in the ‘non-accepting’ group, as there was an equal mix of high-school, university, and TAFE-educated people in this category. The small sample size may account for the limited information that was gleaned regarding education levels (in relation to asylum seeker views). Participants classed as holding ‘ambivalent’ views were more likely to be male (n = 5), and the majority were Labor and Liberal voters (n = 3 for each party). The remaining two participants did not disclose their political preferences.

Like those in the ‘non-accepting’ group, ‘ambivalent’ participants were more likely than ‘accepting’ participants to be religious (n = 5). Again, specific religions varied within this group, with representation from the Church of England (n = 2), Catholicism (n = 1), Christianity (n = 1), and Islam (n = 1). Two participants in this group did not disclose their religion and one identified as ‘spiritual’. Like those in the ‘non-accepting’ group, the education levels of ‘ambivalent’ participants reflected an equal mixture of high-school, university and TAFE education levels. As noted, this study was not primarily concerned with demographic predictors of views toward people seeking asylum, and therefore the aforementioned findings should be interpreted with consideration of the study’s qualitative focus and small sample size. Nonetheless, they warranted some discussion given their noted similarities and differences to prior findings.

5.5.4 News engagement by demographics

It was not possible to draw conclusions regarding participants’ news engagement preferences with respect to their reported gender, nationality or religion.
For gender, the ratio of participants identifying as male to female was even across all preferred types of media. Nationality was not able to be measured as most participants (n = 20) reported ‘Australian’ as their nationality and each of the remaining four listed a different ethnic origin. For religion, too many different responses were cited, and therefore a larger sample size would be required to shed further light on this.

With respect to age, participants who engaged with current affairs programs tended to be either under 30 or between 60 and 70 years. Screen Australia (2012) reported that adults over the age of 55 tend to watch more television news than those under 25, and Bennett, et al (2018) found that older Australians often engage with commercial television news. Collectively, these findings suggest that older audiences may be more drawn to traditional forms of broadcast news than their younger and middle-aged counterparts. No notable trends pertaining to participants’ age and their preferences for print news could be discerned, as all participants who engaged with news content mentioned that they regularly engage with print news.

Talkback radio predominantly attracted older participants, as the majority of those who engaged were over 40 years of age (n = 11). Conversely, most participants who cited commercial radio as a preferred news source were in the 18-40 age bracket (n = 8), with only two participants over 40 stating that they engage with commercial radio. Like print and broadcast news, no discernible trends were evident with respect to participants’ age and their online news engagement, as the majority (n = 22) reported regular engagement with online sources. However, of the 13 participants who reported that they typically access online news via social media, 12 were below the age of 50 and of these, half were younger than 30. This finding supports prior research reporting that younger Australians tend to be heavier users of online news than other age groups (Park, et al, 2018; Screen Australia, 2012; ACMA, 2011).
While discussing their news preferences, most participants mentioned specific media sources they engage with, with some also discussing sources they mistrust. Of the youngest participants in the sample (aged 18-29 years), the majority (n = 8) said that they regularly engage with broadcast television news via the ABC, however, two of these also said that they have some mistrust in the ABC as a reliable source. Similarly, while five participants mentioned Network Ten’s The Project as a key news source they engaged with, three said that they mistrust The Project as a news source, with two indicating that they regularly watch the program despite often disagreeing with its content. Facebook was also a popular means of accessing news among this group, with more than half (n = 6) stating that they regularly use it to access news content. Again, two of these participants indicated that they do not trust Facebook as a credible news source despite regularly using it for this purpose. With respect to commercial television programs, most of the younger participants (n = 5) voiced a dislike of channels Seven and Nine, with only one participant in this age group stating that they regularly engage with either network. The phenomenon of participants discussing news content that they engaged with despite finding it unreliable emerged several times during this research – this finding is discussed further on page 219.

In contrast to younger participants, less than half of those aged between 30 and 49 (n = 3) mentioned the ABC as a preferred news source. Additionally, only three participants in this group accessed news content via Facebook, also differing significantly from younger participants. Like younger participants, more than half of the participants aged 30-49 mentioned television networks Seven and Nine as mistrusted news sources. Furthermore, one of the remaining three participants expressed a strong dislike of the programmes Today Tonight and A Current Affair, which appear on networks Seven and Nine respectively – this indicates that while
this participant did not explicitly name *Seven* and *Nine* as mistrusted sources, they indirectly indicated some mistrust of their content.

When talking about television news sources they engage with, all participants aged over 50 years mentioned the *ABC*, and the majority cited *SBS*. Additionally, more than half noted commercial television networks as mistrusted news sources - three mentioned *Network Ten*, five mentioned channel *Nine*, four mentioned channel *Seven*, and one said they mistrust “all commercial TV news”. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that older Australians tend to prefer *ABC* over commercial TV news broadcasts (Park, et al, 2018; Young, 2011). *ABC Radio* was also popular among this age group, with almost half mentioning it as a regular source of news for them. In contrast to participants in the younger age range, only two participants over fifty said that they use Facebook to access news, and three expressed a dislike of Facebook altogether.

With respect to educational attainment, most participants who engaged with television news were university-educated (*n* = 10). Of the remaining ten television news viewers, five had completed a TAFE qualification and the remaining five reported high school as their highest level of education. No trends were observed with regard to current affairs viewers’ educational attainment as these participants were evenly split across tertiary (*n* = 5), TAFE (*n* = 4) and high school levels (*n* = 4). However, all university-educated participants who watched current affairs programs had obtained bachelor’s degrees (none of the participants with postgraduate qualifications reported any engagement with current affairs programs). Talkback radio appeared to attract an educated demographic, with university-educated participants constituting the majority of those who reported regularly tuning into talkback news programs (*n* = 9). Of the remaining five talkback listeners, three had TAFE qualifications while two reported high school as their highest educational
attainment. No discernible trends were observed regarding participants’ education levels and their engagement with commercial radio, with the exception that no post-graduate level participants noted commercial radio as a preferred news source. Similarly, as most participants engaged with print news, it was not possible to draw conclusions with respect to their print consumption and education levels.

Participants with tertiary educations were the most inclined to engage with online news content (n =12). Furthermore, social media was a common means of accessing news for tertiary educated participants, with most (n = 9/12) reporting that they regularly used Facebook to access news. Most of the trusted news sources discussed by tertiary-educated participants were television broadcast mediums. Most participants in this group (n = 10) noted the ABC as a regular news source they engaged with. The ABC was also popular among TAFE-educated participants, all of whom stated that they engage with the network on a regular basis. Tertiary-educated participants also reported high engagement with SBS, with eight stating they engage with it on a regular basis. By contrast, most of these participants expressed some dislike of commercial television networks (n = 9). Despite five participants claiming to mistrust network Ten, it’s program The Project was the only specific television show mentioned by multiple participants in this group (n = 6) when discussing media sources they regularly engage with – this is another example of audiences’ complex relationship with the news as it suggests that while people may voice an overall dislike of a network, they may still choose to engage with some content presented by the same organisation.

For university-educated participants, The West Australian was the print publication mentioned when talking about mistrusted media, with five noting that they view it as an unreliable source of news. No discernible findings could be established regarding the specific sources preferred by high-school educated
participants, as no single source was mentioned by enough people to derive meaningful conclusions. It is important to point out that the proportion of participants with a tertiary education was higher in this sample than in the general population and as such, this sample was slightly skewed to that of a more educated demographic. Nonetheless, this research was not aiming for generalisability of the results and therefore, all findings pertaining to demographics have been reported to provide a general snapshot of this particular sample’s preferences and views.

5.5.5 News engagement by political & asylum seeker stance

Unlike prior research (Park et al, 2018; Young, 2011), no meaningful findings could be discerned with respect to participants’ print news engagement and their political views. There were also no notable findings relating to their political stance and engagement with television news, as their reported political views were evenly spread across all news types. The only exception to this was that all participants who identified as Liberal¹ supporters were also current-affairs viewers (n = 5), compared with only half of the Greens² voters (n = 4), suggesting a more right-wing orientation for current-affairs viewers. This aligns with prior research, which has revealed that viewers of commercial current affairs style news programs expressed less interest in politics and more right-wing political ideologies than viewers of public broadcast news (Young, 2011; Bean, 2005).

With respect to radio, commercial radio news attracted more Labor³ supporters (n = 4) and significantly less Greens voters (n = 3). Two of the five Liberal supporters in the sample were commercial radio listeners. All Liberal voters

¹The Liberal Party of Australia is a major centre-right political party, one of the two major parties in Australia. It is currently in power under the leadership of Prime Minister Scott Morrison (at the time this dissertation was completed: November 2018)
²The Australian Greens is a political party known for its core values of ecological sustainability, environmentalism, social justice, grassroots democracy, and peace/non-violence.
³The Australian Labor Party is a major centre-left political party, one of the two major parties in Australia.
were talkback radio listeners (n = 5), compared with just over half of the Greens voters (n = 5), suggesting a more right-wing orientation of talkback radio listeners. This contrasts with Young’s (2011) findings that ABC talkback programs had a higher proportion of left-leaning audience members than commercial talkback listeners. There were no observed findings pertaining to participants’ online news engagement and their political views, with the exception that all eight Greens voters reported that they often access online news content via social media. By contrast, Liberal voters were far less inclined to access online news sources via social media platforms (n = 2).

When talking about specific news preferences, Greens voters’ news engagement was markedly similar to participants with university educations. This may be accounted for by the fact that most tertiary-educated participants identified as Greens voters. With respect to television news, Greens supporters overwhelmingly favoured the ABC (n = 7) and SBS (n = 6). Additionally, all eight Greens supporters in the sample mentioned commercial television networks as mistrusted sources. Interestingly, some of those who voiced a dislike of Network Ten mentioned The Project as a source of news they regularly engage with. This further ties in the finding discussed on page 219, whereby some participants demonstrated engagement with news sources despite holding reservations about the reliability of the content. Prior audience reception studies have reported similar complex appraisals of news content, reporting that audiences often simultaneously engage with news content while voicing scepticism about its reliability (Szostek, 2018; Swart, et al, 2016; Clarke, 2015; Vidali, 2010; Denemark, 2005).

As noted in the discussion of findings pertaining to research question 1 (see chapters 6-7), participants voiced a range of perspectives about asylum seekers. Some voiced predominantly ‘accepting’ views (i.e. believing Australia should
welcome asylum seekers), some demonstrated mostly ‘non-accepting’ perspectives (i.e. believing that asylum seekers should not be settled in Australia and/or Australia should restrict its acceptance of refugees), and others voiced a ‘ambivalent’ stance.

All participants in the ‘accepting’ category reported that they engage with news content. Of the two participants who stated that they avoid engaging with the news, one demonstrated ‘ambivalent’ views whilst the other was in the ‘non-accepting’ category. Just under half of the participants who engaged with print news held ‘accepting’ views toward people seeking asylum. Furthermore, the majority of participants who voiced ‘accepting’ views were newspaper readers. Five of the remaining nine participants who cited print news as a preferred source voiced a ‘non-accepting’ stance while four demonstrated ‘ambivalent’ views. There were no notable findings concerning participants’ television news engagement and their stance on asylum seekers.

Talkback radio attracted participants with predominantly ‘accepting’ views (n = 8), followed by ‘ambivalent’ participants (n = 4), and ‘non-accepting’ participants were the least likely to engage (n = 2). This mirrors the findings regarding participants’ political stance, suggesting that those with a more left-wing orientation were also more inclined to hold ‘accepting’ asylum seeker views and demonstrate more engagement with talkback radio. There were no meaningful findings observed with respect to participants’ commercial radio engagement and their stance on seeking asylum. Most who voiced ‘accepting’ views engaged with online news content, and of the remaining online news engagers, five voiced ‘non-accepting’ views and seven demonstrated a ‘ambivalent’ stance on seeking asylum. Of the thirteen participants who reported regular use of social media to access online news, most held ‘accepting’ views toward asylum seekers (n = 8), with three voicing a
‘ambivalent’ standpoint and the remaining two demonstrating ‘non-accepting’ perspectives.

Regarding the specific news sources preferred by participants with ‘accepting’ views about people seeking asylum, findings virtually mirrored those observed for supporters of the Australian Greens political party and participants with tertiary education levels. For broadcast news, most ‘accepting’ participants engaged with the *ABC* (n = 10), and *SBS* (n = 8). All participants in this group disliked commercial television news (n = 11). ‘Accepting’ participants also tended to engage with *The Project*, with more than half (n = 6) indicating that they watch the program regularly. Almost half of the participants in the ‘accepting’ group (n = 5) also said that they listen to *ABC* news on the radio on a regular basis. Like their ‘accepting’ counterparts, most participants who expressed ‘ambivalent’ views toward asylum seekers (n = 6) mentioned the *ABC* as a trusted news source. As no prior research has investigated audience engagement preferences with respect to views on asylum seekers, it is not possible to place these findings in the context of the existing literature. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the marked similarities between ‘accepting’, tertiary-educated, and left-wing participants, with respect their news engagement preferences. Collectively, these findings support those of prior literature, which has suggested a link between left-wing political views, high education levels and positive views toward asylum seekers (Anderson & Ferguson, 2017; Laughland-Booý, et al, 2014; McKay, et al, 2012; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Schweitzer, et al, 2005; Betts, 2001; Pedersen & Walker, 1997). The current results also align with prior findings that have shown a tendency for Australians with left-leaning political views to prefer public broadcasting organisations over commercial sources (Young, 2011).
5.6 Analysis

To address the first research question, this research employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing upon aspects of Conversation Analysis (CA), Rhetorical Analysis (RA) and a Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). To address the second research question, CDA was combined with Audience Reception Analysis (ARA). This combination of analytic and theoretical methods enabled the researcher to situate the findings within the empirical literature concerned with audiences’ discursive constructions of media messages, with consideration of the role of pre-existing ideologies, individual factors, and prior experiences. Utilising aspects of CA, RA and DHA allowed the study to gain insight into how the sample communicated their perspectives (including patterns of language and the use of rhetorical devices to solidify their arguments), as opposed to simply identifying the discourses and themes evident in the transcripts. These approaches required full transcriptions of all interviews, followed by a careful reading of the transcripts to gain a comprehensive idea of the key themes emerging, including the forms and patterns of expression participants used.

For the initial stage of analysis, each transcript was read, and common themes or arguments noted in prior literature were highlighted. During this process, notes were made in the margins of the transcript to provide further context for the discourse identified and to prompt the researcher to compare participants’ constructions with those discussed in previous research. Themes and discourses that had not been identified during the literature review were also highlighted in each transcript as they emerged. This allowed the researcher to delve further into these discourses and ascertain whether they represented new, previously unreported findings. It was also important to make note of discourses that were communicated by more than one participant in this study, as this enabled the identification and
analysis of shared collective representations within the data (Durkheim, 1982, 1994). Once this process was completed for all transcripts, direct quotes that illustrated each discourse were grouped into ‘discourse categories’ in a separate word document. These categories were later organised into Table 2 for research question 1 (see chapter 6) and Tables 3 and 4 for research question 2 (see Appendix F). These ‘discourse categories’ ultimately formed the structure of the Results and Discussion chapters of this thesis, enabling the researcher to easily discuss discourses as they related to, and differed from, one another.

This research employed an inductive approach to analysing the data, which allowed the identified discourses to determine the key themes the thesis would discuss, as opposed to selecting data that fit within pre-determined parameters. The reason for electing to group the data in terms of the emergent themes and discourses (instead of analysing and discussing each participant’s perspectives separately), was due to the variable nature of individual’s stances (Talja, 1999), or, as Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) articulated:

Not only do different actors tell different stories, but over an entire interview, it is often exceedingly difficult to reconstruct or summarise the views of one participant, because each actor has many different voices (p. 2).

The feasibility and value of discursively analysing argumentation strategies became increasingly evident as transcripts revealed that participants used various rhetorical devices to construct their perspectives to achieve certain ends. These included impression management (e.g. using disclaimers and/or justifications when voicing views traditionally regarded as controversial or prejudicial) (van Dijk, 1987), and persuasion (e.g. constructing views in an argumentative fashion by orienting them as responses to alternative perspectives) (Billig, 1991). The fact that participants communicated their stance in a manner that sought to achieve particular
goals further cemented a key principle of CDA: that discourses cannot be conceptualised as indicators of ‘reality (Fairclough, 1992). Instead, it is important to acknowledge the interpretative nature of discourse and avoid making firm conclusions that the mere existence of particular discourses among a sample are indicative of a collective sharing of these views across whole populations. Alternatively, this research focused on an in-depth examination of how participants’ perspectives were articulated, with emphasis on their responses to news discourses. In turn, the dialogic, argumentative and interpretative features of participants’ discussions about media representations of people seeking asylum were essential focal points.

To apply the principles of RA, DHA and CA to this research, a second phase of analysis was conducted, during which patterns pertaining to participants’ articulation of their views were identified and highlighted in each transcript. Foucault (1972) pointed out that discourses can be discerned on the basis of their inconsistent nature, with respect to other positions held by either the same individual or between different people. It is therefore important to look for instances that reveal these internal contradictions for each participant, and then seek to identify distinctions and similarities between different participants’ discussions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). During this stage of analysis, it is also useful to identify instances where participants have repeated ready-known assumptions, also known as ‘scripted responses’ (Edwards, 1995), that underly certain ways of discussing the topic (Talja, 1999). For the current research, this was achieved through the identification and coding of rhetorical devices and communicative patterns that had been identified by prior scholars as well as those that appeared to be unique to the current data. The evident rhetorical devices were then listed in a separate word document and direct
quotes demonstrating each were grouped accordingly, ensuring transparency and an inductive method of analysis.

As rhetorical devices and other discursive patterns were observed within various discussions (and were not limited to certain discourses), these were included within the discussions of the discourses identified during the initial stage of analysis. An initial attempt to include a separate section to solely discuss the evident rhetorical devices and conversational patterns resulted in the Results and Discussion section appearing disjointed and unnecessarily long-winded. The choice to discuss the findings that emerged from the CA, DHA and RA phases of analysis with those of the CDA phase also ensured that the discussion included a clear and logical conceptualisation of what participants said and how they said it, all in the one place. As this research also drew upon an Audience Reception framework (Hall, 1980), analysis pertaining to research question 2 involved the identification of key aspects of Hall’s ‘encoding/decoding’ model. Each instance within the transcripts where participants demonstrated any of Hall’s three proposed methods of media message interpretation (i.e. dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional perspectives) were identified. As with the CDA phase of analysis, illustrative quotes were grouped into these three categories in a separate document and then discussed where relevant in the Results and Discussion section of this thesis.

5.7 Ethical Considerations & Challenges Encountered

Ethics approval for the current research was granted by the University of Western Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee. The standard ethical considerations of research involving human participants were ensured, including: securing the raw data for the duration of the project (and destroying it upon completion); ensuring anonymity and confidentiality for all participants; minimal
imposition on participants’ time and space; gaining informed consent from participants prior to conducting interviews; and providing participants with the option of withdrawing their involvement with the research at any stage of the process. All of these considerations have received attention in ethical guidelines concerning social research, which highlight the importance of upholding the rights of participants and providing them with adequate feedback (Israel, 2015; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

It was important to identify and address the ethical issues and methodological challenges specific to the current research topic. These were: the potential harm caused to participants resulting from critical discussions of their perspectives concerning asylum seekers; and power imbalances between the researcher and participants. Another challenge identified was the topical nature of the subject matter, which meant that the timing of interviews could influence the specific aspects of asylum seeking raised by participants, as well as the media messages they recalled – this issue was less related to ethics and more pertinent in terms of its capacity to limit the discussions generated during interviews. These considerations and challenges are covered in the following discussion.

5.7.1 Critically discussing participants’ perspectives on race

A key ethical concern the researcher grappled with was the potential for harm to participants if they recognise themselves in the final report. Hammersley (2014) proposed that for most interviewees, interviews are seen as opportunities to provide information about their views, behaviour, and/or events they have either witnessed or experienced. Hammersley pointed out that even though interviewees likely understand that researchers must be selective with the data they use and apply their own interpretation to participants’ words, there is potential for the researchers’
treatment of the data to differ from participants’ expectations. More specifically, research reports often contain some critique of participants’ accounts, particularly in research with “an explicit commitment to challenging the dominant ideology, and the institutional patterns and practices it legitimates” (Hammersley, 2014, p. 530). As discussed, the issue of seeking asylum is highly divisive and attracts heated debate amongst the Australian public, and by design, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) requires critical discussion of participants’ perspectives. The current research therefore inevitably involved some critique of the perspectives contributed.

While the utmost care is taken to ensure confidentiality for participants (Miles, et al, 1994), this does not prevent them from identifying themselves in the research should they elect to read the final report (Homan, 1991). One reason this may occur is that it is not possible for a participant to anticipate how the researcher will interpret their words. Furthermore, although informed consent provides participants with some knowledge of the project’s objectives and methods, it is not possible for the researcher to be completely transparent about all possible interpretations they may infer from the data (Tilbury, 2000). Norris (1994) argued that researchers’ motives and actions can never be fully communicated to, or understood by, participants. He suggested that it is necessary for the researcher to construct their descriptions of the project to participants in a manner that ensures they will understand and accept the research topic and its key aims, which will inevitably involve the omission of some information.

Participants of the current study were advised that the research findings would be made available to them. Those who took part did so out of a desire to contribute to this research area, and therefore, most expressed enthusiasm about reading the final write-up of results. This raises an important ethical question: what are the researcher’s responsibilities with regard to protecting participants from
potential harm resulting from critical discussion of their perspectives? The researcher recognised the possibility that participants may either disagree with or experience psychological distress due to the way their discourses have been discussed, particularly given that the topic under investigation concerned race relations.

Tilbury (2000) noted the potential for harm when participants become aware that the researcher has deemed some of their discourses as prejudiced. She argued that one cannot report the findings of such research without the possibility of causing harm to those who took part, which is possibly exacerbated by the common perception that oppositional views about ethnic minority groups are immoral. Wetherell and Potter (1992) proposed that one potential way to address this issue is to clearly frame participants’ views as representations of discourses provided by wider society. Thus, in the context of discussing racism research, the investigator should avoid constructing participants as ‘racist’ in favour of pointing out that they have merely reproduced ‘racist discourse’. Tilbury (2000) expressed caution at exercising this approach, arguing that it can be self-serving as participants may not recognise such subtleties. Hence, the dilemma of making research results available for participants remained an issue for this research – this risk of harm was minimised, however, by ensuring that the researcher was transparent with participants about the nature and focus of the research by clearly explaining to them that the data will be analysed critically, irrespective of the perspectives they voice. It was also emphasised to participants that their views about asylum seekers were merely being collected to provide some context for their position on media discourses and therefore, the most important focal point of the research was concerned with their critical constructions of media discourse rather than their general views on the issue.

Another consideration raised by Tilbury (2000) relates to the ‘greater good’ of research exploring potentially racist discourse. Tilbury argued that such research
can be highly beneficial given the potential for such findings to reveal new ways for combating racism, and any resulting harm caused to individual participants can therefore be considered a necessary means to this end. This suggests a need to conduct a cost-benefit analysis by considering whether protecting a present individual or group is in the best interests of a future group (Smith, 1981). To address this, the current research employed Patton’s (1990) notion of ‘empathic neutrality’ (i.e. by responding to participants’ perspectives sympathetically without agreeing with them). This was achieved by avoiding any discussion of the researcher’s own views or reactions to participants’ offerings. Instead, their points of view were acknowledged and they were encouraged to elaborate further, irrespective of the researcher’s position on the topic. This issue was also addressed by providing participants with a shorter summary of the findings (rather than the full thesis) to give them a more succinct description of the key findings with minimal academic ‘jargon’. In addition to the practical reasons for providing a shorter and more ‘layperson friendly’ report, this approach also enabled the researcher to communicate a more muted analysis, without reference to pseudonyms or other details that may identify participants.

The issues discussed here may also account for why the researcher encountered difficulty when attempting to recruit participants with anti-asylum seeker stances. All participants who initially volunteered for the study expressed welcoming or neutral views toward people seeking asylum, which led the researcher to employ purposive sampling to recruit participants with a less accepting stance. This was necessary for ensuring that a diverse range of views was captured. It is possible that people with views in support of restricting or halting Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers were fearful of how they would be portrayed or suspicious of the true agenda of the research and in turn, felt uncomfortable about
taking part. This was observed by Frankenberg (1993), who reported in her classic book *White Women, Race Matters*, that people are often unwilling to provide their true perspectives out of fear that they will be deemed racist. It is possible that some people shared similar concerns when considering taking part in the current research. To address this issue, whilst attempting to recruit participants with either ‘ambivalent’ or ‘non-accepting’ asylum seeker views, the researcher amended the original Facebook call for participation to emphasise the value of collecting data from people with a variety of views. In this amended version, it was stressed that all perspectives were of critical importance to advancing this research area and as such, “there is no such thing as a ‘wrong’ opinion” (see Appendix A for both Facebook ‘call for participation’ posts). Following this amendment to the original wording, some participants with ‘non-accepting’ perspectives were recruited.

### 5.7.2 Power imbalances between the researcher and participants

An issue that frequently occurs in research involving humans is that of power imbalances between researchers and their participants (Frankenberg, 1993; Silverman, 1993). Where social and demographic factors are concerned, the power imbalance between a researcher and participant can go both ways depending on the backgrounds of those involved, relative to one-another (Phoenix, 1994). In the current research, some of the researcher’s demographic features (e.g. a young female on a low-income scholarship) would place a male participant of high-income in the more powerful position. Conversely, the researcher’s status as white, middle-class, non-migrant with two post-graduate degrees and English as a first language would place a lower-class migrant, without a university education and with English as a second language in a less powerful position. It is important to recognise that in some cases, factors beyond the control of the researcher (i.e. their own demographics) may
result in a power imbalance between them and their participants, and this may have occurred during the current research.

According to Tilbury (2000) this power imbalance can shift during various phases of the research process. For instance, during interviews, while the researcher is predominantly tasked with guiding and directing the topic(s) under discussion, the participant is the one who decides their level of participation (including whether they take part in the first place), and the extent to which they respond to the questions posed to them. On the other hand, during analysis, the researcher has total power. Whilst there was no way to avoid the reality of shifting power dynamics between the researcher and participants in this study, it was important to acknowledge this issue and take steps to minimise any potentially negative impact this could have on participants’ wellbeing and the quality of the data derived.

One aspect of unequal power relations that can be addressed relates to the treatment of participants’ data following their interviews (Glucksmann, 1994). In this regard, the researcher has the power as they are the ones who decide how the data will be analysed and thus, they have control over how participants’ experiences and perspectives are reported as findings and implications. To minimise potential harm caused to participants resulting from this process, the researcher is responsible for treating the data with the utmost care and respect during all phases of transcription, analysis, and write-up. The challenge is to avoid jeopardising the theoretical framework guiding the research (Tilbury, 2000). According to Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994), the most feasible means of addressing issues pertaining to power imbalances in research is to be transparent during the write-up of results, clearly describing how the method of analysis was employed and how the data illustrates the conclusions drawn. One way the current research attempted to achieve this was by referring to examples of direct quotes when discussing the discourses
that emerged. This ensured that those who read the final report could see tangible, verbatim examples of how participants’ words were illustrative of the findings discussed. Despite taking these steps, this research adopted the position that it is not possible to completely alleviate inequitable power relations in research as the researcher will predominantly possess more power than their participants due to their control over the analysis and representation of findings (Hewitt, 2007). It was therefore concluded that the most appropriate means of addressing this ethical consideration was to simply acknowledge its inevitability and make a conscious effort to be as transparent as possible during the analysis and articulation of the research findings.

5.7.3 The topical nature of the research topic

The issue of people seeking asylum in Australia receives considerable media attention, especially during and following policy changes, election campaigns, and key events that result from refugee flows. Participants’ discussions about news representations of people seeking asylum therefore tended to be centered upon recent events they could recall. As a result, the views they offered about how they perceive Australian media portrayals of the issue were often context-specific and therefore, had these participants been interviewed at a different time, their discussions may have been vastly different. One way this research sought to rectify this issue was by intentionally spacing out the interviews (the first participant was interviewed in May 2015, whilst the last interview was conducted in April 2016). This ensured that not all participants talked about the same aspects of asylum seeking, enabling a range of issues to be discussed and a diverse array of perspectives to be captured. Despite this potential limitation, this research was conducted under full acknowledgement that human perspectives concerning social phenomena are fluid and largely context-
dependent (Billig, 1988). In turn, this research made no claims pertaining to the
generalisability of these results with respect to timing. It was also logistically beyond
the scope of this project to conduct a longitudinal study (e.g. by conducting follow-
up interviews with participants at varying time-frames). Such an approach may be
beneficial for future researchers who wish to build upon these results by applying a
similar methodological approach across a longer span of time.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the stages of development for this project, including
a discussion of the methodological approaches applied and how these have been
utilised in prior research. Notably, critical discourse and audience reception research
focused on constructions of social inequality were discussed, illuminating how the
present study could progress the existing body of knowledge in this field. Some key
ethical and methodological challenges were pointed out, including: the topical and
constantly evolving nature of the research topic; issues with the recruitment of
participants; power imbalances between the researcher and their participants; and the
respectful management and reporting of participants’ data, including confidentiality
and informed consent. The analysis methods employed were also discussed with
reference to key theorists and scholars who have applied these approaches to
research with similar goals to the current study. It is concluded that the combination
of Critical Discourse Analysis with an Audience Reception epistemology was ideally
suited to the examination of how Australian audiences construct their perspectives
concerning media representations of asylum seekers.
Results & Discussion Part 1: Participants’ Views on Asylum Seekers

6.1 Chapter Overview

The first research question guiding this thesis was concerned with participants’ perspectives about seeking asylum in Australia. The application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992) revealed the following key themes, as raised by participants: the legality of seeking asylum; the idea of ‘genuine’ versus ‘non-genuine’ refugees; and the concept of ‘economic migrants’. The key discourses voiced for each of these themes were ascertained by applying combination of CDA, utilising aspects of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1974), Rhetorical Analysis (Billig, 1991), and Wodak’s (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach. These discourses are discussed in this chapter with emphasis on how these findings help to address research question 1. Where relevant, participants’ demographic information is also discussed in relation to the key themes identified.

6.2 Views on Seeking Asylum: Key Discourses

As noted, seeking asylum has received considerable empirical focus within Australian and international research, with the following identified as key discourses: Asylum seekers are illegal immigrants (McKay, et al, 2011; Sulaiman-Hill, et al, 2011; Every & Augoustinos, 2008a, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Clyne, 2005; Klocker 2004; Pickering, 2004; Pickering, 2001; Betts, 2001); there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek asylum (Markus & Arunachalam, 2013; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Saxton, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003); asylum seekers are ‘country shoppers’ (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010); asylum seekers are ‘economic migrants’ (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Goodman & Speer, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005; Saxton, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Jones, 2000; Kaye, 1998; van
Dijk, 1997); and refugees receive greater welfare benefits than other vulnerable
groups in Australia (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010; Louis, et al, 2007;
Pedersen, et al, 2005). The majority of these discourses were voiced by participants
in the current research, with two notable exceptions: the absence of the ‘country-
shoppers’ trope; and no discussion of the idea that refugees receive greater financial
benefits than other vulnerable groups, although some participants indirectly alluded
to this discourse by stating that ‘we need to look after our own first’ (see discussion
in chapter 7).

Applying Rhetorical Analysis (RA) to this research revealed a tendency for
participants to construct their views in a dialogic manner, by directly challenging
counter perspectives. For each of the themes discussed, ‘duelling discourses’
(Fozdar, 2008; Fleras, 1998; Billig, 1991) were observed, with participants’
constructing their perspectives in a manner that opposed the views of other people.
For each discourse identified, both the original discourse and the opposing discourse
are discussed with reference to participants’ use of rhetorical devices. Table 2 (see
page 141) depicts the key discourses participants communicated regarding people
seeking asylum. As Table 2 illustrates, for all key discourses articulated, opposing
views or ‘duelling discourses’ were voiced by other participants, indicating
significant division concerning these opinions. This kind of polarisation is common
in discussions about asylum seekers (McMaster, 2002). The ‘illegal’, ‘right processes
and ‘economic migrants’ discourses are discussed in greater depth in this chapter,
referring to a selection of participants’ direct quotes as illustrative examples.
Table 2: Participants’ asylum seeker discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Themes</th>
<th>Discourses</th>
<th>Opposing Discourses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Opinions on asylum seekers</td>
<td>a) It is illegal to seek asylum in Australia</td>
<td>a) It is not illegal to seek asylum in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) People who do not seek asylum in the ‘right way’ are not genuine refugees</td>
<td>b) The notion of ‘genuine’ vs. ‘non-genuine’ refugees is flawed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Asylum seekers are economic migrants</td>
<td>c) Asylum seekers are not economic migrants / One can be an economic migrant and still have a genuine claim for asylum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Views on refugee migration to Australia</td>
<td>a) Refugee migration has a negative impact on Australia</td>
<td>a) Refugee migration has a positive impact on Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Muslim immigration to Australia poses problems and/or risks</td>
<td>b) Concerns about Muslim immigration in Australia are largely unfounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perspectives on Australia’s management of people seeking asylum</td>
<td>a) Support for Australia’s policy of mandatory detention &amp; screening for asylum seekers arriving without valid documentation</td>
<td>a) Opposition to Australia’s policy of mandatory detention &amp; screening for asylum seekers arriving without valid documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Support for Australia decreasing (or maintaining) its annual intake of refugees</td>
<td>b) Support for Australia increasing its annual intake of refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Australia is under no legal obligation to assess claims for refugee status</td>
<td>c) Australia is legally obligated to assess claims for refugee status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2.1 ‘Illegal immigrants’: Perceptions of criminality

The term ‘illegal immigrant’ refers to a person who has entered a country for the purposes of migration without obtaining a valid visa (Phillips, 2015). Conversely, an asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin to seek protection in a safe country due to persecution, or a reasonable threat of persecution (UNHCR, 1951). Australia is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which means that it is legal for asylum seekers to seek protection in Australia (Phillips, 2015). Despite the legal distinction between seeking asylum and illegal immigration, there is continued debate concerning the legality of seeking asylum in Australia (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b).

Some Australian studies have uncovered a tendency for people to believe asylum seekers have committed a crime by seeking protection in Australia (McKay,

Historically, the illegal immigrant trope has been applied to deny Australia’s responsibility to accept refugees (Pickering, 2001). Scholars have theorised that framing asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants’ serves to legitimise exclusionary policies such as mandatory detention, offshore processing and restrictive visa conditions (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007).

Widespread acceptance and endorsement of the illegality discourse can carry dire consequences for people seeking asylum (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017; Weber & Pickering, 2011). Between January 2000 and January 2017, 50 asylum seekers died whilst detained in Australian-run facilities: 15 in offshore detention and 35 onshore (Monash University, 2017). Most of these deaths were caused by illness or suicide, and one case was the result of a homicide (Monash University, 2017). Furthermore, 1,730 asylum seekers self-harmed in Australian-run detention centres between January 2013 and August 2016 (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017). Of these, 203 were children. Coupled with previous studies showing the prevalence of the illegality trope, these implications highlight the importance of investigating whether this view remains a feature of discourses surrounding asylum seekers in Australia.

In the current study, some participants conceptualised seeking asylum as ‘illegal’. For example, when asked what the term ‘asylum seeker’ means to him, Bryan answered:

Frankly, I see it as this kind of political word to describe illegal immigrants, like the politically correct way to talk about them.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

In response to the same question, Don commented:
My perception of what they're trying to do is illegal. They are, in my opinion, illegal immigrants.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Both Bryan and Don’s comments appear to oppose ideas they see as ‘politically correct’ (i.e. that seeking asylum is legal), which is evident in their use of ‘personalisation’ as a rhetorical device. For example, Bryan prefixed his statement with “I see it as”, whereas Don did so with “my perception” and “in my opinion”. In turn, both emphasised that they were stating their own views, potentially as a strategy to highlight the idea that their views represent a voice of common sense against a system they perceive as flawed.

Not surprisingly, participants who drew upon the ‘illegal’ discourse tended to express ‘non-accepting’ views toward people seeking asylum, with the majority of these participants recommending that Australia decrease its annual intake of refugees. This aligns with previous literature showing that people with non-accepting views often believe common myths and misconceptions about asylum seekers (Suhnan, et al, 2012; Croston & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen, et al, 2005). In this case, the stance that asylum seekers are illegal immigrants is a misconception, as according to the UNHCR Refugee Convention, is not illegal to seek asylum in Australia (UNHCR, 1951). Furthermore, all participants who referred to asylum seekers as ‘illegal’ also posited that Australia should either limit or halt its intake of refugees, with some citing ‘illegality’ as the reason. For example, Don expressed concerns about the number of people who seek asylum in Australia, adding the following remarks when asked to elaborate on his concerns:

I just question whether many of them would have even attempted to enter Australia in a legal, you know, a legal way.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)
Don’s use of the language “you know” is an example of the rhetorical device ‘emphasising similarity between self and audience’ (Fozdar, 2008). The use of such terminology implies complicity with the interviewer, via the subtle suggestion that his assertion of a ‘legal way’ to enter Australia is shared knowledge. The presence of this device suggests a perception on Don’s part that his view is universally accepted. This supports previous findings that people who hold negative views toward out-groups often overestimate other people’s agreement with their perspectives (Pedersen, et al, 2008; Watt & Larkin; 2010). The implication of this is that people who believe their views are widely endorsed may be less open to considering alternative perspectives, which can have a detrimental impact on how asylum seekers are regarded and treated in Australia.

It is noteworthy that the majority of participants who voiced the perspective that seeking asylum is illegal also identified as supporters of the Australian Liberal Party, which has a controversial history of punitive policies toward asylum seekers (McMaster, 2002; Burnside, 2003). It is possible that these participants adopted a less-accepting stance on asylum seekers as a result of their alignment with right-wing political ideologies, but this was not able to be measured, nor was it a key focus of this research (nor is this causal direction measurable). Whilst previous research has uncovered a relationship between right-wing political ideology and negative views about seeking asylum (Pedersen, et al, 2005; Augoustinos & Every, 2007), the causal direction remains unclear (i.e. whether right-wing ideologies influence public opinion or if negative views predict political affiliation).

In line with previous findings of studies examining anti-racist discourses (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Fozdar, 2008), some participants challenged the notion that seeking asylum is illegal. For instance, Renee stated:
I think people don’t understand, I think a lot of people feel that there is some illegality about the process. We just run over and say “you’re a better person because you came in legally”.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Renee made it clear that her perspective opposes the illegality argument by referring to the fact that other people view seeking asylum as illegal. Renee made this comment in the context of discussing how debates about migration are often framed in terms of some migrant groups being seen as more deserving of acceptance in Australia than others. Her response “I think people don’t understand” indicates that her position differs from the perceptions of illegality she had referred to, suggesting she believes these views are incorrect. Renee therefore challenged a common position on the topic by implying that the ‘illegal’ view is guided by misinformation. She also used the rhetorical device ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996), as evidenced by her comment “we just run over and say ‘you’re a better person because you came in legally’”. Renee alluded to the fact that other people often make this kind of statement, and clearly challenged this idea. An interesting facet of this finding is that Renee’s acknowledgement of opposing perspectives directly contrasts with participants described in prior literature who were found to overestimate community support for their views (Pedersen, et al, 2008; Watt & Larkin; 2010). Renee’s recognition that others hold different views mirrors findings reported by Fozdar (2008), whereby the rhetorical device ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991) was commonly used by participants with accepting views toward asylum seekers. These results support the theory that people with accepting perspectives are more aware of counter views and thus, less likely to assume their stance is widely supported (Pedersen, et al, 2008; Watt & Larkin; 2010).

Like Renee, Jodie talked about asylum seekers’ actions as legitimate, without explicitly referring to terms associated with legality:
I feel that they’re perfectly entitled to come to Australia.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie’s remark was provided in the context of discussing Australia’s policy of mandatory detention for people who seek asylum by boat. Her use of the term ‘entitled’ is directly oppositional to the term ‘illegal’, demonstrating a clear contrast between her view and those who believe seeking asylum is illegal. The rhetorical device ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993) was evident in both Renee and Jodie’s comments as shown by the use of “I think” and “I feel” when voicing their perspectives, making it clear that they were providing their own opinions as opposed to facts. Conversely, some participants did not use this device. For example, Susan remarked:

It's the, actually, the only way they can claim asylum. The only legal way someone can claim asylum in the country is to arrive on its doorstep and ask.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Fleras’s (1998) notion of ‘duelling discourses’ is evident in Susan’s comment, as her use of the term ‘actually’ implies that there is an opposing perspective she is aware of. By stating that arriving by boat is “actually the only way to seek asylum”, Susan has suggested that other people view seeking asylum by boat as illegal. She has also flipped the trope of illegality on its head by asserting that people who seek asylum on-shore fit the UNHCR criteria for seeking asylum legally. The way Susan has provided facts to discount an opposing view is another example of ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991).

It is worth reiterating that Renee, Jodie and Susan all expressed welcoming views toward asylum seekers. This is consistent with research conducted by Pedersen, et al (2005), whereby people with accepting views about asylum seekers were less inclined to view them as illegal immigrants than those with non-accepting
views. The current findings also support Fozdar’s (2008) assertion that ‘duelling discourses’ are often employed as a means of challenging racist discourses. Instead of merely stating their position, these participants framed their discussions as responses to the notion that seeking asylum is illegal, directly challenging this stance. The finding that perspectives surrounding legality were often constructed in a dialogic manner indicates a continued tendency for the ‘illegal’ trope to attract debate in the form of two opposing discourses (i.e. illegal versus legal). It is clear that use of the legality argument as a justification for exclusionary policies remains a key feature of discussions about asylum seekers in Australia, whilst arguments that challenge the illegality view are typically voiced by those who support inclusionary policies.

6.2.2 ‘The right processes’: Asylum seekers’ mode of entry

Some participants suggested that asylum seekers use unlawful means to come to Australia despite the availability of legal processes. This was demonstrated via comments with reference to terms such as ‘the back door’, ‘the right processes’, and ‘genuine refugees.’ The discursive strategy of referring to a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek asylum has been uncovered in previous literature, with the ‘genuine’ versus ‘non-genuine’ discourse often associated with hostile beliefs about seeking asylum (Markus & Arunachalam, 2013; McKay, et al, 2011; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005). For example, McKay, et al (2011) found that many participants who believed in ‘proper channels’ reported that their opinions toward asylum seekers would be more favourable if they came to Australia the ‘right’ way. Critical discourse scholars have argued that framing refugees as either ‘genuine’ or ‘non-genuine’ serves to justify harsh responses to people seeking asylum (Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Hardy & Phillips, 1999; van Dijk, 1997). For example, Augoustinos and Every (2007) stated:
The categorisation of refugees as “bogus” casts them as cheats and liars, and thus their restriction and detention may be democratically legitimated by framing it in terms of clamping down on users and abusers of the dominant group’s generosity (p. 132).

In the current research, the ‘genuine refugees’ trope was raised by some participants in the context of either explaining their reservations about Australia accepting refugees or differentiating between what they consider the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to come to Australia. For instance, participants often drew comparisons between those who utilise the ‘right processes’ versus people who enter Australia via ‘the back door’ when discussing their views on whether asylum seekers should receive refugee status. For example, while explaining his understanding of what an asylum seeker is, Bryan said:

Asylum seekers are the ones that use the back door.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

When asked the same question, Katie remarked:

I think people that want stuff, want a better life, but don’t want to go through the right processes. There are processes in place and you need to follow those processes, regardless of who you are and regardless of where you’re coming from.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Both Bryan and Katie alluded to the belief that there is a right and wrong way to come to Australia, constructing seeking asylum as the ‘wrong’ way. For instance, Bryan’s use of the ‘back door’ metaphor indicates a belief in the ‘front door’ (or ‘correct’ means of entering Australia). A similar sentiment was shared by Zara:

If they are not real refugees, that would be a concern. I have family members here who were refugees and came in the right way, and I worry sometimes that their experience is being mocked, uh, made a mockery by people who are not in that genuine need, that kind of dire situation my family experienced. That bothers me.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Like Bryan and Katie, Zara demonstrated her belief that there is a right and wrong way to come to Australia, as evidenced by her use of the words ‘the right way’ whilst drawing a distinction between how her parents came to Australia and how others seek asylum here. The statement “if they are not real refugees, that would be a concern” and her use of the term ‘genuine need’ are also examples of subscribing to the ‘genuine’ versus ‘bogus’ trope. Zara has also drawn on her family’s refugee background - as per Wodak’s (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach to critical discourse analysis, this represents the argumentation strategy ‘topos of personal experience’, which enabled Zara to emphasise that their stance on the correct processes for seeking asylum stems from information she has obtained directly from refugees within her own family.

In a more nuanced addition to this discussion, Tom pointed out that seeking asylum via the ‘proper channels’ is not necessarily a straightforward process, yet he made reference to ‘the back door’ and suggested the implementation of a system that allows asylum seekers to wait in the ‘queue’:

I subscribed to the, you know, “you can't come through the back door. You can't do that”, but if the front door is the way they want it to happen, why can't there be a better process? I mean, you know, and that's where maybe they should put the resources, add the physical resources, and then have a process that says “okay, we're going to take this many. Let's do it very quickly but you have to wait in the queue” type of thing.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Tom’s comments suggest some frustration with the way Australia manages the assessment of asylum seekers, as evidenced by his suggestion that a more effective process is needed to ensure that coming through ‘the front door’ is possible, however, he has also indicated a belief in the concepts of a ‘back door’ and a ‘queue’. The word ‘queue’ has been uncovered by previous research as a common term used in debate concerned with seeking asylum in Australia (McKay, et al,
Tom also utilised the rhetorical device ‘emphasising similarity between self and audience’ via his repetition of ‘you know’. This device allows a speaker to subtly imply that their perspectives are shared by the person(s) they are talking to, enabling them to imply that they are communicating a widely-held viewpoint (Fozdar, 2008).

Tom’s comment is also an example of ‘reported speech’ (Nelson, 2013; Benwell, 2012; Stokoe & Edwards 2007; Holt, 2000; Buttny, 1997), whereby a person communicates a perspective they know to be held by others. His comment “I subscribed to the, you know, ‘you can't come through the back door. You can't do that’” demonstrates that Tom previously engaged with (or was exposed to) the ‘back door’ discourse. He also pointed out that his view has changed, as demonstrated by his use of past tense when saying he ‘subscribed’ to this view. This is an example of ‘designed visibility’, whereby a speaker attempts to convince the listener of their alignment with a non-prejudiced viewpoint by emphasising that their perspective has changed (Edwards, 1997). Tom also asked a rhetorical question “why can’t there be a better process?” Fozdar (2008) identified this as a common mechanism used in race-relations discussions, whereby a perspective is framed as a question without any expectation that the question will be answered.

In contrast to the discourses of ‘genuine’ refugees and ‘proper channels’, some participants offered alternative viewpoints, arguing that the concept of a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek asylum is problematic. For example, Susan said:

A lot of people say "Oh, they should be going into the Embassy in their own country and asking them." People don't understand that that's actually impossible. And, that's actually not how you claim asylum anyway.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

In keeping with the ‘duelling discourses’ phenomenon (Billig, 1987; Fleras, 1998; Fozdar, 2008), Susan used ‘reported speech’ (Holt, 1996) to directly oppose the view
that people seeking asylum can do so by “going into the embassy” in their country of
origin. She prefixed her statement with “a lot of people say”, provided an example of
the perspective she wished to challenge, and then offered her counter view “that’s
actually not how you claim asylum anyway”. This last statement is an example of
‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991), which is apparent by Susan’s use of the
term ‘actually’ to prefix her point. Thus, she made it clear that she is communicating
factual information that other people ‘don’t understand’. Like Susan, Luke also
constructed his view in a dialogic manner, arguing against the ‘right way’ versus
‘wrong way’ trope:

There's a “right way” and a “wrong way” to do it, which, you know, if you actually think about it, it's ludicrous because, you know, if your government's trying to murder you, you can't really go to a Thomas Cook and apply to leave the country. It's kind of ridiculous.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

The duelling nature of Luke’s perspective is evident in his use of ‘direct reported
speech’ (i.e. “there’s a ‘right way’ and ‘wrong way’ to do it”). He challenged the
perspective that there are correct processes for seeking asylum by directly orienting
his view against one that he opposes. Furthermore, Luke prefixed his opinion with
‘you know’, which is an example of ‘emphasising similarity between self and
audience’ (Fozdar, 2008). By saying ‘you know’ directly before challenging the idea
of a right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek asylum, Luke subtly implied that the ‘ludicrous’
nature of the ‘right way’ discourse is, or should be, common knowledge. The terms
‘ludicrous’ and ‘ridiculous’ are also examples of the ‘emotion display’ device
observed by Fozdar (2008) as a way to emphasise how strongly a speaker holds a
given opinion.
Jodie elaborated on this discussion by noting the concept of a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek refugee status in Australia as a common viewpoint for people who are not supportive of people seeking asylum:

I’ve read a study and maybe you’ve come across it, but its Scanlon Foundation, Professor Andrew Markus? So, he analysed every single opinion poll between 2009 and 2014, uh, opinion polls on asylum seekers specifically. He found that it was about 70, 75% of people who were very supportive of ‘genuine’ refugees who came here through so called ‘proper means’. That same number of people was totally in agreement with the government’s asylum seeker policy, which is based on an argument in part that people do not come through proper means. This is really a bit of, a bit of a mind-boggler for me.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie cited research by Markus and Arunachalam (2013), which reported a possible link between supporting oppressive asylum seeker policies and believing in the concept of ‘genuine refugees.’ She followed up this statement by saying “this is really a bit of a mind-boggler for me”, indicating disagreement with the position that ‘genuine refugees’ seek asylum via ‘proper means.’ As discussed, there is prior research supporting Jodie’s assertion that people who subscribe to the ‘back door’ argument are more inclined to agree with policies that punish or exclude asylum seekers (Markus & Arunachalam, 2013, 2018; Pedersen, 2005).

The tendency for some participants to challenge the notion of ‘genuine refugees’ and ‘proper channels’ for seeking asylum highlights the polarisation of this component of the asylum seeker debate. It is evident that those who support people seeking asylum appear to be aware of the prevalence of the ‘right processes/genuine refugees’ discourse. The participants who disagreed with the notion of ‘proper channels’ all constructed their views as responses to opposing perspectives (i.e. that there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to seek asylum), providing further empirical
support to the notion of ‘duelling discourses’. The potential implications of this finding are discussed in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis.

6.2.3 ‘All about money’: The ‘economic migrants’ discourse

The concept of ‘economic migrants’ is often raised during debates about seeking asylum. Economic migration has been defined as migration motivated by a desire to improve one’s standard of living by gaining a higher-paying job (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). According to van Dijk (1997), the term originated as a response to Tamil asylum seekers who fled Sri Lanka to seek refuge in Europe in the mid-eighties. He argued that the ‘economic migrants’ idea was routinely employed in political discourse to justify strict immigration policies (van Dijk, 1997). Numerous national and international studies have reported the ‘economic migrants’ trope as a key feature of community and political discourse (Bansak, et al, 2016; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Goodman & Speer, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005; Saxton, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Jones, 2000; Kaye, 1998; van Dijk, 1997). Some prior research has shown a tendency for people to equate seeking asylum with economic migration (Verkuyten, 2005; Goodman & Speer, 2007; van Dijk, 1997). For instance, many participants in Goodman and Speer’s (2007) research conflated the terms ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘economic migrant’. Other research has reported unfavourable attitudes about economic migration (Bansak, et al, 2016; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). For instance, Bansak, et al (2016) found that people were more likely to hold hostile views toward asylum seekers if they had noted financial prospects as a motivator for migrating.

In the current study, some participants referred to the act of seeking asylum as a form of economic migration by suggesting that many people who seek asylum in Australia are motivated by financial gain as opposed to escaping persecution. For
example, when asked to comment on why he believes people seek asylum, Reece remarked:

> Obviously, they don’t leave because “I’m so happy in my country I’m going to go somewhere else”. It’s often “the circumstances in my country are not what I want them to be”, whether you’re in mortal danger or you might be what they call an economic refugee: “I get paid 12 cents an hour or something like that, but I’ll get paid a lot more in Australia”.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Reece’s comments demonstrate a belief that ‘economic refugees’ are a distinct group of people, separate to those ‘in mortal danger’. He has also implied that seeking asylum is a choice based on financial prospects, which is a common argument voiced by people who draw upon the ‘economic migrants’ discourse (Bansak, et al, 2016; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). Reece also used ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996) to illustrate what he perceives as the thought process of people who seek asylum (e.g. “it’s often ‘the circumstances in my country are not what I want them to be... I’ll get paid a lot more in Australia’.” It was unclear whether Reece was recalling actual quotes from people he had encountered or if he was speaking hypothetically, however, he later stated that his only exposure to the topic has been via media, social media, and academic sources. It therefore appears that his use of ‘direct reported speech’ in this instance was based on perspectives he has been exposed to via secondary sources of information.

Like Reece, Katie also proposed more than one distinct group of refugees, one of which she argued to be motivated by economic factors:

> I think there are many types of refugees. There are refugees that are economic refugees and there are refugees that are actually running away from persecution and needing support.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)
Katie further elaborated by reflecting on conversations she has had with asylum seekers in the past:

You know, it’s like “tell me about your life”. “Oh, I live in Iran, that’s where I’ve come from”. “Ok, so tell me about your life there”. “Oh, I own three houses and I have X amount of wives and I have a degree in this and a degree in that and I have lots of cars and life is, I’m very well-off in Iran”. “So why are you coming to Australia?” “Because it’s better money, because I can play the system, because it’s easier.” It’s basically all about money.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie provided these comments after being asked what she thinks motivates people to seek asylum in Australia. Her remarks indicate a perceived binary relationship between achieving economic success and escaping persecution. Thus, Katie appears to have concluded that when asylum seekers communicate a desire to earn more money, their primary motivation for seeking refugee status is financial gain as opposed to “actually running away from persecution and needing support”. To express this view, Katie used ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996), stating that these remarks, while not verbatim, were based on conversations she had with people in the past. For instance, to relay the kinds of discussions she has had with asylum seekers, Katie noted that she has asked questions such as “so why are you coming to Australia?” to which a common response she has received is “because it’s better money”. In this context, ‘direct reported speech’ enabled her to provide a real-life example to qualify her belief that asylum seekers are often ‘economic migrants’.

Katie’s comments also demonstrate the rhetorical device ‘extreme case formulations’ (Pomerantz, 1986), as evidenced by her statement “it’s basically all about money”. According to Pomerantz (1986), terminology such as ‘all’, ‘everyone’ and ‘absolutely’ are absolute terms that serve to add extra emphasis to the speaker’s argument. Katie’s comment posits that in many cases, seeking asylum is “all about money”, which is a generalisation as it is not possible ascertain whether the asylum
seekers he referred to were solely motivated by money and no other factors. Katie’s statement is also an example of ‘topos of authority’ as she has attempted to bestow legitimacy on her statements by paraphrasing a real asylum seeker. However, it seems unlikely that an asylum seeker would use the exact phrase “because I can play the system” and therefore, it appears that Katie inserted her own perspective into this statement, which she framed as direct reporting of someone else’s words.

As discussed in the Literature Review, prior research has highlighted how people with positive views about seeking asylum often challenge the ‘economic migrants’ discourse (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Verkuyten, 2005). The current research expands on these findings, as some participants voiced strong opposition to the ‘economic migrants’ stance. For instance, Adam challenged the viewpoint that unless a person appears poverty-stricken, they must be seeking asylum for personal gain, which is a common feature of the ‘economic migrants’ discourse:

They're not the News Corps branded, muscle bound jocks that have, you know, they've just jumped on a boat and said "we're here for the free shit", and it's not, that's not to me, when you say a refugee, or asylum seeker, it is someone whose coming here for help.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

In keeping with the ‘duelling discourses’ theory, Adam has oriented his perspective as a challenge to opposing views by using ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993). For instance, he first acknowledged the opposing view and then provided his own perspective starting with ‘to me’. In doing so, he made it clear that he was differentiating between his own personal view and the views of others. Adam’s use of the phrase ‘you know’ is an example of ‘emphasising similarity between self and audience’, which acts as a mechanism for subtly establishing ‘middle ground’ with the person the speaker is communicating with (Fozdar, 2008). Adam’s use of the term suggests that he assumed that what he was about to say was already known to
the interviewer, suggesting that he, either consciously or unconsciously, made attributions about the researcher’s agreement with his view. Furthermore, his use of the phrase “someone whose coming here for help” in reference to asylum seekers is illustrative of a ‘topos of humanitarianism’ (Wodak, 2009) – he has made an argument refuting the argument that asylum seekers’ true motivations are financial by emphasising that they are in need.

In addition to people challenging the notion that asylum seekers are ‘economic migrants’, some argued that one can have a genuine claim for asylum on the grounds set forth by the UNHCR (1951) as well as a desire to improve their economic success. For instance, Jodie commented:

People talk about “economic refugees”, I think that’s, that being an economic refugee is a perfectly valid refugee claim, frankly. Some people need our help for a number of reasons and it isn’t, it can’t be looked so black and white.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Renee shared a similar perspective:

People talk about “economic refugees” and, as if that were an unjustifiable category. It seems to me that these are categories created by the government to make these arbitrary distinctions.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Rather than challenging the view that refugees are ‘economic migrants’, these remarks suggest that being an economic migrant does not negate the legitimacy of one’s refugee claim. Interestingly, Jodie and Renee began their comments using the exact same phrase (i.e. “people talk about ‘economic refugees’”). This is an example of ‘reported speech’ (Holt, 1996), which is a key feature of ‘duelling discourses’, as they have referred to perspectives held by others before providing alternative ideas. Jodie’s comment “I think that being an economic refugee is a perfectly valid refugee claim” uses ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993) to construct refugee status along
moral rather than legal lines - while pointing out that seeking asylum on the grounds of economic hardship does not constitute a legal basis for obtaining refugee status, Jodie has implied that economic hardship should, for moral reasons, be considered a valid claim for asylum. In Renee’s remark “it seems to me that these are categories created by the government to make these arbitrary distinctions”, she explicitly asserts that the legal circumscription of refugee status to exclude ‘economic migrants’ is morally wrong. She has thus positioned her statement as one that prioritises morality (which she emphasised using ‘personalisation’ – i.e. “it seems to me”) over those of law, which she positioned as “arbitrary” and problematic. The presence of the ‘economic migrants’ trope in the current study was not surprising given its prevalence in prior literature exploring community beliefs and political discourses about seeking asylum (Bansak, et al, 2016; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Goodman & Speer, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005; Saxton, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Jones, 2000; Kaye, 1998; van Dijk, 1997). The fact that some participants directly opposed this discourse highlights that while perceptions of asylum seekers as ‘economic migrants’ are still being communicated, they also continue to be challenged.

6.3 Summary

This chapter has discussed participants’ perspectives pertaining to the issue of seeking asylum in Australia. Discourses concerned with the legality of seeking asylum, the notion of ‘genuine’ versus ‘non-genuine’ refugees, the concept of ‘economic migrants’ were identified and discussed. Analysis of the data revealed mixed perspectives about the issue, with some participants voicing a mostly accepting stance, some demonstrating predominantly non-accepting views, and others voicing a combination of accepting and non-accepting perspectives. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992), the discourses
discussed in this chapter could be understood in the context of participants’ general stance on seeking asylum, as well as the specific functions of their chosen constructions of these discourses. The application of Rhetorical Analysis (RA) (Billig, 1991) revealed that perspectives were often constructed in a dialogic fashion, supporting the notion proposed by van Dijk (1985, 1987, 1993) and Billig (1987, 1991) that views are often constructed as arguments against a counter-position. This has also been demonstrated by research concerned with the racist and anti-racist discourses, whereby the concept was referred to as ‘duelling discourses’ (Fozdar, 2008; Fleras, 1998). The application of RA also revealed the use of multiple rhetorical devices, which served a number of different purposes, most notably, to strengthen participants’ arguments or to minimise the impact of their statements. The discourses discussed in this chapter (including how these were articulated) highlight a number of important implications from both a research and policy perspective. These are discussed in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis.
7 Results & Discussion Part 2: Participants’ Perspectives on Settling Asylum Seekers in Australia

7.1 Chapter Overview

When discussing their perspectives on seeking asylum in Australia, participants talked about both positive outcomes and potential risks. Two key themes emerged: framing refugee migration as ‘beneficial’ versus ‘detrimental’ to Australia (including discussions of assimilation and integration); and voicing concerns about Australia’s acceptance of Muslim refugees (including discussions of Islamophobia and ‘moral panic’). Similar discursive themes have been explored in previous research. Some studies have highlighted Australian narratives in support of multiculturalism (Brett & Moran, 2011; Moran, 2011; Purdie & Wilss, 2007), whereas others have revealed opposition (Laughland-Booý, et al, 2017; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010; Bulbeck, 2004; Ho, 1990), and some have uncovered both positive and negative views (Markus & Arunachalam, 2018; Markus, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016; Spry & Hornsey, 2007; Betts, 2005, 2002; Dunn, et al, 2004; Ho, et al, 1994). There is also a growing body of research revealing hostility toward Muslims as a key feature of the national discourse regarding migration and seeking asylum in Australia (Morgan & Poynting, 2016; Noble, et al, 2012; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Dunn, et al, 2007; Ho, 2007; Humphrey, 2007; Poynting, 2006; Poynting & Mason, 2006; Dreher, 2005; Dunn, et al, 2004; Turner, 2003; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). al, 2011; Nickerson, et al, 2010; Fozdar, 2014; Jayasuriya, et al, 1992).

Participants of the current research also discussed Australia’s asylum seeker policies. The key issues raised during these discussions related to mandatory detention (both off-shore and on-shore), the number of refugees Australia accepts, and the nation’s legal obligations to assess asylum claims. Each of these topics has
been investigated by prior research, which has revealed perspectives that both support and oppose mandatory detention for asylum seekers who arrive by boat (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Klocker, 2004; Betts, 2001). Prior research has also revealed conflicting views about Australia’s refugee intake (Louis, et al, 2007; Ho, et al, 1994). Furthermore, discussions about Australia’s policies have often centred around the nation’s legal obligations to assess asylum claims (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a). These findings were repeated in the present study and are discussed in this chapter.

7.2 Views on Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers

7.2.1 ‘A melting pot’: Outcomes of migration for Australia

Echoing prior research, participants in the current study demonstrated mixed views about the impact of refugee migration on Australia. Firstly, when asked to comment on whether they support Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers, some talked about the potential risks and challenges associated with a multicultural society. For example, while talking about his concerns about Australia accepting refugees, Bryan brought up stories he had read in his local newspaper describing violent crime perpetrated by young people from migrant backgrounds in his community. He elaborated by attributing these issues to multiculturalism, arguing that an ‘open borders mentality’ is to blame:

I just feel that, probably the biggest contributor to these issues is this whole open borders kind of mentality that, well, it has people jumping up and down about how Australia should be multicultural, when the evidence is that multiculturalism doesn’t work.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

‘Duelling discourses’ (Fozdar, 2008; Fleras, 1998; Billig, 1991) are evident in Bryan’s remarks, as he mentioned an “open borders mentality” and the view that
“Australia should be multicultural” and then refuted these positions by saying “multiculturalism doesn’t work”. The latter is an example of an ‘extreme case formulation’, which in this case, is framed as a justification of Bryan’s opposition to multiculturalism - rather than simply stating that he opposes multiculturalism, he used definitive language to assert that “multiculturalism doesn’t work”. Similarly, when Beth was asked whether she supports asylum seekers being accepted in Australia, she said:

No, um, yeah no. I am of the thought that Australia should be for Australians and that includes obviously my people and your people. I seen [sic] no evidence that it has brought anything positive. You don’t see anything good in the media and I haven’t seen it myself, so it, it might seem an ignorant thing to say, but until I see the proof, I don’t see any positives at all.

(Female, aged 30-39, Indigenous-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Beth attempted to justify her position by pointing out that she has not been exposed to any evidence that accepting asylum seekers has resulted in positive outcomes for Australia. This is an important admission as, unlike Bryan, she did not state in absolute terms that multiculturalism does not work. Instead, she made it clear that her opposition is based on her limited exposure to contrary information. Beth also referred to the media, suggesting that she has derived information about seeking asylum from media content and thus, she appeared to place the onus on the media to provide evidence of the benefits of accepting asylum seekers. Another interesting facet of Beth’s comments is her prefixing of the remark “until I see the proof, I don’t see any positives at all” with “it might seem an ignorant thing to say, but...” This is an example of using ‘disclaimers and/or justification’, which van Dijk (2000) described as a strategy for minimising the impact of a given statement. Beth’s acknowledgement of the potential ‘ignorance’ of her statement aligns with her use of
‘personalisation’ to emphasise that her remarks reflect her own opinion. These findings suggest that Beth may be open to information that counters her perspective.

When asked to comment further on their reservations about asylum seekers coming to Australia, some participants identified education and employment prospects as a concern. For instance, Reece remarked:

The IQ difference between countries is a lot bigger than you’d actually expect. Comparing the average Australian at 100 and something, compared to someone from Syria with an average of 70, that’s a big difference and if you bring in asylum seekers and refugees with low IQs, then who says what correlation of success that will have? If you bring asylum seekers with an IQ of 70, they probably won’t go on to be a doctor or lawyer or something. I think IQ is quite important.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Reece placed a great deal of importance on IQ as an indicator of effective settlement in Australia. He raised an important issue given that there is some research citing educational challenges as a significant barrier to successful economic and employment outcomes for refugees (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Pugh, et al, 2012; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Hatoss & Huijser, 2010; Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009; Olliff & Couch, 2005). However, in addition to not being supported by credible evidence, Reece’s comment assumes that a high IQ is positively correlated with educational and vocational achievements. His remark “they probably won’t go on to be a doctor or lawyer or something” suggests that he views these occupations as measures of successful settlement. This suggests that Reece is unaware of the other skilled trades refugees can enter without the requirement of academic success or high IQ scores (Australian Visa Bureau, 2017). It is worth noting that prior to commencing his interview, Reece mentioned that he was studying at university (as he was preparing for an upcoming exam). His own engagement with tertiary education may account for the importance he has placed on education as a factor in
successful refugee resettlement. Interestingly, one participant offered a view that
directly countered Reece’s perspective about low educational and employment
prospects for Syrian refugees. After arguing that Australia can be enriched in many
ways as a result of accepting asylum seekers, Jane provided the following examples:

Not just the cultural things like food, clothing, creations, materials, and so forth, but Syrians especially are very well educated, very well educated. I know three that have got double degrees and PhDs and so it's like how can you say no to that? And even those that are terribly low skilled. You know, we still need farmers and workers and labourers and fruit pickers and all of those things that most general Australians don't want to do.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Although these comments directly contrast with Reece’s, Jane did not allude to the existence of an opposing view. Another important consideration is that Jane demonstrated a ‘topos of personal experience’ by stating that she has known three Syrian refugees with double degrees. Conversely, Reece reported that he had never met a refugee, instead referring to studies, statistics and media content when voicing his perspectives. Like Reece, Jane also asked a rhetorical question “how can you say no to that?” and used the device ‘emphasising similarity between self and audience’ (Fozdar, 2008), as illustrated by the phrase “you know”. This implies that she perceived the interviewer to share her understanding of these issues. Her remarks are also indicative of a ‘topos of usefulness/advantage’ (Wodak, 2009), as she has highlighted the potential for Syrian refugees to make positive contributions to Australia.

Prior research has revealed that people often raise concerns about the ability of new arrivals to integrate into Australian society (Nolan, et al, 2016; Fozdar & Low, 2015; Fozdar, 2014; Moran 2011; Elder, 2007). This was repeated in the current study. For instance, Sam said:
There should be some sort of guidelines or defined rules, that, you know, people coming into the country should abide by. You know, they have to learn our language or basic culture.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Similarly, when Bryan was asked why he opposes Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers, he commented:

I just don’t like people refusing to assimilate and live their lives the Australian way. I have a view that if they can’t embrace our culture and they want to keep dressing and eating differently to how we do, and treating their women like second class citizens, then they have no place in this country, and yeah, quite frankly, need to go back.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan and Sam both pointed out aspects of assimilation they believe refugees should achieve to be accepted in Australia. For instance, both demonstrated a ‘topos of culture’ (Wodak, 2009) by referring to the need for asylum seekers to embrace Australian culture. However, while Sam advocated for refugees learning to speak English, Bryan talked about choice of dress, food, and the treatment of women as aspects he would like to see adapted to the “the Australian way” if refugees are to deserve a “place in this country”. Similar nationalist rhetoric has been observed by prior research as a common feature of anti-asylum discourse (Fozdar & Low, 2015; Lueck, et al, 2015; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003).

Further to these discussions about assimilation, some participants identified segregation as a concern. For example, Mark said:

Wouldn’t it be nice if they could integrate and pepper themselves out a little bit more so they could become, so they could feel like they’re in our society instead of isolated within their own little micro-society?

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Mark suggested that refugees have a tendency to reside in specific parts of Australia and create their “own little micro-society”, rather than integrating within Australian society. It is worth noting that Mark’s entire comment was phrased as a rhetorical question, which as Fozdar’s (2008) research indicated, is a means of asserting one’s view in a way that encourages the listener to consider it.

Reminiscent of Mark’s comment about refugees forming their own ‘micro-society’, Don talked about the tendency for refugees to form ‘enclaves’:

The danger, the danger of, in my opinion, the refugee situation is when they come into Australia, they form their own little enclaves, which has happened in the past with the Vietnamese. We'll end up with enclaves like we have had that in the past. I mean, Northbridge used to be called Little Italy because it was chock-a-block full of Italian restaurants and things like that. From my point of view, if you go to Mirrabooka Shopping Centre, it appears to me to be majority of um, Serbs, Croats, um, Somali and, and general Muslim appearance. You wouldn’t even know you were in Australia to be perfectly honest.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Like Mark, Don provided these comments during a discussion about the potential impact of refugee migration on Australia. He pointed out his concerns about refugees forming ‘enclaves’, referring to two specific suburbs of Western Australia (i.e. Northbridge and Mirrabooka) as examples. His comment “you wouldn’t even know you were in Australia” (in reference to seeing groups of people with visible ethnic characteristics) suggests a perception that Australian identity is contingent upon whiteness. This tendency to construct national identity on the basis of whiteness has been reported by prior research (Sibley & Barlow, 2009; Schech & Haggis, 2001). For example, Anglo-Australian participants in research by Sibley and Barlow (2009) were more inclined to conceptualise nationhood in terms of whiteness than their Indigenous and New Zealander counterparts. CDA research has identified the ‘everyone is entitled to their opinion’ discourse as a common aspect of discussions.
of polarising topics (Condor & Gibson, 2007; Billig, 1989), proposing that this strategy is routinely communicated to ensure one’s perspective remains immune to criticism. Thus, Don’s use of ‘personalisation’ here may be a strategy for emphasising that because his views represent his personal opinion, they cannot be challenged or refuted.

Further demonstrating ‘duelling discourses’, some participants challenged the idea that refugees in Australia have problems integrating due to an incompatibility with the ‘Australian way of life’. These participants offered alternative explanations for why refugees may face challenges during settlement. For example, Ingrid argued that instances where refugees have experienced problems are a product of Australia’s failure to provide adequate support:

Look, any, any problems that arise from these people who've come to us for help, any problems arise because when we take them in, are because we're so grudging and we put no effort into supporting them and actually helping them integrate. In the Scandinavian countries where they help when arrive, they have help with learning the language, help with learning the culture, help with getting their kids to school and they turn out to be really valuable citizens.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Ingrid compared Australia’s response to refugees to that of Scandinavian countries, suggesting some prior knowledge on her part about how this issue is addressed in other parts of the world. She has also emphasised the perceived benefits for Australia if more adequate support were provided to asylum seekers, allowing them to become “really valuable citizens”. A similar discourse was observed by Cheng (2017) in her analysis of parliamentary discourse on Muslims in Australia, whereby Muslim migrants were described as “hardworking, exemplary Australians” (p. 99). In Cheng’s view, such a statement suggests that the speaker is trying to convince others that she believes it to be true, however, if the statement were truly accepted, the speaker would not feel the need to mention it. Applying this line of thought to
Ingrid’s comment, it is possible that she is aware of a dominant, counter view (i.e. that asylums seekers are not ‘really valuable citizens’) and has felt compelled to counter this idea in her interview.

Contrary to the discussions of potential negative impacts, some participants felt that asylum seekers can positively impact Australia. For instance, Jessica pointed out that Australians can learn from refugees due to their diversity of experience and knowledge:

People coming from different countries have different experiences. Everyone has different experiences. There's got to be some worth in like a longitude of knowledge. Knowledge is strength.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

This comment opposes notions of a ‘complete’ Australia observed in arguments opposing migration and multiculturalism. For example, Cheng (2017) reported some instances where politicians have argued that further input into Australian society from newcomers is not necessary on the grounds that the nation has “somehow reached a kind of Australian utopia and thus we must all accept this utopia” (p. 90). This idea is directly challenged in Jessica’s assertion that asylum seekers’ unique experiences can contribute to a “longitude of knowledge” – she has instead framed asylum seekers’ knowledge as a “strength” with which Australia can benefit from. Similarly, Alan brought up the potential for the nation to become more culturally ‘enriched’ by asylum seekers:

I'm all for multicultural Australia I think like, it's, it's great if they can you know, bring aspects of other culture here and, like, you know, food and clothing and like little traditions like I think it can sort of, enrich the Australian way of life.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Alan’s reference to the “Australian way of life” is worth noting given that prior research has typically identified this as a common phrase used when expressing
concerns about multiculturalism (Fozdar & Low, 2015; Lueck, et al, 2015; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2005). Gillian also felt that refugees can positively impact Australia:

They contribute to the community as a whole. Like, in schools, and with their culture. Like, um, the more differences they have the better. Why do we all have to be the same? Like, the best thing about London is the mix of cultures and races and religions and everything. I loved London because it was a big melting pot and that's how it should be.

(Female, aged 40-49, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Gillian’s question “why do we all have to be the same?” orients her statement to challenge perspectives that oppose diversity. This is another example of ‘duelling discourses’ as she used a rhetorical question to imply that there is an opposing viewpoint (i.e. that Australians should all “be the same”) while providing a counter perspective (i.e. that a mix of cultures and religions is good for society).

Some participants talked about the positives of accepting refugees in Australia in terms of how doing so can enhance Australia’s appreciation of other cultures. For example, Tom stated:

I think there would be a good benefit in Australian people becoming assimilated with other races of people. I think we're a pretty narrow bunch of people in our perspective. I'd be quite happy to have them in my backyard, and I'd find it really good for my own character, to learn about it.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Tom expressed that on a personal level, multiculturalism in Australia can allow him to grow, evidenced by his remark “I’d find it really good for my own character”. This comment is important given that Tom expressed ‘ambivalent’ views about seeking asylum- as prior research has tended to focus on strong pro and anti-asylum seeker perspectives, little is known about discourses voiced by those with a more neutral or mixed stance on the issue. While Tom voiced mixed perspectives about people
seeking asylum, he also voiced predominantly positive attitudes about the impact of 
refugee migration. This suggests that upon engaging in critical discussion about the 
topic, people with uncertain or ‘on the fence’ views may discover they have 
supportive attitudes about asylum seekers.

7.2.2 ‘Religion of hate’ vs. ‘moral panic’: Muslim asylum seekers

Negative views toward Muslims have permeated discussions about seeking 
asylum in Australia. In the years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, 
Western societies have routinely constructed Muslims as the ‘other’ (Colic-Peisker, 
et al, 2016). In turn, studies have uncovered a tendency for Muslim migrants and 
refugees to be labelled as ‘terrorists’ (Pedersen, et al, 2006; Klocker & Dunn, 2003), 
‘criminals’ (Poynting, 2006; Pickering, 2001), and generally having values 
In the present research, a number of participants voiced concerns about Muslim 
immigration. For example, when asked to provide his thoughts on the potential 
impact of accepting asylum seekers in Australia, Gary said he had some concerns:

I'll typically see the, the Muslim side of the asylum seekers, is a 
difficult one. Um, I personally would have liked, I believe they 
should be Christians.

(Male, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Gary’s comment suggests a conditional acceptance of asylum seekers, provided they 
are Christians as opposed to Muslims. This selective acceptance on the basis of 
religion has been discussed in previous literature as a common justification for 
exclusionary attitudes about migration (Dunn, 2001; Hage, 1998, 2002). Through the 
use of ‘personalisation’ (i.e. “I personally” and “I believe”), Gary emphasised that his 
statements reflect his own opinion. This differentiated his remark from others who
made more definitive claims about the impact of Muslim immigration to Australia, such as Bryan:

> It’s not a racist thing, but we’re just not compatible with some groups, like the Muslims mainly, but I don’t hold prejudices or anything.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan’s argument that Muslims are not compatible with Australia is a popular discourse voiced by people who support exclusionary asylum seeker policies (Morgan & Poynting, 2016; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Dunn, et al, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Bryan framed this comment using ‘disclaimers and/or justification’ as a rhetorical device (van Dijk, 2000), during which he denied that he holds racist or prejudiced views (i.e. “but I don’t hold prejudices or anything” and “it’s not a racist thing, but...”). This phenomenon has been reported in the previous literature as a ‘denial of prejudice’, which allows a speaker to justify a prejudiced statement to alleviate any potential criticism it may inspire (Goodman, 2014; Fozdar, 2008; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; van Dijk, 1992, 2000; Billig, 1988). It is possible that Bryan was concerned that his remarks would incur judgement, so he felt compelled to point out that he does not “hold any prejudices”.

He also added:

> Look, 9/11 should have been the end of it, the end of all Islamisation of Western countries, in my opinion. The siege in Sydney last year was a major thing. Like, that guy was a boat person and we let him in and then he goes and, he killed two people and that kind of thing will happen again soon enough.

Bryan’s reference to 9/11 suggests that he associated Islam with terrorism, mirroring previous findings (Pedersen, et al, 2006; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). He also brought up the 2014 Sydney Lindt Café Siege to rationalise his opposition to the “Islamisation of Western countries”. This is consistent with prior research indicating that this incident prompted a definition of Australian national identity that placed Muslims on a binary
of “the ‘good ones’ worthy of inclusion into the ‘good nation’ and the ‘bad ones’ to be excluded” (Colic-Peisker, et al, 2016, p. 373). A similar framing of the Muslim as ‘other’, whilst drawing upon themes of nationhood, solidarity, and fear, was observed by Mikola, et al (2016) in their analysis of newspaper coverage of the tragedy. These prior findings highlight a possible explanation for Bryan’s association between the Sydney siege and 9/11, as numerous publications labelled both events as ‘Muslim terrorism’. For example, in response to the Sydney Siege, The Sydney Morning Herald (December 15, 2014) included the headline “Terror hits home”, and The Australian Financial Review published an article entitled “Islamic State-linked terror grips Sydney” (Kerin, 2014).

Another interesting facet of Bryan’s argument was his use of the term ‘boat person’ to describe the man responsible for the Sydney Siege. According to a report issued by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in 2015, Man Haron Monis came to Australia by plane in 1996 on a one-month business visa and was later granted a protection visa on the basis of political asylum. Therefore, while Bryan was correct in suggesting that Monis was a Muslim refugee, it was incorrect to label him a ‘boat person’. Additionally, Bryan’s statement “9/11 should have been the end of all Islamisation of Western countries” contains an ‘extreme case formulation’ (Pomerantz, 1986). This is apparent via by his use of the term ‘all’, suggesting that banning Muslim immigration in all Western Countries is a viable option for preventing future incidents. This is a significant generalisation given the prevalence of mass-casualty violence carried out in Australia alone by non-Muslim offenders (e.g. Melbourne’s Bourke Street & Hoddle Street massacres, the Russell Street bombing, and the Port Arthur massacre).

Don also voiced concerns about Muslim immigration to Australia:
I think the Muslim religion has a perception of being a religion of hate, um, particularly with their Sharia law and things like that. I, I just find that diabolical that people can be involved in a religion that doesn't promote harmony before persecution, I suppose for lack of a better word. If you did over there, as a Christian, what the Muslims do here to create disharmony, they'd get their head chopped off. Um, so from that point of view, um, I just can't see why people can't live in harmony.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Like Bryan, Don used an ‘extreme case formulation’ in the form of a generalisation, attributing the creation of ‘disharmony’ to Muslims (i.e. “if you did over there, as a Christian, what the Muslims do here to create disharmony, they'd get their head chopped off”). A similar generalisation was offered by Patsy:

I don't worry about them ‘cause they're Muslim. I mean, there’s nothing that concerns me about being Muslim. I worry about the, um, the other side of being Muslim. Do you know what I mean? They'd be, um, wanting to blow everything up and what have you.

(Female, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

An interesting facet of Patsy’s comment is that she contradicted herself by first stating that there are no aspects of being Muslim that concern her, but then added “I worry about the other side of being Muslim”. This was followed by the suggestion that “being Muslim” involves “wanting to blow everything up”, which is another example of an ‘extreme case formulation’ (Pomerantz, 1986).

In direct contrast to the generalisations observed in Patsy and Don’s comments, some participants emphasised the importance of avoiding sweeping statements about Muslims. For instance, Mark said:

You look at the IRA who were, you know, religious, I guess they were Irish Protestants or whatever. We’ve got extremes everywhere so let’s not put them all in the same bucket.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Mark argued that extremist behaviour cannot be attributed solely to people of the Islamic faith, adding that it is problematic to “put them all in the same bucket”. Zara, who identified as a Muslim herself, also brought up the tendency for people to assume that Muslim asylum seekers are “bad people”:

I feel like it always gets brought back to a debate about Islam and most of the people debating the hardest are the ones with the least authority to be debating it really. So every time something bad happens that involves a Muslim, people assume they are an asylum seeker too and that means all Muslims and asylum seekers are bad people, and vice versa, like, when something happens with asylum seekers, sometimes there is no mention of them being Muslim at all, but like, people make that connection anyway and it doesn’t look good for us.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Zara communicated frustration about the tendency for people to make assumptions about Muslims and asylum seekers that frame them as “bad people”. Her comments are an example of a ‘duelling discourse’ as she used ‘reported speech’ (Buttny, 1997) to point out how other people construct this issue (i.e. “people assume” and “people make that connection”) while directly opposing these assumptions. Zara’s use of these devices aligns with a key theory of CDA research - that these devices are commonly applied as strategies for challenging racial and/or prejudicial views (Fozdar, 2008; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Billig, 1987, 1988, 1991; van Dijk, 1985).

Some participants voiced acceptance of Muslim asylum seekers provided they adapt to Australian beliefs. For instance, Brooke asserted that Muslim refugees in Australia should refrain from imposing their beliefs on non-Muslims:

As long as they respect that other people have beliefs and can work together, then it'll be fine. But, yeah, it's when they, you know, demand, for example, demanding that certain fast foods don't allow, you know, and ban, like, bacon or something, and it's like, well it's not the majority or minority that's trying to make a compromise on what to do.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Similarly, Don commented:

I don't think a lot of people like religion shoved down their throats. They've got to accept the fact that not everybody wants to be a Muslim. Not everybody wants to be a Catholic. Not everyone wants to be a Church of England, Salvation Army, or anything like that. I mean, people have the right to choose what they choose, um, but that should not cause any dissension between someone else for them to make that choice. If I had, um, a Church of England or someone like that trying to ram religion down my throat, I'd probably tell them to nick off as well. I couldn't care less if someone's a Buddhist, or Baptist, or Jew. That's your choice. It's also my choice.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie voiced a similar perspective, adding that Muslim asylum seekers need to abide by Australian values:

I don’t think Shari’a law should be part of law, or however it is pronounced. Like, “when I go to your country, I respect your values. If I was to live in your country, I would respect your rules, your regulations, your policies and I would follow them. Do the same here”. Yes, we’re a multicultural country but we have our processes for a reason. We are a democratic country and I have grown up in a democratic country, so I don’t want that to be taken away from me.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

These remarks draw upon themes observed by Fozdar and Low (2015), whereby the perception that Muslims force their beliefs on Australians was commonly voiced to support the notion that they are incompatible with the nation. Don and Katie’s comments also draw upon nationalist themes of ‘Australian values’, which are prevalent in literature investigating how negative views about Muslims are often rationalised (Colic-Peisker, et al, 2016; Mikola, et al, 2016). Both framed their perspectives as concerns about Islamic values being imposed on them if Australia accepts Muslim asylum seekers, indicated by Don’s remark “they've got to accept the fact that not everybody wants to be a Muslim... If I had, um, a Church of England or someone like that trying to ram religion down my throat, I'd probably tell them to nick off as well” and Katie’s comment “when I go to your country, I respect your
values. Do the same here”. This kind of apprehension, while drawing upon ‘Australian values’, has been cited as a common justification for anti-Islamic sentiments (Colic-Peisker, et al, 2016; Mikola, et al, 2016).

Some participants talked about the idea of ‘moral panic’ and a ‘fear of the other’ as prevalent components of the national conversation about people seeking asylum. Many scholars have examined moral panics in the context of Islamophobia, particularly as a facet of negative views toward asylum seekers (Morgan & Poynting, 2016; Martin, 2015; Marr, 2013; Humphrey, 2007; Devetak, 2004; McMaster, 2002; Cohen, 2002; Pickering, 2001). Cohen (1972) argued that the persistence of moral panics can be attributed to the belief that they represent a ‘common-sense’ response to reasonable threats. In the current research, some participants drew upon the concept of moral panics, talking about ‘fear’ as a key driver of anti-Muslim sentiments. For example, Zara directly challenged negative perspectives on Islam that she has encountered:

There is just, there is really very little basis for all of the fear of Islam that Australians seem to have. Not all Australians, of course, but I think even some of the well-meaning ones who support us and welcome us and everything, even they fail to understand how it really is for us and it gets really frustrating.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Zara’s comment provides another example of ‘duelling discourses’ as she has referenced how others perceive Muslims and then refuted the legitimacy of the ‘fear of Islam’. This was achieved via the statements “there is really very little basis for all of the fear of Islam that Australians seem to have” and “they fail to understand how it really is for us”, which are both examples of the rhetorical device ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991). Zara’s use of this device suggests that she wishes to emphasise that she is communicating information most people are not aware of. It is worth noting that in the second sentence of Zara’s quote, she clarified her earlier
statement (i.e. “the fear of Islam that Australians seem to have”). If taken alone, this phrase would appear to generalise all Australians as fearful of Muslims, however, by adding “not all Australians” before explaining that even “well-meaning” Australians often misunderstand her religion, she has highlighted an important point - that efforts to alter anti-Islamic sentiments should not focus solely on people who oppose Islam, as pro-Muslim advocates may also have problems understanding and responding to the needs of Muslims.

Whilst refuting that notion that accepting Muslim asylum seekers increases Australia’s risk of terrorism, Jessica commented:

I guess it’s enhanced fear and the community does not want it to happen. They really narrow in on the fear factor.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

This concept of Australia’s ‘fear’ of asylum seekers was also discussed by Jodie, who talked about how the target of hostile attitudes has shifted over time:

Concerns with waves of migration have always been the ones to, kind of, cause this fear. In the immediate post-war period it was the Central Mediterranean Europeans, and then you had the Southeast Asians in the seventies and eighties. And now it’s the Muslim immigrants, but it’s interesting to see how, as time goes by, some become more acceptable than others and then you find there’s a new victim. It’s, it’s really interesting to track how Australia constructs the ‘other’.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie made these comments while raising the issue of ‘moral panic’ as a driving force behind exclusionary attitudes towards asylum seekers. She referred to Muslims as a “new victim” of Australia’s construction of the ‘other’ after noting that many previous migrant groups have experienced similar hostility. While Jodie’s reference to this historical aspect of Australian migration was uncommon among this sample, it is clear she has given this issue some critical thought. This is not surprising given her
‘accepting’ stance on the topic, as research has shown that people with positive views about seeking asylum have typically been exposed to more information about the issue than their non-accepting counterparts (Pedersen, et al, 2006; Pedersen, et al, 2005).

The findings discussed in this section have highlighted some nuanced perspectives on the impact of refugee migration to Australia, including mixed views concerning multiculturalism, the potential positive and negative outcomes of refugee migration, and Muslim immigration. As noted, some of these discourses mirror those reported by prior studies, however, others have highlighted aspects of the national discourse that require further empirical attention. The following discussion further adds to these findings by detailing participants’ views on Australia’s policy responses to people seeking asylum.

### 7.2.3 ‘Deliberate cruelty’: Australia’s asylum seeker policies

Australia’s policy of mandatory detention for asylum seekers arriving by boat receives considerable attention in research and debate. It is a highly polarising topic, with numerous perspectives reported in the literature, which have indicated both community support and opposition to the policy (Muller, 2016; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Hartley & Pedersen, 2007; Klocker, 2004; Betts, 2001). The current research also revealed mixed perspectives, with some participants expressing views in favour of detention, framing it as ‘necessary’ and ‘responsible’, and some opposing it, using terms such as ‘cruel’ and ‘inhumane’. There were also some participants who reported a more nuanced stance on the issue. These participants voiced concerns about detention from a human rights perspective whilst also indicating support for the policy from a national security standpoint.

Some participants voiced support for detention. For example, Don said:
Don provided this comment while discussing the necessity of Australia’s policy of mandatory detention. It is therefore apparent that by referencing the need to “have some sort of control” in this context, he argued that detention is in the best interests of the country. This notion of control, as a means of ‘protecting Australia’, has been discussed in prior literature as a common discourse voiced in support of harsh immigration policies (McKenzie & Hasmath, 2013; Every, 2008; Lynn & Lea, 2003; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Cronin, 1993). In addition to referring to a need for ‘control’, Don defended mandatory detention by asking the rhetorical question “is Nauru worse than where they left?” before immediately answering the question himself: “I doubt very much whether it would be”. Furthermore, his use of the phrase “you’ve got to” implies that he is speaking on behalf of other Australians, which serves to bring the listener in, rendering them unable to disagree.

Katie framed her argument in a similar way to Don, by voicing support of detention whilst arguing that the conditions in Australian centres are no worse than the places asylum seekers have fled:

On Manus Island they’re given three meals a day. Their rights are respected with regards to their faith, so they’re given prayer mats and places of prayer. They have air-conditioned units, they’re provided with clean water. So, is it different to what other families, people that are seeking refugee and asylum seeker status in camps, is it any different? I mean, they have internet access, they have got phone access, they’ve got all sorts of things available to them and they have contact with their families regularly. They’ve got access to mobile phones. You don’t hear about that. So really, okay, the conditions are hot, and they’re not ideal, they’re not fantastic, but are they any worse than where they came from?
Both Katie and Don compared offshore facilities and the conditions asylum seekers have fled, arguing that the latter is worse. There was some recognition that conditions in detention facilities are problematic (e.g. Katie’s comment “they’re not ideal, they’re not fantastic”), yet these comments imply that despite this, detention is justifiable because it is more favourable than the alternative option (i.e. refoulement). Furthermore, both Katie and Don used rhetorical questions (i.e. “is it any different?” and “are they any worse than where they came from?”) to orient their perspectives as arguments against the notion that detention is unjustifiable. This is another example of ‘duelling discourses.’ In Katie’s comment, the rhetorical device ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991) is also evident. In her remark “they’ve got access to mobile phones. You don’t hear about that”, Katie implied that she is privy to information others may not have as “you don’t hear about that” implies that asylum seekers having mobile phones in detention is not widely discussed. Like Katie and Don, Reece also argued that detention is justifiable:

I mean, allegations aside, if those allegations are true, that’s pretty crap, but allegations aside, it’s a safe place, well, safe enough. They’re not going to be stabbed there very often.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Reece’s comment “they’re not going to be stabbed there very often” demonstrates some acknowledgment that people are likely to experience violence in detention. However, he suggested that the perceived infrequency of such violence makes detention “safe enough”. This draws upon the ‘it could be worse’ theme observed in Katie and Don’s comments whilst also appearing to trivialise the victimisation of asylum seekers who are subjected to violence. Reece’s comment also normalises a low standard of safety for detained asylum seekers, as evidenced by the suggestion that unless stabbings happen ‘often’, asylum seekers in detention are ‘safe’.
Contrary to the notions of detention being necessary for ‘control’ and the assertion that it is ‘safe enough’ for asylum seekers, some participants expressed attitudes opposing mandatory detention, labelling it as inhumane and cruel. For example, when Susan was asked to comment on her views on the policy, she said:

I think it's fucked. I think it's evil.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

The abruptness and use of language in Susan’s comment indicates a strong opposition to mandatory detention. Her use of strong language here is a classic example of an ‘emotion display’ (Fozdar 2008). Jodie voiced a similar opinion:

To say that it’s inhumane is just downplaying it quite frankly. It’s, it’s cruel, it’s deliberate cruelty. I just think it’s absolutely atrocious.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie also used an ‘emotion display’ (Fozdar, 2008) as demonstrated by her description of detention as “absolutely atrocious”. Furthermore, this framing of detention as inhumane has been uncovered by prior studies showing that people who oppose harsh asylum seeker policies favour discourses of compassion as opposed to ‘control’ (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). These findings therefore provide further support for the oppositional nature of ‘compassion’ versus ‘control’ discourses in debates about seeking asylum. Jodie went on to oppose the perspective that detention is necessary for screening purposes:

People say “we have to screen for diseases” and such and such. Well, there is actually evidence that people coming here have lower incidence of all the so-called infectious diseases we are afraid of than Australians themselves. This whole processing issue has more to do with politics than the actual factual situation on the ground. If that’s the case, if there’s no issue in terms of any sort of health threat, then this whole issue about processing and screening them for something that does not exist, seems to me to be more about protecting our national identity from an emerging community.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)
Jodie also used ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996) by stating “people say ‘we have to screen for diseases’ and such and such”. She then opposed this viewpoint by saying “there is actually evidence that people coming here have lower incidence of all the so-called infectious diseases” which is an example of ‘claiming special knowledge’ (1991). The ‘duelling discourses’ concept is also evident as Jodie expressed opposition to the notion of detention as a necessary means of protecting Australia’s national identity (i.e. “this whole issue about processing and screening... seems to me to be more about protecting our national identity from an emerging community”). This assertion has empirical support as prior research has suggested that people who support punitive asylum seeker policies often demonstrate strong nationalist rhetoric (Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003). It therefore appears that there is a relationship between Australian nationalism and exclusionary attitudes toward people seeking asylum, however, as stated in the literature review, the nature of this relationship is unclear.

Some participants who opposed mandatory detention talked about the punitive nature of the policy. For example, Gillian stated:

I worry that children are almost being punished, and yet they haven't done anything wrong, only like, their parents might be still be going through the screening process but why should the children suffer, like, in there?

(Female, aged 40-49, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Zara also referred to the punitive nature of detention, arguing that it sends a message to others that seeking asylum is a crime:

It makes people think they must have done something wrong because detention is a punitive thing, so people think asylum seekers are criminals or need to be separated from the rest of the world.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Both Gillian and Zara made these remarks after being asked to comment on Australia’s asylum seeker policies. While voicing her opposition to detention, Zara used ‘reported speech’ (Buttny, 1997) to refer to how others view asylum seekers as a result of the policy (i.e. “people think asylum seekers are criminals”). By doing so, she situated her opposition to detention within a discussion about why others’ views may differ. Like Zara, scholars have discussed how punitive treatment of asylum seekers facilitates their criminalisation among the wider public. For example, Welch and Schuster (2005) argued that exclusionary policies often coincide with discursively constructing asylum seekers and criminals in similar ways. Thus, policies such as mandatory detention are argued to perpetuate the message that asylum seekers have done something to warrant their exclusion from society.

Some participants had not formed a strong opinion on mandatory detention. For example, Andrew voiced ‘ambivalent’ views about seeking asylum and mentioned that mandatory detention was not an issue he had considered in any depth. However, after being asked to provide his thoughts on the issue, he said:

To be honest, I haven’t spent much time thinking about it, but it does seem quite rough to stick a family that’s come from, obviously quite a hardship place, then to stick them in a detention centre.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Andrew’s remarks here are an example of the argumentation strategy ‘perspectivation’, whereby speakers involve themselves in discourse by signalling their point of view within the discussion (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001). The fact that Andrew began his discussion by stating that he had not given detention much thought, subsequently commenting that detention of families seems “quite rough”, suggests that being prompted to consider the issue led to him realise that he opposes the policy. This is a promising finding given that little is known about the perspectives of people with mixed/ambivalent views on seeking asylum. It is
therefore worth further exploring whether engaging these groups in discussion can encourage greater critical thought on the topic, potentially resulting in more people adopting views that oppose exclusionary policies.

7.2.4 ‘Look after our own first’: Australia’s capacity to accept asylum seekers

As discussed in the literature review, prior research has reported considerable polarisation regarding the nation’s capacity to accept asylum seekers. Findings have suggested that while some people believe Australia’s refugee intake is too high, others have advocated to increase it (Louis, et al, 2007; Ho, et al, 1994). The present study also revealed varied perspectives about whether Australia should reduce or increase its annual intake of refugees. Opponents of increasing the intake drew upon themes of ‘control’ and Australia’s need to ‘look after our own first’. Conversely, those who voiced support for increasing the intake framed the issue in terms of ‘compassion’ and ‘values’. Firstly, Tom believed that the number of refugees Australia accepts per annum should remain the same, citing competition over resources as a justification.

I would think it's a good amount because I think people have made that decision based on the resources we'd have to actually accommodate them. It would concern me if we didn't have the resources here to actually bring people here, place them somewhere and give them, you know, a safe environment to live.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Mark also referred to Australia’s resources when discussing his views on the nation’s annual refugee intake, pointing out the following concerns:

How much of the budget do we allocate towards making sure these people have better care? This is a totally stupid thing to say, but at what point do we start seeking asylum ourselves because our government doesn’t have enough money? How do we make sure that the infrastructure can handle it?

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Mark framed his response as a series of rhetorical questions, as he was not asking the researcher to answer them. By asking these questions, Mark subtly encouraged some consideration of these issues, whilst alluding to his own concerns. Whilst he has not explicitly claimed that Australia lacks the capacity to manage large numbers of refugees, he has suggested that this may be the case by posing these questions about economic factors. Mark has also used a ‘disclaimer’ in his remark “this is a totally stupid thing to say, but...” before suggesting that Australia’s continued acceptance of refugees could result in Australians needing to seek asylum themselves. His use of a disclaimer here suggests that Mark recognised the far-fetched nature of the idea that Australians could become asylum seekers themselves if the nation’s acceptance of refugees causes its economic status to diminish. His comments are also an example of the ‘we need to look after our own people first’ discourse, which has been cited as a common perspective among people with concerns about asylum seekers (Laughland-Booë, et al, 2017; Fozdar & Low, 2015; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003; Pickering, 2001; Chiswick & Miller, 1999).

Bryan also demonstrated the ‘looking after our own first’ discourse:

The biggest concern is that, um, yeah, we don’t look after our own first and we give preferential treatment to these people. That’s a big problem as we have major issues with homeless people and, yeah, pensioners who struggle. Actual Australians need to take priority. That’s my biggest thing. We have to give preference to Australians and Australian values.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan’s comment “we don’t look after our own first” demonstrates a belief that refugees cannot be considered part of Australian society. This is also apparent in his statement “actual Australians need to take priority”. By differentiating refugees from ‘actual Australians’ and ‘our own’, Bryan constructed them as the ‘other’ whilst
drawing upon nationalist discourse, which prior research has found to be a common discursive strategy among people who oppose seeking asylum (Fozdar & Low, 2015; O’Doherty & Augoustinos; 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003). His comment “we have to give preference to Australians and Australian values” in this context implies that he believes refugees cannot be considered as Australians and do not possess Australian values. When Bryan was asked what he meant by Australian values, he responded with:

Just, you know, caring about Australian stuff, and like, yeah, I dunno, just respecting the Aussie way of life.

Bryan did not offer a specific definition of what constitutes ‘Australian values’ and declined to provide an example when prompted to elaborate. This suggests that he was not able to articulate how refugees’ values may differ from “actual Australians”. Vague terminology such as “Australian values” and the “Aussie way of life” have often been voiced in both political and community discourse, typically as justifications for harsh asylum seeker policies (Laughland-Booû, et al, 2017; Fozdar & Low, 2015; O’Doherty & Augoustinos; 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003). The fact that the present study found similar discourses among participants who also expressed views in support of restrictive asylum seeker policies suggests some replication of these prior findings. Thus, the linking of nationalist rhetoric with anti-asylum views appears to be a continuing discursive feature of discussions about seeking asylum in Australia.

Contrary to the views of participants who opposed Australia increasing its annual refugee intake, some supported the idea. For example, Gillian commented:

We probably don't take enough. I think we're a big country and with our values, we can afford to be generous, kind-hearted and open-hearted. I don't think there should be a limit to our compassion and on how many people we take.’

(Female, aged 40-49, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)
An interesting facet of Gillian’s remarks is her reference to Australian values in support of a completely different argument to that of the previous examples. Instead of referring to Australian values as a reason to exclude people seeking asylum, Gillian has likened “our values” with being “generous, kind-hearted and open-hearted”, drawing upon these values to argue that there should be no “limit to our compassion”. Some prior research has found that people with both accepting and non-accepting views toward migrants and asylum seekers often bring up ‘Australian values’ as a driving force behind their stance (Austin & Fozdar, 2018; Cheng, 2017; Cheng, 2013a; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). This is a prime example of a key aspect of CDA: that the construction of one discourse can serve vastly different functions, with the same concept being drawn upon to support two completely oppositional positions (Fairclough, 1992). This is why context is important in the interpretation of these discussions. It appears that no universal definition can be applied to the concept of ‘Australian values’ as this idea will hold varying connotations to different people. These contrasting interpretations of what ‘Australian values’ seem to depend on whether they are viewed in terms of compassion and humanity, or the exclusion of the ‘other’.

In the same context as Gillian’s comments, Jessica challenged the notion that Australia is ‘full’:

I don't think any country can ever say they're full. I think that the idea of being inundated with refugees is a bit of an exaggeration. I think the government sort of latches on to this idea that we're full, we can't be supporting, we can't afford to support the people financially, and we can’t afford it to give these people jobs.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Jessica was not asked to comment specifically on the notion that Australia is ‘full’. Rather, she was asked to provide her thoughts on Australia’s refugee intake and whether she believes the nation can continue to accept people who seek asylum.
Instead of simply offering the view that Australia can continue to accept refugees, Jessica responded by directly challenging the idea that Australia is being “inundated with refugees”, indicating some awareness that these arguments exist. This is an example of ‘duelling discourses’ as she constructed her perspective by addressing a counter position, and then elaborated with “I think the government sort of latches onto this idea that we’re full”, making it clear that she directly opposed the ‘full’ discourse.

Adding some further complexity, some participants expressed conflicting or conditional views about Australia’s refugee intake. For instance, Don commented:

Australia can sustain on this. Obviously, countries that are not as, um, well-off as Australia are doing their bit, but again, if you do too much, all of a sudden you will have too many.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie made a similar remark:

Australia definitely needs to take refugees. If you’ve got the capacity to do it, you should do it, but I think there will also come a time when we will not have the capacity.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

These comments from Don and Katie illustrate a key principle of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that this thesis is guided by: the recognition that one person can express nuanced discourses about a given topic (Fairclough, 1992). Whilst both Katie and Don voiced perspectives about seeking asylum that were predominantly ‘non-accepting’, these two quotes indicate some degree of acceptance of refugees (provided Australia has adequate resources). It is therefore apparent that Don and Katie are not completely opposed to seeking asylum, as their concerns about asylum seekers were largely linked to how people seek asylum (i.e. whether they were seen to follow the ‘right processes’ as discussed in the previous chapter). Both also alluded to the need for ‘control’ with regard to how many refugees Australia accepts,
as evidenced by the remarks “if you do too much, you will have too many” (Don) and “I think there will also come a time when we will not have the capacity” (Katie). The fact that these participants voiced such nuanced views illuminates the complexity of discursive constructions of this issue.

An important consideration when interpreting the above findings is that prior research focused on community perspectives about seeking asylum has often discussed discourses in a binary form, suggesting two distinct camps: those who accept asylum seekers and those who oppose them (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2005). Such a binary may result in people with diverse motivations driving their views being grouped together on the grounds of their general stance. For example, it would be problematic to liken a participant who voiced strong opposition to people seeking asylum in Australia (irrespective of the nation’s capacity to accept refugees) to a participant who supported refugees coming to Australia, but voiced concerns about the country’s capacity to manage high refugee numbers. Both participants may have the same response to the question ‘do you think Australia should accept asylum seekers?’, but for vastly different reasons. The value of the current findings (and the application of qualitative, CDA approaches more generally) is the revelation of such ‘grey areas’ in discourse. In this instance, such a nuance was prevalent in discussions about Australia’s capacity to accept asylum seekers, as participants demonstrated varied reasons for their concerns and some expressed stronger reservations than others. This highlights the need to recognise the propensity for people to demonstrate considerable variation with respect to both the level of concern they express about asylum seekers and the basis for these concerns.
7.2.5 ‘A toothless tiger’: International law concerning asylum seekers

As a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951), Australia’s obligations under international law to accept refugees is a contentious issue in public discourse (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a). Every and Augoustinos (2008a) found that pro-asylum seeker advocates often referred to Australia’s legal obligations to assess asylum seekers’ claims when challenging anti-asylum seeker sentiments. The current study further explored this, asking participants to comment on their thoughts on Australia’s obligations to accept refugees who are found to meet the criteria set forth by the UNHCR (1951). Again, views were mixed, as some participants felt that Australia does not have any obligations, some questioned the applicability of international law in Australia, some believed that Australia is legally obligated to assess asylum claims, and others argued that Australia has a moral obligation. Some participants also argued that Australia is failing to satisfy its legal obligations as per the UN Refugee Convention (1951).

Of the participants who felt that Australia is not under any obligation to accept refugees, the majority argued that the decision to accept them is at discretion of the nation. For instance, Bryan remarked:

I don’t believe we have any obligation as such. I think it’s something that has been forced on us by some kind of international treaty or something like that, not sure exactly what it is or what it means. I just think we should be the ones who decide who we want in our country and under what conditions we accept them.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan’s comment “we should be the ones who decide who we want in our country and under what conditions we accept them” bears a striking resemblance to an infamous statement made by former Prime Minister John Howard in 2001: “we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances with which they come”.

Howard made this statement as part of his campaign launch speech for the 2001
Federal Election and was widely covered by the Australian media. Bryan’s remarks essentially mirrored the argument posited by Howard, who asserted that the acceptance of refugees in Australia should be at Australia’s discretion. It is possible that Bryan unconsciously remembered John Howard’s 2001 speech that and his similar remark was no coincidence. It has been argued that Howard’s quote was representative of the wider political and public discourse that had pervaded the national conversation about seeking asylum at that time (Clyne, 2005; Marr & Wilkinson, 2003). It is therefore probable that Bryan’s near repetition of Howard’s statement can either be attributed to the ‘Howard discourse’ or can be understood as an example of the public discourse that influenced Howard’s speech in the first place. It was not possible to measure any kind of causal relationship between participants’ remarks and political discourses, nor was this the purpose of the study. Thus, it could not be ascertained whether statements such as John Howard’s 2001 speech impacted participants’ views. Nonetheless, the similarity between these remarks is unlikely to be coincidental and is significant since it highlights the need to further investigate the impact of political constructions of asylum seekers on perspectives among the general public.

Whilst Bryan’s remarks indicate some awareness that Australia’s acceptance of refugees occurs due to “some kind of international treaty”, he acknowledged that he is not sure “what it is or what it means”. Interestingly, he made this admission whilst making a case for Australia having no obligations to accept refugees, which is contradictory to his statements about such obligations being “forced on us”. It appears that rather than asserting that Australia is not obligated to assess refugee claims, Bryan’s argument was that Australia should not be obligated.

Mark believed that Australia has chosen to accept refugees, but is not under any legal obligation to do so:
Without knowing what the legal stuff is, my impression is we don’t have to accept these people, but we are. We could easily say “sorry, you all have to go home, we’ll take you to the closest international airport and put you on a plane back to where you came from.” We could be doing that, but we don’t because we have charity. We are a wealthy first-world nation and that’s what we do.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

These comments were provided in response to the question ‘What is your understanding of Australia’s obligations to people who seek asylum here?’ Mark did not argue a position that either supported or opposed Australia accepting asylum seekers and therefore, his comments merely reflect his understanding of why Australia has a refugee intake. He prefixed this statement with a ‘disclaimer’ (e.g. “without knowing what the legal stuff is...”) to point out the limitations in his knowledge about the laws regarding Australia’s response to asylum seekers. Mark also talked about how Australia has “charity”, asserting that the country chooses to assist refugees due to its position as a “wealthy, first-world nation”. In discussions of Australia’s response to people seeking asylum, the concept of ‘charity’ has typically been framed as an argument for fair and humane policies (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). Conversely, depictions of Australia as a charitable nation have also been associated with a need to restrict refugee migration on the basis that charity must ‘begin at home first’ (Hebbani & Angus, 2016). Thus, the charity discourse has been used in arguments both for and against accepting refugees. In Mark’s case, he constructed Australia’s sense of charity as a motivating factor for its acceptance of refugees.

Some participants acknowledged the existence of international laws regarding refugees in Australia, but challenged the perspective that Australia needs to uphold these obligations. For example, Katie argued:

I find a lot of the time when this topic comes up, people will go ‘but they’re a refugee and they’re coming from persecution and we have
to give them asylum’, and it’s like actually, ‘no, we don’t have to. We don’t have to do anything. We don’t have to follow the UN Conventions. We choose to follow those UN Conventions’.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie used a variety of rhetorical devices in this comment. Firstly, she demonstrated ‘duelling discourses’ by pointing out what she has heard other people say (i.e. “but they’re a refugee and... we have to give them asylum”) before directly refuting this point with her own view (i.e. “no, we don’t have to”). This is also an example of ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996), as she has mimicked the words of other people whilst highlighting her counter view. Her use of the term ‘actually’ is an example of ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991) - by saying ‘actually’ before providing her perspective, Katie implied that the views she opposed are incorrect and her subsequent remarks are therefore an attempt to enlighten the interviewer of the ‘correct’, alternative position. Collectively, these rhetorical devices serve a similar purpose: to increase the persuasive ability of her arguments.

An interesting point to note about Katie’s interview is that her use of rhetorical devices (notably ‘claiming special knowledge’ and ‘duelling discourses’) has often been observed in people expressing non-hegemonic discourses about asylum seekers, that is, views in support of Australia accepting them (Fozdar, 2008; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013). This was typically the case in this research, with the exception of Katie, who often challenged opposing perspectives using language that claimed ‘special knowledge’ whilst making arguments in support of more normative accounts (i.e. ‘non-accepting’ views). One potential explanation for why Katie’s construction of her views seemed to deviate from typical observations of discourses about seeking asylum is her direct experience with the issue. The Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954) suggests that people with direct exposure to a given group of people are more likely to demonstrate favourable views toward that group than those with
no such exposure. Whilst some research findings have provided support for this theory (Barlow, Louis, & Hewstone, 2009; Paolini, Hewstone & Cairns, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Sigelman & Welch, 1993), others have indicated that negative contact is a stronger predictor of non-accepting views (Barlow, Paolini & Pedersen, et al, 2012). Whilst the majority of participants in the current research with direct contact with asylum seekers voiced accepting views, Katie described personal contact with asylum seekers as part of her previous occupation yet voiced a predominantly non-accepting stance. At one point during her interview, she attributed her stance to incidents where she witnessed problematic behaviour by asylum seekers:

I’ve actually seen first-hand, saw their behaviour, and I know what they can really be like. So that’s why I have these concerns.

It is evident that Katie’s views were largely based on negative experiences with asylum seekers, supporting the findings of Barlow, et al (2012). Her linking of her perspective to her direct exposure to asylum seekers is also an example of a ‘topos of personal experience’, as she has drawn upon her own experiences with asylum seekers to lend legitimacy to her stance.

Returning to participants’ perspectives on Australia’s legal obligations, Jodie argued that international laws cannot influence the policy directions of a nation unless state legislation is enacted in accordance with those international laws:

It’s basically very much a toothless tiger, because international law depends very much on the nation state enacting legislative mechanisms that support that international law. Australia has never had anything like that. That’s the problem with, actually, people citing international law as a campaigning method. It’s just that it does not actually have any grounding unless a nation state decides to give it grounding. I think that at the moment, what we’ve done in Australia, and what is actually happening in any other countries in the world, we’ve made international law, uh, redundant.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)
Jodie used a metaphor (i.e. “toothless tiger”) to illustrate the point that international laws concerning the treatment and settlement of people seeking asylum are only as effective as their implementation by the nation state. She also argued that people should avoid referring to Australia’s international legal obligations in campaigning efforts because “it [international law] does not actually have any grounding”. Her use of the term ‘actually’ here is an example of ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991), which allowed her to subtly imply that she was about to provide information that is not well known. Jodie also voiced this perspective using ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993), evidenced by her use of language such as “I think”, which enabled her to emphasise that she was providing her own opinion. It is important to note that Jodie provided the above comment while arguing that Australia has legal obligations under international law, but these cannot be enforced unless the nation implements these laws at the state level. She added that she would like to see Australia adopt a fairer system and therefore, her comments critiquing the enforceability of international law were provided in this context.

While some participants viewed international obligations regarding the acceptance of asylum seekers as non-existent (or questioned its enforceability in Australia), others argued that Australia is legally obligated to assess asylum claims. For example, Alan commented:

It's illegal for us to turn away asylum seekers.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Similarly, Adam said:

Legally, I believe, we're meant to be honouring their request for help. I mean, we're part of the Convention. We signed up, you know?

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)
Adam has demonstrated a ‘topos of responsibility’ here, pointing out that Australia has an obligation under the Refugee Convention to assist people seeking asylum. Furthermore, his use of the phrases “I believe” and “I mean” are examples of ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993). He also asked the rhetorical question “we signed up, you know?” whilst also ‘emphasising similarity between self and audience’ (Fozdar, 2008). Adam did not appear to expect the interviewer to answer this question but appeared to ask it as a means of assuming his view was widely shared.

There were some participants who responded to the question about Australia’s legal obligations by pointing out that the country is morally obligated to settle asylum seekers. For example, David commented:

There's more a moral obligation to me, rather than a legal one that we have. We are very fortunate still, in this country, um, so we should try to share. What is signed in the Convention should be the minimum.

(Male, aged 30-39, Venezuelan-Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Ingrid went one step further, arguing that Australia has both a moral and legal obligation, drawing upon notions of sharing and Australia’s fortunate position in the economy, relative to other countries:

We're very fortunate economically. We could afford to share. We have moral obligations to share, I think. Um, we, we also have, as I understand it, legal obligations to people who come to us for help, and we, I think, we are neglecting both of those.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

In making a case for Australia’s moral obligations, Ingrid drew upon the concept of Australia as a wealthy nation that can “afford to share”, which is a common discourse voiced by people with accepting views toward asylum seekers (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a). She followed this up by stating that she believes Australia is
also legally obligated, using ‘personalisation’ in the form of phrases such as “as I understand it” and “I think”. By doing this, Ingrid has emphasised that these comments reflect her understanding with regard to Australia’s moral and legal obligations. Her final comment reveals that she believes Australia is not meeting either its moral or legal obligations to people who seek asylum. A number of other participants shared this view. For example, Luke commented:

I think we're failing. I can't imagine the UN sitting there and saying “this is how you should be doing this.” I used to think ‘oh well, what else can we do’, but I think Julian Burnside is trying to get the international criminal courts to look into the matter, so that kind of says we're not doing the right thing.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Luke’s reference to QC Julian Burnside’s work as being a catalyst for him changing his own perspective suggests that he views such action (i.e. “trying to get the international criminal courts to look into the matter”) as indicative that Australia is failing to uphold international laws. This points to the importance of such action being publicised – if action taken by high-profile Australians is seen as compelling evidence that the nation’s policies are problematic, others may be encouraged to reconsider their position (as Adam indicated he has).

7.3 Summary

Overall, findings were mixed with respect to participants’ views on Australia’s policies, including mandatory detention for people who arrive by boat, the annual intake of refugees, and Australia’s obligations under international law. The discussions outlined in this chapter have revealed important findings with respect to participants’ views concerning: the impact of asylum seekers being accepted in Australia; and the nation’s policies and international legal obligations for responding to the issue. Firstly, the ‘duelling discourses’ finding highlights that
perspectives about Australia’s acceptance and treatment of people seeking asylum are continuously challenged through discursive constructions of the issue. The application of a critical discourse framework revealed that while some people believe Australia’s acceptance of asylum seekers brings about positive outcomes for the nation (e.g. by exposing Australians to a diversity of cultural views and practices and demonstrating the charitable and compassionate nature of the country), others raised concerns (e.g. regarding Australia’s resources for managing high numbers of asylum seekers and the ability of newly settled refugees and migrants to integrate effectively into Australian society. These arguments were often drawn upon to either support or oppose restrictive policies, notably mandatory detention for people who arrive by boat to seek asylum in Australia. These findings highlight some important implications from both a research and policy perspective. These are outlined in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis, where recommendations and important considerations for future research are also discussed.
8 Results & Discussion Part 3: Participants’ News Engagement

8.1 Chapter Overview

The second research question guiding this thesis was concerned with the sources of Australian news that participants engage with, and their perspectives concerning how these sources portray asylum seekers. Ascertaining participants’ news engagement behaviours and preferences provided essential context for the findings pertaining to their views on how asylum seekers are represented in media discourses. This chapter discusses the findings relating to participants’ engagement with Australian news sources. Firstly, participants were asked how they are typically exposed to information about asylum seekers, with most citing the news as a sole or key source of information on the topic. However, some noted that news content is not a key source of information about asylum seekers for them, and a small number stated that they prefer to avoid engaging with the news altogether.

Irrespective of whether they regarded the news as a source of information about seeking asylum, all participants discussed their general engagement with television, print, online, social media, and radio news. Most also provided a critical explanation of news sources they trust more than others. This revealed some interesting complexities and nuances, most notably, that participants often engage with news content they dislike or mistrust. Some participants also talked about whether they believe their views about asylum seekers are influenced by news content, and vice versa, with mixed perspectives emerging. Drawing upon principles from Audience Reception Theory (Hall, 1980) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992) this chapter discusses these results, with references to illustrative quotes from participants.
8.2 General News Engagement Findings

Consistent with previous findings (Donald, 2011; Pedersen, et al, 2006), most participants reported that they typically receive information about asylum seekers from news content. For example, when asked where he usually sees or hears information or discussions about refugees and asylum seekers, Gary commented:

For me, it’s media, because like, the press or the TV is probably the biggest, and of course you only, you can only take your judgement on what you see, you know?

(Male, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Similarly, Tom said:

Basically, TV and newspapers. I'm, to some degree, deprived from having social contact with those sort of people.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

As their statements illustrate, both Tom and Gary have acknowledged their limited exposure to people from asylum seeker backgrounds, however, some participants talked about knowing refugees and/or having social connections that expose them to information about the topic. For instance, Jodie stated:

I get a lot of my information from the guys themselves. I talk to a lot of people on Manus Island. So it’s academic and social, most always actually asylum seekers themselves.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Zara also talked about having personally known people from refugee backgrounds and hearing discussions of the topic in a social context:

I know a few people who are refugees. I have friends, I have my family, and it comes up at work sometimes too.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

It is important to note that these participants stated that they engage with news content and discussed their preferences, but they also made a point of saying that the
information they receive on this topic has come predominantly from social discussions and/or direct contact with asylum seekers, which demonstrates a ‘topos of personal experience’. It is also worth noting that, with the exception of Zara (who voiced ‘ambivalent’ views), most of these participants held ‘accepting’ views toward asylum seekers. Conversely, most of the participants with ‘ambivalent’ views, and all participants with ‘non-accepting’ views, mentioned having no contact (or limited contact) with asylum seekers. This supports previous literature that has reported a higher degree of accepting views amongst those with more exposure to people from minority groups, compared with those with no such exposure (Barlow, et al, 2009; Paolini, Hewstone & Cairns, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Cairns, & Voci, 2004; Sigelman & Welch, 1993). Some findings have indicated that negative intergroup contact often predicts non-accepting views (McKay, et al, 2012; Barlow, et al, 2012). These findings were further supported by one participant in the current study, Katie, who stated:

I’ve met asylum seekers, and from what I’ve seen, I’ve been attacked and spat on and abused, so to be honest, I, I don’t have much sympathy for them, well, at least the majority.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie’s remarks indicate that she has drawn upon her own negative encounters with asylum seekers to construct the view that she does not have “much sympathy for them”. As Katie was not asked to comment on how she regarded asylum seekers prior to her personal experiences with them, it is not known whether her ‘non-accepting’ stance was a direct result of her negative encounters. Nonetheless, by prefixing her above statement with “I’ve met asylum seekers”, Katie implied that her experiences with people seeking asylum are relevant to her position on the topic. This is further evidenced by the fact that her comments were provided in the context of discussing why she mistrusts asylum seekers. Applying Wodak’s (2001)
discourse-historical approach to these remarks, Katie’s remarks demonstrate a ‘topos of personal experience’, whereby her personal experience with the issue is emphasised as a means of lending legitimacy to her point of view.

In addition to being questioned about their exposure to information about asylum seekers, participants were asked whether they feel that their news choices are influenced by their pre-existing views, or whether they believe their views are shaped by their exposure to news content. The results varied considerably. Some participants felt strongly about avoiding news sources if they do not fit with their pre-existing stance. A notable example was Bryan:

I tend to disregard any information that I don’t think is true or any opinions that seem like complete rubbish to me. The ones I really pay attention to are the ones that I feel are presenting the same points in the same way that I would see them, if that makes any sense. It’s kind of a ‘gut feeling’. So, yeah, I probably choose the news I want to hear, which is again, it’s probably the wrong way to put it, but I’m being honest here.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan’s use of the phrase “it’s probably the wrong way to put it, but I’m just being honest here” is an example of the use of the ‘disclaimer’ device (van Dijk, 2000), especially given that it immediately followed his statements “I tend to disregard information that I don’t think is true” and “I probably choose the news I want to hear”. Use of this device enabled Bryan to soften the impact of his words by signalling to the interviewer that he is aware that his news engagement is selective and potentially limited. He demonstrated a strong awareness of the fact that he disregards news messages that do not align with his own stance. Bryan also referred to his choices as the result of a “gut feeling”, suggesting a lack of conscious reasoning behind his selection of news content. Overall, Bryan’s comments support the theory of ‘selective exposure’ (or ‘echo chamber’ theory), which posits that people choose to engage with perspectives that align with their own views.
(Lazarsfeld, et al, 1944). Some prior research has further supported this theory, reporting that people often seek out information that supports their pre-determined perspectives whilst discounting counter evidence (Happer & Philo, 2016; Kahan, et al, 2011). Another participant of the current research, Alan, indicated that his stance on a given topic impacts whether he will accept or reject news messages about the issue:

If they're like, demonising a certain group of people I'm not gonna like, jump on their bandwagon no matter how, like, convincing their argument might be.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Alan’s comment suggests that a convincing argument is not sufficient to keep him engaged with news coverage if it is “demonising a certain group of people”. It was apparent that in Alan’s perspective, this “demonising’ will trump even the most well-rounded arguments presented. This supports prior findings that people often disengage from the news if they become overwhelmed by the negativity of the content (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010).

Credibility was also seen as a key factor for some participants when talking about factors that influence their news engagement preferences. For example, David remarked:

I guess I tend to discredit or dislike or like media channels based on my, uh, political views. I guess as a scientific, with a scientific background, we tend to be a bit more sceptical of what comes in the news.

(Male, aged 30-39, Venezuelan-Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

David’s comments indicate that he makes decisions about which news sources to engage with based on a desire for scientific rigour/reliability as well as his political ideologies. He also explicitly pointed out his scientific background as a key factor for his scepticism about the reliability of news content. David’s use of ‘we’ in this
context implies a collective position of scepticism among the scientific community when interpreting media messages.

While most participants talked about their own choices when discussing news engagement, some spoke more generally about the phenomenon of selecting media based on pre-existing views. For instance, Renee commented:

> You hear what you want to hear and so I think people choose what aligns more closely with their views. I do think we filter out, people choose to listen to things that feed our own assumptions and that’s why people will listen to Alan Jones or whatever, so they can get worked up about those issues. I tend to think people’s views are ingrained and they choose the media source that suits them.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Renee specifically referred to right-wing Australian radio personality Alan Jones while discussing her perspective that people choose to engage with news sources that support their pre-existing views. Given the current research focus on people seeking asylum, this is an interesting finding as programs hosted by ‘shock jocks’ have been previously found to incite ‘moral panics’ about migrant groups, including asylum seekers (Dandy, 2009; Poynting, 2007; Lattas, 2007; Poynting, 2006; Mickler, 1997), and Alan Jones has been cited as a key after he encouraged participation in the 2005 Cronulla riots during an on-air segment (Lattas, 2007; Poynting, 2006). It appears that Renee is aware of Alan Jones’ stance on issues concerning race as she specifically named him as the kind of source people engage with “so they can get worked up on those issues”. Jones has thus stood out for her as a prime example of someone whose depictions of issues relevant to asylum seeking may reinforce similar views among his supporters. Renee’s comments (i.e. “you hear what you want to hear”, “we filter out”, “people choose to listen to things that feed our own assumptions”, and “they choose the media source that suits
them”) refer to examples of the notion of ‘selective exposure’ or ‘echo chamber’

theory proposed by Lazarsfeld, et al (1944). Jodie voiced a similar perspective:

The media may mould certain values, but I do think that a lot of these
values have much deeper roots. What we have to do is deal with that,
you know, very deep seated, predestined, so to speak, fear in people,
which I don’t think is caused by the media, but I think media just simply
reinforces it, and I, I emphasise reinforces rather than shapes, because it
actually plays into people’s fears which are all pre-existing, and it gives
them a rationale to justify those fears if you like. So I don’t necessarily
think the media can just shape people. I don’t think people are cultural
dupes. The sort of values people have are not necessarily shaped by the
media because they, these values are developed over much longer
period of time, you know, but having said that, we’ve lived now since
September 11, in an environment of total and utter fear of the other.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

These remarks reveal some sophisticated analysis of how fear may be reinforced
through media discourse. Jodie made a point of stating that she does not believe
people are “cultural dupes” whose views are shaped directly by news messages,
instead arguing that the media merely reinforces existing views rather than
producing them in the first place. This position mirrors that of Hall (1980) whose
theory of audience reception was largely grounded in the notion that audiences are
active, rather than passive, consumers of media messages. Another key premise of
Hall’s model (alluded to in both Renee and Jodie’s comments) is that media
selection and interpretation varies among audiences, with pre-existing views largely
determining whether people apply dominant-hegemonic readings (i.e. wholly
accepting the message), negotiated readings (partial acceptance of the message), or
oppositional readings (complete resistance to the message) (Hall, 1980).

The notion of media content reinforcing existing audience perspectives was
further illustrated by the remarks of numerous participants who either stated that they
choose to engage with news content that reinforces their existing stance, or their
exposure to particular news sources helps to shape their perspectives. For example, Zara said:

I think if anything it’s probably more a case that it reinforces how I already feel about certain things. So, yeah, I think it would probably be quite naive to say that the media doesn’t influence me. Of course, it does, but maybe it can only go so far, you know? Like, my mind probably won’t be completely changed by something in the media, but it might reinforce something I was already thinking, or it might encourage me to go and find out more.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Similarly, Ingrid remarked:

It stimulates me, but it doesn't form my opinion. I think it's that the media stimulates me to ask myself ask questions about things rather than the media tells me what my opinion will be.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Zara and Ingrid’s comments suggest that they may often apply a negotiated reading (Hall, 1980) to the media information they engage with. With a negotiated reading, an audience member partially accepts a given media message whilst applying some critique to it. In doing so, they either seek out further information (as both Zara and Ingrid indicated above) or reject aspects of the content they disagree with whilst accepting other components (Hall, 1980). In contrast to these perspectives, some participants claimed that their views do not impact, nor are they impacted by, media coverage. For example, Jodie stated:

In terms of media, it doesn’t have any influence because I come from very much, a long history of political activism and awareness.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Tom agreed:

I think with most things I have an opinion about, I don't think reading the news is going to change that in any particular way.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)
Some participants elaborated further by asserting that they prefer to consult with further information to gain a more thorough understanding of an issue being reported. For instance, in the context of explaining why he does not trust the media as an information source, Sam said:

I guess, like, you know, if I want to find evidence, I'll look for that evidence.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Similarly, Jessica commented:

If I hear something that makes my head go "why?" um, I'll just Google it to get more information that way.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

These comments paint a picture of participants’ general assessment of how their media engagement relates to their views. While some openly stated that their media engagement is impacted by their pre-existing beliefs, others were either unaware of their own selection biases or denied the potential effect of news discourses on their views. These nuances are potentially exacerbated by the current media environment, whereby there is a considerably greater degree of choice than prior to the digital age, in terms of the content people access and how they access it. This abundance of choice means that engagement with ‘fake’ news and/or contradictory messages is becoming increasingly prevalent (Nelson & Harsh, 2018; Vargo, Guo & Amazeen, 2018; Corner, 2017). Consequently, it is potentially more difficult for audiences to apply a critical lens to media coverage, which may account for why the current research revealed such varied perspectives on the influences of media messages on participants’ views and vice versa.

Consistent with prior research (ACMA, 2011; Phillips, et al, 2008; Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2001), most participants (n = 22/24) reported that they
engage with Australian news media at least once per week. However, both
participants who reported that they do not engage with the news nonetheless
provided opinions on how they believe Australian media organisations portray
asylum seekers. It is important to note that one of these participants, Katie, claimed
that she chooses not to engage with news content, yet she provided numerous
examples of sources when discussing her views on how asylum seekers are
represented by the media. This suggests that either Katie avoids engaging with news
content yet has still been exposed to it incidentally, or she is an active news
consumer despite claiming otherwise. For both participants who claimed to avoid
news content, negativity and a lack of reliability were cited as key reasons. For
example, when Sam was asked whether he engages with the news, he said:

    No, not, yeah, I’m not really, um, a news person. Like, I don’t seek it
    out because I just find it too negative and I’d rather spend my time
    with friends or, you know, not, like, watching stuff that will probably
    just make me angry or, you know, feel bad.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Katie voiced a similar view:

    Not everyone lives with the news. I choose not to. I just find it too
    depressing.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

This tendency to disengage from news content on account of viewing it as negative
has been uncovered by prior research (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010). While
there were not enough participants who indicated that they avoid the news to draw
meaningful conclusions from this finding, the consistency of Sam and Katie’s
reasons for shunning media indicates that the perceived negativity of news content
may be a key factor for why people avoid it. However, to ascertain this, further
research involving a greater sample size is warranted. In addition to Katie and Sam,
some participants also talked about the propensity for news content to be
‘depressing’. For example, Ingrid talked about how engaging with the news can
make people feel depressed as it often generates fear and sadness:

I'm very aware that the news is making Australians fearful and it's
making, making us depressed. And I think it's, um, it concerns me a
little bit, really. I've got friends who are much similar, you know,
recently retired like me and we talk about some of this stuff for a bit,
and then we'll say, "I chose not to watch that, because I really, I'm not
looking for information and I do not need to be depressed about it”.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

In this comment, Ingrid talked collectively, evidenced by the phrases “the news is
making Australians fearful” and “it’s making us depressed”. Her reference to
“Australians” and use of the word “us” in this context suggests she was speaking on
behalf of Australians and considers herself one of many audience members who
share this viewpoint. Furthermore, Ingrid’s recognition of the potential for the media
to incite fear in audiences is reminiscent of the sentiments expressed by Jodie when
talking about the potential influence of news content on audiences’ views (see page
205). This incitement of fear has been uncovered by prior studies concerned with
news representations of racial minority groups in Australia (McKay, et al, 2011;
Dandy, 2009; Lattas, 2007; Poynting, 2006, 2007; Pickering, 2001; Mickler, 1997)
and has also been identified by previous audience reception scholars as a key factor
for disengaging with the media (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010). In addition
to the negativity factor, reliability also came up as a reason for avoiding media. For
instance, Luke remarked:

I kind of ignore, uh, news because working in the media I know how
easy it is to manipulate anything to get what you want.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)
Luke based his preference for avoiding news content on personal experience working in the media and his comment suggests he is sceptical about whether news coverage presents a fair and balanced picture, as evidenced by his reference to media having the ability to “manipulate anything”. Previous audience reception studies have revealed similar forms of scepticism concerning the reliability of the news (Szostek, 2018; Lancaster, et al, 2012; Schröder, 2011; Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Philo, 2002).

Another interesting finding was that it was common for participants to express ambivalent views about their news engagement, with some indicating that they often engage with news sources despite mistrusting them. For example, Tom stated that he regularly watches news on *ABC*\(^4\), even though it makes him angry:

> I tend to watch the ABC a lot because it's just, um, yeah, they probably make me the angriest, but I've always watched it.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Similarly, Mark commented:

> I’ll watch Q&A\(^5\) and I’ll end up tweeting and shouting at the screen. I’m one of those people.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Mark and Tom have both suggested that they often apply an ‘oppositional reading’ (Hall, 1980) when engaging with these news sources. This means that when engaging with these sources of news, they reject the messages presented. In another example, Reece named the *ABC* as a news source he often engages with, yet he also made comments suggesting that he is sceptical about the network’s reliability:

> I watch ABC for about 30 minutes while I eat breakfast. I find that they, I don’t think they’re particularly left wing or right wing, but I

---

4 *ABC* (The Australian Broadcasting Corporation) is a national news service owned by the Australian government. It is Australia’s only free-to-air, 24-hour television news channel, and also produces radio and online content.

5 *Q&A* is a televised panel-discussion program produced by the ABC, whereby public figures (including members of Australia’s political parties, celebrities, and academics) address policy-based questions posed by audience members and viewers.
think they’re very sensationalistic. For that reason, I’m not sure I can take everything they say at face value.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Reece’s reference to sensationalism in this context supports prior audience reception research, whereby people cited sensationalised content as a reason for their mistrust or disengagement with news content (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2004). Reece’s comments also demonstrate that he has likely applied an ‘oppositional’ and/or ‘negotiated’ reading of the ABC’s content, as evidenced by his statement “I’m not sure I can take everything they say at face value”. This indicates that he may sometimes accept the ABC’s news messages, but due to his perception that they are “sensationalistic”, there are occasions where he, at least partially, rejects these messages. This kind of nuanced engagement with news media has been uncovered by prior studies (Swart, et al, 2016; Vidali, 2010). For instance, Swart, et al (2016) observed that audiences often engage with news content despite viewing it as negative, boring, unreliable, or complicated. Additionally, Vidali (2010) found that their sample regularly engaged with the news whilst also providing strong critiques of the content. When interpreting findings pertaining to audiences’ news engagement behaviours, it is critical to take these findings into consideration as they illustrate that a person’s engagement with a news source does not mean they accept the messages presented. Hall’s (1980) theory of ‘encoding/decoding’ is therefore highly relevant to these results as its central premise is that one media message can be interpreted and evaluated in vastly different ways by different people.

In addition to views about news content eliciting negative feelings, some participants simply stated that their lifestyles do not enable them to regularly engage
with the news. Brooke talked about her preference for spending time with her family over engaging with news media:

I'm a parent and our family routine doesn't work around the news. I think I've found it takes more precedent over sitting down and going 'what's everyone else doing?'

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

When Brooke was asked whether she regularly engages with news, she indicated that she does and therefore, it is important not to interpret her comment as evidence that she does not engage. Instead, it appears that while Brooke engages with news content, it is not prioritised over other aspects of her routine. It is also important to note that Brooke provided this remark after being asked about what factors influence her news consumption choices, and thus, she suggested that practicality is important in this context. This aligns with prior studies showing that news engagement is often influenced by situational factors rather than personal or political views (Perala, 2014; Wonneberger, et al, 2011). On the whole, these findings have highlighted a complex relationship with news information, whereby audiences draw upon multiple critiques of coverage to make decisions about whether to engage further with particular sources as well as how they evaluate the news discourses they are exposed to.

8.3 Participants’ Specific News Preferences

Participants’ news engagement preferences are reported in Tables 3 and 4 (see Appendix F). As noted, the vast majority (n = 22) reported that they engage with Australian news media at least once per week. This is consistent with prior research (ACMA, 2011; Phillips, et al, 2008; Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2001). Table 4 also shows that all participants who engaged with news content noted multiple types of media as preferred sources. Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as ‘news grazing’ (Morris & Forgette, 2007), and previous research has found it to be
common practice among audiences (ACMA, 2011; Morris & Forgette, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2004). The following discussion outlines participants’ reported news engagement with reference to the specific media types they indicated: television news (including broadcast bulletins and current-affairs style programmes), print news (i.e. physical newspapers), radio news, and web news (via online newspapers and social media sites).

8.3.1 Television (broadcast news)

With respect to television news, most participants engaged with broadcast news bulletins (n = 20/24). This is consistent with prior literature, which has revealed television as a popular source of news (Schrøder, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2011; Mahtani, 2008; Keown, 2007). Broadcast news also accounted for significantly more participants than current affairs-style programs, with only thirteen participants reporting any engagement with these. For participants who discussed examples of television news sources they engage with, ABC and SBS6 were overwhelmingly favoured. For example, Renee commented:

I guess it’s traditional in my family that we’ve always watched the ABC. I tend to think of the ABC as having more impartiality.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Renee’s use of the rhetorical device ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993), (i.e. “I guess”) indicates that she was reflecting on her family’s news engagement from her own perspective, as opposed to speaking on their behalf. Her use of this device served to highlight that the ‘traditional’ aspects of her family’s preference for the ABC is based on perception as opposed to fact. Renee also implied that she sees the ABC as having “more impartiality” than other news networks, even though she did

* SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) is an Australian government owned, multilingual media network comprising of broadcast television, radio, and online news and entertainment content.
not explicitly state the networks she alluded to. Some participants were more explicit when voicing their preferences for some television news sources over others. For instance, Katie remarked:

   ABC24 provides better information than, you know, channel Seven. If I want to get some really good information, generally I’ll go to ABC.

   (Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie used the rhetorical device ‘emphasising similarity between the self and audience’ (Fozdar, 2008). Her use of “you know” implies a belief that the interviewer was either already aware that Katie views ABC24 as a more reliable news source than channel Seven7 or was aware that ABC24 is widely regarded as a reputable source.

   Many other participants reported a mistrust of commercial television networks (i.e. Seven, Nine8 and Ten9), with some providing specific examples such as A Current Affair, Today Tonight, The Project, and The Bolt Report10. For instance, Gillian said:

   I hate channel Seven, I hate channel Nine. If I sit and watch, um, one of those, they're just so biased and I just go "uh, oh God they're just so biased" you know, it's like, yeah, it's not authentic.

   (Female, aged 40-49, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Gillian’s repetition of “biased” when talking about networks Seven and Nine is noteworthy as it indicates a strong belief that the news content of both networks does not present objective material. Audience reception studies have uncovered bias as a key criticised levelled at news material (Vidali, 2010; Coe, et al, 2008; Heider, et al, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2004). Furthermore, a number of other participants raised the issue of bias while discussing news discourses about people seeking

---

7 The Seven Network is a major Australian commercial free-to-air television network owned by Seven West Media.
8 The Nine Network is a major Australian commercial free-to-air television network owned by Nine Entertainment Co.
9 Network Ten is a major Australian commercial free-to-air television network owned by CBS Corporation.
10 All four television programs (i.e. A Current Affair, Today Tonight, The Project, and The Bolt Report) are commercially owned and present current affairs-style commentary on news events and issues, predominantly as these relate to Australian populations.
asylum (see discussion chapter 9). Gillian’s use of “you know” before saying “it’s not authentic” is an example of the rhetorical device ‘emphasising similarity between the self and audience’. By using this device, Gillian subtly suggested that the lack of authenticity in channels Nine and Seven is common knowledge (or that this perception is shared by the researcher). Adam voiced a similar perspective:

The stuff you get on channel Seven, channel Nine and channel Ten is horrendous. I feel like I'm being force-fed garbage.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Adam used ‘personalisation’ (i.e. “I feel like”) in order to signal that his statement about the content of commercial Australian news being “garbage” reflects his own personal perception. He also constructed this view using the metaphor “force-fed garbage”, enabling him to succinctly communicate the view that he does not value the content presented by these news networks. His use of this phrase also seems to emphasise the truth of his previous assertion that Seven, Nine and Ten’s coverage is “horrendous”. He has also framed this remark as an ‘emotion display’ (Fozdar, 2008) by linking his argument to personal experience and his affective response.

These findings contrast with prior research, which has shown a tendency for Australian audiences to prefer commercial television news (i.e. Seven, Nine, and Ten) over public broadcasters (i.e. ABC and SBS) (ACMA, 2011; Bean, 2005). A potential explanation for this discrepancy is that the present sample contained a higher ratio of tertiary to non-tertiary educated people than in the general population. Additionally, tertiary-educated participants were more inclined to engage with public as opposed to commercial news sources (see Table 4 – Appendix F). However, the current research did not aim for generalisability as the focus was on participants’ discursive constructions of their views.
There were rare instances where participants voiced a preference for commercial television news over public broadcast content. For instance, when asked to elaborate on his engagement with television news, Bryan stated:

No SBS or ABC. Too much bias there and it’s all the same stuff all the time. I don’t like being told what to think and their programs put too much of a leftist spin on things I find. I prefer to get both sides of a story or at least not have so much of a, I don’t know, that lefty kind of stuff thrown in my face.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

As Bryan’s comment illustrates, his personal preferences for television news engagement are largely dictated by whether he perceives the source as having “too much bias”. Bias was commonly raised by participants as an issue when discussing their media engagement as well as their views on news representations about seeking asylum (see discussion in chapter 9). Bryan’s comments suggest that he perceives SBS and ABC as engaging in ‘content bias’ (Entman, 2007) as he claimed that these channels place “too much of a leftist spin on things”. This is not a surprising comment given that Bryan indicated he is a Liberal supporter and also demonstrated ‘non-accepting’ views toward people who seek asylum, both of which are commonly associated with an avoidance of media considered to present left-wing perspectives (Young, 2011). Prior discursive research has also found that use of terms such as “leftist” is common in discussions about seeking asylum in Australia (Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013). Another interesting facet about Bryan’s remarks is his reference to a desire to be exposed to “both sides of a story” (another aspect of ‘content bias’ – see Entman, 2007). This was a common view among this sample and is discussed further in the following chapter.
Many participants talked about current-affairs style programs when discussing their news engagement preferences. For example, Ingrid said:

At the moment, I'm stimulated by programs like The Feed and The Project. They have become pretty regular staples.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

While Ingrid talked about *The Feed*\(^{11}\) and *The Project*\(^{12}\) being “regular staples” for her, Bryan appeared to have a more sporadic approach to engaging with his chosen current-affairs programs:

I sometimes watch Today Tonight, but not all the time. Um, yeah, with 60 Minutes, I’ll watch it if something there interests me enough, same with the others really. I watched that Sunday Night show a few times recently, and occasionally Four Corners. Oh, and I sometimes watch The Bolt Report, um, if I remember it’s on. I think that’s a good one.\(^{13}\)

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Like Bryan, Gary also mentioned multiple examples of current-affairs programs he engages with:

I'm a big of a fan of Four Corners. 60 Minutes I tend to take with a pinch of salt but, um, I like Four Corners, and Foreign Correspondent used to be a favourite of mine, but I don’t always get as much time to watch it anymore.\(^{14}\)

(Male, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Gary indicated a clear preference for *ABC’s Four Corners* over other current-affairs programs. He has also stated that while he has enjoyed *ABC’s Foreign Correspondent* in the past, he does not have time to engage with it anymore.

---

\(^{11}\) *The Feed* is an Australian news, current affairs and satire television series that airs on SBS.

\(^{12}\) *The Project* is an Australian news and current affairs television program that airs daily on Network Ten.

\(^{13}\) All five television programs mentioned (i.e. Today Tonight, Four Corners, 60 Minutes, Sunday Night and The Bolt Report) present current affairs-style commentary on news events and issues, predominantly as these relate to Australian populations.

\(^{14}\) All three television programs mentioned (i.e. Four Corners, 60 Minutes and Foreign Correspondent) present documentary and current affairs-style commentary on news events and issues, predominantly as these relate to Australian populations.
This aligns with prior studies that have reported that news engagement is often influenced by such situational factors and convenience (Perala, 2014; Wonneberger, et al, 2011). Gary also used the idiom “take with a pinch of salt” in reference to how he perceives the content presented by 60 Minutes. This comment implies that he has some engagement with this program whilst holding reservations about its reliability. This kind of complex relationship with the media was observed for several participants of this research, with many talking about news organisations and/or programs they choose to engage with despite demonstrating a strong critique of these sources (see discussion on page 219). Such nuanced views are also well documented in the audience reception literature (Szostek, 2018; Swart, et al, 2016; Clarke, 2015; Vidali, 2010; Denemark, 2005).

Some participants demonstrated an outright dislike and avoidance of current-affairs programs. For instance, when Andrew was asked to comment on whether there are any news sources or types that he chooses not to pay attention to, he remarked:

Bloody A Current Affair and Today Tonight or any of them. I just think that they’re all crap, so I tend not to put any sort of faith in anything they say. The current affair ones tend to me more like the, I don’t know, about shock value or whatever is sort of trending at the time, you know.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

It is worth noting that Andrew was not asked to comment specifically on current-affairs programs, but when asked about mistrusted media sources, Nine’s A Current Affair and Seven’s Today Tonight were instantly mentioned. He then followed this up with “I just think they’re all crap”, whereby he used ‘personalisation’ to voice his apparent discontent with these programs. Andrew concluded this comment by asserting that he generally views current affairs programs to be “about shock value or whatever is sort of trending at the time”, suggesting that he does not place much value
in the intentions of the producers of these shows. While making this point, Andrew also used the rhetorical device ‘emphasising similarity between the self and audience’, evidenced by the phrase “you know”, which subtly implies an assumption on his part that his view about the “shock value” of current affairs programs is shared by the researcher. The reason for such an assumption has likely stemmed from a common belief among Australian society that commercially-produced current affairs programs are not reliable sources of news (Young, 2011).

There were some instances where participants demonstrated a complex and nuanced relationship with current-affairs programs, indicating that while they engage with them, they do not always enjoy or agree with the content. For instance, Mark talked about how he watches the ABC program Q&A and finds himself “tweeting and shouting at the screen”:

I’ll watch Q&A and I’ll end up tweeting and shouting at the screen. I’m one of those people.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

When asked to elaborate, he said: “I think most of the time it’s like ‘seriously?’ and ‘what the hell are you on about?’, but other times I’m like ‘yes! Finally someone said it’.” It appears that while Mark enjoys engaging with Q&A, he experiences a combination of agreement and disagreement with the perspectives aired on the program. Applying Audience Reception Analysis, Mark’s comment provides an example of a ‘negotiated’ reading, whereby aspects of media content are accepted whilst others are rejected (Hall, 1980). Like Mark, Katie also demonstrated a ‘negotiated’ reading of a current-affairs style program, in this instance, The Project:

I like The Project and how they go about it. Having said that though, when they talk about asylum seekers and those sorts of issues, and I don’t know what the guy’s name is, Waleed? Something like that. I just think he’s pushing his own agenda as well and I don’t think it’s fair for him to do that. He’s very much trying to push the ‘we’re not
all bad, don’t put us into the same category’. That’s fair enough, but again, there are people that are not informed who will follow him and will take his word, so it’s like ‘I get what you’re trying to do, but you also have to be very careful as to how you go about it. You’re responsible. You are a person of power, you have power in this particular situation and you need to be very aware of that’.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie specifically referred to regular host of *The Project*, Waleed Aly, as an example of a media personality who impacts her degree of trust in the program. She argued that he appears to push “his own agenda” when discussing “asylum seekers and those sorts of issues” and suggested that she is sceptical about the reliability of his position as it may taint the views of others “who are not informed and will follow him and take his word”. Thus, without saying so explicitly, Katie appears to suggest that Waleed’s views may contain a degree of ‘decision-making bias’ (Entman, 2007). She also repeated the assertion that Waleed is in a position of “power” to be able to utilise such a public platform. Mark and Katie’s comments both highlight the complexities of audiences’ relationship with news content by demonstrating that one can engage with news whilst simultaneously critiquing or rejecting aspects of its content.

8.3.3 Print (newspapers)

Most participants (n = 22) reported some engagement with print news (i.e. newspapers). The two participants who did not engage with print news reported that they did not engage with news content at all. Hence, all participants who engaged with news content engaged with print news. The specific Australian publications mentioned were *The West Australian, The Australian, The Guardian, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Sunday Times, The Weekend West*, and various local/community newspapers. For example, Bryan stated:

We get the West and that’s kind of a morning ritual for me. I’ll sit with a coffee and the West and check that out every morning to see
what’s going on. Um, we get a local rag too, the Wanneroo Times or whatever it’s called these days.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Of the participants who talked about newspaper publications they avoid or mistrust, *The West Australian* was mentioned most frequently. For example, Ingrid remarked:

I do not believe the West Australian is any sort of newspaper really.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Similarly, Jane commented:

The West is just too full of the Liberal party. I’ve heard that’s it gotten a bit better but, and other Australian papers, well, they are not independent anymore. For the most part I will accept what the Guardian tells me as being mostly truthful, reasonably truthful, um, and at least they are willing to admit that they made a mistake or misquote or so forth.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Jane’s avoidance of The West Australian due to her perception that they are “too full of the Liberal party” is another example of Fozdar and Pedersen’s (2013) finding whereby one refers to the perceived political orientation of another person when disputing or rejecting their perspectives. Tom also referred to the perceived political ideologies of print news publications when discussing his engagement preferences:

You know the golden rule of newspapers, don't you? To not read the newspapers is to be misinformed? Well, to read it is to be misinformed. And because I get the Australian every day, um, digitally, and I read it, I'm probably more right-wing than I am left-wing, so that's basically where I read, so that's why I guess, I'm exposed to a bit of that right-wing point of view.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Tom made these remarks while discussing why he engages with particular newspapers. Therefore, his comment serves to justify his selection of *The Australian* on the basis its perceived right-wing content, as evidenced by the statement “I'm probably more right-wing than I am left-wing… so that's why I guess, I'm exposed to
a bit of that right-wing point of view”. While this comment suggests that Tom’s preference for *The Australian* may stem from its right-wing focus, it also implies that his right-wing ideologies may be influenced by his choice of newspaper. An interesting observation here is that Tom talked about his views being impacted by his exposure to *The Australian* after claiming that reading newspapers leads people to be misinformed. This suggests that he is aware of the potential for the content published in the *The Australian* to be unreliable. Given that Tom alluded to this newspaper’s possible impact on his own political stance, his assertion that “to read the newspaper is to be misinformed” suggests that he has somewhat questioned the reliability of his own views.

Some participants referred to print news coverage about asylum seekers when talking about their news engagement preferences. For instance, when Adam was asked whether there are any news sources or types that he avoids or mistrusts, he responded:

Courier Mail, I get angry when I read articles or even just see the headlines from them. Um, in particular when it comes to, you know, ‘the illegals’. They are not fucking illegal. They are genuinely seeking help. The way they change the language is, um, is a big concern.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

This comment demonstrates an ‘oppositional reading’ (Hall, 1980), as Adam provided an example of a news discourse he had seen about people seeking asylum (i.e. that they are “illegals”) and then disputed this by saying “they are not fucking illegal.” This is also an example of a ‘duelling discourse’ (Fozdar, 2008; Fleras, 1998; Billig, 1987), as he has directly opposed a viewpoint that he knows to be held by others. Luke also referred to a specific example of what he viewed as a problematic print news representation, in this case, concerning media discourses surrounding terrorism:
Things like The West and The Australian and all these papers and you just have to see what their front covers were after, um, the Q&A debacle a few weeks ago, which wasn't even a debacle. Like, David Hicks got to question John Howard on the show and no one cared because he wasn't brown, you know? And then you see, you know, the front page of the newspaper with Jihadists holding ABC flags and you think, ‘come on’.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Luke referred to the news response to an instance in 2015 whereby Zaky Mallah, a Muslim man who was acquitted of terrorism charges in 2005, asked the following question on Q&A: "what would have happened if my [terrorism] case had been decided by the Minister and not the courts?" (Zein, 2017). This question resulted in widespread debate across Australia, with the Abbott Government boycotting Q&A and many commentators condemning their decision to allow a former terror suspect to speak on the program (Zein, 2017). Luke drew parallels between the coverage of Mallah’s question and the 2010 discussion between Australian former terror suspect David Hicks and former Prime Minister John Howard on the same program, claiming that in the latter example, “no one cared because he wasn’t brown”. This remark raises an issue common in discussions about Australia’s media coverage of violent incidents involving racial minority groups (e.g. Sudanese ‘gangs’ and Muslim migrants) – there is evidence to suggest that the racial profiles of these groups are often portrayed as causal factors for their behaviour (Budarick, 2018; Ewart & Beard, 2017; Morgan & Poynting, 2016; Nolan, et al, 2011; Windle, 2008; Poynting, 2006; Kabir, 2006).

Zara also brought up a specific example of print media coverage when talking about the kinds of media sources she avoids:

I can’t remember which one exactly, but whoever put that ‘death cult’ headline up last year after the Lindt Café hostage thing, The Telegraph I think? Well, I don’t know if I read their stuff before, but I certainly won’t be now. I could never be able to see them as credible after that. That really bothered me. They lost my respect as
that was just so inflammatory and it caused so many problems for my community. It was such a poor move on their part.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Zara referred to a headline published by *The Daily Telegraph* in 2014 after the Sydney Lindt Café siege which read “Death Cult CBD Attack”. As her comment illustrates, Zara has clearly opted to avoid *The Daily Telegraph* as a result of this headline, as evidenced by her remarks “I don’t know if I read their stuff before, but I certainly won’t be now. I could never be able to see them as credible after that”.

Zara’s remarks also demonstrate an ‘oppositional’ reading of this text (Hall, 1980) as she mentioned the ‘death cult’ headline and then rejected the discourse presented. It is important to note that when Zara said “it caused so many problems for my community”, she was referring to the Muslim community as she identified as Islamic. She therefore indirectly brought up the issue of Islamophobia in news discourses by pointing out that the *The Daily Telegraph*’s coverage of the siege portrayed her religion in an “inflammatory” manner. As discussed in the previous chapter, some news publications described the siege as an act of “Muslim terrorism” (e.g. Kerin, 2014), and Australia’s national discourse about Muslims became increasingly hostile in the weeks following the event (West & Lloyd, 2017; Colic-Peisker, et al, 2016).

Luke and Zara both highlighted specific instances of print media coverage they deemed problematic and provided these remarks in the context of discussing their news engagement preferences. This indicates that these discourses had a strong impact on whether they viewed these news sources as trustworthy. This was a strong theme throughout the research, as most participants focused on aspects of media coverage they dislike when discussing their preferences for engaging with news.
8.3.4 Radio

Fourteen participants noted talkback radio as a regular source of news for them, with networks such as 6PR, 720 (ABC News), Radio National, and RTR-FM provided as examples. For example, Gary said:

I listen to the ABC on 720. I generally do that in the morning.

(Male, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Ingrid also mentioned that she engages with ABC Radio, also adding that she enjoys Radio National:

I'm an ABC Radio person, so I have that on lots of the time. And I really like listening to background briefing programs on Radio International [sic].

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie brought up multiple radio news programs when asked to comment on her preferred news sources:

Maybe Radio National, ABC is pretty good. Um, actually RTR-FM is pretty good as well, so very much alternative left-centre radio. A lot of the stuff, a lot of the information 3CR, which is another community radio station in Melbourne that has some really good programs that do present very left view of asylum seeker politics.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie’s reference to her preferred radio programs having a “left-centre” focus is another example of linking one’s news preferences to their political views. She repeated this point again at the end of her comments, by stating that 3CR “has some really good programs that do present very left view of asylum seeker politics”. It is evident that Jodie based her preference for these programs on her political stance as she identified as a Greens voter and demonstrated ‘accepting’ asylum seeker views.

More participants noted talkback radio as a preferred news source than commercial radio, which contrasts with prior research that has shown that more
Australians engage with commercial radio than talkback radio (Commercial Radio Australia, 2008). Two participants reported that they sometimes listen to news on Australian commercial stations 92.9 and 94.5, however the remainder did not provide examples. Additionally, some participants made a point of stating that they dislike commercial radio as a source of news. For example, Bryan commented:

The commercial stations are shocking these days and there is just too much advertising and just crap really.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

It was rare for participants to bring up specific people when talking about their mistrust of radio news sources, however two participants mentioned Australian ‘shock jock’ radio personality Alan Jones when asked to talk about whether there are any news sources they choose to avoid. For instance, Renee said:

I imagine if you listen to Alan Jones, ah, you know, he couldn’t give a shit.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Similarly, Ingrid remarked:

I get really angry that people consider people like, you know, Alan Jones to be, um, commentators on these topics when really, they are just really entertainers. I think someone like him is a destructive sensationalist entertainer, not an authority at all.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Alan Jones is an Australian breakfast radio commentator for Sydney’s commercial station 2UE, and he is known for voicing controversial and conservative opinions on migration, race, and seeking asylum (Gelber & McDonald, 2006). Both Ingrid and Renee demonstrated the rhetorical device ‘emphasising similarity between the self and audience’ by saying “you know” when citing Alan Jones as a reason for avoiding certain radio news personalities. It appears that Renee and Ingrid either
held prior beliefs that others also view Alan Jones as a sensationalist radio
broadcaster, or they have assumed that the researcher shares this view.

8.3.5 Online (news sites & social media)

The most common news source participants reported engaging with was
online news (n = 22). This supports prior findings that audiences are becoming
increasingly more inclined to engage with online news rather than traditional content
(i.e. broadcast, print, radio) (Park, et al, 2018; Szostek, 2018; Vidali, 2010; Young,
who provided specific examples of preferred online material, the web versions of
Australian news publications including The Guardian, ABC News, The Australian,
PerthNow, WAToday and SBS were the most popular. Few participants talked about
online news sources they avoid, however The Guardian, PerthNow and News.com
were provided as examples of mistrusted sources by some participants. For instance,
Mark commented:

I don’t really go to the PerthNow websites and stuff where it’s
manufactured. With PerthNow, I’ve seen headlines like ‘five
shocking facts about refugees, the fourth one will blow you away’.
Just click bait articles, those sort of things. They’re just trying to get
you to their site so their affiliates can feed you their ads. They don’t
care about the news.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Mark implied that PerthNow as a sensationalist news source, as evidenced by his use
of the descriptors “manufactured” and “click bait articles” when describing content
he has seen on this site. His remark is also indicative of an ‘oppositional reading’ of
the “five shocking facts about refugees, the fourth one will blow you away” news
headline he referred to. This rejection of the discourse is evident from his remarks
“they’re just trying to get you to their site so their affiliates can feed you their ads.
They don’t care about the news”. These comments indicate that Mark regards *PerthNow* as being driven by profit as opposed to informing the public (refer to chapter 9 for further discussion about participants’ perspectives on similar bureaucratic factors impacting media coverage). Adam also voiced a mistrust of *PerthNow*:

I tend to avoid Perth Now because that's all, I think it's PerthNow that I find to be quite sensationalist. I avoid that like the plague.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Adam’s description of *PerthNow* as “quite sensationalist” illustrates that his avoidance of the site is motivated by similar factors to those expressed by Mark. Furthermore, his use of the metaphor “like the plague” placed emphasis on how strongly he holds the perspective that *PerthNow* is problematic by likening it to an issue widely regarded as serious and worthy of avoidance (i.e. “the plague”).

With respect to how people access online news content, prior research has indicated that it is common for people to do so via social media (Nelson & Webster, 2017; McCollough, et al, 2017; Mitchell, et al, 2013; Vidali, 2010; Costera Meijer, 2007). In the current study, most of the participants who engaged with online news reported that they regularly accessed this content via social media. For example, Zara commented:

I tend to read stuff online, the online version of newspapers mostly. The WA Today one rings a bell and I see a lot of stuff from the Guardian through Facebook. Sydney Morning Herald comes up too.

(Female, aged 18-29, Pakistani-Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Zara’s use of the phrase “comes up” in relation to how she accesses these online news sources suggests that she does not actively search for certain sources or routinely consult with specific online publications. This is further evident from her
comment “I see a lot of stuff from the Guardian through Facebook”. It therefore appears that Zara’s primary means of accessing online news is through social media. When Facebook was mentioned, some participants indicated that they often navigated to specific news sites upon seeing a headline of interest in their news feeds. For example, Bryan said:

I also see stuff on Facebook. I guess most of the time it’s more a case of such and such has shared something on their page and it pops up and then I might read it if I’m interested enough.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Other participants did not specifically talk about formal news websites they access via Facebook, but rather, talked more generally about people using social media to post about current events. For instance, Katie identified Facebook as “pretty much your biggest media source”:

I find that nowadays pretty much your biggest media source is Facebook. People seem to be more and more putting up things on Facebook.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Beth referred to a specific example of a Facebook post she has seen relating to people seeking asylum:

The only stuff I see online about this kind of thing is on Facebook posts, like that one with the welfare comparisons and all, that kind of thing. When that picture went around about the benefits they all get, like there was a column about what refugees get and then a column with what Australians get and the numbers were really alarming. I remember that causing an uproar with my friends, so that’s a good example, and I found that to be good information.

(Female, aged 30-39, Indigenous-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

The post Beth’s comment referred to originated around 2004 in Canada and has regularly been shared across the UK, US and Australia (despite each country having vastly different welfare entitlements). The post was fact checked and debunked via
Snopes.com\textsuperscript{15} and HoaxSlayer.com\textsuperscript{16}. Beth referred to this post in the context of discussing her online news engagement, suggesting that she regarded the post as a form of news. In this context she described it as “good example” and “good information”, indicating that this post may have impacted her views on asylum seekers. This is an important finding given that Beth’s asylum seeker stance was ‘non-accepting’. As prior research has found that people with non-accepting perspectives toward asylum seekers are more inclined to accept misinformation on the topic than their accepting counterparts (Suhnan, et al, 2012; Croston & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen, et al, 2005), it is possible that Beth’s exposure to this misinformation about asylum seekers’ welfare entitlements may have contributed to her stance.

Conversely, some participants expressed mistrust of content shared on Facebook. For instance, Adam brought up the propensity for social media “and the internet in general” to dispense unreliable information:

\begin{quote}
Social media, and the internet in general, is inherently powerful in such a manner that you can disseminate information, whether it's correct or not, and the people who read it will go "whoa" and then just fly into a rage because of something and I'm just like 'no, no, no, no, no. Just look into it a little bit more'. You know, 'just because you've read that doesn't mean it is right'.
\end{quote}

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Adam’s use of the rhetorical device ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996) as a means of mimicking how he perceives others to react to online news content (i.e. "whoa!") indicates a strong belief in the power for online news to influence audiences. He mentioned a propensity for people to “fly into a rage” without fact-checking and then offered his counter perspective “just because you’ve read that doesn’t mean it’s right”. This is an example of an ‘oppositional reading’ (Hall, 1980), as Adam has

\textsuperscript{15} See https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/monthly-refugee-benefits/
\textsuperscript{16} See https://www.hoax-slayer.com/canadian-pension-refugees.shtml
signified that he often questions or rejects news messages and encourages others to do the same. Ingrid shared similar sentiments:

> I would not trust any information that came from Facebook. I think, and this happens, of course, we have cognition that in some ways, those things confirm you in your opinions. So, if somebody sends one of those things that says, "asylum seekers get so many thousand dollars a month and unemployed in Australia only get this," it doesn't make me believe that. It makes me despair about the misinformation out there.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Interestingly, Ingrid’s comment directly challenged the discourse Beth referred to about asylum seekers’ welfare entitlements, which is an example of ‘duelling discourses’ (Fozdar 2008; Fleras, 1998; Billig, 1987). Ingrid was not aware that another participant had brought up the same Facebook post, which indicates that both participants have been exposed to the post yet interpreted it in vastly different ways. While Beth accepted the content and thus, applied a ‘dominant-hegemonic’ reading, Ingrid applied an ‘oppositional’ reading by rejecting the message presented (Hall, 1980). As Ingrid demonstrated an ‘accepting’ asylum seeker stance, it is probable that her pre-existing perspectives impacted whether she perceived the welfare post as credible. This finding also further supports the notion that people with accepting views toward asylum seekers are less susceptible to believing misinformation than those with a less accepting viewpoint (Suhnan, et al, 2012; Croston & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen, et al, 2005). The perspectives discussed in this section highlight that overall, most participants demonstrated some awareness of the potential dangers of unreliable news disseminated via digital platforms.

### 8.4 Summary

As discussed, this research applied a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992) and Audience Reception Analysis (Hall, 1980) to
address the second and most pertinent research question guiding this project: What sources of Australian news content have this sample engaged with, and what are their perspectives concerning how these sources portray asylum seekers? The first part of this question required insight into participants’ news engagement preferences and behaviours, which revealed that all participants had some exposure to news content about people seeking asylum, with the majority stating that media discourses have constituted their main source of information about the topic. All participants discussed their general engagement with television, print, online, social media, and radio news, with most stating that they engage with multiple mediums on a regular basis. The majority also provided a critical explanation of news sources they trust more than others. A notable finding uncovered here was that participants tended to engage with news sources, programs and/or publications despite expressing a strong dislike or mistrust of their content, providing further support for Denemark’s (2005) proposition that Australians often demonstrate a love-hate relationship with the media. This chapter has provided some insight into the news preferences of the current sample with consideration of their demographics and views on seeking asylum. The following chapter builds on this discussion by focusing on participants’ perspectives concerning Australian news coverage on asylum seekers, concluding the Results and Discussion component of this thesis.
9 Results & Discussion Part 4: Participants’ Views on News Portrayals of Asylum Seekers

9.1 Chapter Overview

The second and most pivotal component of research question 2 was concerned with participants’ perspectives about Australian news representations of people seeking asylum. This required participants to reflect on news coverage they had encountered and provide their comments on how they believe asylum seekers were framed in these news depictions. The interview questions were deliberately open-ended, allowing for participants’ views to emerge inductively. One significant finding that emerged during these discussions was that all participants, irrespective of their own position on the topic, felt that they were not being adequately informed about asylum seekers by Australian news content. This is noteworthy given that all participants claimed that media content was their main source of information about people seeking asylum and some cited news depictions as their only exposure to information on the topic. The key themes that emerged when participants discussed their perspectives and concerns were that news discourses about people seeking asylum are: negative; sensationalist; unreliable and biased; lacking in balance; de-humanising and lacking inclusivity; and non-transparent. Additionally, some participants argued that Australian news content is largely driven by bureaucratic factors that further exacerbate these problems. Another noteworthy aspect of these findings is that participants often evaluated news content as a means of emphasising and legitimising their own perspectives on people seeking asylum, thus engaging in the wider debate about the topic through their critique of Australian media. This chapter discusses these findings in further detail, with references to illustrative quotes from participants.
9.2 Perspectives on News Representations of People Seeking Asylum

9.2.1 *We need more positive stories*: Negativity in news discourse

When participants were asked to comment on their perspectives about news representations of asylum seekers they have been exposed to, the most common response was that the news has often painted the issue in a predominantly negative light. For instance, Bryan remarked:

> Everything I see is about them making trouble and being dangerous and sometimes even as far as committing terrorism acts, the ones from Islam mostly. This is, uh, what I get for the most part when I hear about it in the news or see something on TV about them: They are either rioting or raping each other or jumping on roofs.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan’s mention of asylum seekers “jumping on roofs” was a reference to reported incidents in Australian-run immigration detention centres whereby detainees have stood on the roofs of the facilities as a means of protesting against their indefinite detention (Newman, Proctor & Dudley, 2013). It is apparent that Bryan has been exposed to media coverage depicting asylum seekers taking part in protests as well as other behaviour he described as “making trouble” (e.g. “committing terrorism acts”, “rioting”, and “raping each other”). While it is unclear which media reports or incidents Bryan was referring to specifically, the fact that this comment constituted his immediate response to the question “can you reflect on any news stories about asylum seekers you can recall?” suggests that these aspects of the media’s representation of people seeking asylum have stood out for him the most. Bryan’s reference to Islam is also of interest as his wording implies a belief that Islam is a place that some asylum seekers come from as opposed to a religion some of them follow, however it is possible that he was actually talking about countries with high proportions of Muslims and therefore meant to say “Islamic countries”. The linking of Islamic asylum seekers to terrorism has been uncovered by prior research.
(Goodman & Burke, 2011; Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007; Dunn, et al, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). It is not clear from Bryan’s remarks whether he believes media depictions of asylum seekers are representative of reality (as he did not provide further comments concerning the reliability of these depictions), however, his predominantly ‘non-accepting’ asylum seeker stance indicates beliefs that align with the media discourses he referred to. Bryan’s comments therefore provide one example of how participants tended to use their critique of news coverage to further their own perspectives on people seeking asylum. Additionally, as he stated that his exposure to information about the topic has come solely from media sources, it is reasonable to infer that Bryan’s stance on seeking asylum has been impacted by the news discourses he described here as negative.

Some participants framed negativity as a shortcoming of news depictions about people seeking asylum. For instance, Andrew stated:

It’s probably more skewed on the negative side of things I feel. They only tend to talk about it when there is an event, like there’s not much general discussion about refugees. It’s ‘a boat’s crashed’ or a hunger protest or um, you know, riots or something like that. Yeah, there’s not much else.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Rather than stating a certainty (i.e. “it is skewed on the more negative side”), Andrew added “I feel” and “probably” to this statement, making it clear that he was speaking from his own perspective, allowing for the possibility that others may hold different views. Andrew later went on to argue that if news discourses were more focused on the “human factor” of seeking asylum as opposed to the negative aspects of the issue, more members of the public may be able to better understand and empathise with asylum seekers. This suggestion that exposure to negative content may be causing people to adopt negative views was further supported by Beth, who pointed out:
On the news it’s mostly negative and so then I think of it all as negative. So maybe I’m swayed, like, more towards the negatives on it because that’s what the media’s doing.

(Female, aged 30-39, Indigenous-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Beth’s comment was provided upon being asked to reflect on news coverage she has been exposed to about people seeking asylum in Australia. She admitted that she is possibly more “swayed” toward a negative perspective on the topic as a result of the kinds of media discourses she has encountered. Don shared a similar view:

I think they have a lot to answer for in the sense that they appear to me to concentrate far too much on negative things about, um, controversial issues, like the Muslims. There's obviously a lot of Muslims in Australia that are perfectly good. They fit, have fitted into society. Why don't they portray them or publicise that a bit more than the radicals? I'd like to see, I feel we need more positive stories. I might even see things differently myself if I knew of some positive outcomes. There's always a nice story about something and I don't think they concentrate enough on those stories, you know, someone who's succeeded, someone who's rocked up here from Iraq or Iran or Somalia and become a lawyer, um, instead of all the dole bludgers and things like that.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Although Don’s comment was provided as a response to being asked to provide his views on Australian news portrayals of asylum seekers, he referred specifically to portrayals of Muslims as an example of the negative news discourses he has been exposed to. This indicates that the topic of Islam has been strongly linked to seeking asylum in news content Don has encountered. His description of news content about Muslims as “controversial” is interesting as this suggests that his exposure to news depictions of Muslims has painted them in a predominantly unfavourable light. He also recognised that any negative behaviour he has seen attributed to Muslims is not representative of their entire faith. This is demonstrated by his statement “there's obviously a lot of Muslims in Australia that are perfectly good. They fit, have fitted into society. Why don't they portray them or publicise that a bit more than the
Don framed this statement as a ‘rhetorical question’, which Fozdar (2008) identified as a rhetorical device that enables one to encourage others to consider their point of view with no expectation of answering the question posed. Don’s use of this device implies that the question he posed (i.e. “why don’t they portray them or publicise that a bit more than the radicals?”) has no easily discernible answer.

Like Beth, Don also suggested that his views have likely been impacted by negative news portrayals he has been exposed to, which is apparent from his remark “I might even see things differently myself if I knew of some positive outcomes”. Don and Beth’s comments are important to interpret with consideration that both expressed a ‘non-accepting’ stance about asylum seekers. The fact both stated that their own views about the issue may be geared toward a negative standpoint on account of negative news depictions is a promising finding. It suggests that more news coverage about, as Don put it, “positive outcomes” may help audiences to associate seeking asylum with less negativity and in turn, be more inclined to view asylum seekers in a more welcoming manner.

Some participants offered examples of positive news coverage about seeking asylum. However, these discussions invariably occurred after these participants discussed negative portrayals of asylum seekers. For example, Ingrid pointed out that positive news content about asylum seekers is rare, but then provided a specific example that stood out for her:

The news really does paint them as the villains and that’s a shame because there are, are plenty of great things happening to counter all the negative stories, but we seldom hear those. I was out walking one time and heard a really good hour program about a Pakistani, um, asylum seeker, who had settled in Northam and become a very successful Australian and they were telling you his story. That is something that really sticks with me, because that was, that was on the radio, but it was his words.

(Female, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)
Renee also discussed an example of positive media coverage about asylum seekers:

I think there were some very positive views about, who is the Governor of South Australia now, the refugee? Well, there were some really positive stories about that. Um, but then, he’s not a Muslim. He’s not from, wherever, Sri Lanka or the Middle East or Afghanistan. Goodness knows if we had this, you know, veiled woman from ‘X’ standing for Governor of South Australia, who knows?

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

An interesting facet of Renee’s comment is her emphasis that the Vietnamese South Australian Governor she was referring to, Hieu Van Le, is not Muslim nor of middle-eastern appearance, arguing that if he was, he may not have received positive media coverage. There is some empirical evidence to suggest that the achievements and positive contributions of Muslims receive less positive public attention than those of their non-Muslim, Anglo-Saxon counterparts (Kuhn, 2007). Renee demonstrated some awareness of this phenomenon, pointing out a complex and ongoing issue with race relations in western nations. It is also noteworthy that both Ingrid and Renee voiced ‘accepting’ views about asylum seekers and they were the only participants to bring up specific examples of positive news content about the issue. While this finding provides some support for the notion that a person’s exposure to positive news stories about asylum seekers may impact their own stance (McKay, et al, 2012), it could not be established whether Renee and Ingrid held ‘accepting’ views before they encountered these stories. It is possible that their stance impacted whether they paid attention to these positive reports, as some prior research has found that people often self-select media content that aligns with their existing viewpoints (Szostek, 2018; Happer & Philo, 2016; Coe, et al, 2008).

While the current research is the first to focus specifically on audience perspectives about Australian news portrayals of asylum seekers, prior research has revealed a similar tendency to view coverage as negative (McCollough, et al, 2017;
Vidali, 2010). Additionally, news audiences have been found to remember negative content more readily than positive stories (Kepplinger & Daschmann, 1997; Donsbach, 1991; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987). While this was not measured explicitly in the current research, participants discussed considerably more negative news representations of asylum seekers than positive ones. Taking prior studies into account, this indicates that audiences may be more prone to perceive news coverage about asylum seekers as negative and more inclined to remember negative as opposed to positive coverage. Consequently, when exposed to equal quantities of positive and negative news content about seeking asylum, audiences may pay more attention to the negative stories.

Additionally, given that some participants cited negativity as a reason for disengaging from news content, the widespread belief among the sample that news representations of asylum seekers are predominantly negative may indicate that such coverage is causing people to switch off from news altogether. These findings are particularly salient considering the significant body of prior research that has reported negative news depictions of asylum seekers and refugees (Pantti & Ojala, 2018; Lippi, et al, 2017; Goodman, et al, 2017; Parker, 2015; Esses, et al, 2013; Philo, et al, 2013; Donald, 2011; Sulaiman-Hill, et al, 2011; Young, 2011; Nolan, et al, 2011; McKay, et al, 2011; KhosraviNik, 2010; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Horsti, 2007; Nickels, 2007; Goodman & Speer, 2007; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007; Baker & McEnery, 2005; Buchanan & Grillo, 2004; Gale, 2004; Saxton, 2003; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Henry & Tator, 2002; Pickering, 2001; van Dijk, 1991).
9.2.2 ‘Manufactured hysteria’: Sensationalist news representations

The notion of sensationalism in media discourse has often been discussed in prior literature concerned with the notion of the media ‘spectacle’ (Smelik, 2010; Kellner, 2009, Kellner, 2005, King, 2005, Hall, 1997). Kellner (2009) defined the concept of media spectacle as “technologically mediated events, in which media forms like broadcasting, print media, or the Internet process events in a spectacular form” (p.1). In Kellner’s view, competition between media organisations routinely results in stories being constructed in a sensationalistic manner to both attract and maintain the attention of audiences. In research concerned with audience responses to media coverage, allegations of sensationalism have commonly been reported, particularly with respect to news representations of minority groups (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2004).

In the current study, many participants raised the issue of sensationalism when asked to provide their perspectives about Australian news representations of asylum seekers. For instance, when Luke was asked to reflect on news content he has been exposed to about people seeking asylum in Australia, his response was:

I mean, it's very sensationalist. Like, the Murdoch media especially, I find it just so sensationalist and, um, just blatant propaganda.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Luke has referred specifically to Murdoch-owned media organisations, which have commonly been argued to present sensationalist material (Kellner, 2012). Adam also referred specifically to news sources owned by the Murdoch media:

I can't help but feel that, particularly the commercial-based and Murdoch-owned news, they are just trying to instil some sort of fear in you. I don't like that at all. I feel like it’s all manufactured hysteria. Like, fuck, “whip up something. We need something. We need something to distract us from this foreign policy that you're trying to push through.” It’s like, “how can we, uh, whip this up into such a frenzy that we'll get as much attention as we can”, even though it's
not, it's not meaningful attention. It's not actually, they're not drawing attention to actual issues.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Adam provided these comments after being asked to reflect on instances where he has seen news depictions of people seeking asylum, arguing that commercial and Murdoch-owned media organisations intentionally try to incite fear in their audiences. He punctuated his remarks using the rhetorical device ‘personalisation’ (Crismore, et al, 1993), as evidenced by his use of the phrase “I can’t help but feel”, “I mean”, and “I feel”. By doing this, Adam has made it clear that these remarks reflect his own opinion, adding further emphasis to his argument by positioning his remarks as emotional testimony. He also used ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996) (i.e. “whip up something. We need something. We need something to distract us from this foreign policy that you're trying to push through” and “how can we, uh, whip this up into such a frenzy that we'll get as much attention as we can”). Adam’s use of ‘direct reported speech’ in this context appears to signify that he has formed some assumptions about the possible decision-making processes behind these kinds of news discourses.

It is evident that Adam has challenged the validity of some of the news discourses he has seen whereby asylum seekers were presented in a manner he regards as “manufactured hysteria”. This is another example of an ‘oppositional reading’, which, according to the Hall’s (1980) ‘encoding/decoding’ model of communication, occurs when audiences completely reject the dominant-hegemonic discourse presented by the media – in Adam’s case, the discourse he appeared to reject was the notion that asylum seekers are worthy of fear. Alan also referred to the generation of fear in news discourses about seeking asylum:
A lot of the ones that I see like, they tend to be like, you know, fear mongering and like, just sensationalising the whole issue beyond recognition.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Alan further elaborated by providing the following example of ‘fear mongering’ content about asylum seekers that he had encountered on Facebook:

The thing that I made a note about a few months ago is this little side bar ad I found on Facebook and uh, the tag line was, "no visa? No way", and there's like a couple of them and one of them had a picture of like the, outline of Australia with this red circle with a line through it, and, the other one was like a picture of like, a boat sailing through treacherous waters as if that was like, an image that was meant to generate some kind of fear. But really, for me, seeing that just makes me feel sorry for them and want to help them more. But the whole like, premise of the ad I just found absolutely appalling, that they're not only putting those kinds of um, customs in place, but they're advertising it as something, as a kind of value to be championed.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

While the example Alan discussed was an advertisement as opposed to a news discourse, it is important to this discussion as it clearly stood out for him as a memorable piece of content distributed via a significant social media platform. He argued that the *No Visa, No Way* advertisement was intended to generate fear, citing it is an example of the sensationalist nature of representations of asylum seekers in the public sphere. Furthermore, Alan has demonstrated an outright rejection of the message being purported, taking an ‘oppositional reading’ to the text (Hall, 1980), instead claiming that the advertisement made him want to “feel sorry for them [asylum seekers] and want to help them more”. This is an important and interesting finding as the *No Visa, No Way* advertisement was launched by the Australian Liberal Party in late 2013 following Tony Abbott’s Federal Election win and was designed to deter people from seeking asylum in Australia and demonstrate the Abbott government’s ‘hard line’ approach to managing boat arrivals (Refugee
Council of Australia, 2018). Therefore, Alan’s assertion that it actually made him feel a stronger inclination to help asylum seekers suggests that similar messages, when perceived as ‘fear mongering’, may have the opposite effect on audiences to that intended.

Brooke also mentioned ‘fear mongering’:

A lot of it is posted in a way of fear mongering and I'm like, "well, you're making fear, but you haven't presented all the facts". You can't publish something and leave out facts and make people scared. You have to have all the facts up.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Brooke appears to have made a connection between the news generating fear and omitting facts, suggesting that stories that “make people scared” have not “presented all the facts”. When asked if she could recall any specific examples of news content she has encountered to provide further context for this perspective, Brooke added:

I guess all that stuff about protesting in the camps, it seems to present a scary and kind of exaggerated image of what these people are like and sort of a ‘this is why they are in detention’ kind of image, but without any reasons for why they are protesting and, I’m like ok, so what is the real problem and what is being done about it? Like, if they told us why they protest, we might understand better.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Brooke’s remarks indicate some frustration with the way asylum seekers’ protests have been represented by the Australian press, referring to it as “scary”, “exaggerated” and lacks sufficient context to enable audiences to understand the nature and cause of the protests. Brooke’s last comment “if they told us why they protest, we might understand better” is of significance because earlier in her interview when she discussed her own views on people seeking asylum, she talked about their protesting as an indicator of a lack of gratitude for Australia taking them in. It is apparent that although Brooke’s own views on asylum seekers has been
negatively impacted by her exposure to stories about them engaging in protests, she has also acknowledged that the news depictions she has seen about these protests have presented limited information and used a “fear mongering” approach. Brooke’s critique of these news discourses despite drawing on them to justify her own views on asylum seekers’ conduct is an example of taking a ‘negotiated reading’ of the media text, whereby audiences accept aspects of a media message whilst rejecting or challenging others (Hall, 1980). It is also a prime example of the complex relationship between news audiences and news content, providing further support for prior findings that many people hold nuanced, contradictory, or ‘love-hate’ views on the news discourses they engage with (Denemark, 2005).

Like Brooke, other participants brought up specific instances of news content they had come across when talking about the issue of sensationalism in depictions of asylum seekers. For instance, Reece brought up the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis, referring specifically to Aylan Kurdi, a young Kurdish boy who drowned in September 2015 after the boat he was travelling in capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. Photographs of Aylan’s body washed up on a beach in Turkey made national headlines in the aftermath of the tragedy. Reece commented:

The biggest example is out of the Syria refugee crisis, there was the picture of the investigator with the three year old cradled in his arms. That’s the best example of a story because there are so many things you could say about that picture. A worker holding a child, a young child in his arms, and doing it in a way that showed he really cared about the child, even though that child was dead. It was like ‘look, this child died’. That’s a fantastic story because it’s bound to bring about mass public outcry. I mean, of course it’s a bit manipulative. What if it showed someone pulling a full-grown man across the sand?

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

For context, Reece had previously commented that he has found some news content concerned with asylum seekers to be “emotionally manipulative”. When prompted
further, he made the above remarks. It appears that Reece evaluated this story as an example of said “emotional manipulation” labelling it as a “fantastic story” due to its ability to evoke “mass public outcry”. He also posed the rhetorical question “what if it showed someone pulling a full-grown man across the sand?”, which appears to imply that the same degree of “public outcry” would not have occurred if the story had depicted a deceased adult man as opposed to a young child.

9.2.3 ‘Irresponsible and dangerous’: Reliability in news portrayals

As noted, prior audience reception studies have revealed that people are often sceptical about the reliability of news information (Szostek, 2018; Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015; Lancaster, et al, 2012; Schrøder, 2011; Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Philo, 2002). When participants of the current study recalled news content they have encountered about people seeking asylum, the majority brought up the issue of reliability, specifically with respect to whether they believe the news can be trusted as a source of information on the topic. Mixed perspectives arose, and few participants stated that they regard news representations of asylum seekers as predominantly reliable. For instance, Patsy remarked:

I think most of it is quite informative and reliable.

(Female, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Patsy’s view was rare, as most participants, irrespective of their own position, either felt that news content about asylum seekers is unreliable or that some news outlets are more trustworthy sources of information on the topic than others. For example, Bryan commented that in his perspective, the accuracy of news depictions of asylum seekers is dependent on the media source and the position they take on the issue:

I think they get it wrong a lot of the time. Again, it always depends on where it’s coming from. I don’t see many of the mainstream stuff going wrong, but I think when it gets too PC and there is this leftist...
agenda and it takes that, kind of, bleeding hearts angle, that’s when I take it with a pinch of salt.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Bryan asserted that mainstream media sources appear to present reliable representations of people seeking asylum, provided they don’t get “too PC” (politically correct) or communicate a “leftist agenda” or “bleeding hearts angle”.

Given that Bryan self-identified as a supporter of the Australian Liberal Party with ‘non-accepting’ views on people seeking asylum, these remarks indicate that his own ideologies come into play when evaluating whether he feels the news is painting an accurate picture of the asylum seeker issue. This supports the ‘echo chamber’ theory proposed by Lazarsfeld, et al (1944), which posits that audience members’ pre-existing beliefs play an important role in whether they trust news content. Some research has supported this idea, showing that people often reject news messages that conflict with their own perspectives (Mutz, 2006; Sweeney & Gruber, 1984). Bryan further elaborated on his perspective, suggesting that the reliability of news content relies upon potential biases the reporter may have about a given topic. After his earlier comment about taking some media depictions “with a pinch of salt”, he provided the following response when asked if he could provide specific examples of media coverage that come to mind in this context:

I mean, I’m often a bit more sceptical with the female journos I find. It’s probably really bad on my part, but I kind of, I don’t know, I think there is, you get a more one-sided perspective. I just, I don’t completely discount anything they write, but I take it with a pinch of salt and I tend to, I guess I’ll always look for a second opinion in those cases. And don’t get me wrong, it’s not a sexist thing or anything like that. It’s just how it comes across when I’m reading it, like, it would probably be more balanced and less, you know, emotional, if a man wrote it. Of course, when women talk about it, they are women speaking on behalf of other women. I prefer those topics to be covered by people less likely to have a kind of, uh, I guess, a bias is the right word. It’s just something I feel really strongly about.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)
Bryan has brought up allegations made in 2015 that asylum seekers were sexually assaulted while detained on Nauru, an Australian-run immigration detention facility. He then commented that he is sceptical about the credibility of such allegations if they are reported by female journalists, whom he believed to voice a “one-sided perspective”, indicating that he has taken an ‘oppositional’ reading of media coverage about this issue when reported by female journalists. This is evident from his remarks “it would probably be more balanced if a man wrote it” and “when women talk about it, they are women speaking on behalf of other women”. Bryan made the argument that women represent a biased and unreliable source of information concerning the topic of sexual assault against other women because they have a vested interest in the topic. Bryan has not accounted for the possibility that female journalists may not necessarily have personal experience with sexual abuse (or that male reporters may have such experiences) and therefore, his assertion that women are a biased source of information about this issue appears to be based primarily on assumption.

Bryan’s comments also draw upon the idea that the media must present a completely objective and ‘removed’ stance on the issues they report, which is interesting given that many participants, including Bryan himself, also talked about the lack of asylum seekers’ voices in media depictions of their own experiences, arguing that more involvement of those most impacted by the issue at hand would give more credibility and humanity to news representations (see discussion in section 9.2.5). Taken together, these findings highlight an apparent conflict between the notion of personal experience as a necessary driver of reliable media representations of otherwise invisible and disempowered groups and the position that the news must remain neutral and present facts in an objective way.
It is worth noting that Bryan used numerous rhetorical devices when making the above points. Firstly, he used ‘personalisation’ (e.g. “I mean”, “I guess” & “I think”), which enabled him to emphasise that as he was merely stating his own opinion, the notion of free speech protects him from any judgement or critique that may follow. Another strategy he appeared to employ to meet the same end was his use of ‘disclaimers and justifications’ (van Dijk, 2000), evidenced by the remarks “it’s probably really bad on my part, but…” and “don’t get me wrong, it’s not a sexist thing or anything like that…”. These statements indicate some degree of awareness that these views are unpopular, suggesting that Bryan may have previously come across criticism of this point of view. There are also strong parallels between Bryan’s remarks and the ‘denial of prejudice’ (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; van Dijk, 2000). Although Bryan’s comments constitute a denial of sexism rather than a denial of racism, the same principles outlined by van Dijk (2000) are applicable here - both require the speaker to deny their participation in the construction and/or maintenance of prejudicial attitudes about an oppressed group the speaker does not belong to.

Nuanced perspectives like Bryan’s were common among this sample, with a number of participants taking a conditional stance on whether news representations of people seeking asylum are trustworthy. For instance, Gillian stated:

> Everything can be twisted around so like, you know, the way someone writes something, like you can, you can put a spin on it, so I don't believe everything that I read. I tend to take elements out of it that I might think are true.

(Female, aged 40-49, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Like Bryan, Gillian appears to have demonstrated a ‘negotiated’ reading of news depictions of asylum seekers, indicating that she believes part of what she is exposed to via media discourse whilst rejecting other aspects, as evidenced by her comment “I
tend to take elements out of it that I might think are true”. According to Hall’s ‘encoding/decoding’ model (1980), audiences demonstrate a negotiated reading when they partially accept the dominant-hegemonic discourse put forward by the media, whilst taking an ‘oppositional’ perspective on other components.

While raising the issue of unreliable news depictions of asylum seekers, some participants referred to the matter of time constraints as a potential factor. For example, Luke commented:

I think the media has shifted a lot where, you know, it used to be you had a story, you investigated it, you followed leads, and you researched everything before you published it. Now it's just like “oh shit, there isn’t time to get the facts so I’ll just get it out there and worry about it later”, which I think is, um, really irresponsible and dangerous.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Similarly, Susan remarked:

Occasionally I'll know that something can be incorrect, um, where they've relied on, on a source that I know might be, not reliable. Or where they've, sometimes I think the problem is that they jump the gun a little bit on some issues, before they've been fact-checked very well. Like, I've even talked to reporters, like, people that I know who’ve said “this is what we've been told at this moment. We're trying to get some more info” and then they're like "oh my deadline's in half an hour. I'm gonna run with that.”

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

In addition to pointing out how time constraints can result in unsubstantiated material being published by news outlets, Susan has also brought up the matter of source-reliance. As her comment illustrates, she argued that time constraints may cause the media to “jump the gun” and report content derived from unreliable sources, despite the material not being fact-checked beforehand. In making this point, Susan recounted her own experiences, using ‘direct reported speech’ to illustrate the kinds
of things journalists have said to her (e.g. “oh my deadline’s in half an hour. I’m gonna run with that”).

Luke also used ‘direct reported speech’ to the same end, as evidenced by his comment “now it's just like ‘oh shit, there isn’t time to get the facts, so I’ll just get it out there and worry about it later’”. Unlike Susan’s example, it was unclear whether Luke was drawing upon his own experience with the media or merely stating his perception of how some journalists may rationalise the decision not to verify accounts of events before finalising a story. These issues were theorised by Herman and Chomsky (1988) as evidence for a Propaganda Model of communication, which asserts that time and economic pressures often result in media organisations becoming source-dependent, and therefore news discourses are routinely shaped by the ideological positions of a narrow range of ‘official’ sources.

Although some needed prompting, when participants were talking about the issue of reliability in news representations, most brought up specific media discourses they have encountered. The most common event raised in this context was the children overboard affair of October 2001, during which Australia’s then Prime Minister John Howard, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock and Defence Minister Peter Reith publicly claimed that Iraqi asylum seekers, who were intercepted on a vessel near Christmas Island, had thrown their children into the ocean to blackmail the Australian navy to bring them to Australia (Slattery, 2003). These claims were later revealed to be false as the images they were based on depicted both adults and children fleeing a sinking vessel by jumping into the ocean to save their own lives (Slattery, 2003). Fourteen years after this incident, some participants of the current research recalled the news coverage they were exposed to in 2001, citing it as a key example of unreliable Australian news representations of asylum seekers. For instance, after Jane argued that most news coverage about asylum seekers she has
seen has been “highly problematic”, she was asked if she could recall any specific examples that came to mind, offering the following response:

Children overboard, as soon as they said that I knew it was all lies, I just knew it. There is no way, women that go through all that and have gotten through all that time on the boat and everything, go and throw in their babies over to drown in that situation. There were no facts. I think that’s the part that really annoyed me more than anything else, there was this accusation of women throwing their babies overboard and that was it, it went no further. There was no expansion, there was no further information.

(Female, aged 50-59, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Similarly, Brooke commented:

The only one I can think of is the big one where the news reported that they threw the kids over the boat and it wasn't. It was that the boat was sinking and they were all in the water. That's the only one where I've seen the media and thought ‘what lies. Obviously, the government's behind that, saying “we need to push our agenda”.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

An interesting commonality in Jane and Brooke’s comments is that both referred to the media coverage of children overboard as “lies”, implying there was a deliberate effort to mislead the public on the part of the Australian media. However, Brooke added “obviously the government’s behind that, saying ‘we need to push our agenda’”, suggesting that news coverage of the incident was largely dictated by the Liberal government. Again, this acknowledgement of the political influence on media content supports Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) Propaganda Model, which is concerned with how ideologies that favour the interests of the dominant elite can shape media discourse. Without referring specifically to the model, Brooke’s assertion that the Australian government played a significant role in how the children overboard affair was publicly constructed indicates some applicability of the model in this instance. Jodie also talked about children overboard as an example of
problematic news coverage, adding that she saw the incident as a “turning point in the media portrayal of asylum seekers”:

Look at how the media portrayed the children overboard affair. And the reason that I say that is, that I think that was very much a turning point in the media portrayal of asylum seekers because it coincided with September 11th and all of that. It really, yeah, it really did entrench this view of how asylum seekers are a threat to our borders. I think that was a really important point where the media, and specifically the Murdoch media, they’re a prime example, this was the point where they completely abandoned all pretence of so-called objective reporting and, well, completely and utterly distorted the public view towards asylum seekers and refugees, absolutely.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

As her comments illustrate, Jodie identified both 9/11 and the children overboard affair as pivotal moments that resulted in the widespread construction of asylum seekers as a “threat” to Australia’s borders. This aligns with prior research concerned with public, political and news discourses, which has shown that asylum seekers have been increasingly framed as threats to Australia since 2001, the year that both incidents occurred (Colic-Peisker, et al, 2016; Lueck, et al, 2015; Clyne, 2005; Osuri & Banerjee, 2004). Some scholars have referred specifically to the Murdoch media’s construction of asylum seekers in this manner (O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007). Therefore, Jodie’s reference to the Murdoch media as a “prime example” of Australian media showing complicity in distorting “the public view” provides more support for these claims.

Some participants brought up more recent examples of news coverage about asylum seekers that they deemed unreliable. For example, Don mentioned the Aylan Kurdi drowning, commenting that he found media coverage of the incident “really misleading”:

That guy that um, uh, lost his son I think it was? Washed up on the beach something or other? I found the media treatment of that whole accident really misleading and confusing. And then it turned out the guy was not even from Syria. He was from a completely different
country, but all of a sudden, they're basically blaming the whole Syria situation for an unfortunate accident.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

It appears that Don’s assertion that Aylan and his family were “not even from Syria” was based on the fact that their boat had departed from Turkey. However, Aylan and his family were in fact from Syria and had fled to Turkey prior to boarding the boat that later capsized. Thus, in this case, Don’s belief that the media’s coverage of the event was misleading is actually based on his own confusion about the facts of the incident. Nonetheless, his comments indicate that there was possible conflicting or unclear information circulated in the media. It is also important to note Don’s own acknowledgement that he found the coverage confusing, as he consequently took an ‘oppositional’ reading to the media messages he discussed, which appeared to impact his own perspectives on the Syrian refugee crisis.

Another event involving asylum seekers that generated considerable media attention in Australia was the Manus Island riot that occurred in February 2014, resulting in the death of 23-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, Reza Berati (Narayanasamy & Parfitt, 2014). Some participants brought up this incident while talking about the reliability of Australian news depictions of asylum seekers. For example, Katie remarked:

I think the biggest one for me would be the riot. When I watched the news footage, it shows asylum seekers in white masks, that sort of stuff. It portrayed the guards as being very violent towards them, picking up chairs et cetera, et cetera. What it didn’t portray though was the fact it was an organised attack, that the plan was extremely well documented and planned out. What they were planning to do could have hurt a lot of people.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

Katie later clarified that by “they” she was referring to the detainees and therefore her comment posits that the asylum seekers detained on Manus instigated the incident.
There is continued debate surrounding what occurred on the night of the Manus riots. In their analysis of Australian news coverage of the incident, Ellis, et al, (2016) reported that newspapers *The Australian* and *The Guardian* published conflicting accounts of how the riots were initiated – *The Australian* predominantly framed the asylum seekers as being responsible for the violence, constructing them as threats to Australia’s security and sovereignty, whereas most of *The Guardian’s* reports framed asylum seekers as the victims of violence instigated by the Papua New Guinea locals and Manus Processing Centre employees (Ellis, et al, 2016). It is evident that Katie has encountered media content depicting the latter perspectives and has rejected these messages in favour of those in support of the view that asylum seekers were at fault for the incident.

All participants who referred to specific media coverage to illustrate their perspectives about the reliability of news depictions of asylum seekers demonstrated an ‘oppositional’ reading of the examples they discussed. According to Hall (1980), when audiences take this kind of ‘oppositional’ stance, they are outright rejecting the media message(s) presented to them. This finding is not surprising given that these discussions occurred in the context of labelling news representations of the issue as unreliable, however it is interesting that no participants recalled examples of reliable news representations. Prior research has found that audiences tend to more readily remember news content that provokes a negative response for them than content that they regard favourably (Kepplinger & Daschmann, 1997; Donsbach, 1991; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987) – this phenomenon may account for why far more participants talked about media depictions of asylum seekers as unreliable than reliable. On the whole, the findings discussed in this section highlight the continued capacity for news discourses to polarise audiences when it comes to the issue of people seeking asylum. More
specifically, Australian audiences appear to be taking a predominantly critical response to news depictions of the issue, with many either completely rejecting the messages presented to them or accepting some aspects of the messages whilst discounting others. Irrespective of how they perceived news content, it was clear that participants of the current research considered numerous factors to evaluate media discourses, with many linking their views to pre-existing beliefs and personal experiences.

9.2.4 ‘Both sides of the coin’: Balanced reporting of asylum seekers

The idea that the news should strive for 'balanced' reporting has been criticised by media scholars on the basis that doing so implies that unreliable or unsubstantiated perspectives and accounts warrant equal attention to factually sound information (Dunwoody & Peters, 1992; Wartenberg & Greenberg, 1992; Taylor & Condit, 1988). For instance, Wartenberg and Greenberg (1992) argued that when journalists commit to balance where balance is not necessarily warranted, audiences are exposed to different points of view without being adequately equipped to assess the reliability of the content they have been exposed to, nor “the process by which those views have developed” (p. 391). Despite these critiques, many participants of the current study expressed the view that the media should endeavour to provide ‘both sides of the story’ when reporting on issues involving asylum seekers. For example, when asked to elaborate further about aspects of media coverage concerning asylum seekers that she has found problematic, Brooke said:

I think sometimes I get annoyed at the media when they do one-sided arguments for certain subjects. That makes me frustrated. It’s hard to get a real idea of what is going on without getting the other side too.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Mark shared a similar view:
At the end of the day, sometimes you need to hear the opinion on the other side of the story. Otherwise, you can’t form your opinion properly.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Like Mark and Brooke, Sam also argued that he needs to hear differing perspectives on a topic before he can ascertain his own position:

I'm pretty open-minded, but, you know, I need that, um, I need the two, both sides of the coin to find out where my values, uh, reside.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Similarly, Bryan said:

I mean, usually there are two sides to everything and you can get something and read it and think ‘no that can’t be right’ and then you read something else and think ‘that’s more where I’m coming on, this bloke gets it’.

(Male, aged 40-49, British-Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)

An interesting side-note with Bryan’s remarks is his gendered use of language with “this bloke gets it”. The way he used “bloke” (particularly in the context of talking about media discourses he trusts over those he discounts) implies that he may feel some degree of increased trust in information presented by journalists he regards as similar to himself. This phenomenon has been reported by prior studies showing that people often regard others more favourably when they perceive them as similar to themselves (Farmer, McKay & Tsakiris, 2013; Todorov, 2008; DeBruine, 2005).

Bryan’s use of the term “bloke” when referring to examples of trusted media content is of particular relevance considering that later in his interview, he claimed that he puts less faith in information presented by female journalists because he believes they rely too heavily on “emotion” and less on “objective facts” (see further discussion on page 246). Collectively, the participants quoted above drew upon the ‘two sides of the story’ trope in response to being asked about what factors they believe impact
whether they trust news representations of people seeking asylum. This suggests a strong belief that to understand the issue adequately enough to form a meaningful opinion, these participants felt that exposure to alternative arguments was important. An interesting aspect of this finding is that all participants who argued a need to be exposed to “both sides of the coin” voiced either ‘ambivalent’ or ‘non-accepting’ views about asylum seekers. This suggests that those with an ‘accepting’ stance are either less concerned with the issue of balanced reporting or they are not interested in alternative ‘sides of the story’. Use of the ‘both sides of the coin’ discourse therefore appears to be an example of the ‘middle ground’ positioning that some scholars have noted as a rhetorical device commonly used to appear balanced in one’s views (e.g. Fozdar, 2008; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

### 9.2.5 ‘We’re talking about real people’: Dehumanising discourses

Australian journalist and researcher Peter Mares (2002) stressed the importance of journalists exercising utmost care when reporting on matters involving asylum seekers to ensure they are represented in a humanising manner. Mares (2002) argued that such humanity is represented in the type of imagery the media employs (both verbal and visual), and the language used to frame people who seek asylum, emphasising:

> These things are integral to our public responsibility to report with integrity. We owe it both to our audiences and to the refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people about whom we write (p. 76).

These concerns were echoed by some participants of the present research as a common argument many of them contributed was that people seeking asylum deserve more compassionate, humanising and inclusive representation in news discourses. For instance, Andrew remarked:
Maybe a bit more of a, you know, a human approach might help things. They're all talking about, as I said, the bad things that are happening and they never just show, like, families or things like that and I think if more people saw that, you know, I think if you spoke to most family people, if they were in a country where, you know, there was pretty much a lot of danger for their family and the kids and everything, they would do the exact same thing, you know, try to get out. I think if you showed that side of it to more people, I think they'd probably be a bit more understanding.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Andrew’s comments suggest that he wishes to appeal to people’s humanity when discussing issues impacting people seeking asylum. This is evident from his repeated references to family and suggestion that “most family people” would be able to empathise with people seeking asylum (who also have families) who are in “a lot of danger”. To make this point, Andrew used ‘personalisation’ (i.e. “I think) when expressing these views, indicating that these are his own personal perspectives on how he believes news organisation could improve their representations of asylum seekers. He also repeated “you know” three times, which is an example of the ‘emphasising similarity between the self and audience’ rhetorical device (Fozdar, 2008). It therefore appears that Andrew either knew (or perceived) that his view is shared by others and/or that he assumed the researcher was aware of the same points he raised. Similar to the “more human approach” proposed by Andrew, David pointed out the need to emphasise that asylum seekers are “real people”:

The media should at least acknowledge that we're talking about real people going through really difficult situations.

(Male, aged 30-39, Venezuelan-Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Later in his interview, David made the following recommendation for improving news representations of people seeking asylum:

You really need to talk to the people who are involved if you are going to try to understand what is happening to them.

(Male, aged 30-39, Venezuelan-Australian, ‘accepting’ views)
Like David, Jodie also advocated for involving asylum seekers in the news-making process “instead of speaking for them”:

These guys are silenced and there’s no way to get their views out. Surely a more inclusive model of journalism is possible, one that actually gave people a voice instead of speaking for them.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie’s view that asylum seekers are “silenced” supports prior findings showing that asylum seekers are rarely given the opportunity to contribute to news coverage about their experiences (Cock, et al, 2018; Cooper, et al, 2017; Buchanan & Grillo, 2004). This finding also provides further support for the applicability of Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) Propaganda Model (PM), which posits that commercial media organisations are structurally inclined to legitimise and advance the interests of the most powerful members of society. This facet of the PM is relevant to Jodie’s assertion that asylum seekers voices are notably absent from Australian news coverage about their experiences. As media access to asylum seekers in Australia is highly restricted, particularly for those in immigration detention facilities Australia’s media relies heavily on government sources for information about asylum seekers, and rarely includes the experiences and/or perspectives of asylum seekers themselves (Ellis, et al, 2016; Murphy, 2016). The fact some participants of the current study brought up the absence of asylum seekers’ voices as an issue affecting the media’s ability to portray them in a humanising way has important implications for media policy and research – these are discussed in the Conclusion chapter.

9.2.6 ‘We’re not getting the whole story’: News transparency

The Australian government has often been criticised for the lack of clear information about what is going on with respect to asylum seeker policies and incidents that receive media attention (Murphy, 2016; McCullough & Tham, 2005).
In turn, the media has also faced similar criticism, further exacerbated by the fact that Australian media are highly restricted with respect to the information they receive from official sources about people seeking asylum, and their access to asylum seekers themselves. For instance, news organisations’ access to Australian-run detention centres is highly restricted (Ellis, et al, 2016; Murphy, 2016), impacting the media’s ability to report on emerging issues in the public interest. With respect to how audiences perceive these limitations to the information presented in media coverage, the current research has highlighted that these issues have not gone unnoticed, with many participants commenting on the limited information and “transparency” in news reports about asylum seekers. For example, Gary remarked:

I'm never quite sure sometimes whether the media is giving us the whole story. It's a, it's a pretty narrow view and that's why sometimes you, you know you feel you're being, it's not open enough and it’s not transparent.

(Male, aged 70-80, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Gary’s assertion that the media is not giving the public “the whole story” about asylum seekers was repeated by several participants, including Adam who said:

I feel that, I mean, we don't get, we're not getting the whole story.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Jessica agreed:

They give you what they want you to see. They don't give you the whole story and they omit important pieces of information if they don't think that it will have the right opinion, or it might taint your opinion of the government or of a particular political party or Australia.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

In addition to pointing out information gaps in Australian news representations of asylum seekers, Jessica has also brought up the issue of potential political influences on media content. This came up as an issue for other participants who expressed
concerns about bureaucratic issues that impact on the reliability of news content (refer to section 9.2.7 for further discussion).

Some participants referred to specific examples of media content they had encountered when discussing their views on the lack of transparency in Australian news representations of asylum seekers. For instance, when Tom was asked if any specific news depictions come to mind when he thinks about his perspectives about Australian media coverage of asylum seekers. He talked about the Manus Island detention centre riots of 2014:

I think probably, um, the riots on Manus Island, I mean, I still don't know the truth about that in terms of whether it was something the local people started, you know, or whether it was, you know, internal. The aftermath of that was a bit frustrating. There was just no clarity or, um, transparency in how that was reported, and so much, um, conflicting information. I still don't know what happened.

(Male, aged 60-69, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Tom has explicitly argued that the Australian press coverage of this incident lacked transparency and clarity, adding that he felt there was “conflicting information” that confused his understanding of what took place. Tom’s concerns have been well documented in public critique of the media’s handling of the Manus incident. For instance, Ellis, et al (2016) examined Australian news coverage of the riots and found that news outlets had to rely on government sources due to the media being banned from attending liaising with first-hand witnesses and attending offshore processing centres maintained by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Ellis, et al (2016) concluded that the resulting news coverage of the incident was vague, inconsistent, and confusing to audiences.

Mark also expressed concerns about the lack of information reported by the Australian press about asylum seekers, this time in reference to the Liberal party’s claim that they have ‘stopped the boats’:
I know that there’s talk of the fact that the reason there’s less boats because we’ve either started turning them away or stopped reporting on them, things like that. Well okay, that’s fair enough, but that’s something we need to look into. Why is it that people aren’t reporting this? It seems like we’re being kept in the dark about what’s going on, so people can say “see, they have stopped the boats!”

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Like Tom, Mark has argued that the information provided to the Australian public about asylum seekers is often lacking. He used the rhetorical device ‘direct reported speech’ (Holt, 1996), by mimicking a statement he believes others are saying (i.e. “see, they have stopped the boats”). By quoting the “party line”, as Mark referred to it, he has been able to articulate his interpretation of how ‘the boats have stopped’ discourse has been presented in the public sphere.

9.2.7 ‘A numbers game’: Bureaucratic influences on news content

When participants were discussing their perspectives about the reliability of news representations of people seeking asylum, some brought up bureaucracy as a hindrance to factual reporting. They touched on issues such as ratings, financially-based decision making, relationships with the Australian government, and media ownership. Again, this finding provides support for Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) Propaganda Model, which posits that commercial media organisations are structurally inclined to legitimise and advance the interests of the most powerful members of society. All participants’ references to bureaucratic issues occurred while reflecting specifically on how they feel about media representations of asylum seekers. It therefore appeared that these participants were trying to articulate why they think the problems they identified with respect to news discourses about asylum seekers occur in the first place. This is an interesting finding as it shows that, rather than simply identifying problematic news discourses they have come across,
participants had put some thought into the potential root causes of these issues. In some cases, participants framed these discussions in terms of how they would like to see media organisations address these issues. For instance, Brooke talked about the government having “tight reins” on Australian media outlets, adding that she would like to see news organisations have more “range” to conduct “true reporting”:

I think the government has tight reins on the media and it does influence what's allowed to be released and what the content is. It would be nice if media outlets could have range enough to do um, I don't know, what's the word? Um, true reporting.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Like Brooke, Luke also posited that there are political influences on Australian news content

I think a lot of what they're doing is, um, based upon, achieving political goals rather than accurate representations of what's happening, which is dangerous.

(Male, aged 30-39, Australian, ‘accepting’ views)

Luke made this remark after stating that overall, he does not trust Australian media to inform the general public about issues that impact on human rights. Thus, his assertion that it is “dangerous” that Australian news organisations often base news content on “achieving political goals” appears to be referring to the dangers from a human rights perspective (i.e. concerning the potential implications of news discourses about people seeking asylum) that are not “accurate representations of what’s happening”.

As noted, some participants brought up the issue of media ownership in the context of unreliable news discourses about people seeking asylum. For example, Jodie stated:

I think a really important point to make with analysing media is that, its consumption is not necessarily always driven by, from the bottom up. Its consumption is actually driven from the top and who owns it
and how they come to own it and how they can actually manipulate that ownership to influence an entire national public opinion. There’s certainly a correlation between the ownership of the media and what we actually see as news.

(Female, aged 40-49, Serbian-Australian ‘accepting’ views)

Jodie argued that news consumption is largely dictated by media ownership, as the content presented by the media (which ultimately influences audience engagement) is driven by the needs and goals of those who own the organisation. While making this point, she demonstrated the rhetorical device ‘claiming special knowledge’ (Billig, 1991), which is evident in her repetition of ‘actually’ when explaining that media consumption is a top-down process, whereby “they [media owners] can actually manipulate that ownership to influence an entire national public opinion”. It appears that Jodie is confident in her assertion that news production is dictated by media ownership, suggesting she has obtained some prior experience and/or knowledge in this area.

The matter of maintaining viewers/ratings is another issue impacting news content that has been attributed to media ownership (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In the current study, some participants brought up ratings when talking about news portrayals of people seeking asylum, with some suggesting that the prevalence of negative news coverage about the issue may result from the pressure to obtain, and maintain, high ratings. According to Katie:

I think the media, unfortunately, plays the game of, they play a numbers game. They need to play a numbers game with regards to ratings. What plays better, a nice story about refugees being settled or a story about refugees rioting? The one that will grab people is the negative one, unfortunately. I think they can do a better job of reporting what actually happens, but then again, I know that they probably won’t because they need to sell papers, get their ratings et cetera.

(Female, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘non-accepting’ views)
Katie’s repetition of the word ‘unfortunately’ when arguing that the media plays a “numbers game” demonstrates some degree of dissatisfaction with the way news organisations operate in Australia, particularly considering that Katie indicated earlier in her interview that she avoids the news as she finds it “too depressing” (see page 208 for further discussion). Katie also asked the rhetorical question “what plays better, a nice story about refugees being settled or a story about refugees rioting?” before answering the question herself with “the one that will grab people is the negative one”. It was clear that Katie did not expect the interviewer to answer this question given that she answered it immediately herself and therefore, this question served the purpose of emphasising her own perspective.

The issue of ratings was also brought up during participants’ discussions of potential motivators for the news discourses presented to the Australian public. For instance, Mark followed up his comments about the degree of negativity in news coverage about people seeking asylum with the following remarks:

I mean, they need to base these decisions on what will be popular with viewers. So, it’s financially-motivated reporting when you think about it. At the end of the day, they’ve got something to sell and those reporters won’t have jobs if their news company isn’t actually making money.

(Male, aged 18-29, Australian, ‘ambivalent’ views)

Like Katie, Mark provided these comments during a discussion about the prevalence of negative news content concerning asylum seekers. It appears that both participants have tried to understand why news portrayals of people seeking asylum are often negative, with Katie suggesting that such content is more likely to “grab people” and Mark arguing that it is “popular with viewers”. Both Mark and Katie’s comments appear to suggest that these issues are unlikely to be resolved, as evidenced by Mark’s statement “at the end of the day, they’ve got something to sell and those reporters won’t have jobs if their news company isn’t actually making money” and
Katie’s remark “I think they can do a better job of reporting what actually happens, but then again, I know that they probably won’t because they need to sell papers”. There is a degree of despondence evident in these comments, as Katie appeared to suggest that while this is not the reality of news production and consumption, in a perfect world, news content would be free from the pressures associated with “making money” and “selling papers”.

9.3 Summary

The findings discussed in this chapter highlight some important complexities with respect to audience perceptions of Australian news discourses about seeking asylum. Firstly, participants offered mixed accounts of whether they felt that news content impacts their perspectives about asylum seekers, or whether their pre-existing views influence their perceptions of media coverage. Some participants explicitly stated that they are drawn to media content that aligns with their perspectives, others believed that news representations have influenced their views on people seeking asylum, and some denied any relationship between their media exposure and stance on the topic. Despite these varied perspectives, one notable commonality was observed: all participants, irrespective of their personal views regarding people seeking asylum, identified problems with how Australian news organisations represent this issue.

Reflecting on specific examples of news coverage they have been exposed to, participants discussed negativity in news representations, sensationalist accounts of asylum seeker events and incidents, unreliable and biased reporting of asylum issues, a lack of balanced perspectives in news portrayals, de-humanising depictions (including the exclusion of asylum seekers from news-making processes), and a lack of transparency in media coverage. Another common argument raised during these
discussions was that Australian news content is largely driven by bureaucratic factors, which ensure asylum seekers are framed in a manner that serve the interests of the most powerful and influential members of society. In some cases, participants appeared to use their critique of news depictions to further their own stance (i.e. by injecting their own views about seeking asylum into their discussion of how Australian media coverage represents the issue). This suggests that participants’ perspectives on the topic impacted how they reflected on media discourse, aligning with some observations discussed within the pioneering audience reception literature (see, for example, Morley, 1980).

By applying Audience Reception Analysis to participants’ discussions of their views, this research uncovered a combination of dominant-hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated readings of the media messages participants could recall. In other words, participants demonstrated that while they sometimes accepted news representations of asylum seekers at face value, participants often rejected these representations (or accepted some aspects whilst discounting others). Collectively, this sample demonstrated a sophisticated critique of Australian media discourses about asylum seekers, pointing to a complex relationship between audiences and news framings of the issue. The implications of these findings, with respect to their impact research and policy in both the social sciences and communications domains, are discussed in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis, where recommendations for future research directions are also highlighted.
10 Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

The adaptation of Audience Reception Analysis in conjunction with a Critical Discourse approach enabled this research to highlight the complex and nuanced nature of audience responses to media discourses about asylum seekers. The central take-home message this thesis emphasises is that Australian media audiences are highly critical of news coverage about asylum seekers, voicing a wide range of concerns about the ability of the news to adequately inform the public about the issue, regardless of their orientation to the issue.

This research addressed a notable gap in the literature, concerned with how Australian community members conceptualise and evaluate news representations of people seeking asylum. To meet this objective, participants’ general views about the topic were explored, which was followed by an examination of their perspectives about Australian news coverage of asylum seekers. The emergent findings carry important implications for sociological and communications research, policy and practice. This chapter discusses these implications, identifies some limitations of the research, provides recommendations for future research directions, and concludes by highlighting how this research has enhanced audience reception and critical discourse scholarship concerned with perspectives about news representations of people seeking asylum.

10.2 Summary of Key Findings & Implications - Research Question 1

10.2.1 Perspectives on asylum seekers

To provide context for the emerging findings with respect to participants’ views on media coverage of the topic, their general perspectives on asylum seekers
were investigated. This served three important purposes: to build upon prior research findings showing that Australians are highly polarised about the issue of seeking asylum (Markus & Arunachalam, 2013; Laughland-Booý, et al, 2014; Fozdar & Pedersen, 2013; McKay, et al, 2012; Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; Pedersen, et al, 2006; Clyne, 2005; Pickering, 2004; Betts, 2001); to ensure that diverse views about asylum seekers were represented in the sample, which more accurately reflects the polarisation observed for the wider Australian population; and to enable the researcher to consider participants’ pre-existing views about seeking asylum when analysing their responses to Australian news discourses about the issue.

Participants voiced numerous discourses about people seeking asylum. Firstly, some described asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants’, arguing that they use the ‘back door’ to obtain refugee status in Australia. This perspective was typically raised in the context of arguing that asylum seekers need to follow the ‘right processes’ to be settled in Australia. Another finding was the tendency for participants to label asylum seekers as ‘economic migrants’ by suggesting that many are motivated by financial gain as opposed to escaping persecution. The emergence of these discourses may have negative implications from a policy perspective, especially as prior research has demonstrated that such beliefs often serve as a justification for oppressive laws and policies (O’Doherty, 2001; Clyne 2003, 2005). In turn, the ‘illegal’ and ‘back door’ tropes can have harsh consequences for asylum seekers in Australia. Therefore, some closer examination of the factors that cause asylum seekers to be regarded in these terms is warranted.

It is noteworthy that some participants opposed the construction of asylum seekers as illegal immigrants who fail to follow the right processes. These participants instead argued that people are well within their rights to seek asylum in Australia, and there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to gain refugee status. Some
participants also rejected the notion of economic migration, in some cases asserting that people can simultaneously have a genuine claim for refugee status whilst seeking to improve their financial circumstances. These findings highlight that while the ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘right processes’ and ‘economic migrants’ discourses continue to be voiced, they also continue to be challenged. A common mechanism used by participants to oppose these notions was to point out the existence of these discourses before challenging them (e.g. “people say they are illegal. They are not illegal”). This phenomenon has been coined ‘duelling discourses’ (Fozdar, 2008; Fleras, 1998; Billig, 1987). It is noteworthy that all of these participants voiced ‘accepting’ views and expressed opposition to punitive policies such as mandatory detention. This finding carries important implications for the treatment and subsequent well-being of asylum seekers in Australia. It suggests that when one rejects notions of asylum seekers as ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘economic migrants’ or using ‘the back door’, they are less inclined to support harsh and exclusionary migration policies. It is therefore possible that dismantling constructions of asylum seekers as criminal and/or deviant could lead to reduced endorsement of the Australian government’s asylum seeker policies, which, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission, severely impact asylum seekers’ physical and mental wellbeing (AHRC, 2017).

In addition to expressing views about asylum seekers’ methods of entry and motivations for coming to Australia, some participants voiced concerns about Muslim asylum seekers. The most common of these reservations related to the belief that Islamic values are incompatible with those of other Australians. A popular concern raised in these discussions was that enabling Muslim asylum seekers to settle in Australia could place the country at risk of terrorism. By contrast, some participants believed that such concerns are largely unfounded, stressing the
importance of avoiding harmful generalisations about Muslims. While the latter finding is promising, it appears that more progress is needed to address anti-Islamic sentiment among the Australian community, particularly with respect to misconceptions about the involvement of Muslims in extremism.

### 10.2.2 Discussions of Australia’s asylum seeker policies

Participants’ discussions about the impact of asylum seekers being settled in Australia revealed mixed perspectives. Some talked about the potential risks and challenges associated with refugee migration, whereas others felt that Australia was enriched by it. Among those who were wary about refugee migration in Australia, some raised concerns about the nation’s capacity to settle asylum seekers (with respect to managing numbers of arrivals and providing adequate infrastructure and services). Others cited assimilation and segregation as key issues, arguing that asylum seekers must assimilate and adhere to the ‘Australian way of life’. This mirrored previous findings (Laughland-Booï, et al, 2017; Nolan, et al, 2016; Fozdar & Low, 2015; O’Doherty & Augoustinos; 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Pedersen, et al, 2005; Saxton, 2003), indicating that the linking of nationalist rhetoric with anti-asylum views is a continuing discursive feature of discussions about seeking asylum in Australia. In stark contrast to drawing upon themes of nationalism to oppose people seeking asylum, some participants cited ‘Australian values’ as reason for Australia to be generous and welcoming with asylum seekers. Of those who argued that settling asylum seekers can have positive outcomes for Australia, a common viewpoint was that they can contribute a diversity of experience, skills and knowledge to the nation.

Australia’s policies for responding to people seeking asylum were also raised in most interviews. For instance, some participants expressed views in favour of
mandatory detention, framing it as ‘necessary’ and ‘responsible’ from a security perspective, whereas others opposed it, using terms such as ‘cruel’ and ‘inhumane’.

There were also some participants who reported a conflicting and nuanced stance on Australia’s policies and international legal obligations. These participants voiced concerns about mandatory detention from a human rights perspective in addition to support for restrictive policies from a national security standpoint. One possible implication of this finding is that those who regard Australia’s asylum seeker policies as inhumane may still support these policies when motivated by security concerns. Therefore, one cannot assume that people either completely support or oppose Australia’s asylum seeker policies. Instead, the current findings paint a nuanced picture suggesting that people can simultaneously understand the motivation for mandatory detention (i.e. for screening purposes) whilst expressing concerns about how this is achieved (i.e. depriving asylum seekers of civil liberties).

10.2.3 Individual factors for views about asylum seekers

Although potential demographic factors for participants’ views on seeking asylum were not a key focus of this research, some interesting findings with respect to demographics are worth mentioning. In keeping with prior research, most participants who demonstrated ‘accepting’ views toward asylum seekers were female, university-educated, non-religious, and indicated a preference for left-wing political parties. By contrast, most participants in the ‘non-accepting’ and ‘ambivalent’ categories were male, more likely to be religious than their ‘accepting’ counterparts, and typically supported moderate or right-wing political parties, but varied in terms of education level. It was also observed that while most participants did not have direct experience with people from asylum seeking backgrounds, those who did were more inclined to voice an ‘accepting’ stance than those with no direct
exposure to asylum seekers. There was one exception, as one participant who voiced ‘non-accepting’ views recalled some negative encounters with asylum seekers during a previous professional role. This participant drew upon these experiences when discussing her concerns about Australia accepting and settling asylum seekers.

As discussed, these findings supported those of prior research reporting that direct exposure to minorities often coincides with positive perspectives about them (Barlow, et al, 2009; Paolini, Hewstone & Cairns, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Delving further into the capacity for direct contact with asylum seekers to elicit positive attitudes could enable the development of effective strategies focused on fostering attitudinal change and action, such as campaigns designed to mobilise the public to advocate for fairer humanitarian policies. More specifically, the finding that contact with asylum seekers generally aligned with ‘accepting’ viewpoints suggests that campaigning and/or public education efforts may benefit from utilising more direct involvement of asylum seekers, providing more opportunities for people to hear their stories and subsequently relate to them on a more personal level.

10.2.4 **Rhetorical devices and topoi as argumentation strategies**

Participants used numerous rhetorical devices and argumentation strategies when voicing their perspectives about asylum seekers. These enable speakers to subtly provide emphasis and/or justification for their arguments (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Wodak 2001, 2009; Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

The use of Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach to analysis (DHA) enabled the identification of numerous argumentation strategies participants used to lend legitimacy to their views. The two most commonly observed were a ‘topos of personal experience’ and a ‘topos of authority’, both of which enabled participants to inject their personal stance into the discussion by means of ‘perspectivation’,
whereby certain judgements are framed with emphasis on the speaker’s own position and direct experiences with the topic. This was particularly common for participants who have had direct contact with people from refugee backgrounds, either through employment, friendship or family.

The rhetorical devices participants used to either emphasise or deflect responsibility for their views were: personalisation, disclaimers/justification; emphasising similarity between self and audience, direct reported speech; designed visibility; claiming special knowledge; extreme case formulations; rhetorical questions; and emotion displays. A significant device observed was the use of ‘justifications and/or disclaimers’ (van Dijk, 2000), whereby participants acknowledged potential problems with their views by pre-fixing or ending their statements with some form of acknowledgement that their position is based on limited knowledge (e.g. “I don’t know the legal side of things, but I think…”). In some cases, these comments included references to the media as a key source of information that these participants had relied upon (e.g. “I can only go by what I have seen in the media, but…”). This occurred most frequently with participants who demonstrated either ‘ambivalent’ or ‘non-accepting’ views about asylum seekers. Conversely, those who voiced ‘accepting’ perspectives tended to avoid giving justifications or disclaimers for their views and instead, their arguments were voiced with more certain language. This is consistent with previous research (e.g. Fozdar, 2008; Tilbury, 2000), and is an important finding given that prior research has shown that people with ‘accepting’ views about asylum seekers are more likely than their ‘non-accepting’ counterparts to voice accurate information on the topic (Suhnan & Pedersen, 2012) – the current results build on this by suggesting that not only do people with ‘accepting’ views demonstrate more accurate knowledge about the topic,
but they may also be more confident in the legitimacy of their positions and hence, do not feel the need to provide disclaimers or justifications for their comments.

Furthermore, given that most participants reported media coverage as their main source of information about asylum seekers, their news engagement, and subsequent stance on news portrayals of asylum seekers, is of critical importance - when considering participants’ use of rhetorical devices with respect to their news engagement preferences, findings suggest that those who consult with various sources of information on asylum seekers: are more prone to voice accepting views; challenge media representations of the topic; and talk about asylum seekers using more definite language, suggesting more confidence in their knowledge on the subject. From a campaigning and educational standpoint, this is a promising finding as it signifies that increased exposure to accurate media information about seeking asylum may facilitate more welcoming perspectives among the community.

10.3 Summary of Key Findings & Implications - Research Question 2

10.3.1 News engagement preferences & behaviours

As stated, findings pertaining to participants’ engagement with, and views concerning, media representations of asylum seekers varied considerably. For most participants, news content served as either the sole or most prominent source of information on people seeking asylum in Australia. This is an important revelation given the strong opinions on seeking asylum that many participants voiced. It is reasonable to conclude that as most participants were either solely or primarily informed about asylum seekers via media discourse, their own positions on the topic were likely impacted by the representations of these media sources. However, this research adopted the position that to draw any meaningful conclusions about this, one cannot regard the Australian media as one, homogeneous entity because
news organisations differ vastly with respect to how they portray migration and humanitarian issues. It was therefore essential to gauge each participant’s specific news engagement preferences to gain insight into the actual media types and sources that exposed them to discourses about asylum seekers.

Most participants reported that they engage with Australian news content at least once per week. The most common source of news participants mentioned was online news, supporting prior findings indicating that news audiences are becoming increasingly inclined to engage with online news content than traditional sources (i.e. broadcast, print, radio) (Szostek, 2018; Vidali, 2010; Young, 2009; APC, 2007; Nguyen & Western, 2007; Pew Research Center, 1998). Furthermore, most of the participants who engaged with online news reported that they regularly accessed this content via social media. The majority also engaged with televised news bulletins, however many claimed to avoid current affairs-style programs. For participants who discussed specific examples of television news content they engage with, the majority preferred public broadcast networks (i.e. ABC and SBS), with most arguing that these networks are more reliable and trustworthy than commercial channels. Newspapers also constituted a common source of Australian news content for this sample. When participants talked about print news sources they avoid or mistrust, The West Australian was the most frequently mentioned publication. Some also noted talkback and commercial radio as a regular source of news for them. Of these participants, most noted talkback radio as a preferred news source, as commercial radio was predominantly accessed for entertainment purposes as opposed to engaging with news.

As these results indicate, participants discussed multiple types of media they use to access news. Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as ‘news grazing’ (Morris & Forgette, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2004), which has also been found
to be increasingly prevalent in the digitised age of ‘new media’ due to audiences
having more news options to select from as well as easier, faster access to media
content (Nelson & Webster, 2017). News grazing was more common among
younger participants in the current research, suggesting that older audiences may be
more inclined to consume media in more traditional ways. When talking about their
motivations for engaging with certain news sources, most participants stated that
they choose to engage with content that aligns with their existing political views,
whereas a small number believed that their exposure to particular news sources
helps to shape their perspectives. Some participants denied that their news
engagement influences, or is influenced by, their political views, instead claiming
that they select media on the basis of convenience (e.g. ease of access to material or
timing around daily routines).

An interesting finding that emerged when participants talked about the
motivations for their news engagement preferences was that most brought up
aspects of media coverage they dislike and/or mistrust when discussing their
choices. This shows that these participants drew upon critiques of news content in
order to explain and/or justify their news engagement choices. Another significant
finding was that many participants were not motivated to engage with news sources
because they enjoyed or agreed with the content presented. Rather, some
participants indicated that they often engage with news sources despite finding
aspects of the coverage problematic. This illustrates that a person’s choice to
engage with a news source does not necessarily mean they accept the messages
presented. This provides some support for Hall’s (1980) premise that different
audience members can apply highly contrasting interpretations and evaluations to a
single media message. This finding also suggests that people are not necessarily
self-selecting into ‘echo chambers’ of sources they agree with, which is important
as it contradicts the finding that some participants admitted to engaging with news content that aligns with their pre-existing views, supporting Lazarsfeld, et al’s (1944) ‘echo chamber’ theory.

One important consideration to make when interpreting these results is that exposure to news content does not necessarily denote a deep and meaningful engagement with it (Young, 2011). It is therefore possible that some participants regarded news exposure and engagement as the same concept and hence, conflated instances where they actively paid attention to media messages with those where they caught mere glimpses of coverage they had not actively sought out. In the latter scenario, the extent to which news content was absorbed and carefully considered may be significantly diminished. Future research efforts could benefit from delving further into how people define ‘news engagement’ to provide more context for their discussions about news consumption. One way to facilitate this could be through participants’ use of media diaries to keep track of the media content they are engaging with, including their thoughts on the coverage, such as whether they agree or disagree with the content (and why).

Collectively, the findings summarised here highlight a complex relationship between Australian audiences and the news, whereby some people appear to apply multiple critiques of news discourses when deciding what material to engage with, whereas others appear to engage with media irrespective of their trust in the content. This raises an important question for audience reception scholars: what specific factors, either relating to the individual or the media messages they consume, may account for why some audiences engage with news content they mistrust? Shedding light on this may enhance scholars’ understanding of the complex processes that underlie media selection and engagement.
10.3.2 Perspectives on news discourses about asylum seekers

As discussed, participants in this research demonstrated strong disenchantment with Australian media coverage of people seeking asylum. It was rare for the sample to bring up positive examples of news depictions of asylum seekers, nor did many discuss coverage they have found reliable or informative. Few participants appeared to agree with how the Australian media represents asylum seekers, irrespective of their own views on the topic. For instance, some voiced views about asylum seekers that directly aligned with the same media discourses they later critiqued or challenged. This suggests that some these participants may be unaware of how news content has affected their views and/or how their responses to media depictions contradict their stance on the wider issue – this points to a need to address the question that if people feel that media coverage on this topic is problematic, why do they continue to hold similar views themselves? Conversely, some participants actively engaged with the debate about asylum seekers while critiquing media coverage of the issue by injecting their own positions on the topic within discussions about the problems with Australian news depictions. This appeared to be a strategy for both emphasising and legitimising participants’ perspectives.

It is important to reiterate that previous research has revealed low levels of general trust in the media (not just with respect to asylum seeker coverage) (e.g. Park, et al, 2018; Alcorn & Buchanan, 2017). Furthermore, data for the current research was conducted prior to US President Donald Trump’s diatribes about ‘fake news’, which has further undermined people’s trust in the media (Allcott, & Gentzkow, 2017). It is therefore possible that mistrust of media representations of asylum seekers go hand in hand with mistrust of media content altogether and therefore, the current findings should be interpreted with this in mind – a potential
direction for future research could be to establish whether people with high levels of trust in the media, voice similar degrees of mistrust in news coverage about asylum seekers (as such an exploration could reveal more about the specific issues and content that predict such critiques about news discourses).

The most common critique voiced by participants was that news discourses paint asylum seekers in a predominantly negative light, either through representations that portray them in an unfavourable manner (e.g. as illegal immigrants, a threat to Australia, undeserving of protection, and as political pawns), or by focusing on ‘depressing’ content (e.g. conflict surrounding the issue, protests and riots, and human suffering). For many participants, this perception of negativity was cited as a key reason for their disenfranchisement and in some cases, disengagement, with the news. When participants brought up instances of more positive news portrayals, many noted that these were rare, with some arguing that the way these representations are framed implies that positive stories are exceptional. Given empirical evidence that people often recall negative information more readily than positive information (Kepplinger & Daschmann, 1997; Donsbach, 1991; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987), these results are not surprising.

It is noteworthy that all participants, irrespective of their stance on seeking asylum, brought up the issue of negativity in news depictions of the issue. This highlights that either negative representations of asylum seekers are prevalent in Australian news content, or audiences may more readily recall negative media content. When coupled with the fact that many participants cited negativity as a reason for disengaging with media coverage, this finding suggests that negative news portrayals may result in audiences having less exposure to information about the issue, or no exposure whatsoever.
A similar finding related to participants’ views on sensationalism, which were typically voiced in the context of explaining why they avoid and/or mistrust certain media sources, aligning with prior research findings (McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2004). These participants used terms such as ‘moral panic’, ‘hysteria’ and ‘shock value’ to describe news content about the issue. The finding that negativity and sensationalism were cited as factors for why participants disengage with news content has important implications. Such disengagement may cause the public to become detached from the issue or shielded from information about the plight of asylum seekers in Australia. Future research could benefit from exploring the effects of exposure to more positive and less sensationalist stories about people seeking asylum, with particular focus on whether this can predict increased engagement with news content. Furthermore, some exploration into the capacity for more positive news representations of asylum seekers to counter negative public opinion about the issue is needed.

Consistent with prior studies (e.g. McCollough, et al, 2017; Vidali, 2010; Coe, et al, 2008; Heider, et al, 2005), numerous participants also raised the issue of unreliable and biased news representations of asylum seekers in Australia. Again, this issue was raised by participants with ‘accepting’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘non-accepting’ perspectives about asylum seekers, indicating that such a critique of media discourses was not limited to participants with any particular stance. The 2001 ‘children overboard’ affair was the most common example participants provided when talking about their perceptions of bias and unreliability. Citing this incident as a key example, a common criticism was that news outlets often publish content about asylum seekers that has not been fact-checked, or they rely on particular sources (e.g. political figures/organisations) that may have a vested interest in presenting the issue in a certain manner. In this context, participants demonstrated some awareness of
structural constraints placed on media organisations that may exacerbate these issues, which indicates that these participants recognised the complex relationship between news-making processes and the resulting discourses presented to the public.

Another issue identified by participants was the potential influence of bureaucratic demands (i.e. financial, ratings-related, and ownership) on how media organisations portray asylum seekers. Some argued that news content about people seeking asylum is often driven by a desire to maintain ratings, satisfy the demands of media owners and major financial supporters, and avoid alienating key governmental sources. This finding points to a heightened awareness among these participants about the impact of structural and bureaucratic constraints on news outputs. An implication of this finding is that it provides further evidence for perceptions among the Australian public that media reporting operates within an agenda that may not be in the best interests of audiences. Along with prior studies (Vidali, 2010; Coe, et al, 2008; Heider, et al, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2004), this research found that such perceptions were often voiced as a reason to avoid the news altogether. A consequence of such avoidance is that people may become ill-informed about important issues that impact their own lives and the human rights of others, or alternatively, they may seek out more credible sources and become more informed.

It is worth noting that when discussing news portrayals of asylum seekers, many participants constructed their perspectives as recommendations for how they believe Australian media organisations can improve their coverage on the subject. During these discussions, the issue of balanced media coverage was raised, with some participants suggesting that news outlets need to present “both sides of the story”. This perspective was most commonly raised during discussions about the lack of positive depictions of asylum seekers. For instance, many participants argued that more positive stories about asylum seekers are needed to balance out the
negative coverage. In these discussions, participants conceptualised ‘positive’ representations in terms of asylum seekers’ ‘success stories’ and/or effective integration into Australian society, which further draws upon themes of assimilation and nationalism (as ‘positive’ outcomes for asylum seekers were typically aligned with how much they are seen to ‘fit in’ or ‘contribute to’ Australia). Conversely, participants’ definitions of ‘negative stories’ typically focused on the reporting of asylum seekers using frames of conflict/violence, suffering, death, illness, threat, and political polarisation.

There were also some participants who believed that they could benefit from exposure to multiple points of view about the topic. This position was not limited to participants with certain views on seeking asylum, which is promising as it indicates a willingness to be exposed to perspectives that differ from their own. However, a potential problem with a desire for balanced reporting among audiences is that media attention to ‘both sides’ of a given issue can imply that unreliable or unsubstantiated perspectives warrant equal attention to factually sound information (Dunwoody & Peters, 1992; Wartenberg & Greenberg, 1992; Taylor & Condit, 1988). In other words, it is dangerous and potentially confusing for audiences when the media provides equal airtime to perspectives that lack credibility in the interests of ‘balance’. It is important to take this issue into consideration when interpreting participants’ recommendation that news content encompass ‘both sides of the story’.

Another recommendation many participants made was a need for greater transparency in news coverage about people seeking asylum. These participants elaborated by claiming that they find news content about the issue confusing, with some stating that Australian audiences are ‘kept in the dark’ or ‘not getting the whole story’. Once again, some of these participants brought up the issue of structural constraints on reporting, stating that the lack of transparency may result from media
organisations being restricted from accessing reliable sources, including asylum seekers themselves. For some participants, this discussion segued into a critique about the lack of asylum seekers’ voices in news coverage. These participants recommended that news organisations exercise greater inclusivity by prioritising the perspectives of people with asylum-seeking backgrounds, thus providing these groups with a role in the news-making process.

Participants’ assertions about the need for more inclusive representations were often coupled with the argument that news coverage often lacks humanity. This perspective was typically framed as a recommendation for Australian media organisations to cover the issue with more acknowledgement that asylum seekers are ‘real people’. As limited research to date has focused on audience responses to news content about people seeking asylum, little is known about the effects of such approaches, and how these are interpreted by the Australian public. It is therefore recommended that future research explore this further. If a relationship is established between humanising media representations of people seeking asylum and more welcoming audience perspectives on the issue, this could have significant implications for Australian public opinion and subsequent policy directions that affect the wellbeing of asylum seekers.

Overall, the findings discussed in this thesis have provided additional support for the applicability of Audience Reception Analysis (ARA). Participants demonstrated a combination of dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional readings to the media messages they recalled about people seeking asylum, providing further credence for Hall’s proposal that news audiences are not merely ‘cultural dupes’ who accept media messages at face value, but rather employ a complex set of evaluations to the content they are exposed to. In doing so, they draw upon their prior knowledge, experiences and existing positions on the topic at
hand. As the first Australian research to adapt and apply ARA to a discursive exploration of audience perspectives on news representations of asylum seekers, the current study has further advanced the work of Hall and Morley (1980), demonstrating the continued applicability of an Audience Reception epistemology in the new media era, particularly when used alongside Fairclough’s (1992) CDA framework.

### 10.4 Progression of Key Theoretical Concepts

As noted, the current study took a pragmatic approach to analysis, utilising multiple methods in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the emergent findings. With respect to the discursive analyses, the application of Wodak’s (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enabled the identification of two argumentation strategies, or ‘topoi’, not previously noted in CDA research concerning audience responses to media discourse. These were a *topos of authority* and a *topos of personal experience*.

As discussed in the Results and Discussion component of this thesis, a *topos of authority* operated similarly to the ‘claiming special knowledge’ rhetorical device. It was evident where participants framed their views as a product of their position in society – a position that they have implied affords them a degree of credibility on the topic that they perceive to be lacking in others. A *topos of personal experience* was observed in instances where participants drew upon relevant prior experiences when articulating their stance. Both strategies were common in this research, suggesting a tendency to point out one’s personal association to the topic (either through direct experience or pre-existing knowledge) as a means of emphasising the viability of arguments concerned with people seeking asylum, including perspectives of media coverage of the issue.
Through the application of an Audience Reception epistemology, this research has demonstrated how some of the ideas that underpin existing models of media effects and influence are evident in the processes audiences use to navigate and make sense of Australia’s media response to this complex issue. For instance, aspects of agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) can be seen in participants’ discussions of how much importance media organisations attribute to issues and/or events surrounding asylum-seeking, while participants’ moral judgements about the conduct of certain journalists, media organisations, politicians, and political parties gives some credence to the notion of priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Additionally, findings regarding the choices participants make when engaging with Australian media sources align with uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), particularly in the instances where participants noted that they select news material to meet specific needs, such as convenience, accuracy, and entertainment. As such, the current findings support notions of the audience as active participants in media processes and effects who demonstrate a great deal of autonomy, both through their selection of news material and their evaluations of the veracity of the messages they encounter.

Perhaps one of the more innovative and novel aspects of this research is how combining CDA with aspects of Halls’ ‘encoding/decoding’ model led to the identification of some highly nuanced critical discussions of Australian media coverage about people seeking asylum, whereby news engagement was not necessarily driven by perceptions of reliability and trust in media. Such nuances indicated that participants often reflected on their own personal experiences and prior understandings of the topic (and of media more broadly) to express their concerns about news depictions they have been exposed to, with all twenty-four
indicating various ways they believe Australian media is currently failing to inform citizens about this topic.

Overall, these results (and their subsequent implications) have progressed scholarship in the fields of sociology and communications by building on the existing literature concerning: discursive constructions of people seeking asylum in Australia; how the Australian public perceive their exposure to mediated constructions of the issue; and how news audiences perceive and evaluate news representations of asylum seekers. The value of the current findings with respect to the first research question (i.e. participants’ general perspectives on the topic of seeking asylum) is that they have revealed several nuances and ‘grey areas’ regarding asylum seeker discourse in Australia. This research has emphasised the need to identify and explore conflicted positions about asylum seekers, and to recognise the propensity for widely divergent discourses to exist both between and within groups. This is particularly salient given that participants often constructed their arguments in a dialogic fashion by challenging alternative perspectives about seeking asylum, demonstrating Fleras’ (1998) concept of ‘duelling discourses’. In sum, this research highlights how audiences not only identify issues that impact their trust and engagement with Australian media, but they also employ a range of rhetorical and argumentative devices to express their resistance, in many cases making suggestions for how news organisations could foster more accurate, compassionate, balanced, and reliable coverage on asylum seekers.

10.5 Limitations & Future Research Recommendations

The findings documented in this thesis should be considered in light of some evident limitations. The first of these relates to the diversity of the sample. Participants were drawn from one geographic area of WA, the majority identified as
Australian, and the proportion with tertiary educations and left-wing political preferences was substantially higher than that of the general population. This may have affected the findings as it is possible that different discourses and themes may have been observed with a sample comprising more geographically and ethnically diverse, less educated, and more centre or right-wing participants. While this research did not strive for generalisability, nor is this necessary in qualitative research employing discursive approaches (Smith, 2008; Talja, 1999; Silverman, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), future research could benefit from applying a similar approach to examine the perspectives of a more diverse sample (e.g. more representation from: people from migrant and/or refugee backgrounds; people living in regional areas and/or other Australian states and territories; people with more varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds; and people with more centre-right political orientations). This could enable scholars to build upon the themes and discourses reported in this research, shedding further light on whether the present findings are applicable to different populations in Australia.

Another limitation is that it was challenging to draw meaningful conclusions about how media discourses affected (or were affected by) participants’ views due to the reliance on recall of news content they had been exposed to. As this study was concerned with gaining insight into the sample’s conceptualisations based on their general exposure to news content, it was unnecessary to analyse their responses to a specific instance of media reporting. However, such an approach may provide further insight into whether audiences accept, reject or apply negotiated readings of particular media constructions of asylum seekers, and how this occurs in real time. In turn, this could enable scholars to apply Hall’s (1980) ‘encoding/decoding’ model more extensively. It is therefore recommended that future research concerned with media effects explore audiences’ discursive responses to specific news depictions of
people seeking asylum (possibly by comparing emergent perspectives in response to a variety of different news discourses).

It is also important to point out that the current results could not ascertain the points of view underlying the media messages produced. Future research could therefore benefit from analysing public perceptions of news coverage about seeking asylum in conjunction with the perspectives of the media organisations responsible for the coverage. Such an approach could enable scholars to better understand news organisations’ ideological positions on this topic whilst also measuring whether audiences accept, partially accept or reject these ideas. Nonetheless, as the focus of this study was inductive as opposed to experimental, the main objective was to have participants express their views about media coverage freely, irrespective of whether these views reflected Hall’s theoretical perspectives. Additionally, since it took a discursive analytical approach, the focus was on how people express their attitudes and media consumption, rather than determining actual practices. As this research was not concerned with measuring the accuracy of participants’ interpretations of media content and therefore, it was not necessary to employ both the ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ facets of Hall’s model to address the research questions.

Another key consideration impacting the interpretation of the current findings relates to the cross-sectional nature of the research. Because the data was collected at one time-period, conclusions cannot be drawn with respect to how changes in media discourse, political leadership, and other contextual factors (such as varying asylum seeker flows and policy responses) may impact subsequent media effects. This limitation could be addressed via the implementation of longitudinal studies that examine how audiences’ responses to news discourses on the issue may alter depending on the nature of coverage they are exposed to. This is important given that media depictions of asylum seekers have been shown to evolve over time (Parker, et
al., 2018; Wallace, 2018; Goodman, et al., 2017), and hence, such a longitudinal approach may reveal useful insight into the factors that affect how people interpret and appraise news discourses concerning this topic.

The final limitation this thesis wishes to highlight is concerned with the wide range of news sources and discourses covered (i.e. participants were not directed to talk about any particular media sources or outputs). This made it difficult to analyse participants’ views about specific discourses in substantive depth. Should future studies focus on audience views with respect to how one or two news types and/or sources have represented people seeking asylum, greater analysis of how audiences perceive these discourses could be achieved. Such an approach may also allow researchers to draw useful comparisons between the responses of different participants, for instance, in terms of their demographic features, views on seeking asylum, and political preferences.

10.6 Concluding Remarks

As noted, this research is the first to apply a Critical Discourse framework coupled with Audience Reception Analysis to explore how Australian media audiences reflect on news representations of people seeking asylum. The most significant and original contribution to the literature has occurred via the exploration of research question two (i.e. participants’ engagement with media discourses about people seeking asylum, and their conceptualisations of these discourses). Collectively, these results highlight a significant degree of disenchantment among news audiences with respect to media discourses, regardless of whether they hold positive or negative views about asylum seekers. This is apparent from the high level of critique participants provided, coupled with the fact that most constructed their concerns as recommendations for how news organisations can improve their
approach to reporting issues impacting asylum seekers. Participants argued that the public could benefit from media organisations adopting more transparent, compassionate, and inclusive practices for covering issues concerning asylum seekers. Such approaches may serve to promote public understanding of the issue and in turn, encourage the Australian community to reconsider depictions that favour harsh, fearful, and punitive reactions to people who seek protection in this country.
11 References


Fozdar, F. (2014). “They want to turn to their religion. But they should turn to be Australians”: Everyday discourses about why Muslims don’t belong in Australia’. *Muslims in the west: Spaces and agents of inclusion and exclusion*, 87-103.


Hamilton, R., & Bowers, B. (2006). Internet recruitment and e-mail interviews in qualitative studies. Qualitative Health Research, 16(6), 821-835.


Appendices

Appendix A: Call for Participants - Facebook Advertisements

Original Post:

Research Participants Needed – Public Opinion about Media Representations of Asylum Seekers in Australia

My name is Ashleigh Haw and I am a PhD student in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Western Australia.

For my doctoral thesis, I am conducting a research project exploring public opinion about Australian media coverage of asylum seekers.

As a member of the Western Australian public, your perspectives about how asylum seekers are portrayed by the Australian news media is of great importance to this study. I am therefore looking for members of the WA community to take part in a short interview (approx. 30-45 minutes in duration).

Anonymity will be ensured to all participants in the final report (and any additional publications arising from the project). Participants can also withdraw their involvement at any stage of the process.

If you would like more information about participating, please email me at ashleighlouise.haw@research.uwa.edu.au - I will then provide you with a Participant Information Statement and answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ashleigh Haw
Amended Post:

Research Participants Needed – Public Opinion about Media Representations of Asylum Seekers in Australia

My name is Ashleigh Haw and I am a PhD student in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Western Australia.

For my doctoral thesis, I am conducting a research project exploring public opinion about Australian media coverage of asylum seekers.

As a member of the Western Australian public, your perspectives about how asylum seekers are portrayed by the Australian news media is of great importance to this study. I am therefore looking for members of the WA community with a wide range of views about asylum seekers to take part in a short interview (approx. 30-45 minutes in duration).

Anonymity will be ensured to all participants in the final report (and any additional publications arising from the project). Participants can also withdraw their involvement at any stage of the process.

There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers – It is important to gain as many different perspectives on the topic as possible!

If you would like more information about participating, please email me at asheighlouise.haw@research.uwa.edu.au - I will then provide you with a Participant Information Statement and answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ashleigh Haw
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Project Title: Discursive responses to news representations of asylum seekers among Western Australian media audiences

(1) What is the research about?

You are invited to participate in a study of Western Australians’ views about the Australian media reports issues concerning asylum seekers. The key aim of this study is to uncover how WA media audiences perceive news representations of the issue.

(2) Why have I been recruited for this study?

You have been asked to participate in this research because you are a resident of WA, and the research is interested in how members of the WA public feel about portrayals of the asylum seeker issue in Australian news coverage.

(3) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Ashleigh Haw and will be completed to satisfy the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at The University of Western Australia. The project is being carried out under the supervision of Farida Fozdar (Associate Professor/Future Fellow, Anthropology and Sociology) and Rob Cover (Associate Professor, Media and Communication).

(4) What does the study involve?

Face-to-Face Interview:
Should you volunteer your time to this research, you will take part in one interview, which will be audio-recorded. The interview may be conducted at any location convenient to you. During your interview, you will be asked a series of questions concerning your media use (e.g. the types of news outlets you engage with), your beliefs about asylum seekers, and your
opinions regarding news coverage of asylum seekers in Australia. Before your interview begins, you will be asked to complete a short written questionnaire to provide basic demographic information (e.g. your age, occupation, level of education, etc).

(4) How much time will the study take?

Your interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to consent and consent can be withdrawn at any time without affecting your relationship with the University of Western Australia. You may stop your interview or leave the focus group at any stage if you do not wish to continue, in which case the information you have provided will not be included in the study.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information about the participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, however all names will be replaced with pseudonyms and participants’ personal details will not be included in the report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

The University of Western Australia will provide you with $20 as small token of our appreciation for your participation in this research. Another benefit of taking part is that you will be contributing to important research as the results of the study will assist future researchers and practitioners to better understand this issue from the perspective of the Australian public.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes.

(9) What if I require further information about the study or my involvement in it?

If you decide to take part in the study and would like more information, Ashleigh will discuss the study with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Associate Professor Farida Fozdar on (08) 6488 3997 or farida.fozdar@uwa.edu.au or Ashleigh Haw on 0433431250 or ashleighlouise.haw@research.uwa.edu.au.

(10) What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact Dr Caixia Li (Acting Manager, Human Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia) on (08) 6488 4703 or caixia.li@uwa.edu.au.

This information sheet is for you to keep.
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ........................................................................................... [PRINT NAME], agree to participate in the research project: Discursive responses to news representations of asylum seekers among Western Australian media audiences

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

2. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

3. I have been advised as to what data is being collected, the purpose for collecting the data, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research.

4. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

6. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential. I understand that any research data gathered from the results of the study may be published however no information about me will be used in any way that is identifiable.

7. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Western Australia now or in the future.
8. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, in which case the information I have provided will not be included in the study.

9. I consent to having my interview audio-recorded.

............................................................................................
Signature
............................................................................................
Please PRINT your full name
............................................................................................
Date
Appendix D: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Survey

*Responses are optional (respond with N/A or ‘prefer not to say’ for any questions you do not feel comfortable answering)

Full Name: ______________________________________________________

Date of Birth: ____ / ____ / ____ Place of Birth: _______________________

Nationality: ___________________ Religion: _______________________

Occupation: _______________ Gender (Please Circle): M / F / OTHER

Highest Educational Attainment (Please Circle):
  * Postgraduate Degree
  * Graduate Diploma/Certificate
  * Bachelor Degree
  * TAFE Diploma/Certificate
  * High School (Completed Year 12)
  * High School (Completed Year 10)
  * Other (Please Specify):
    ____________________________________________________________

Preferred Political Party (Please Circle):
  * Labor (ALP)
  * Liberal (LNP)
  * The Australian Greens
  * Palmer United Party
  * National Party of Australia
  * Australian Democrats
  * Other (Please Specify):
    ____________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Appendix E: Interview Schedule

1. What comes to mind for you when you hear the word ‘asylum seeker?’
   *Prompt: who are they and why do they come here?

2. What do you think about the number of asylum seekers Australia accepts?

3. How do you feel about the Australian government’s policies for people seeking asylum?
   *Explain them to any participants who are not aware of the current policies

4. What is your understanding of Australia’s obligations to people who seek asylum here?

5. Overall, how do you feel about asylum seekers who come to Australia?
   *Prompt: do you think Australia should continue to allow them to come and be settled here? Why/why not?

6. Where do you get information about asylum seekers?
   *Prompt: friends/family, news sources, work, direct experience, academic sources

7. How often do you engage with news content?

8. What types of news do you like to engage with and why?
   *Prompt: television broadcasts, current affairs programs, newspapers, radio, online news, other online content, social media

9. Are there any specific sources of news you engage with regularly?
   *Prompt: specific media organisations, publications, networks, programs, media personalities, websites, etc

10. What do you think impacts your choices when it comes to engaging with news content?
    *Prompt: sources (e.g. reliability/trustworthiness), news content itself, interest in the topic(s) discussed, convenience of access, etc

11. Do you think your perspectives about asylum seekers are influenced by media coverage about the issue? Why/why not?

12. What do you think about portrayals of asylum seekers in the news?
    *Prompt: Do any examples come to mind?

13. Is there anything that you would like to add that we have not talked about already?

Thank you so much for your time.
### Appendix F: Tables 3 & 4 – Participants’ News Engagement

#### Table 3: Participants’ News Engagement - Media Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Basic Demographics</th>
<th>News Engagement (Y / N)</th>
<th>Weekly News Engagement - Type(s) of Media18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender19</td>
<td>Education Level20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patsy</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HS - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 **Asylum Seeker (AS) Stance:** A = Accepting, NA = Non-Accepting, AM = Ambivalent 
18 **Type of Media:** TV (B) = Television (Broadcast News), TV (CA) = Television (Current Affairs), P (NP) = Print (Newspapers), RAD (TB) = Talkback Radio, RAD (CR) = Commercial Radio 
O (NS) = Online (News Sites), O (SM) = Online (Social Media) 
19 **Gender:** M = Male, F = Female 
20 **Education:** U-PG = University – Postgraduate, U-BD = University – Bachelor’s Degree, TAFE = TAFE Diploma, HS-12 = High School – Year 12, HS-10 = High School – Year 10 
21 **Nationality:** AU = Australian, AU-IN = Australian-Indigenous, AU-BRIT = British-Australian, AU-PAK = Australian-Pakistani, AU-VEN = Australian-Venezuelan 
22 **Religion:** CH = Christian, UC = Uniting Church, COE = Church of England, CA = Catholic, RC = Roman Catholic, IS = Islamic, SP = Spiritual, AT = Atheist, AG = Agnostic 
23 **Political Pref:** ALP = Australian Labor Party, LP = Liberal Party, G = Australian Greens, ALP-G = Swing Voter (Labor /Greens), ALP-LP = Swing Voter (Labor /Liberal) 
24 **N/D:** Not Disclosed
Table 3 (cont.): Participants’ News Engagement – Media Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Basic Demographics</th>
<th>AS Stance</th>
<th>News Engagement (Y / N)</th>
<th>Weekly News Engagement - Type(s) of Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
<td>AU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>AU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25 Asylum Seeker (AS) Stance: A = Accepting, NA = Non-Accepting, AM = Ambivalent
26 Type of Media: TV (B) = Television (Broadcast News), TV (CA) = Television (Current Affairs), P (NP) = Print (Newspapers), RAD (TB) = Talkback Radio, RAD (CR) = Commercial Radio, O (NS) = Online (News Sites), O (SM) = Online (Social Media)
27 Gender: M = Male, F = Female
28 Education: U-PG = University – Postgraduate, U-BD = University – Bachelor’s Degree, TAFE = TAFE Diploma, HS-12 = High School – Year 12, HS-10 = High School – Year 10
29 Nationality: AU = Australian, AU-IN = Australian-Indigenous, AU-BRIT = British-Australian, AU-PAK = Australian-Pakistani, AU-VEN = Australian-Venezuelan
30 Religion: CH = Christian, UC = Uniting Church, COE = Church of England, CA = Catholic, RC = Roman Catholic, IS = Islamic, SP = Spiritual, AT = Atheist, AG = Agnostic
31 Political Pref: ALP = Australian Labor Party, LP = Liberal Party, G = Australian Greens, ALP-G = Swing Voter (Labor /Greens), ALP-LP = Swing Voter (Labor /Liberal)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Political Preference</th>
<th>AS Stance</th>
<th>Trusted News Sources (programme, organisation, publication)</th>
<th>Mistrusted News Sources (programme, organisation, publication)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>ALP-G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, The Guardian, ABC (online), Radio National</td>
<td>7, 9, 10, Alan Jones (radio), The West Australian, The Guardian (online), Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>ABC, 7, 9, 10, local newspaper (not specified), Facebook</td>
<td>The Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, 10, The Project, 92.9 (radio), WA Today, Facebook</td>
<td>7, 9, The West Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, Fairfax (online - not specified), The Guardian (online), Facebook, ABC News (radio), Radio National, RTR-FM (radio), 3CR (radio)</td>
<td>7, 9, The Bolt Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>UC</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, Q&amp;A, local newspaper (not specified)</td>
<td>7, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, The Feed, The Project, The Conversation, The New Daily, Twitter, ABC (radio), Radio International</td>
<td>The West Australian, Facebook, all commercial radio (not specified), all commercial TV news (not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, 7.30 Report, Lateline, Four Corners, Sydney Morning Herald, The Guardian (online), New Matilda, Facebook</td>
<td>7, 9, 10, The Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patsy</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>COE</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, online newspapers (not specified)</td>
<td>N/D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HS - 10</td>
<td>AU – IN</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7, 10, Today Tonight, Facebook</td>
<td>N/D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
<td>AU - PAK</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>ABC, Q&amp;A, The Project, 94.5 (radio), WA Today, The Guardian (online), Sydney Morning Herald (online), Facebook</td>
<td>7, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, 10, The Project, Q&amp;A, The West Australian, various online (not specified), Facebook</td>
<td>7, 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Asylum Seeker (AS) Stance: A = Accepting, NA = Non-Accepting, AM = Ambivalent
33 Gender: M = Male, F = Female
34 Education: U-PG = University – Postgraduate, U-BD = University – Bachelor’s Degree, TAFE = TAFE Diploma, HS-12 = High School – Year 12, HS-10 = High School – Year 10
35 Nationality: AU = Australian, AU-IN = Australian-Indigenous, AU-BRIT = British-Australian, AU-PAK = Australian-Pakistani, AU-VEN = Australian-Venezuelan
36 Religion: CH = Christian, UC = Uniting Church, COE = Church of England, CA = Catholic, RC = Roman Catholic, IS = Islamic, SP = Spiritual, AT = Atheist, AG = Agnostic
37 Political Preference: ALP = Australian Labor Party, LP = Liberal Party of Australia, G = Australian Greens, ALP-G = Swing Voter (Labor & Greens), ALP-LP = Swing Voter (Labor & Liberal)
38 N/D: Not Disclosed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Political Preference</th>
<th>AS Stance</th>
<th>Trusted News Sources (programme, organisation, publication)</th>
<th>Mistrusted News Sources (programme, organisation, publication)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, The Project</td>
<td>7, 9, 10, all Murdoch publications (not specified), Courier Mail, PerthNow, News.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>Today Tonight, A Current Affair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 12</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>The Project, The Guardian (online)</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, 7, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 10</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>N/D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U - BD</td>
<td>AU - BRIT</td>
<td>COE</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, The West Australian, Finance Report, The Fremantle Herald, ABC (online), SBS (online), ABC (radio)</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, Q&amp;A, all commercial radio (not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U - PG</td>
<td>AU - VEN</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, The West Australian, Finance Report, The Fremantle Herald, ABC (online), SBS (online), ABC (radio)</td>
<td>7, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>COE</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>ABC, SBS, Four Corners, 60 Minutes, Foreign Correspondent, The Australian, ABC (radio), 720 (radio)</td>
<td>7, 9, The West Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>HS - 10</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>COE</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>ABC, Al-Jazeera, 7, 10, Q&amp;A, 6PR (radio), ABC (radio), 720 (radio)</td>
<td>9, Q&amp;A, Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>N/D</td>
<td>ALP-LP</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>ABC, ABC (online)</td>
<td>ABC, The Drum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 Asylum Seeker (AS) Stance: A = Accepting, NA = Non-Accepting, AM = Ambivalent  
40 Gender: M = Male, F = Female  
41 Education: U-PG = University – Postgraduate, U-BD = University – Bachelor’s Degree, TAFE = TAFE Diploma, HS-12 = High School – Year 12, HS-10 = High School – Year 10  
42 Nationality: AU = Australian, AU-IN = Australian-Indigenous, AU-BRIT = British-Australian, AU-PAK = Australian-Pakistani, AU-VEN = Australian-Venezuelan  
43 Religion: CH = Christian, UC = Uniting Church, COE = Church of England, CA = Catholic, RC = Roman Catholic, IS = Islamic, SP = Spiritual, AT = Atheist, AG = Agnostic  
45 N/D: Not Disclosed