

**Asylum seekers in the UK: A social psychological understanding of a moral panic**

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For Mum and Dad, with love and thanks

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis critically investigated the concept of 'moral panic' in relation to the UK response to asylum seekers and considered how the explanatory value of this concept could be enhanced by using social psychological theory to understand the cause and impact of such a moral panic. A theoretical framework of social representations and social identity theory was used to explore psychological processes underpinning UK host receptivity to moral panic discourse, and the social and psychological impact on the asylum seekers labelled as 'folk devils'. The research was based on a quantitative content analysis of 415 UK national newspaper articles, a qualitative analysis of a sub-set of 120 of these articles, 8 group interviews comprising 36 members of the host community, and 25 individual interviews with people who have sought asylum in the UK. The findings established some empirical indicators for evidence of a 'moral panic', but also drew attention to the complexity of applying criteria such as disproportionality and volatility. There was clear evidence for a moral panic about asylum seekers in the tabloid media and in host community responses, but not in broadsheet coverage. Nonetheless, individuals who had sought refuge in the UK clearly experienced the host reception as a moral panic. The moral panic discourse centred on three core representations: asylum seekers as 'bad people', 'threatening', and 'illegitimate', and this discourse was widely dispersed and resistant to change. Further analysis revealed that host community responses were consistent with some, although not all, intergroup processes predicted by social identity theory. Social identity theory was also useful for identifying strategies asylum seekers used to cope with their stigmatised group membership. Overall this research points to the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach which draws on sociological and social psychological theorising to produce a model which enhances the utility and explanatory power of the 'moral panic' concept.



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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

When the following terms are used in this thesis they refer to the United High Commissioner for Refugees definitions as follows (UNHCR, 2010):

### **Asylum Seeker:**

An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum against persecution under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and is waiting for a decision. In the UK an asylum seeker is someone who has asked the Government for refugee status and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application.

### **Economic Migrant:**

An economic migrant is someone who leaves their home country to seek work and opportunities unavailable there. The term could be applied to all those who obtain work permits from the government to fill labour shortages in the UK. UNHCR describes a 'migrant' as someone who makes a conscious, voluntary choice to leave their country of origin. When they want to, they can return home in safety.

### **Illegal Immigrant:**

An illegal immigrant is a person residing in the UK without permission. An asylum seeker is not an illegal immigrant. Under the 1951 Convention, anyone has a legal right to apply for asylum in the UK and remain in the country for the duration of their asylum claim.

### **Refugee:**

A refugee is anyone who has been granted asylum under the 1951 UN Convention, to which the UK is a signatory along with 144 other countries. The precise legal definition in Article 1 of the Convention refers to a 'refugee' as a person who: "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter sets out the aims of this thesis and specifies the research questions to be addressed. It also outlines the research context and provides an overview of the theoretical and methodological approaches that have been adopted.

### 1.2 AIMS OF THE THESIS

Since the 1970s, 'moral panic' has been used to characterise negative media and public responses to a range of social groups identified as posing a threat to the values and interests of society. Most recently, the overwhelmingly negative response to asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> in the UK has led a number of commentators to describe this reaction as a 'moral panic'. The main aims of this thesis are to (1) examine whether this is an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers and the extent to which such a claim is empirically testable, and (2) determine whether social psychological theory can be used to provide a model which can (a) theorise the content as well as the process of moral panic, and (b) understand both the cause and the impact of this response. In addressing these issues, this research looks to extend links between sociological and social psychological theorising and contribute to the development of theory and methodology in moral panic research through enhancing the explanatory value of the moral panic concept. It also aims to enhance understanding of moral panic responses with a view to identifying features that may have implications for policy and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> As outlined in *Definitions of Terms* above, 'asylum seeker' describes an individual who has applied for asylum against persecution under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and is awaiting a decision. It is therefore a legal term and the only information it provides about an individual is that she/he has sought protection from persecution. It is in this sense that this term is used throughout this thesis. However, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, classification processes inevitably lack neutrality and The Independent Asylum Commission has recently expressed particular concerns about the negative connotations attached to the term 'asylum seeker'. It is therefore important to recognise that regardless of authorial intention this is not a value-free label. Consequently, whilst it would not be possible to avoid referring to 'asylum seekers' in a thesis which explores responses to and impacts of this label, the use of this term is problematic. In order to address this issue, every effort has been made throughout this thesis to avoid a 'taken for granted' use of 'asylum seeker' and to clarify the ways in which this term is used.

## 1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

### 1.3.1 Theoretical framework

Moral panic is a sociological concept which was developed in the 1970s by British sociologists, in particular by Stanley Cohen (1972) in his seminal work "Folk Devils and Moral Panic". Moral panic refers to "a form of collective behaviour characterised by suddenly increased concern and hostility in a significant segment of a society, in reaction to widespread beliefs about a newly perceived threat from moral deviants" (Victor, 1998: 2). It is a clearly defined concept, used to describe situations that follow predictable trajectories identified by specific criteria<sup>2</sup>.

Despite this, the 'moral panic' label is frequently applied to societal responses without any systematic examination of whether or not they meet these criteria, and the 'taken for granted' use of this concept has been criticised (Thompson, 1998). McCorckle and Miethe (1998) also argue that much research on moral panics fails to fully operationalise the concept or focus on a sufficiently lengthy time period to establish adequate empirical evidence. Furthermore, some critics have suggested that 'moral panic' is essentially an ideological concept, and that criteria such as 'disproportionality' are based on claims that cannot be empirically tested (cf Waddington, 1986). Yet empirical testing is important, as whilst this concept draws attention to power dynamics and therefore has the potential to expose social injustice, unless claims have an analytic basis they are no more than unsubstantiated value judgements. As Ungar (2001:287, italics in original) has argued "taking a critical posture is not inherently unscientific. Rather it depends on whether or not observers have sufficient rigorous evidence to support the contention that *particular* reactions are *patently* unwarranted". The first aim of this thesis is therefore to examine the extent to which it is possible to empirically test the claim of a moral panic.

A second major critique of moral panic is that it lacks explanatory force. As Goode (2000) highlights, there is no such thing as 'moral panic theory'. Rather moral panic is an analytic concept, describing a process that can be explained by a number of

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of moral panic, along with its defining criteria and explanatory models are described more fully in Chapter 2.



different theories. Cohen's original work on Mods and Rockers provided a sociological analysis of deviance which focused on why certain acts came to be defined as deviant in particular contexts. Cohen was particularly interested in the process of moral panics and consequently tended to focus on the creation and transmission of moral panic but, as he has since acknowledged, he did not develop the theory behind these processes (Cohen, 1987). Subsequent models of moral panic have attempted to enhance the explanatory power of the concept by focusing more on the causes of this type of response. Explanatory models have drawn on Marxism (Hall et al, 1978), Social Constructionism (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a) and most recently the concept of 'risk society' and discourse theory (Cricher, 2008, Thompson, 1998). However, even proponents of the moral panic approach have acknowledged that currently its usefulness lies more in describing than explaining why these outbreaks of social anxiety occur (cf Adams, 2003, Sparks, 1995, Weeks, 1993) and Thompson (1998:16) suggests that "some of the most useful contributions of each of these approaches have yet to be fully combined into an explanatory framework."

Cricher (2003, 2008) and Thompson (1998) have identified two particular limitations with current models of moral panic. The first refers to the prioritisation of process over content, which does not allow analysis of the way particular events are constructed as moral panics. The second refers to the lack of satisfactory explanation for why the public are apparently predisposed to panic. Current moral panic models tend to attribute this to unspecified 'social anxiety'. However this is founded on an untested, a priori assumption that social actors experience a collectively shared insecurity (Hier, 2003). The second aim of this thesis is therefore to develop a model of moral panic which focuses on content as well as process and which may also be able to explain, rather than simply describe, receptivity to moral panic discourse.

It will be argued that in order to develop such a model it is necessary to theorise the motivational aspects of group behaviour, but this is not possible if explanations are restricted to a sociological level of analysis. In order to develop an explanatory framework with the potential to achieve this, a social psychological approach is adopted, drawing in particular on social representations and Social Identity Theory.

Moscovici defines Social Psychology as “a discipline which seeks to discover unity and commonality among models of sociology and models of psychology concerning certain phenomena which neither one nor the other could take up alone” (Moscovici and Marková, 2000: 285). What distinguishes Social Psychology from the disciplines of Sociology and Psychology is its focus on the dialectical relationship between the individual and society (Howarth, 2001). As such a social psychological analysis is able to avoid reducing an explanation to either an individual or societal level and can be used to explore group level responses as well as their psychological impact.

The theories of social identity and social representations were both developed in Europe during the 1960s in response to concerns regarding the individualisation of social psychology and as Marková (2007: 215) has described “they have brought into focus the study of the interactions and interdependencies between groups, individuals, and institutions shaped not only by contemporary events but also by collective memories and forgetting, as well as future visions”<sup>3</sup>. Despite the fact that these are two distinct theories which examine intergroup conflict and relations from differing perspectives, there has been increased interest in the possibility of combining these theories to provide an analysis which can account for both content and process of social knowledge (Moloney and Walker, 2007). A social representations approach to social identity can identify the social psychological processes that underpin intergroup dynamics and therefore has the potential to account for why the public are receptive to moral panic discourses.

Related to this is an aspect of moral panic which has been largely undeveloped in the literature to date, and that is the impact of moral panic on those classified as ‘folk devils’ (St Cyr, 2003). Current moral panic models tend to focus primarily on those producing the panic and the political impact of moral panics, rather than the impact on those who are the subject of the panic. However, many moral panics focus on what Cohen (2002: viii) describes as “social identity clusters” such as youth groups, drug users and single mothers who are likely to lack power or access to cultural capital (Cohen, 1972). The moral panic process stigmatises these groups

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<sup>3</sup> The theories of social identity and social representations are both described more fully in Chapter 3 of this thesis.



and is therefore likely to have an impact on the social identity of 'folk devils' which may have significant social consequences for intergroup relations and individual behaviour. This thesis will argue that failing to consider this issue is a key limitation with existing models which may also be addressed through the adoption of a social psychological approach to moral panic. The second aim of this thesis therefore also includes examining the impact of a moral panic response on 'folk devils'.

There are a number of reasons why it is important to identify and study moral panics. As Critcher (2005: 4) notes, moral panics "reveal a lot about the workings of power, specifically who has the capacity to define a social problem and prescribe appropriate action". Furthermore, moral panics may play a key role in social change and are therefore likely to have important consequences in terms of influencing legal and social policy (Cohen, 1972). In reconfirming moral boundaries, moral panics also define and label what society finds acceptable and subsequently play an important role in drawing boundaries around communities, determining those who do or do not belong (Critcher, 2005). It is this element of moral panics – i.e. their role in intergroup dynamics, which make them particularly suitable for social psychological enquiry, despite the fact that the concept has its origins in sociology.

Whilst any number of moral panics could have been chosen for this research, the UK response to asylum seekers is particularly appropriate, because not only is it a response which Cohen (2002) has identified as a contemporary moral panic, but it is also one which raises questions about the definition of the moral panic concept, in particular in relation to the criterion of 'volatility' – i.e. ongoing hostility towards asylum seekers suggests that this is not a response which erupts and then swiftly subsides as is the assumed trajectory of moral panics. This is important, as whilst Cohen recognises the "virtually uninterrupted message of hostility and rejection" towards asylum seekers (Cohen, 2002: xix) he also maintains that 'volatility' is a key identifying feature of moral panic. This thesis will argue that by understanding moral panic as part of 'normal' intergroup processes, a social psychological approach may help explain ongoing hostility as well as the frequency and repetition of these events.

### **1.3.2 Background to asylum seekers in the UK**

In order to understand how the UK response to asylum seekers has come to be characterised as a 'moral panic' it is necessary to examine the social and political background to this response. Since the early 1990s, the issue of asylum has been at the forefront of UK media and government discussion (Finney, 2005; Lewis, 2005). Government legislation has focused on restricting access for individuals seeking asylum in the UK and potential abuses of the asylum system (Flynn, 2003) and media coverage has consistently focused on negative stories about the asylum system and asylum seekers (Coole, 2002; Greenslade, 2005; Lewis, 2005). The amount of negative attention this issue has received has been attributed to five main factors; (1) the significant rise in asylum numbers during the 1990s, (2) the increase in Third World applications for asylum in the UK, (3) changes in the way that asylum applications are made, (4) changes in economic circumstances in the UK and, (5) increased global insecurity post 9/11 (Crisp 2003; Finney, 2005; Robinson, 2003; Statham, 2003).

In 1951, the Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees was adopted by twenty-six countries, including the UK, in response to the refugee crisis created by World War II (UNHCR, 2001). This convention defined the terms under which an individual would be considered a refugee and set out the legal obligations that signatory countries had to those seeking asylum. At this time and for many years after, both in the UK and in Europe more generally, the majority of asylum applicants were white Europeans fleeing from communist or fascist regimes (Crisp, 2003; Robinson 2003). Refugees from the Third World entered Europe in small numbers through controlled quota systems organised by the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and most were resettled in refugee camps in countries that bordered their own (Robinson, 2003). Consequently few individuals sought asylum in the UK during the post-War period and most applications came from European dissidents, considered to be 'bravely fleeing communism'. As such, numbers were not an issue and 'worthy white refugees' could be distinguished from 'undeserving black immigrants' (Robinson, 2003).

However, the collapse of state communism in 1989 and an increase in armed conflict and collective violence in developing countries in the early 1990s led to a



rise in numbers of refugees worldwide (Crisp 2003; Statham, 2003). In addition, the advent of cheaper airfares and the increase in direct flights to European cities in the 1990s made it easier for individuals from developing countries to travel independently to make asylum applications in the UK rather than having to wait in refugee camps for selection by the UNHCR (Robinson, 2003). Consequently there was a twenty fold increase in asylum applications to the UK from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s (Finney, 2005). This led not only to an increase in the number of individuals seeking asylum in the UK, but also changed the demographic make-up of the refugee population. Increasingly refugees were coming to the UK from countries traditionally associated with economic migration. Furthermore, not only were they arriving independently but they often applied for asylum 'in country' rather than at the port of entry and by 1991 80% of all asylum claims in the UK were made this way (Robinson, 2003). This alerted the media and policy makers to the apparent permeability of UK borders and shifted perceptions of asylum seekers from 'deserving' white European dissidents to 'bogus' impoverished black or Asian economic migrants (Robinson, 2003; Statham, 2003).

At the same time there were a number of changes taking place in the UK. The deindustrialisation of the economy meant there was less need for cheap foreign labour than there had been during the post-War economic boom. Oil price crises in the late 1980s and early 1990s coupled with increasing unemployment meant that there was economic instability, and competition for resources amongst the disadvantaged was exacerbated by the reduction of social housing stock during this period (Robinson 2003). In this context, attitudes towards immigration in general became less positive in the UK (Robinson, 2003). Furthermore, as the UK asylum system was not designed to deal with large numbers of applicants, a backlog started to build up, leading to what has been described as a "bureaucratic meltdown" in the early 1990s (Statham, 2003: 164). This in conjunction with concern that the asylum system was being used as a means of economic migration led to the politicisation of asylum seekers (Statham, 2003; Robinson 2003). As a result, government legislation since the 1990s has focused on the detention and containment of individuals seeking refuge in the UK (Finney and Robinson 2007; Flynn, 2003). This approach has made it increasingly difficult to make successful asylum applications, for example by reducing legal support and tightening deadlines,

leading to an increase in rejection rates for asylum applicants, which in turn has further reinforced the image of asylum seekers as 'bogus' (Kundnani, 2001). Dispersal programmes designed to spread the 'burden' of asylum may also have added to the perception that the issue is a problem (Robinson, 2003; Schuster, 2003).

Increased global insecurity since the events of 9/11 and explicit links made in the media between asylum seekers and the attempted London tube bombings in July 2005, as well as terrorism more generally, have also contributed to the negative perception of asylum seekers in the UK (Crisp, 2003; Finney, 2005). These links have been reinforced by the fact that many individuals who have sought asylum in the UK since 2001 have come from countries associated with radical Islam and political violence (Crisp, 2003). This, when added to existing concerns about numbers, means of entry and economic impact, has firmly positioned asylum seekers as both undeserving and threatening and has produced a very different context to that in which the Geneva convention was agreed. By framing the issue in this way, both the government and media have legitimised anti-asylum opinions (Robinson, 2003; Statham, 2003), producing what the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) have described as a negative climate of opinion about asylum seekers in the UK (ECRI, 2001; 2005). This is supported by an analysis of the Eurobarometer 2000 survey conducted by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) which found that the UK ranked the lowest in Europe for accepting attitudes towards asylum seekers, with 12% of respondents willing to accept asylum seekers without restriction (compared to the European average of 24%) and 23% of respondents (in comparison with the European average of 12%) suggesting that asylum seekers should not be accepted at all (EUMC, 2001). An analysis of the 2003 Eurobarometer and European Social survey also found the UK to be amongst the most resistant to asylum seekers (EUMC, 2005).



## **1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.4.1 Research questions**

As described above, the aims of this thesis are to (1) examine whether 'moral panic' provides an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers and the extent to which this is empirically testable, and (2) determine whether social psychological theory can be used to provide a model which can (a) theorise the content as well as the process of moral panic, and (b) understand both the cause and the impact of this response. To this end this thesis addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent does the concept of moral panic provide an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers?
- How are 'asylum seekers' socially represented in the UK, and what does this tell us about the spread and transformation of moral panic discourse?
- To what extent can a social psychological model of moral panic help to explain the cause and impact of the UK response to asylum seekers?

### **1.4.2 Research design**

These research questions are informed by the theories of moral panic, social representations and social identity, each of which has particular implications for the selection of methods, data sources, and techniques for data analysis. The approach adopted to ensure that the most appropriate method is used for each research question is outlined below<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The research design and methodology that have been employed in this thesis are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

*To what extent does the concept of moral panic provide an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers?*

To investigate this question it is necessary to identify objective criteria as the basis for a systematic analysis of UK responses to asylum seekers. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) proposed five key criteria for claiming evidence of a moral panic; *concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility*. By operationalising these criteria, a measure of "objectified" interpretation can be established to demonstrate that the interpretation is not simply arbitrary or idiosyncratic (Bauer, 2000: 133). This indicates the use of a quantitative approach and requires the selection of a data source that lends itself to this type of analysis. One such data source is the media.

The media is an essential constituent of a moral panic, playing a vital role in providing the symbolic vocabulary and in disseminating this rhetoric (Cohen, 1972). A media analysis is therefore a logical starting point for examining the evidence in relation to the claim that the UK response to asylum seekers constitutes a moral panic. It is recognised that 'the media' is not a single, unified source of material and distinctions are made, for example, between print and broadcast media, and between traditional and new media such as the internet (Cricher, 2003). This research focuses on an analysis of national daily newspapers as they are the most widely read print media, they set the tone for public debate and they shape the selection of stories for television news coverage (Greenslade, 2005; Lewis 2005). The use of content analytic methodology to reduce the data to features of interest (Berg 2001) enables this media coverage to be tested against the moral panic criteria.

Whilst moral panic research has been criticised for using the media as an indirect measure of public opinion (Ungar, 2001), in this research it is analysed not as a proxy for public opinion but as a key claims maker in its own right. In order to examine public opinion directly, other measures such as opinion surveys or interviews are more appropriate (Bauer, 2000). However, in order to access the ways in which the host community talk about asylum seekers, both of these approaches are rather limited: opinion surveys do not access the ways in which the



host community talk about asylum seekers and individual interviews only stimulate responses to questions that have been directly asked. Instead, group interviews are used because they involve discussion between group members and therefore allow the collective sense-making of the host community to be explored. Interview data indicates the use of a qualitative rather than quantitative content analysis.

In contrast to previous research, this thesis is also concerned with the experiences of individuals to whom the panic is directed (the 'folk devils'). Exploring whether the 'folk devils' experience the UK response to asylum seekers as a moral panic is an important first step prior to examining its impact, as moral panic rhetoric will only have an impact to the extent that these 'folk devils' are aware of this rhetoric and experience it in negative terms. Semi-structured interviews are used here because they are able to provide a more in-depth exploration of individual experiences than group interviews, which again indicates the use of qualitative content analysis.

*How are 'asylum seekers' socially represented in the UK, and what does this tell us about the spread and transformation of moral panic discourse?*

To address this question, the social representations of asylum seekers are examined. Whilst the social representations tradition does not privilege any one particular research method, the nature of the theory does indicate some general research strategies. For example, whilst this perspective supports the use of experimental research in principle, most research is conducted outside the laboratory as social representations are culturally specific phenomena that operate in particular social contexts (Farr, 1993). The need to capture differences as well as consensus, and the importance of avoiding the imposition of the researcher's own representations on participants' responses mean that qualitative methods are often required (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999; Morant 1998). For these reasons a qualitative paradigm is adopted in this thesis for analysing social representations of asylum seekers.

As the aim of this analysis is to examine the content of any moral panic discourse identified in the first stage of this research, it makes sense if possible to use the same data sources. However, before embarking on this analysis it is important to



scrutinise the data to establish that it is appropriate in its own right. In contemporary society, the mass media play an important role in producing images that disseminate particular discourses and guide collective symbolic coping. The media therefore plays a key role in the construction of social representations and is therefore an appropriate source for this analysis. Social representations are not a distributed property of individual minds, but exist through the joint activities of particular groups or communities, and representation is both a cognitive and a social process (Raudsepp, 2005). Group interviews are therefore also a useful means of accessing social representations as they provide a setting in which representations arise from more naturalistic social communication and allow the research to focus more on the arguments produced than the individuals producing these arguments (Moloney and Walker, 2002).

Although this means that group interviews can be particularly effective for social representations research, this does not preclude the use of individual interviews for the identification of representations. The effectiveness of individual interviews as a means of obtaining more detailed accounts of the contents of representations, as well as the meanings given to these representations, mean they can provide more information than would be obtained using group interviews (Berg, 2001). Consequently, despite inevitably involving a less 'genuine' social interaction, individual interviews are also commonly used for studying social representations (Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell, 1992). For these reasons it is appropriate to use all three of the original data sources for the identification of social representations of asylum seekers. Thematic analysis is employed here as this is a rigorous procedure which allows a formalised approach to research to provide a qualitative analysis that goes beyond intuition (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

*To what extent can a social psychological model of moral panic help to explain the cause and impact of the UK response to asylum seekers?*

To address this question it is necessary to identify the extent to which public receptivity to moral panic discourse can be explained by social identity processes and to examine the impact of stigmatised group membership on those seeking asylum in the UK. This requires re-analysis of the group interviews with members of

the host community and the individual interviews with people who have sought asylum in the UK, to establish whether their responses are consistent with the predictions of Social Identity Theory.

Unlike the theory of social representations, which is primarily concerned with describing the content of representations, Social Identity Theory is an explanatory model which aims to predict behaviour. Consequently, research within this tradition tends to adopt experimental or quasi-experimental methods (Breakwell 1993a). However the incorporation of social representations has implications for research design, indicating the use of methods that can contextualise identity processes and enable the identification of both commonalities and differences in the way that individuals negotiate their identities in particular situations (Breakwell, 1993a, 1993b). A qualitative research paradigm enables an analysis which is sensitive to consistency and diversity in responses and which elicits data in a way which is context sensitive. The fact that the use of interview data indicates the use of qualitative research methods is therefore consistent with a social representations approach to social identity.

### **1.4.3 Research Approach**

The nature of the research questions and theoretical underpinnings of this thesis necessitates the use of the multi-method approach outlined above, in order to ensure that the most effective method is adopted for each research question. Traditionally quantitative and qualitative research have been linked to incompatible theoretical positions of positivism and constructionism respectively (Flick, 2009). However, more recent discussion has increasingly focused on the benefits of methodological pluralism for producing more sophisticated analyses of social reality, and there has been a shift from treating qualitative and quantitative approaches as competing paradigms to the recognition that they may be complementary approaches (Bauer, Gaskell and Allum, 2000; Morant, 1998). From this perspective, all methods have strengths and weaknesses and what is important is the adoption of the most appropriate tool for the specific research question to be addressed.

It will be argued in Chapter 4 that whilst the concept of moral panic and a social representations approach to social identity stem from different disciplines and are



based on different theoretical assumptions, the basic epistemological underpinnings of these approaches are compatible. The concept of 'moral panic' was developed by Cohen as a critical tool to examine the processes by which particular issues and groups become construed as social problems. As such it addresses the social construction of social objects, but does so within the context of a realist framework that assumes that it is possible to make an objective judgement about the magnitude of an issue. Social representations theory also adopts a constructivist perspective that recognises the role representation has in constructing social reality whilst rejecting the relativism of a radically social constructionist perspective. Consequently, research conducted from this theoretical orientation also tends to adopt a research paradigm that is realist in the sense that it recognises that representations are constructed in relation to the "brute facts" of the world (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999: 169).

Social identity theory developed from a positivist tradition which has the aim of establishing universal truths about human behaviour. However, from a social representations perspective, social identities cannot be understood outside of the particular representational context in which they develop. Therefore understanding social identity processes within a social representations framework requires a shift in focus from the universal to the particular to allow an analysis of the way that identities have been constructed within a specific context. As such, a social identity analysis conducted in conjunction with a social representational approach will also adopt a constructivist position that recognises the socially embedded nature of identity processes. This thesis therefore adopts what Seale (1998:x) characterises as a "subtle realist orientation", that is a research approach which accepts that knowledge is always mediated by pre-existing ideas and values but which recognises that it is nevertheless possible to distinguish between accounts which are more or less plausible. As such this approach acknowledges the constructed nature of research, but does not abandon conventional scientific aims in relation to producing independently verifiable work.

When conducting research that aims to be socially relevant, it is important to avoid the tendency, however well-meaning, to produce "advocacy research" (Jacobsen and Landlau, 2003: 2) whereby findings are generated in support of research

motivations. One means to avoid this is to adopt what Bauer and Gaskell (1999: 179) refer to as a “disinterested research attitude”; a sensitive approach to respondents’ views that recognises the validity of the social reality of others and does not try to influence their views. This approach does not advocate the avoidance of social intervention, but rather argues that intervention is more effective when based upon research that has been obtained with methodological rigour. The current research has been designed and conducted from this perspective.

## **1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

Following this introduction to the thesis, Chapters 2 and 3 provide the theoretical context for the research. Chapter 2 examines the concept of ‘moral panic’, considering key explanatory models and limitations with this approach. Chapter 3 extends the theoretical context by introducing the social psychological theories of Social Identity and Social Representations and discusses how these theories can be used to develop an understanding of the causes and impacts of a moral panic.

Chapter 4 focuses on research design and methodology, describing the methods used to collect and analyse the data on which this thesis is based and the procedures applied to ensure good practice in the research design.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present and discuss the research findings. Chapter 5 investigates the claim that the UK response to asylum seekers can be conceptualised as a ‘moral panic’. Chapter 6 maps the social representations of asylum seekers to examine the spread and transformation of moral panic discourse as it is communicated in the media and understood by the public, as well as by those who are the focus of the panic. Chapter 7 examines the role that social identity plays in the genesis and impact of a moral panic, exploring whether identity threat can account for host receptivity to moral panic discourse and the extent to which ‘folk devils’ are able to contest this categorisation and negotiate a positive social identity.

Chapter 8 draws together key ideas and findings and examines the implications for theory, methodology, policy and future research.



## **CHAPTER 2: CONCEPT AND THEORY OF MORAL PANIC**

### **2.1 OVERVIEW**

The previous chapter established that the negative response to asylum seekers in the UK has led a number of commentators to describe this reaction as a moral panic. This chapter describes the concept of 'moral panic' more fully and discusses the extent to which it can be usefully applied to this issue. Key explanatory models are considered and their limitations are explored. It is argued that whilst the concept of moral panic provides a useful starting point for this research, current explanatory models are unable to fully account for the cause and impact of the UK response to asylum seekers.

### **2.2 THE CONCEPT OF 'MORAL PANIC'**

The concept of 'moral panic' was developed in the 1970s by British sociologists who drew on American sociological theories of deviance and collective behaviour (Thompson, 1998). The first fully developed conceptualisation was provided by Cohen (1972) in "Folk Devils and Moral Panics", a groundbreaking analysis of the reactions of the public, media, police, politicians and action groups to altercations between 'Mods' and 'Rockers' that took place in the UK in the mid 1960s. In this work, Cohen defines a moral panic as a situation in which

"A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the subject of a panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself."

(Cohen, 1972: 9)

As such 'moral panic' describes a particular societal response characterised by concern and hostility towards a group or social object that is newly identified as a moral threat. Although this definition allows for moral panic to be directed towards a range of social objects, and indeed the theory has been applied to topics including 'video nasties' and 'killer dogs' that do not involve the demonization of a particular group, Cohen primarily focuses on what he calls 'social identity' clusters such as youth groups, drug users and single mothers as the objects of moral panic (Cohen 2002: viii). This leads him to identify 'folk devils' as an important feature of a moral panic. Folk devils are those groups considered to be the perpetrators of the moral threat, the "visible reminders of what we should not be" (Cohen, 1972: 10), who are classified by the moral panic process as deviant and are stereotyped in the media by negative attributes. As such they become symbolic of deeper anxieties and the threat of something larger than themselves, and their label may become a general term of abuse. Cohen suggests that for a moral panic to be 'successful' the subjects of the panic (or 'folk devils') are likely to lack power and access to cultural capital (Cohen, 1972).

The idea of deviance is embedded in the 'moral' element of the concept, and this distinguishes moral panic from other types of social anxiety, for example fears about scientific and environmental risks (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a). Moral panics are ultimately about labelling and punishing unacceptable behaviour in order to draw boundaries and reconfirm moral values (Cricher, 2005). Key to this approach is the idea of an exaggerated or disproportionate response to the perceived threat. From this perspective, what constitutes a problem is largely a matter of definition, and moral panics are based not on objective measures of harm, but rather 'claims making' that resonates with the 'common sense' of the audience (Hier, 2002a). This is not to say that the reaction is delusional or that the issue is non-existent – Cohen points out both in his original thesis and in the introduction to the thirtieth anniversary edition of his book that this is not the intention of the concept. Rather the moral panic label indicates that the extent and significance of the problem has been exaggerated, particularly in comparison with other more serious problems.

Five key criteria have been identified as indicators of a moral panic; *concern*, *hostility*, *consensus*, *disproportionality* and *volatility* (Goode and Ben-Yehuda,



1994a). *Concern* is defined as heightened apprehension about the behaviour of a particular group, and the impact that behaviour has on the rest of society. This can be identified in measurable forms such as opinion polls, media commentary and proposed legislation. *Hostility* describes increased antagonism directed towards the group considered responsible for the threat, leading to an 'us/them' divide and the stereotyping of 'folk devils'. *Consensus* is indicated by widespread agreement in society (or at least amongst dominant groups in society) that this is a problem and that these particular 'folk devils' are responsible. *Disproportionality* refers to the implicit assumption in labelling a response as a 'moral panic' that concern about the threat posed by these 'folk devils' is in excess of that which would be proportional to 'objective' measures of harm. *Volatility* indicates the limited time period in which a moral panic takes place. Whilst concerns may recur over time, a situation will only be termed a moral panic during limited periods of intense hostility (Cohen, 2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a). By clarifying specific characteristics of a moral panic, this approach provides a systematic way of examining societal responses to perceived threats.

Cohen's original conception primarily focused on societal reaction to perceived threat rather than on the situation or group that produced the response, and he was particularly interested in the role of the media in producing and amplifying moral panic. Cohen considered the media to be particularly important in the initial stages of a moral panic, influencing societal reaction through three key processes: exaggeration, prediction and symbolization. In these ways the media distort the seriousness of events, predict their recurrence and provide a symbolic vocabulary for understanding social problems (i.e. 'Mod' came to represent youth style and deviance). Cohen suggested that since most people have no direct experience of deviance, the media are central in defining its causes and key players and he therefore saw the media as playing an important role in moral panics. However he also recognised that appropriate social circumstances are required to produce a willing reception to the message about moral danger and suggested that moral panics are therefore most likely to happen when society is in crisis or experiencing disturbing social changes (Cohen, 1972).



Based on accumulated evidence from a range of case studies, Critcher (2005) identifies key factors that increase the likelihood of the occurrence of moral panic. Firstly, there should be consensus amongst the media and elite groups concerning both the severity of a problem and how it should be dealt with. If there is an effective alliance amongst at least two of the key players in the moral panic (e.g. the public, politicians, claims makers, police or the media), this will also increase the likelihood of a moral panic response. A moral panic is also more likely when the media recognises claims makers as experts. In contrast, where there is a lack of consensus in the media, where there is effectively organised opposition from counter-claims makers, where elite groups do not agree about the seriousness of the problem (or recognise the problem but do not agree about the causes or remedies) and when attempts are made to brand individuals from high status groups as 'folk devils', then it is unlikely that a moral panic will occur. Cohen (2002) illustrates the importance of power differentials in potential folk devils, contrasting the moral panic surrounding child murderers following the Jamie Bulger case with the press coverage surrounding the Stephen Lawrence murder. Cohen suggests that the latter failed to become a moral panic because the subject of blame, the police, had the power to refute group level accusations of guilt.

Where a moral panic does occur, the resultant concern and hostility will usually lead the media and public to demand greater social regulation or control and a return to 'traditional' values. It may therefore produce legislative changes, although panics can also subside due to a refocus of media attention or diminished public interest (Cohen, 1972). However, even when there is no institutional change, unlike fads moral panics are likely to have a lasting impact in terms of reaffirming moral and social boundaries and in establishing a social reality that forms the context for later panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994b).

### **2.3 A 'MORAL PANIC' RESPONSE TO ASYLUM SEEKERS?**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the overwhelmingly negative response to asylum seekers in the UK has led a number of commentators to describe this reaction as a 'moral panic' and Cohen himself, in his introduction to the latest edition of "Folk Devils and Moral Panics", uses refugees and asylum seekers as an example of a

contemporary moral panic (Cohen, 2002). This is supported by a study in which 500 on-street surveys and 39 in-depth interviews were conducted which found the majority of public respondents expressed attitudes in line with moral panic, with counter moral panic attitudes held by a small minority (Finney, 2003)<sup>5</sup>. Whilst there has been little research that has systematically examined the indicators of moral panic in relation to this issue, there is evidence to suggest that it is reasonable to describe the UK response to asylum seekers in this way. This evidence can be examined in relation to the five key criteria that have been identified as indicative of a moral panic; *concern*, *hostility*, *consensus*, *disproportionality* and *volatility* (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

Public opinion research indicates *concern* about asylum seekers in the UK. For example, focus groups conducted for the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found participants to be concerned about the negative impact of asylum seekers on employment, housing and welfare. Asylum seekers were also associated with criminal activity and the undermining of British identity. These concerns were most often expressed by those who were young, living in social housing or from an ethnic minority background (Lewis, 2005). There is also evidence to suggest that hostile attitudes are prevalent amongst the UK public. For example, a YouGov poll conducted for The Economist in December 2004 found 85% of respondents citing asylum seekers as the main reason there are 'too many' immigrants in Britain and a number of recent MORI polls also suggest *hostility* towards asylum seekers (ICAR, 2004; Finney and Peach, 2006). Stonewall (2003), in a survey of 1,183 people, found that the minority groups that respondents felt least positively about were gypsies and travellers (35%) and refugees and asylum seekers (34%). In the light of these findings, the particularly hostile reaction to Roma asylum seekers in Dover in the late 1990s is perhaps unsurprising (Kushner, 2006).

As previously discussed, there is evidence to suggest a high level of *consensus* in the media response to asylum seekers. The issue has been framed as a problem across publications with differing editorial stances and in broadcast as well as print

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<sup>5</sup> It should, however, be noted that the panic about asylum seekers does not extend to the concept of asylum provision, with opinion polls consistently indicating that three quarters of the population support the principle of asylum for those they consider to be in genuine need (Kushner, 2006).



media (Buchanan, Grillo and Threadgold, 2004). Furthermore, successive British governments have maintained a consistently hostile approach to asylum seekers, framing the issue in ways that reflect (or are reflected) in the tabloid press (Cohen, 2002). Political consistency is also indicated by the fact that the two main political parties in the UK both currently share a focus on the need to deter claims and reduce numbers of asylum seekers (Statham, 2003). Total consensus amongst the public would obviously not be expected, but the large percentage of negative responses to opinion polls suggests that there is a sizable majority position. Furthermore, Morrison and Statham (1999) conducted 17 focus groups with participants from different ethnic backgrounds and found that all groups were hostile towards the admission of asylum seekers to the UK. Moreover, despite some expressions of sympathy by more recent immigrants, all groups expressed the view that Britain was 'full'.

In terms of *disproportionality*, there is evidence to support the contention that media coverage of the asylum issue has been excessive. For example, in a six month period from October 2002, The Daily Express featured over six hundred articles on asylum and over 400 articles appeared in The Daily Mail, the equivalent of approximately three per day (Kushner, 2003). Whilst it could be argued that the intensity of focus during this period reflected the increase in numbers of asylum seekers at this time, media attention has remained high despite the steady decline in numbers since 2002. So, for example, in newspapers sampled during a ten week period at the beginning of 2005, 34% of all articles in the highest circulation daily newspapers focused on asylum, which is the equivalent of approximately one article per day for the national papers (ICAR, 2007). There is also evidence to indicate a disproportionate response by the general public, with research suggesting that the host population tend to overestimate numbers of asylum seekers in the UK (Lewis 2005; Saggarr and Drean, 2001). A MORI poll conducted in May 2002 found on average respondents thought that the UK accommodated 23% of the world's refugees when at the time the actual figure was less than 2% (Kushner, 2003). *Disproportionality* even extends to situations in which more detailed local knowledge might be expected to counter the panic response. So, for example, nearly a third of respondents who took part in a survey in Norwich estimated that there were



between 2,000 and 5,000 asylum seekers and refugees living in the city when the actual figure was less than one hundred and fifty at the time (Lewis, 2005).

*Volatility* is the one moral panic criterion for which there seems little support in the case of asylum seekers, as research to date indicates that current concerns about asylum seekers form part of an ongoing hostile response to immigrants (Greenslade, 2005; Schaffer, 2006). Cohen (2002), despite using asylum as an example of a contemporary moral panic, acknowledges this ongoing hostility, but doesn't reconcile this with his assertion that volatility is a key defining feature of moral panic. Finney (2003), whilst providing the most systematic account of asylum as a moral panic to date, only demonstrates the links between her findings and the other four criteria and therefore also fails to address the issue of *volatility*. This issue does not only arise when applying moral to asylum. For example, Watney (1987, 1988) raises the same point in relation to using moral panic to characterise AIDS commentary in the 1980s. This is therefore an issue for moral panic theorising which goes beyond the current example and this is discussed in more detail in 2.5.3 below.

## **2.4 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE 'MORAL PANIC' RESPONSE TO ASYLUM SEEKERS**

The media plays an important role in moral panic because (a) it is a key source of information (as well as misinformation), (b) it frames the debate, (c) it produces and circulates stereotypes that simplify the issue and, (d) it reflects and amplifies public opinion.

### **2.4.1 A source of information**

On a basic level the media is an important source of information, particularly for issues like asylum where most people have no direct experience (Greenslade, 2005). For example, in a survey of attitudes towards minorities, 32% of respondents cited newspapers as one of the most important influences on their views on this topic and 42% cited television (Stonewall, 2003). The media also provides common reference points that individuals can use to support arguments, and research participants often cite the media as the source of their opinions (Kitzinger, 1999). For example, in the Mass-Observation directive in 2000, in which two hundred

people volunteered to write about their reaction to asylum seekers and refugees as part of an ongoing social anthropological project, participants used newspaper cuttings to illustrate and defend their views (Kushner, 2006). It is important to recognise that media images are not simply imprinted on individuals, and that audiences interact with the material. However this interaction may actually enhance as well as weaken media effects (Kitzinger, 1999).

A number of studies have demonstrated that as well as being a principal source of information, the media is also an important source of misinformation<sup>6</sup> and initial indicators suggest that this has occurred with UK press reporting of asylum. In a preliminary exploration of public views of asylum in which interviews were conducted during 2005 with thirty English people who had little or no contact with asylum seekers, one in four participants spontaneously mentioned that there were very few asylum seekers in France due to its strict quota policy (Pearce and Stockdale, 2009). As France was the largest recipient of asylum applications amongst all industrialised nations in the two years preceding these interviews (UNHCR, 2005), it seems likely that this erroneous belief stemmed from media reporting of this issue. Extensive media coverage of the closure of the Red Cross centre at Sangatte had clearly made a strong impression, with just under half of participants directly mentioning it in their accounts, despite the centre closing three years before the interviews were conducted. Furthermore, participants described French policy in confident terms, describing 'what the French do' despite indicating that they knew very little about UK asylum policy. This suggests that not only had participants encountered media coverage which incorrectly reported that France was more stringent in its treatment of asylum seekers, but also that this was accepted as an authoritative account.

In drawing on the media to form arguments and by reproducing inaccurate media accounts in conversation, negative representations of asylum seekers produced by the media therefore become part of a shared 'common sense' understanding of the

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<sup>6</sup> Philo (1990) for example, found that participants who were asked to describe the 1984/5 miners strike reproduced media representations of violent picket lines despite the fact that both police and picketers who were there did not perceive the situation to have been particularly violent. Similarly, research on media representations of the shooting of three IRA members in Gibraltar found that participants reproduced false evidence that had been widely reported in the media (Miller, 1994)



term 'asylum seeker'. This produces an environment in which a moral panic can potentially thrive.

#### **2.4.2 Framing the debate**

In addition to being a direct source of information, the media provides a framework for debate (McCombs, 1994; Silverstone and Georgiou, 2005). The media frames issues by selecting which stories are considered to be newsworthy and providing a vocabulary for discussing the issue (Kaye, 1998; Kitzinger, 1999). In this way, the media plays a vital role in providing the symbolic vocabulary for a moral panic and in disseminating this rhetoric.

As already noted, the asylum issue has for the most part been reported in a way that frames it as a problem. In line with the government, the UK media has tended to focus on numbers and the need to regain control by 'stemming the flow' of asylum seekers. Furthermore, whilst reporting on the conflicts that produce asylum seekers, the media rarely make connections between these events and the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK and tend to focus on 'pull' rather than 'push' factors—i.e. the benefits offered by the UK rather than the problems that force individuals to flee (Schuster, 2003). With the exception of *The Daily Mirror*, tabloid coverage of the asylum issue has been largely negative (Greenslade, 2005) and this coverage tends to be unchallenged by the two main political parties (Kushner, 2003). The newspapers with the highest readership and most consistently anti-asylum seeker coverage are *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* (Greenslade, 2005; Kushner, 2003). As *The Sun* has daily sales of over three million copies and *The Daily Mail* sells over two million copies<sup>7</sup> and estimates suggest that up to three people read any one newspaper in any given day (Greenslade, 2005), as many as fifteen million people in the UK may be exposed to these representations on a daily basis.

The media also frames the debate by providing a vocabulary which shapes the discussion of asylum seekers. For example, Buchanan, Grillo and Threadgold (2004) monitored national print and broadcast coverage of asylum seekers over a twelve week period in 2002 and found that in general there was a failure in media reporting

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<sup>7</sup> Figures taken from the ABC National Newspaper Circulation figures for June-Nov 2009



to adequately distinguish between asylum seekers and economic migrants, and that the tabloid press in particular tended to use inaccurate and derogatory terms such as 'illegal refugee' and 'asylum cheat', and dehumanising imagery such Britain being 'flooded' by asylum seekers. Similarly, research on the impact of media and political images of refugees and asylum seekers conducted by the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR) found, when monitoring the national and local London press over a two month period in 2003, that in fifty-eight articles featuring 'asylum', 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee' in the headline, words such as 'bogus', 'false' and 'illegal' appeared five times in headlines and one hundred and three times in the text of articles, whereas words like 'genuine', 'real' and 'successful' did not appear in any headlines and appeared only eight times in the text of articles (ICAR, 2004).

Furthermore, the media tends to make a distinction between 'bogus' asylum seekers and 'genuine' refugees, and 'asylum seeker' has been prefaced by 'bogus' so routinely that 'bogus asylum seeker' has become a recognisable descriptive category in itself (Kundnani, 2001; Robinson, 2003). By treating asylum seekers as conceptually distinct from refugees, the media is able to produce anti-asylum rhetoric whilst supporting the idea of asylum in principle (Kushner, 2003)<sup>8</sup>. Importantly, this kind of language has entered common usage to the extent that it also appears in articles that provide a balanced account of the issue, normalising an inaccurate and negative understanding of asylum seekers (Mollard, 2001). There is also evidence that the public use this language in their discussion of the issue and even people who reportedly don't read tabloid newspapers reproduce the content and language of these publications (D'Onofrio and Munk, 2003, 2004; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009), suggesting that influence may extend beyond direct readership.

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<sup>8</sup> Kushner (2006) has developed a convincing case for the fact that 'genuine' refugees are always located historically. For example, the media use Jewish refugees from World War II as an example of existing refugees who contribute positively to Britain to contrast with the current 'flood' of 'bogus' asylum seekers. However, Jewish refugees were not welcomed when they arrived in the UK. The popular media at the time contrasted them to the Huguenot refugees whose contribution to Britain distinguished them from these Jewish 'dangerous aliens'. Of course the Huguenots had also been unwelcome on arrival.

As a result 'asylum seeker' changed its meaning from a little used piece of legal terminology to a negative label that is frequently used as a synonym for 'illegal immigrant' (Kundnani, 2001). This led the UNHCR to express concern regarding UK tabloid reporting of asylum (UNHCR 2003) and both the UNHCR (in conjunction with the National Union of Journalists) and the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) felt that it was necessary to issue guidelines with a view to increasing fair and accurate reporting of this issue (PCC 2003; UNHCR, 2004). Whilst the PCC guidance note seems to have helped to some extent, research examining its impact suggests that it has had the least effect on newspapers with the highest circulation figures and found that two-thirds of articles focused on the same themes that had been highlighted in previous research (ICAR, 2007). It therefore seems that the mainstream media continues to endorse negative attitudes and provide a climate in which these attitudes are legitimised (Greenslade 2005; Kushner, 2003). In framing the issue in negative terms it is therefore not only the content of media coverage but also the tone of the debate which is consistent with a moral panic response.

#### **2.4.3 Stereotyping the group and simplifying the issue**

The UK media uses the term 'asylum seeker' as if asylum seekers were a distinct group of people with shared features rather than as a legal status applied to individuals arriving from diverse places for different reasons as is actually the case (Greenslade, 2005; Schuster, 2003), and both print and broadcast media have been found to rely on stereotypical images which represent asylum seekers as young, threatening males (Buchanan, Grillo and Threadgold, 2004). By using the term 'asylum seeker' unambiguously, a stereotypical caricature has been constructed which dehumanises individuals and allows a simplified debate (Finney and Robinson, 2007; Schuster, 2003). Furthermore, as the term appears to be racially impartial, both the media and other opinion formers discuss asylum seekers in terms that would be socially unacceptable if applied to particular racial groups (Greenslade 2005; Lewis, 2005). However, by using 'asylum seeker' as a label for immigrants perceived not only to be visibly and culturally different, but also to be threatening, the category has in many ways become racialised (Robinson, 2003) and asylum seekers are treated as different from both the white English community and existing immigrant groups (Greenslade, 2005). This produces what Kundnani (2001) describes as 'common-sense racism' towards asylum seekers whereby



xenophobic discourse legitimises the social exclusion of asylum seekers and replaces the overt racism against ethnic minorities which is no longer accepted in media reporting.

Despite this tendency towards negative generalisation, the UK media has provided some limited support for specific groups of asylum seekers. For example, Scottish editions of The Daily Mail and Daily Express initially portrayed Kosovan asylum seekers positively in contrast to their negative coverage of Roma asylum seekers (Mollard, 2001). By limiting their sympathy to certain groups, however, these publications perpetuate the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' migrants, with groups most similar to 'us' (i.e. non-Roma white Europeans) presented as more deserving than other asylum seekers. Positive coverage also tends only to last for a brief period and is limited to groups like the Kosovans who have entered the country as part of a controlled quota system and can therefore be contrasted with more 'threatening' independent asylum seekers (Schuster, 2003). Furthermore, positive coverage of asylum seekers mostly focuses on exceptional cases and 'human interest' stories that are contrasted against the negative norm. These stories also mostly appear in publications like The Guardian and The Independent that have lower circulation figures (Finney, 2003; Greenslade, 2005). Consequently, what limited positive coverage there is fails to offset dominant negative media stereotypes.

#### **2.4.4 Reflecting and amplifying public opinion**

The extent to which the media constructs or reflects public opinion is notoriously difficult to ascertain, but there is good evidence to indicate that media representations can have an impact on public opinion (Kitzinger, 1999; Miller and Philo, 1999). For example, several authors have drawn links between the intensive media campaign against the mainly Roma asylum seekers in Dover during the summer of 1999 and violent acts perpetrated against asylum seekers at this time (see for example, Kundani, 2001 and Robinson, 2003). Opinion polls have found correlations between periods of intensive media coverage of asylum and public responses to asylum seekers that are negative and misinformed (Refugee Council, 2002) and have also found increased levels of concern about immigration amongst those who regularly read newspapers (Duffy and Rowden, 2005). Data relating to



attitude change also indicate that levels of self-reported racial prejudice are more highly correlated with the number of negative media articles than immigration figures (Coe, Fricke and Kingham, 2004) and recent experimental research that examined thoughts and behaviour towards asylum seekers found participants more likely to engage in automatic racism following negative media primes (Lido, Dittmar and Long, under review). This is important as most theorists agree that for a fully fledged moral panic to take off it is necessary for the public to be receptive to negative media discourse.

However, the power of a particular media representation is likely to depend on the extent to which it is compatible with existing views and personal experiences (Kitzinger, 1999) and other influences such as family, friends, religion and schools are also likely to play an important role in opinion formation (Stonewall, 2003). People tend to converse with those who share similar opinions and read newspapers that confirm these beliefs (Greenslade 2005; Wagner and Kronberger, 2001) and in this way common understandings that emerge through personal communication combine with media images to produce shared representations of an issue. Much of the power of media representations therefore depends on the extent to which they converge with existing public opinion (Kitzinger, 1999).

The influence of any particular message will also be related to its 'social currency' – i.e. the extent to which people are interested in what they have read and are willing to repeat its message (Kitzinger, 1999). So, for example, the frequently used stock media image of male asylum seekers attempting to board trains to Britain from Sangatte in Northern France provides a powerful image that resonates with public concerns and helps to reinforce the representation of asylum seekers as a threatening 'other' (Buchanan and Threadgold, 2004). Whilst it is therefore likely that the media play a role in constructing public opinion, it is unlikely that particular media images would become shared and form part of social reality if they did not in some way relate to images already widely held by individuals (Wagner and Kronberger, 2001). It seems probable, therefore, that there is a reciprocal relationship between public and media opinion, in which media images both construct and resonate with public concerns.

The final factor of importance to audience reception is the extent to which individuals critically engage with the material. Where there is pre-existing knowledge of an issue, and in situations where different media outlets produce different versions of events, there is an increased likelihood of audience resistance (Kitzinger, 1999). For example, one study which examined the impact of media images of refugees and asylum seekers on community relations in London found that the media had the least influence on those who had experienced ethnic diversity, had access to alternative sources of information and who were sceptical about the media (ICAR, 2004). It is important, however, to recognise the limits of scepticism as a source of resistance to media influence and even those who explicitly express doubts regarding the truth of media representations nevertheless reproduce media stereotypes (D'Onofrio and Munk, 2005; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009). Furthermore, despite increased access to multiple media sources there is no evidence to suggest that audiences are becoming more critical in their media engagement. To the contrary, a comparison of writings produced for the 1939 Mass-Observation project with those written in 2000 found comparatively less questioning of media hostility in more recent responses (Kushner, 2006). It is therefore important not to overstate the extent to which an 'active' audience can resist media messages (Kitzinger, 1999; Miller and Philo, 1999).

Regardless of the extent to which the media is an accurate reflection of public opinion, the media plays an important role in communicating a particular representation of public opinion to its audience. One way that the media represents public opinion is through publishing readers' letters. However, these letters are not a neutral reflection of public opinion. Not only is there editorial selection, but the letters are written in response to articles which have framed the issue as a problem. It is therefore unsurprising that their content reflects this negativity. Furthermore, the letters that are selected often discuss issues in terms that would be unacceptable if produced in editorial content. By printing these letters, newspapers are therefore able to indirectly promote an extreme viewpoint whilst simultaneously claiming that negative reporting reflects public opinion (Robinson, 2003). The representation of public opinion in the media is important, as by informing 'us' and 'them' how 'we' think about issues like asylum, the media constructs an apparently consensual 'public opinion' of the issue and this representation of public opinion may be more



important in fuelling a moral panic than the particular attitudes of individuals. This is supported by interviews with the public which found perceived public negativity about asylum seekers to be greater than the attitudes evinced in that sample would suggest (Pearce and Stockdale, 2009).

## 2.5 THEORETICAL MODELS OF MORAL PANIC

As Goode (2000) highlights, there is no such thing as moral panic “theory”. Rather moral panic is an analytic concept, describing a process that can be explained by a number of different theories. Key amongst these are Cohen’s (1972) original ‘politics of anxiety’ approach based on labelling theory and deviancy amplification, Hall et al’s (1978) Marxist account which relates moral panics to the struggle over hegemony, and Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994a) social constructionist model which conceptualises moral panics as collective behaviour triggered by particular interest groups (Cricher, 2008). Most recently, it has been proposed that two theoretical developments in sociology, the ‘risk society’ concept and discourse theory, are likely to inform future moral panic models and may provide the opportunity for enhanced explanatory power (Cricher, 2003, 2008; Thompson, 1998). Hier (2002a, 2008) suggests that future moral panic models should also draw on theories of moral regulation, a perspective that has tended to be critical of the moral panic concept. He argues that moral panics can be conceptualised as a “*volatile local manifestation of what can otherwise be understood as the global project of moral regulation*” (2002a: 329, italics in original) resulting from periodic crises in moral governance. However, as yet, this approach has not been more widely adopted.

For Cohen, moral panics occur at times of social anxiety and serve to confirm the dominance of the established value system by reaffirming moral boundaries. His original work on Mods and Rockers drew on a number of sociological theories, primarily labelling theory, cultural politics and critical sociology (Cohen, 2002). Labelling theory, which comes from a symbolic interactionist perspective, departed from previous sociological analyses in that it shifted the focus from attempts to explain the causes of deviance to consideration of why certain acts came to be defined as deviant in particular contexts. In this model, deviance is not an inherent



property of a specific behaviour or person; rather it is the consequence of a label that is conferred by agents of social control (Cohen, 1972). Cohen also drew on theories of collective behaviour in particular Smelser's 'value added schema' and the work of the Disaster Research Group in the US. Smelser's work suggests a sequence of determining factors for collective behaviour, from 'structural conduciveness' (the conditions under which collective behaviour is viewed as legitimate) through to the 'operation of social control' (the response from agencies of social control that aim to limit these determinants).

What Cohen dubs 'disaster research' provides a sequential model to describe the phases of a typical disaster. Whilst the phases do not exactly map on to a moral panic, Cohen (1972: 23) argued that a condensed version of the sequence "provides a useful analogue" for analysing the reaction of the social system to threatening or disturbing events. The key difference that Cohen identified between the sequence of a disaster and a moral panic is that the disaster sequence is "linear and constant" whereas a moral panic response is "circular and amplifying". Whilst a disaster occurs independently of reaction, in a moral panic the impact of deviance is directly linked to audience response. Therefore whilst Cohen's model provides a sense of the trajectory of a moral panic, from initial response, through media amplification to its eventual demise, the sequential nature of moral panics should not be overstated. As Critcher (2003, 2008) notes, although there is implicit linearity in the way that this is presented, Cohen's focus is more on processes than stages.

Cohen has acknowledged that in primarily focusing on the processes involved in the creation and transmission of moral panic "the theory behind this process was somewhat undeveloped" (Cohen, 1987: xxiii). Subsequently, however, a number of alternative explanatory models have been advanced. One of the first and most well known of these was developed by Stuart Hall and colleagues in their analysis of press coverage of 'mugging' in the early 1970s. Hall et al (1978) argue that the ostensibly new crime of 'mugging' (a term imported from America, which first appeared in the UK press in 1972) was actually the relabeling and conflation of a number of existing crimes, leading to the scapegoating of Black youths. Working within a Marxist framework, Hall et al considered moral panics to be the result of state attempts to maintain hegemonic domination:

"To put it crudely, the 'moral panic' appears to us to be one of the principle forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a 'silent majority' is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a 'more than usual' exercise of control." (Hall et al, 1978: 221)

According to Hall et al, the mass media are one of the most powerful influences in shaping public understandings of topical issues, and whilst recognising that the UK media is independent of the state apparatus, they suggest that the media tend to rely on official sources for information, and as such "reproduce the definitions of the powerful" (Hall et al, 1978:57). This is not, however, an exact reproduction. The information is 'transformed' in the process, albeit within ideological constraints, to the style of the publication and in terms that resonate with public understandings. In this way the media are described as 'secondary definers' of perspectives offered by institutions of crime control such as the police and the Home Office, who are considered to be the 'primary definers'. This model presents the mass media as agenda setters, selecting which stories should be considered 'newsworthy' and 'making sense' of events for an audience that the media both assumes to be and constructs as consensual. Importantly, the information that is presented is often not directly experienced by the audience, so the media not only defines what is newsworthy but also interprets how these events should be understood. New threats are made sense of using a labelling process that draws explicit or implicit parallels between current events and existing problems. Although different publications may have different presentational styles, Hall et al argue that 'news values' are widely shared between different media. As well as re-presenting the perspective of 'primary definers', the media also represents public opinion both to the public and the primary definers, thus legitimising particular understandings as 'reasonable' or 'rational'. This interaction between media and agents of social order produces what Hall et al term a 'signification spiral' in which the process of signification escalates the perception of threat and the panic becomes self-perpetuating.

Although Hall et al's work on mugging has been subject to criticism, particularly in relation to the evidence used to demonstrate that there was a disproportionate



response to mugging (see 2.5.2 below), this has nevertheless remained an influential model, and in detailing the role of the media in moral panics it has been argued that Hall et al have provided a distinctive and important contribution to moral panic models (Thompson, 1998). However, by transforming the model into a Marxist framework, moral panic is re-conceptualised as a tool employed by the state to maintain hegemony and the range of moral panics that can be accounted for is therefore limited (Cricher, 2003). Subsequent work on moral panics has therefore tended to move away from a Marxist analysis to focus more on middle level claims makers and interest groups (Jenkins, 1992). These more recent approaches have been classified by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a, 1994b) into three models; the *grassroots model*, the *elite-engineered model* and the *interest group model*. Goode and Ben-Yehuda specify the differences in these explanations using two dimensions; the 'morality v interests' dimension and the 'elitism v grassroots dimension', relating to the motive for and source of the panic respectively.

In the *grassroots model*, moral panics are seen to originate with the general public, arising spontaneously across a broad spectrum of the population in response to widespread concern and anxiety. An example of this is the panic over "sex slave" abductions in France in the late 1960s. This rumour was neither initiated nor endorsed by middle level claims makers (such as the media, the police or religious groups) and there was no obvious interest group or elite group that was served by the panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a). Central to this explanation is the idea that there are strongly felt attitudes and beliefs amongst a broad section of society that the object of the panic poses a threat. In this model, politicians and the media are simply responding to concerns that have occurred spontaneously. By contrast, in the *elite-engineered model*, powerful groups are seen to intentionally generate panic over an issue that is not particularly harmful in order to provide a distraction from more serious societal problems, the solution to which would be against the interests of the elite. An example of this is the panic produced by anti-Semitic propaganda in Czarist Russia, used to distract the wider population from focusing on the problem of extensive poverty (Victor, 1998). Finally, the *interest group model*, described by Goode and Ben-Yehuda as the most widely adopted perspective, suggests that moral entrepreneurs create crusades, which in turn may become panics, to ensure that particular rules are adopted and enforced. In the interest

groups model, groups such as the police, the media and other middle-level organisations may wish to draw attention to an issue that is unrelated to elite interests. So, for example, Jenkins (1992) and Victor (1998) emphasise the role of interest groups in moral panics surrounding satanic ritual abuse, arguing that religious conservatives use moral panic to promote particular constructions of reality that advance their moral perspective.

The range of viable explanations for different examples of moral panics have led a number of commentators to conclude that different theories are required to explain different panics, the logic being that observed reality is too complex to be accounted for by a single explanation (cf Jenkins, 1992 and Thompson, 1998). Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) agree that it is unlikely that there is a single model that can adequately account for all panics and suggest that the nature of a panic needs to be specified prior to agreeing a theoretical explanation. However, they also argue that simply concluding that different theories can be applied to different moral panics is ultimately unsatisfactory (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a, 1994b). They propose instead that rather than providing discrete explanatory models, these different approaches can actually be seen to draw attention to different dimensions or factors in moral panics. Thus, the grassroots model identifies the importance of a receptive audience, what they call the “raw fuel” without which a moral panic would not occur (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a: 141) and the interests group model elucidates the way in which this ‘fuel’ is mobilised for particular projects.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda therefore argue that an approach which combines these models can account for both the content and timing of moral panics, with grassroots models highlighting the specific concerns that interest groups utilise and interest groups models explaining the triggers that are required to activate these underlying concerns. From this perspective, elites are seen as marginal, with ‘successful’ moral panics resulting from a combination of middle-class claims making and grassroots feeling. However, whilst identifying grassroots concerns, this model does not explain the cause of this apparent widespread anxiety. Therefore despite its usefulness in identifying contributory factors in moral panic, this model remains unable to fully account for why panics arise. Recent theorising suggests that understanding contemporary Western societies as ‘at risk’ societies may provide an



explanation for this apparent receptivity to moral panics, and it has been argued that by drawing on a combination of 'risk society' and discourse theory the explanatory power of moral panic models may be increased (Critcher 2008; Thompson, 1998).

'Risk society', as conceptualised by Beck (1992), characterises modern societies as experiencing a heightened awareness of risk, brought about by the disintegration of cultural practices associated with social stability, and the advent of new types of environmental and scientific risks that appear beyond our immediate control. In this account, risk and fear are more pertinent to contemporary society than earlier foci of sociological theorising such as class or the distribution of wealth. Thompson (1998) argues that a risk society provides conditions of social anxiety in which audiences are receptive to claims makers and therefore more likely to respond to moral panic and Critcher (2008: 1140) describes moral panics as "extreme but symptomatic" examples of heightened risk consciousness. Likewise, Hier (2003) proposes that the prevalence of anxiety in risk society is likely to exacerbate community level concerns and therefore moral panics would be expected to proliferate in this environment. Cohen (2002: xxvi) himself sees 'risk society' as "a new backdrop" for moral panics, although he maintains that the element of morality distinguishes moral panics from 'techno-anxieties' associated with risk theory, arguing that risk analysis and moral panic therefore remain distinct concepts. However, both Thompson and Critcher conclude that a 'risk society' analysis can enhance the explanatory power of moral panic models, arguing that this approach allows the examination of moral panics within their wider context and draws attention to the links between risk and change, as well as the implications of increased risk awareness at a time when risk control is perceived to have moved from the individual to the 'experts'.

The suggestion that a 'risk society' analysis may be used to enhance the explanatory power of the moral panic concept is an interesting one as this theory has also been drawn upon to critique the moral panic concept. For example Ungar (2001) suggests that 'new sites of social anxiety' about environmental and technological threats do not fit in with the moral panic focus on social control and exaggeration. He argues that whilst in industrialised societies moral panics provided discourses of safety by identifying threat and the possibility that it could be contained, in contemporary 'risk society', where anxiety is focused on technological

and scientific threat beyond the control of individuals, safety discourses are less effective. For Ungar, risk society threats are unpredictable with 'roulette dynamics' that result in authorities often being the target rather than instigator of moral outrage. He argues that authorities are therefore more likely to attempt to dampen rather than amplify perceived threat. However, although Ungar draws attention to alternative sites of social anxiety, there is no evidence to suggest that there has been a decreased focus on moral issues in contemporary society.

The second theoretical development posited as potentially contributing to understanding moral panic is discourse theory. Thompson and Critcher agree on the benefits of conceptualising moral panics as forms of discourse, although they differ in the detail of their approach. Thompson (1998) argues that Foucault's work on discursive formation should be utilised to develop Hall et al's ideas about signification spirals, arguing that Foucault's characterisation of knowledge as a discursive practice allows the movement away from questions of truth, to recognising moral panics as the result of power struggles over the production of knowledge and the regulation of moral conduct. Hier (2002a) also draws on Foucauldian theory, arguing that the 'success' of a moral panic depends on how successfully discursive formations construct folk devils as the embodiment of a more generalised moral harm. Critcher (2008: 1139) similarly highlights the importance of discursive formations in prescribing "who has the right to speak, on what terms and to which ends", but he suggests that discourse analysis as practiced within discursive psychology may be more compatible with moral panic models than a strict Foucauldian analysis, as discourse analysis has "less theoretical baggage" in relation to power and government (Critcher, 2003: 21).

Whilst neither risk society nor discourse theory were developed with a view to theorising moral panic, it has been argued that drawing upon these theoretical frameworks may enhance our understanding of the causes of moral panics, with risk society providing an explanation for why the public are sufficiently anxious to be receptive to moral panic discourses, and discourse theory identifying how particular events are constructed, the reasons for these constructions and who has the power to define events (Critcher, 2008).



## **2.6 THE LIMITATIONS OF MORAL PANIC MODELS**

Whilst moral panic remains a key sociological concept, it has been subject to a number of important criticisms (Cricher, 2003, 2008). Some of these relate to the way the concept has been applied, for example the use of the media as a proxy for public opinion (Ungar, 2001) and the lack of adequate operationalization of criteria (McCorckle and Miethe, 1998). However, these issues can be addressed by the use of methodological rigour and as such do not threaten the usefulness of the concept in the current context<sup>9</sup>. Methodological concerns aside, there remain four important criticisms that raise questions about the usefulness of the moral panic concept, (1) the relevance of the concept in the light of increasing media diversity and opportunities for folk devil empowerment, (2) whether moral panic is an ideological rather than an analytic concept, (3) whether moral panic can be applied to situations where there is ongoing hostility, and (4) the extent to which moral panic models provide sufficient explanatory force.

### **2.6.1 Is moral panic a relevant concept?**

The first issue to address is the extent to which the concept of moral panic remains relevant in the current social context. Cohen himself notes that “the term ‘moral panic’ very much belongs to the distinctive voice of the late Sixties” (Cohen, 2002: vii) and some commentators have suggested that changes in the structure of society and the mass media have reduced the incidence of moral panics sufficiently to render the concept no longer useful (cf Boëthius, 1995; Ungar, 2001). Others have suggested at the very least that the concept needs a major overhaul to deal with changes in the structure of the media and increased opportunities for folk devils to provide a dissenting voice (De Young, 2004; Hier 2002b; Jewkes 2004; McRobbie 1994; McRobbie and Thornton, 1995; Miller and Kitzinger, 1998).

The argument that societal changes have reduced the likelihood and impact of moral panics is made most strongly by Boëthius, who goes as far as to question whether moral panics are possible in what he describes as “the western world’s late modern media societies” (Boëthius, 1995: 52). He identifies a number of features of modern society that he considers to have contributed to an environment where

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<sup>9</sup> For further discussion of methodological issues in moral panic research see Chapter 4

moral panics are unlikely to thrive. These include an increased supply of media and popular culture, mounting cultural and moral pluralism, increased tolerance towards sex and violence in the media and the reduction of group differences and social tension that he links to greater individualism and reduced class solidarity in modern societies. Conversely he suggests that 'less developed' countries in Africa, Asia and South America may be more likely to produce the conditions for moral panics, arguing that factors including rapid modernization, illiteracy, social antagonism and fundamentalist leadership are more likely to produce panics than "the secularized and pluralistic mass media societies of the west" (Boëthius, 1995: 53)

However, others have suggested exactly the opposite; arguing that moral panics are increasingly prevalent in Western societies, and particularly in the UK (cf Jenkins, 1992 and Thompson, 1998). In fact Thompson (1998) suggests that it is precisely as a result of the ongoing, swift succession of moral panics that the concept was revisited by British sociologists in the 1990s, having been relatively neglected since the 1970s. In contrast to Boëthius, Thompson characterises contemporary Western society as one in which risk perception is magnified due to factors including the reduction of traditional sources of authority and increased ethnic and cultural diversity. Instead of reducing social conflict, Thompson suggests that increased social pluralism and change actually enhance the likelihood of value clashes, which in turn give rise to the need for social groups to assert their particular value system through moral enterprise. Furthermore, rather than producing tolerance, increased diversity is actually more likely to result in anxiety around issues of national identity. Likewise Critcher (2005: 9) argues "the more society is unsettled about its core moral values, the more we can expect to find moral panics as a means of restoring certainty". Boëthius fails to provide evidence to support his claim that moral panics are on the decline or for his characterisation of an increasingly harmonious society and given the amount of research evidence across a range of different topics to indicate responses that appear to fit the moral panic model (cf Critcher, 2003) it seems unreasonable to abandon the concept on this basis.

The concerns of those who advocate an overhaul of the moral panic concept, as opposed to its complete abandonment, are centred on changes in the media and



media audience relationships. For example, whilst McRobbie and Thornton (1995) acknowledge that the model of moral panic provided by Cohen and reformulated by Hall was pertinent when first conceptualised, they argue that social relations have subsequently become too complex to be accounted for by this approach. Partly this is due to the mass media becoming more fragmented, with a greater number of micro-media and niche outlets providing a platform for a wider range of views than would have been previously possible. They also argue that the media now plays such an important role in producing social reality that it is no longer possible to separate the media and society, with socially shared representations “impregnated with the mark of media imagery” (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:571).

Furthermore, they argue that the media itself has become more aware of its own role in the formulation of ‘moral panics’ and that what were once the “unintended outcome of journalistic practice, seem to have become a goal” (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995:560). At the same time, they argue that pressure groups speaking on behalf of folk devils, as well as folk devils themselves, have become more media savvy and are now able to successfully engage in media debate about the ‘panic’, becoming less marginalised in the process. They therefore suggest that modern audiences are more sophisticated and participate more in media content than would be indicated by traditional models of moral panic and caution against the use of an approach that represents a straightforward relationship between the media and agents of social control, arguing “this leads us to query the usefulness of the term ‘moral panic’ – a metaphor which depicts a complex society as a single person who experiences sudden fear about its virtue” (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995: 567).

In contrast, Cohen (2002) and Thompson (1998) characterise the mass media as increasingly homogenised and powerful, and contend that recent changes to the media have actually enhanced the likelihood that moral panics will occur. Cohen (2002: xxiv) suggests that in recent years the media has taken an enhanced role in claims-making and that the focus of reporting has shifted from perpetrator to victim centred discourses that have made folk devils easier to demonise and have allowed the media to construct a culture of ‘tabloid justice’. Thompson (1998) argues that three key features of the media have contributed to an increased number of moral panics, (1) the Daily Mail taking on a moral campaigning role in the 1990s, (2) the

'tabloidization' of broadsheet newspapers in which social problems became more personalised and sensationalised and, (3) increased competition in broadcast media leading to television documentaries also focusing more on entertainment and personalised storylines. He argues that these features, coupled with a 'risk society' audience that is receptive to mass media agitation, provide ideal conditions for moral panics to thrive. Furthermore, as Critcher (2003) notes, despite increasingly diverse media outlets, the mainstream media retain the power to define issues and connect with agents of social control in a way that most new media are unable and when a moral panic is at its height, the variations between different news media and their sources become negligible.

It is therefore likely to be in those situations in which the media (whether they are the primary definers or taking up the cause of other claims makers) produce an agenda which is supported across a range of print and broadcast media, that an issue may gain sufficient impetus to become a fully formed moral panic (Critcher, 2003). In contrast, in situations in which there is a lack of media consensus, moral panics are less likely to be 'successful'. For example, Hier (2002b) demonstrates how the heterogeneity of media commentary coupled with 'folk devils' who were capable of contesting their representation subverted the potential moral panic about raves and ecstasy use in Toronto in the summer of 2000. The proliferation of niche media outlets may therefore play a role in making the construction of moral panics more difficult, but the ongoing 'success' of events that fit the classic moral panic description indicates that for some issues at least the mainstream media remain more powerful than dissenting voices.

Similarly, with respect to the assertion that 'folk devils' are "fiercely defended" and "can and do 'fight back'" (McRobbie, 1994: 199, 201), despite increased opportunities for pressure groups to promote alternative perspectives in the media, it is precisely in those situations where these groups either do not exist or do not have the power to draw focus to their views that a moral panic can develop (Cohen, 2002). Therefore, whilst it is important to ensure that any analysis of contemporary moral panics is conducted in such a way as to ensure that variability in responses is accounted for rather than obscured, this is once again an issue of methodological



rigour rather than evidence that the concept cannot be usefully applied in a contemporary setting.

### **2.6.2 Is moral panic an ideological rather than an analytic concept?**

A number of critics have expressed concern that labelling a response as a 'moral panic' implies that this response is irrational (Hier, 2008; Miller and Kitzinger, 1998; Sparks, 1995). Miller and Kitzinger, for example, suggest that the term implies an involuntary response to a situation that is either non-existent or exaggerated. Hier (2008: 180) suggests that it would be better to talk about the 'volatility of moralization' rather than 'moral panic' in order to avoid making a negative normative judgement that "volatile moralizing discourses" are irrational evaluations of threat. However whilst Boëthius, (1995: 43) also expresses concern regarding what he considers an emotionally loaded label, he points out that the term 'panic' usefully captures the "sudden and explosive character" of moral panics and that furthermore a panic response is not necessarily an irrational one (he uses the example of the 'rational' panic response to a house fire to illustrate this point). Likewise Critcher (2003: 144) argues that whilst 'panic' may be an imperfect label it is "the best available descriptor of the emotional force generated by the issue". Whilst Cohen concedes that the connotations of loss of control are 'unfortunate', he suggests that the term 'panic' "has caused unnecessary trouble" (Cohen, 2002: xxvi), arguing that it works as an 'extended metaphor'. Given that this terminology is so well established, it seems unlikely that an alternative label such as that suggested by Hier will replace 'moral panic' and as long as research using this framework is clear in its characterisation of the response, this is unlikely to be an obstacle to adopting this approach.

Concerns about semantics aside, the idea that a moral panic response is an irrational one is also embedded in the definition of a moral panic as an exaggerated or disproportionate response to a social issue. The use of 'disproportionality' as a key indicator of moral panic and the implications this has for judgements about 'objective reality' have therefore made this a central element of concern for critics of the moral panic approach (Ungar, 2001). For example, Waddington (1986) provides a detailed critique of Hall et al's analysis of 'mugging' as a moral panic, in which he questions the statistical evidence drawn upon to support the claim of

disproportionality. Arguing that Hall et al have played down the actual increase in violent crime in the 1970s, Waddington re-examines the statistical evidence and finds that instead of supporting Hall et al's study that it points instead to the crime situation dramatically worsening during this period. He therefore concludes that the police, courts and media had every reason for increasing their focus on the situation. Waddington suggests that revisiting the study on mugging raises wider issues with the concept of moral panic, arguing that it contains no criteria for distinguishing a proportionate from a disproportionate response. On this basis he concludes that moral panic is ultimately "a polemical rather than an analytical concept" (Waddington, 1986:258).

Whilst it is not disputed that Waddington has identified methodological flaws in Hall's work, defenders of the moral panic approach have argued that this does not undermine the wider use of the concept. There are two key lines of defence here. Firstly that to identify a response as disproportionate is not the same as saying that the problem is nonexistent, and secondly, that it is possible to identify indicators of disproportionality that can be empirically tested (Cohen, 2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994a). Cohen (2002) is clear that identifying disproportionality does not preclude the possibility that this response is based on a real issue of concern. Instead, he argues that by recognising issues as socially constructed, moral panic draws attention to inequalities in how much attention is paid to which particular issues. He also provides a defence against the criticism that there is no measure for whether a response is proportionate or not, arguing that claims like Britain being "flooded" by asylum seekers can be measured against population statistics. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) provide a more detailed account of how disproportionality can be empirically tested and use a range of research evidence to demonstrate that this can be objectively measured, arguing that assessments as to whether a response is proportionate do not have to be based on value judgements.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) suggest that there are four potential indicators of disproportionality, (1) exaggeration of figures, (2) fabrication of figures, (3) disproportionate focus on the issue in relation to other more harmful conditions and, (4) changes over time. For example, they identify a moral panic in the US in the late 1980s about illegal drugs and illustrate that the disproportionality criterion has been



met as there was an intense period of focus on this issue, despite the fact that the actual proportion of Americans who used illegal drugs declined at this time. Furthermore, far greater attention was paid to illegal drugs than to the threat posed by legal drugs, despite the fact that alcohol and cigarettes cause more than twenty times the number of premature deaths per year than illegal drugs. There are clearly some contexts in which it would be difficult to demonstrate disproportionality in such a clear cut way and not all types of 'harm' can be quantitatively measured. For example Thompson (1998) suggests that the threat posed by an issue such as pornography will inevitably involve subjective judgements and Cohen (2002) argues that it is not possible to accurately measure complex issues like suffering in relation to crime and deviance. However, as Goode and Ben-Yehuda demonstrate for many moral panics, disproportionality can in principle be measured in an empirically sound way that goes beyond simple claims making.

In adopting this approach, Goode and Ben-Yehuda are keen to establish the credentials of moral panic as an objective analytic tool that can be used for systematic empirical examination of evidence, and they are very clear about the fact that they do not consider moral panic to be an ideological concept, arguing that "debunking for political ends is neither one of its necessary nor principle features; it is measurable, it can be applied to cases supporting a wide range of political views, and it has no *inherent* political slant" (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994a: 51). However, in practice, moral panics are a response to social change with the aim of reaffirming an existing moral framework and they are therefore inevitably the product of conservative forces. Furthermore, given that one of the defining features is that this is a disproportionate response, it is very difficult to see how moral panic could be applied to a situation where the reaction is considered to be reasonable (Critcher, 2005). More importantly, in taking the critical element out of the concept, it could be argued that Goode and Ben-Yehuda have actually lost part of Cohen's original intention to draw attention to the power dynamics in cultural reproduction. For Cohen, the issue of proportionality is key to identifying social inequities and whilst agreeing with Goode and Ben-Yehuda that there is a need to base analysis on empirical evidence rather than 'truth claims', he does not agree that moral panic should be used as a neutral analytic or descriptive tool. For Cohen, the 'political

edge' of the tool should not be blunted and exposing social injustice is an entirely appropriate outcome of this kind of research (Cohen, 2002).

In fact, some critics have argued that the moral panic concept doesn't take this potential for political analysis far enough. Watney, for example, argues that in accepting that there is a 'reality' that can be contrasted with representations, the moral panic approach is "unable to develop a full theory concerning the operation of ideology within all representational systems." (Watney, 1987: 41). For Watney, this approach presents moral panics as if they were discrete episodes rather than understanding them as the current expression of an ongoing struggle over public representations. However, whilst moral panics need to be understood in relation to ongoing representations (see 2.5.3. below) the comparison between representations and 'reality' does not divert attention from the operation of ideology. Instead, as Cohen (2002) contends, moral panic draws attention to power dynamics and through this process allows the identification of those who have the means to influence cultural reproduction. Whilst it remains important to base claims on empirical evidence and not unsubstantiated value judgements, "taking a critical posture is not inherently unscientific. Rather it depends on whether or not observers have sufficient rigorous evidence to support the contention that *particular* reactions are *patently* unwarranted" (Ungar, 2001: 287; italics in original) and this is the approach that will be adopted in the current thesis.

### **2.6.3 How does moral panic fit into an ongoing response?**

A third aspect of moral panic models that has attracted critical attention relates to the way that the trajectory of moral panics have been presented. There are two related issues here, 'volatility' as a defining feature of moral panic, and the conceptualisation of moral panics as discrete events. The former criticism centres on the presentation of moral panics as flaring up from nowhere and disappearing after a very limited period of time, the latter on the failure of moral panic models to draw thematic links between panics that allow them to be viewed as part of a longer-term ideological struggle over public representation (cf. Jewkes, 2004; Sparks, 1995; Watney, 1987, 1988; Weeks, 1993).



According to Cohen, moral panics are by definition sporadic, temporary episodes that flare up and then burn themselves out, and he goes as far as to say “the notion of a ‘permanent moral panic’ is less an exaggeration than an oxymoron” (Cohen, 2002: xxx). Likewise Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a: 38) specify ‘volatility’ as a defining feature of moral panics, arguing that whilst they may lay dormant and then recur from time to time, moral panics are volatile “by their very nature” and will erupt fairly suddenly and subside almost as quickly. However, a number of commentators have emphasised the ongoing nature of responses that have been characterised as ‘moral panics’, arguing that the same concerns are expressed over considerable periods of time (Jewkes, 2004; Sparks, 1995; Watney, 1987, 1988; Weeks, 1993). For example, Jewkes (2004) suggests that current anxieties about juvenile delinquency draw on discourses about youth that have been rehearsed for hundreds of years. Watney (1987, 1988) and Weeks (1993) discuss this issue in more detail in relation to the ‘moral panic’ about AIDS in the 1980s.

Whilst Watney (1988:57) sees “a certain descriptive likeness” between the classic moral panic model and representations of homosexuality in AIDS commentaries, he suggests that the longevity of the response poses a problem for this approach. He argues that by presenting moral panics as events that flare up and then disappear once they have run their ideological course this approach fails to recognise representation as “a site of *permanent* ideological struggle and contestation between rival pictures of the world” (Watney, 1988: 58: italics in original). Furthermore he contends that whilst AIDS was negatively associated with homosexuality during this period that it was not a ‘moral panic’ about AIDS that turned homosexuals into folk devils. Instead he considers AIDS discourse as part of the ongoing “medicalization of morality” that draws on notions of ‘decency’ and ‘human nature’ to reproduce a representation of a collective identity in which homosexuality is ‘other’ and ‘not natural’. For Watney, moral panics are serial and repetitive because they are trying to produce a cohesive collective identity where one does not exist and this imaginary sense of shared ‘national family unit’ therefore needs constant defence. From this perspective, rather than creating folk devils out of homosexuals, AIDS commentary simply draws on existing representations of homosexuals as “monsters” (Watney, 1988: 60).

Of particular relevance to the current thesis is the fact that when using asylum seekers as an example of a contemporary moral panic, Cohen (2002) draws attention to similar issues, acknowledging that:

"This area is crucially different from my six other examples... although there have been intermittent panics about specific newsworthy episodes, the overall narrative is a single, virtually uninterrupted message of hostility and rejection" (Cohen, 2002: xix)

However, despite recognising this difference, he does not go on to address how this can be reconciled with his previous comments about the importance of volatility as a defining feature of moral panics. Weeks (1993) resolves the apparent contradiction between describing a response which is part of ongoing hostility as a moral panic by suggesting that what is actually going on is a series of panics which flare up in response to new pieces of information or rumours that feed into existing hostility. From this perspective, whilst the degree of hostility generated at the height of a moral panic is not sustainable over long periods of time, this does not mean that moral panics are without historical antecedents. As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) note, later panics may be built on earlier ones and long lasting concerns can become moral panics for short periods. It is simply the intensity of focus on these issues that waxes and wanes, and concerns are only classified as moral panics during periods of intense focus. Therefore in the same way as Weeks (1993) identified a succession of panics about AIDS that tapped into ongoing hostility towards homosexuals, recent anti-asylum rhetoric can be considered the latest manifestation of ongoing representations of 'undesirable' immigrants.

With regards to the criticism that moral panic research fails to recognise thematic links between panics, it is certainly the case that much research on moral panic has focused on separate case studies. However, it is unfair to suggest that all researchers working within this framework have ignored this issue. For example, Jenkins (1992), whilst ultimately finding no support for the Marxist interpretation that Hall and colleagues brought to the moral panic model, draws attention to the fact that Hall's work makes an important contribution in terms of placing panics within a broader historical framework rather than examining them in isolation. Furthermore, Jenkins own work on moral panics explores the links between moral panics on



sexual abuse, child pornography, satanic rituals and serial murder and emphasises the importance of viewing panics as interdependent. The extent to which moral panic research recognises the interconnectedness between panics is therefore more to do with the focus of the individual piece of research rather than the way that the moral panic model is set up, and it is therefore perfectly possible to contextualise moral panics without having to abandon this approach.

#### **2.6.4 Does moral panic provide an adequate explanatory model?**

The final and most important issue for moral panic research is the extent to which moral panic models can explain as well as describe this phenomenon. A number of critics have questioned the explanatory power of the moral panic concept (cf Adams 2003; Hier 2003, 2008; Miller & Philo, 1999; Sparks 1995; Weeks 1993). For example, both Sparks and Weeks agree that whilst moral panic is able to draw attention to the recurrence of particular phenomena, its usefulness lies in describing rather than explaining why these outbreaks of social anxiety occur. Adams (2003: 260) suggests that the moral panic concept has tended to “function as something of a taxonomy”, with central questions regarding the ways in which the public are or are not mobilised by moral entrepreneurs left unanswered once the criteria for a moral panic have been checked off and established. Even those like Thompson (1998: 16), who is a proponent of the moral panic approach, agree that “it can be argued that some of the most useful contributions of each of these approaches have yet to be fully combined into an explanatory framework”.

Critcher (2003, 2008) and Thompson (1998) have identified two key areas where classic moral panic models lack explanatory power. Firstly, the lack of theorisation of the causes of moral panic, specifically in relation to public receptivity to moral panic discourses, and secondly, the focus on process rather than content, which does not allow analysis of the construction of these events as moral panics. The first point relates to why it is that the public are apparently predisposed to panic. Moral panic models tend to attribute this to unspecified ‘social anxiety’ (Critcher, 2003; Jewkes, 2004). As Sparks (1995: 55) explains, the problem lies in the fact that moral panics are presented as “a consequence of some (hypothetically universal, endlessly cyclical) feature of social life, namely panickyness”. The range

and number of moral panics that have been identified over the past forty years suggest that social anxiety is a permanent feature of modern societies. However as moral panics are seen as both resulting from and evidence for this, the explanation becomes somewhat circular, and it has been suggested that this account is founded on an untested, a priori assumption that social actors experience a collectively shared insecurity (Hier, 2003).

Critcher (2003) suggests that to some extent the problem is due to the fact that moral panic research traditionally locates social anxiety in the general public, whereas he believes that the focus should be on the way that the media, pressure groups and politicians mobilise moral rhetoric for their own ends. For Critcher, the public response is less important than the way that it is represented in the media and the element of 'consensus' in identifying a moral panic should be related to agreement amongst elites rather than the public as a whole. However for a fully fledged 'moral panic' to take off there needs to be some receptivity from the wider community, what Goode and Ben-Yehuda refer to as the 'raw fuel' for the panic, and Critcher's proposal therefore remains unable to satisfactorily resolve the issue of why it is that moral panic rhetoric resonates with the wider community. As noted in 2.4 above, more recently, along with Thompson (1998), Critcher (2008) has suggested that incorporating elements of 'risk society' theory may resolve this issue by understanding moral panics as a symptom of heightened risk consciousness. However, whilst the 'risk society' concept draws attention to important changes in society that have altered public perceptions of risk and risk control, this still does not explain why it is that moral panic discourses resonate with the public. As Cohen (2002) notes, 'risk society' may provide a context for contemporary moral panics, but the elements of modern society that it characterises do not directly relate to issues of morality and therefore this approach does not explain why the public would respond to particular moral panic discourses.

The second limitation Critcher and Thompson identify is the prioritisation of process over content, which does not allow analysis of the construction of events as moral panics. Critcher (2003, 2008) and Thompson (1998) have suggested that this can be resolved by conceptualising moral panics as forms of discourse. However, although this allows the content to be examined, the focus on language in discourse



analysis restricts analysis to the immediate communicative context, which may obscure the importance of wider contextual factors (De Rosa, 2006; Voelklein and Howarth, 2005). Furthermore, discourse theory (both from a Foucauldian or discursive psychological perspective) adopts a radical social constructionist perspective which divorces social practices from psychological processes (De Rosa, 2006; Jovchelovitch, 1996). This approach therefore does not allow motivational aspects of group behaviour to be taken into account or the psychological impact of moral panic to be fully theorised. Therefore, whilst a discursive approach to moral panic may enhance existing models of moral panic by providing a means of focusing on the way that issues become constructed as moral panics, this approach is unable to provide a full account of the context in which moral panics are generated and it is also unable to fully examine the consequences of this response. It is for this reason that discourse theory has not been utilised to analyse the content of moral panic in the current thesis.

The limitations that have been identified with using discourse theory to analyse moral panic raise an important issue which highlights a third limitation with current models of moral panic, that is the consequences of moral panic for those who are classified as 'folk devils'. This is an issue that has been almost entirely ignored in the moral panic literature to date, and current moral panic models tend to focus primarily on those producing the panic and the political impact of moral panics rather than the impact on those who are the subject of the panic. A notable exception is St Cyr (2003) who raises this issue in relation to gangs in the USA. St Cyr uses a questionnaire study to examine the extent to which gang members identify the same folk devil as the public and agents of social control. However, although she draws attention to the importance of measuring the impact of moral panic on 'folk devils' she does not provide a theoretical model to analyze this. This is an important omission in current moral panic theorising, as it is recognised that moral panics play an important role in drawing boundaries around communities and therefore determining who does or does not belong (see for example Cohen, 1972; Critcher, 2005). However the impact of group membership on those whose group is defined as 'not belonging' remains untheorised.

## 2.7 SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the concept of moral panic and identified the key strengths and limitations of this approach. Having examined the theory and application of the concept it is concluded that whilst some of the limitations of this approach can be addressed through methodological rigour, moral panic theorising is currently unable to provide a full explanatory model. Despite concerns regarding the explanatory utility of the moral panic approach, most critics conclude that the concept remains useful as a descriptive tool (cf Adams 2003; Sparks, 1995; Weeks, 1993). Whilst current moral panic models may be unable to provide a full explanation for this phenomena, with an awareness of these limitations, the concept can an extremely useful device for testing whether an issue is being distorted or exaggerated. As such it has been argued that moral panic should be viewed as the starting point for an analysis rather than an entire analysis in itself and this framework opens up the possibility for a range of analytic explanations (Adams, 2003; Critcher, 2008). Recent theorising has focused on 'risk society' and discourse theory as possible options for enhancing the explanatory power of moral panic models. However, despite the improvements offered by the inclusion of these theories it is argued that neither approach is able to produce a model that can fully account for both the causes and impact of moral panic. Chapter 3 will introduce the social psychological theories of Social Identity and Social representations and identify how these theories might be used to develop a model of moral panic that has the potential to resolve these issues.



## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS, SOCIAL IDENTITY AND MORAL PANIC**

#### **3.1 OVERVIEW**

The previous chapter introduced the concept of moral panic and argued that whilst this approach provides a systematic method for exploring the way that particular social issues are represented in the media and understood by the public, existing models are unable to provide an explanatory framework that is able to adequately account for the causes and consequences of this response. In this chapter it will be argued that the problem lies in restricting explanations to a sociological level of analysis that does not allow the theorisation of the motivational aspects of group behaviour or the impact that a moral panic has on those labelled 'folk devils'. In order to develop an explanatory framework that is able to address these issues, this chapter will introduce the social psychological theories of social identity and social representations and identify how these theories could be used to develop a model of moral panic that has the potential to account for both the causes and impact of moral panic.

#### **3.2 FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL TO A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MORAL PANIC**

The moral panic concept was developed within the discipline of Sociology, and current analytic models have therefore drawn on sociological theories of deviance and collective behaviour to explain this phenomenon. Sociology focuses on "societies and the way they shape people's behaviour, beliefs and identity" (Fulcher and Scott, 1999: 4) and consequently sociological models tend to use social structures as their unit of analysis. When attempting to explain why the general public are receptive to moral panic discourse, models derived within the discipline of Sociology therefore adopt a societal level explanation, drawing on concepts like 'risk society'. By adopting a sociological level of analysis, however, these models do not take into consideration psychological aspects of group dynamics. This is important, because in reconfirming moral boundaries, moral panics also define and label what society finds acceptable and they therefore play an important role in drawing boundaries around communities, determining those who do or do not belong

(Cricher, 2005). In this way moral panics help to define the social identity of both the group producing the panic and those at whom the panic is directed, but this particular aspect of moral panic remains untheorised if a purely sociological approach is adopted.

In order to develop an explanatory framework that has the potential to address these issues, the current thesis adopts a social psychological understanding of moral panic. Social Psychology developed as a discipline in the early part of the twentieth century and much contemporary theorising has its roots in theories that were developed in response to the events of World War II (Chryssochoou, 2004). Social Psychology focuses on the interaction between the individual and the social with a view to understanding how societies function (Moscovici, 2000). Social Psychology therefore focuses on very similar topics to sociology but adopts a different level of analysis which includes the motivational aspects of group behaviour. Chryssochoou (2004: xxix) argues that "the expertise that social psychologists have acquired about how people deal with unfamiliarity and psychological threat, about the conditions that can lead to conflict and its reduction, about what motivates people's actions, how they deal with power and status asymmetries, and how they construct theories about the world, can be a very powerful tool in understanding the new social reality". It is for these reasons that this perspective has been adopted here.

From a social psychological perspective, in order to understand public receptivity to moral panic discourse it is necessary to examine the intergroup relationship between the community doing the 'panicking' and the group who is the object of the panic. One theoretical framework that lends itself particularly well to exploring intergroup relationships is Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT analyses the behaviour of people in groups in relation to their self-conception as group members, recognising that group behaviour is distinct from interpersonal behaviour. Its purpose is to identify the social psychological processes that lead to intergroup conflict, explore the psychological consequences for members of groups of different social status and to elaborate on strategies for dealing with the challenges that result from this (Tajfel, 1981). A model of moral panic which incorporates SIT



therefore has the potential to theorise public receptivity to moral panic discourse as well as identifying the strategies adopted by 'folk devils' to negotiate a positive social identity within this context. However, as with traditional models of moral panic, SIT is a theory which prioritises process over content. In order to develop a model that can adequately deal with the content as well as the process of moral panics it is therefore necessary to go beyond a traditional social identity analysis.

One approach to addressing this issue is to utilise the theory of Social Representations (SRT). Like Discourse Theory, SRT provides a way of analysing social discourses, but unlike Discourse Theory this approach recognises the importance of wider contextual and psychological factors outside of the particular context that is being analysed (De Rosa, 2006). By taking into account elements like group memberships, beliefs and memories, a social representations approach recognises the individual as "a "social actor" who constructs and represents his/her knowledge and thus his/her social identity during the exchanges of everyday life through multiple systems, channels and contexts of communication (inter-individual, institutional and mass media)." (De Rosa, 2006: 176). SRT therefore understands knowledge as both resulting from and the object of, interactive processes. In this way limitations in conceptualising knowledge as purely cognitive phenomena are recognised (Flick, 1998) and the "behaviourism by the backdoor" of a discursive analysis which denies cognition any role in social thinking is also avoided (Jovchelovitch, 1996: 128).

Although SIT and SRT are distinct theories with differing perspectives, there has been increased interest in the possibility of combining these approaches to produce an analysis which can account for both the content and process of social identity (Moloney and Walker, 2007). The possibility of successfully combining these theories has been demonstrated (see for example Howarth, 2002, 2004 and Jovchelovitch, 1996) and their epistemological positions are compatible – i.e. both theories recognise the importance of socio-cognitive processes and therefore reject the radical social constructionist approach of discourse theory. On this basis, this thesis seeks to develop a social psychological model of moral panic which utilises both SIT and SRT. The remainder of this chapter will provide an introduction to each

of these theories followed by an explanation of how they will be combined to examine both the causes and impact of the 'moral panic' response to asylum seekers in the UK.

### **3.3 SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY**

In the early 1970s, Henri Tajfel and colleagues conducted a series of studies to establish the minimal conditions in which intergroup discrimination would occur (Tajfel, 1978a). These studies were designed to start from a 'no discrimination' baseline that would allow variables that were considered to contribute to prejudice to be sequentially introduced so that their relative impact could be measured (Tajfel, 1978a, 1981). At this time, the predominant theory of intergroup prejudice was Realistic Conflict Theory, which posited that prejudice was based on competition for limited resources and incompatible goals (Sherif 1967). However, intergroup differentiation was observed even in 'minimal group' conditions that controlled for these elements. This suggested that intergroup prejudice is likely to occur even in the absence of conflict of interest or existing history between groups. In order to explain these findings Tajfel and Turner developed Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978a, Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a model of intergroup relations that recognises that there is an association between identity and group membership. From this perspective, social identity (the sense of self derived from group membership) is based on social categorisation, whereby others are classified according to whether they belong to the same category (in-group) or a different category (out-group) as oneself. The need for positive identity combined with this categorisation process leads to social comparisons that enhance positive and distinctive in-group images, whilst also giving rise to negative and homogenised out-group images (Turner, 1999). As such, intergroup conflict is presented as a by-product of the perceived structure of particular intergroup relations (Reynolds and Turner, 2001). If social identity processes are found to underlie moral panic responses in the public, this would place moral panics within the context of 'normal' group behaviour which would help to explain the frequency and repetition of these events.



SIT was developed with the aim of producing a non-reductionist social psychology of intergroup relationships that would take into account the importance of both the 'individual' and the 'social' in psychological processes (Abrams and Hogg, 1990). As such, its aim was to provide a truly social psychological account of intergroup relations that recognised the influence of social factors on psychological formation (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). In identifying the social psychological processes that lead to intergroup conflict as well as elaborating on the strategies adopted to deal with the resultant challenges, SIT provides an analysis that can explain ethnocentrism, discrimination and social change (Reynolds and Turner, 2001)<sup>10</sup>. In the current context this also makes it particularly useful for exploring the social psychological processes that may underpin host community receptivity to moral panic discourse about asylum seekers, as well as exploring the strategies that those labelled as 'asylum seeker' may adopt in response to being treated as 'folk devils'.

### 3.3.1 Social Identity Processes

Tajfel (1978a: 63) defines social identity as "that *part* of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (*italics in original*). It is the move from personal to social identity that instigates the change from interpersonal to intergroup behaviour and once behaviour is based on social identity processes it will be guided by the beliefs and values associated with that particular identity (Reicher, 2004). From this perspective social identity is located on a continuum of human behaviour with "purely" inter-individual behaviour at one end and "purely" intergroup behaviour at the other (Tajfel, 1978a: 41). The

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<sup>10</sup> Tajfel's colleague John C Turner subsequently went on to develop Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) (see Turner et al, 1987). Although SCT draws on the same conceptualisation of social identity and these approaches are often discussed together, it is nevertheless a separate theory (Turner, 1999). It is therefore important to be clear that the discussion of social identity in this thesis is based on Tajfel's original conception and not Turner's extension. In SCT there is a shift in focus from intergroup processes to the cognitive underpinnings of social identity and the main focus is therefore on the way that we categorise ourselves. As such this approach fails to address the imposition of categories such as 'asylum seeker'. Furthermore there is a shift from conceptualising prejudice as an irrational consequence of rational processes to focusing on positive aspects of stereotyping and it is therefore a less useful tool for the analysis of group relationships where there are asymmetric power dynamics (see Billig, 2002 for further discussion of this issue).

interpersonal end of the continuum represents a social encounter in which the interaction is entirely determined by individual characteristics and personal relationships. The intergroup extreme is that in which an interaction is entirely determined by group membership. Tajfel suggests that the extreme interpersonal end is "absurd" due to the impossibility of communication in a social vacuum.

Whilst the intergroup extreme is also unlikely, it is nevertheless possible and Tajfel suggests that there are clear examples of this in real situations, for example, in contemporary warfare where hand-to-hand combat is rare and individual characters are therefore non-discernable in interactions with enemy troops. Movement towards the intergroup extreme leads to an increased awareness of intergroup differences, reduction in differentiation between members of the out-group, and an increased assumption that out-group members share certain traits to which value judgements are attached (Tajfel, 1978a). It is at this end of the continuum that depersonalisation may lead to the dehumanisation required for atrocities like the concentration camps in World War II. When there is a switch from personal identity (interpersonal conduct) to social identity (intergroup conduct) a chain of cognitive and motivational processes occur that dictate the path that intergroup relations take. For a social identity to be activated, an individual must be aware that they belong to the group in question and they must attach emotional importance to this membership (Tajfel, 1978a).

All individuals will belong to many social categories, although some memberships are more salient than others and some may vary with situation and over time. For example, Jacobson (1997) highlights the issue of multiple identities and the relative salience of different social identities in her work on perceptions of Britishness, arguing that for many Pakistanis their religious identity may be more important than their national identity. Therefore, despite appearances, there is no set form of social categorization in which intergroup relations are invariable across all contexts (Reicher, 2004). Some social categories may be chosen, for example political identities, however, other social identities may be imposed by virtue of characteristics like skin colour over which individuals have no control. Any characteristic shared by a collection of individuals has the potential to become a defining element of that social group. However whilst some distinctions are based



upon differences that are socially important, others may not be so clearly defined. For example, people may belong to 'majority' groups simply by virtue of being able to demonstrate that they are not members of a 'minority' group<sup>11</sup> (Tajfel, 1978b). Furthermore, in the case of minority groups, a feeling of group membership may arise in response to treatment received from the majority group and this may happen before they have constructed any self definition of what it means to belong to that particular group or any sense of shared characteristics or behaviours (Tajfel, 1978b). This is likely to be the case for 'asylum seekers' as this is an imposed label applied to a disparate group of people who do not have any obviously shared features beyond their immigration status.

Categories are socially not individually determined and through the assimilation of existing categories individuals make sense of the world in terms of culturally determined stereotypes (Billig, 2002). The social structure of these categories is not static. The defining features of categories are subject to change and the same categories may have different meanings for different people (Timotijevic and Breakwell, 2000). However, in situations where categories serve to legitimate social relations it is likely that there will at least be an appearance that they are fixed. For example, racial categories, despite changing across time and having different classifications across cultures, are treated as if they are biologically essential – i.e. as if the stereotypes associated with particular racial groups stem from inherent characteristics of the group (Deaux and Wiley, 2007). According to SIT, this categorisation process, in combination with the need for positive identity, leads to social comparisons that enhance positive and distinctive in-group images, whilst also giving rise to negative and homogenised out-group images (Turner, 1999).

This conceptualisation draws on Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison (cited in Tajfel, 1978a) that postulates that individuals have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities in comparison to others. However, instead of focusing exclusively on inter-individual comparisons, SIT extends this work to include group comparisons. In the same way as our personal identity defines our uniqueness in relation to other individuals, our social identity is defined in comparative terms by

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<sup>11</sup> Minority is used in the sense of a group that is socially disadvantaged rather than in reference to the number of group members.

what differentiates our group from other groups. This occurs at a collective rather than an individual level, will be based on valued dimensions of comparison and will depend on the particular categories through which we define ourselves and others (Reicher, 2004). It is through this process of social comparison that the characteristics of groups gain significance and the perceived differences as well as the values attached to these differences lead to particular features acquiring importance. For example economic deprivation has most impact on social attitudes and behaviour once it becomes “relative deprivation” (Tajfel, 1978a: 66). The presence of other groups in the social environment are therefore key to a groups’ self definition, sense of shared characteristics and the values that are attached to these characteristics (Tajfel, 1978) and it is this social comparison process, coupled with the need for positive esteem and psychological group distinctiveness that may lead to discrimination.

### **3.3.2 Social Identity and discrimination in high status groups**

SIT makes specific predictions about the circumstances in which high status groups will exhibit prejudice and discrimination towards lower status groups. This is pertinent to this thesis as it provides a possible explanation for host group receptivity to moral panic discourse. According to this model, in-group bias is a function of specific intergroup comparisons and the interaction between relative status positions, perceptions regarding the nature of status differences (i.e. whether they are perceived to be legitimate and/or stable) and perceptions regarding the permeability of group boundaries. For example, members of high status groups where boundaries are considered to be legitimate but unstable are likely to be threatened by the activities of lower status groups and are therefore likely to be highly discriminatory (Reynolds and Turner, 2001). However, it is acknowledged that particular social psychological responses will not apply to all members of any given group and Tajfel (1978b) suggests that there is also likely to be between-group variation, albeit within the constraints of finite possible responses. Furthermore, a common misunderstanding of SIT is that it implies that discrimination is inevitable whenever there is an in-group/out-group dichotomy (Reynolds and Turner, 2001). Social identity processes do not inevitably lead to discrimination and in situations where groups with different status positions mutually accept this disparity it is



possible for status differences to exist without much discrimination (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As such, SIT is useful precisely because it allows us to identify the specific conditions that may lead to intergroup conflict and consider why it may occur in some situations and not others (Reicher, 2004).

SIT therefore treats discrimination as a socially shared symptom of social psychological structures of intergroup relations rather than the cause of intergroup behaviour. As a result, it provides a useful explanation of intergroup discrimination in the absence of conflict of interests. In emphasising the psychological effects of group membership, Tajfel does not dismiss other causes of prejudice, such as clashes of economic interests. However, he clearly positions these as outside the remit of social psychology (Tajfel, 1978b). Whilst arguing that the historical and economic background should be analysed by historians, sociologists, economists and political scientists, Tajfel acknowledges that it is not possible to separate categories from the social context in which they arise. For example, he recognises that within any particular intergroup relationship, one group usually has more power, prestige and resources and it is likely that more powerful groups will seek to maintain asymmetric relations by promoting their own values and systems (Tajfel, 1978b).

### **3.3.3 Social Identity and resistance**

SIT is particularly appropriate for studying group relationships where there is a power differential, as the theory originated from Tajfel's interest in the impact of asymmetrical social relations on the categorisation process (Reicher, 2004). Tajfel was specifically interested in identifying how individuals would respond to stigmatised group membership and the circumstances in which they would act collectively to challenge the situation. SIT therefore explains how dominant groups who have the power to assign identities and stereotypes can be challenged by minority groups. As such, "the primary focus [of SIT] was not so much on discrimination as resistance: it was concerned not with the inevitability of domination but with the possibility of change." (Reicher, 2004: 931) and Billig (2002) therefore suggests that "it is, at root, a theory of group freedom." SIT therefore lends itself particularly well to examining the impact on 'folk devils' of belonging to a group that

is negatively perceived by the wider community, as well as the strategies that 'folk devils' may adopt to cope with stigmatised group membership.

Group esteem, which is linked to positive social identity, is not the same as personal self esteem, the latter being located in within-group comparisons (Tajfel, 1981). However, in situations of intergroup conflict, social comparisons may become an extremely important element of self-image and minority groups' acceptance of negative images imposed by society can have extremely detrimental effects on individual self-image. For example, Kenneth Clark (1965) describes the impact of the ghettoization of Black communities in America and argues that a lack of respect from the wider society leads to self doubts which become "the seeds of a pernicious self- and group-hatred" (as quoted in Tajfel, 1978b: 10). It is therefore necessary to recognise the constraints that stem from the imposition of social categories such as 'asylum seeker' and the limits to the possibilities for challenging social inequity. However it remains important to be able to theorise resistance and recognise the possibility for negotiation and contestation in relation to identity construction. SIT provides the tools to do this by identifying the strategies that minority groups may adopt in order to challenge stigmatised social identity and the situations in which individual or group strategies are likely to occur.

Tajfel (1978b, 1981) identifies two broad types of belief structure that are likely to determine whether members of subordinate groups respond to status inequity on an individual or collective basis, namely *social mobility* and *social change*. As with intergroup bias, the extent to which group boundaries are perceived as permeable is an important factor in determining outcome. If boundaries are considered to be permeable (i.e. there is a social mobility belief structure), individual 'exit' strategies will be followed, whereas if an individual's fate is perceived to be tied to group membership (i.e. there is a social change belief structure) collective action is more likely. Social mobility is likely to lead to individual assimilation, whereby individuals disassociate themselves with the subordinate group and show preference for the out-group with a view to moving between groups on an individual basis. As such, a social mobility belief system is unlikely, at least initially, to lead to social change and whilst individuals may move between groups, the overall status differences are likely to remain the same (Reynolds and Turner, 2001). In contrast, in situations where



there is a social change belief structure, it is assumed that the only way for individuals to improve their circumstances is for conditions to be changed for the group as a whole and this therefore leads to collective rather than individual action. What kind of collective activity occurs depends on whether status differences between groups are considered to be legitimate and/or stable. Two main strategies have been identified for social change, *social creativity* and *social competition* (Tajfel, 1978b).

Social creativity involves redefining the comparative situation and is likely to occur when asymmetries between groups are perceived as legitimate and stable. Although these strategies may be used to achieve social competition, they are likely to be adopted in situations when direct social competition is difficult or impossible, in order to provide a collective means of coping in situations where it is not possible to radically change the status quo (Reynolds and Turner, 2001)<sup>12</sup>. Social creativity responses can take three broad forms, although in reality these strategies are not mutually exclusive; (1) values attached to existing dimensions of comparison may be redefined. For example 'Black is beautiful' movements, (2) the comparative frame of reference may be altered by focusing on an alternative, inferior out-group for comparison. For example, Firestone (1970) discusses working class sexism in this context, or (3) a new dimension of comparison may be sought. For example, highlighting sporting prowess over academic achievement. Lemaine (1966) demonstrates this strategy in an experiment in which summer camp boys were in competition to build huts and those with the worst huts attempted to persuade judges to recognise that they had a better garden. Which strategy is adopted will ultimately depend on practical constraints, not only in relation to the extent to which boundaries are permeable, but also in terms of the reaction of the dominant group. For example, reinterpreting the values attached to dimensions of comparison or shifting the dimensions of comparison will only be successful if the dominant group is willing or potentially willing to agree that the relevant dimensions should be positively evaluated (Reicher, 2004).

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<sup>12</sup> In circumstances where differences are considered to be illegitimate, high status groups may also adopt social creativity strategies with a view to perpetuating status differences by reframing their relative positions as legitimate.

Social competition is likely to occur when status differences are considered to be illegitimate and when the social system is insecure - i.e. it is possible to conceive of an alternative situation in which group relationships are more equitable. In these circumstances subordinate group members are likely to feel committed to and identify with their group. This leads to attempts to improve the opportunities and status of the group whilst retaining a distinct group identity, what Tajfel (1978b:16) describes as “a movement towards ‘equal but different’”. For example, the Gay Pride movement which emerged following the Stonewall riots in 1969 emphasised positive difference and mobilised the lesbian and gay community to protest against legal discrimination against their group. Similarly black social movements in the 1960s in the US argued that the black minority should obtain equal economic and social opportunities whilst remaining distinct from the majority group. This latter example illustrates the links between social creativity and social change; what started out as social creativity – the redefinition of the value attached to a particular skin colour through the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement – becomes part of the process of social competition with a view to achieving social change.

### **3.3.4 The limitations of a social identity approach to a moral panic**

By theorising the social psychological processes that lead to intergroup conflict and identifying strategies that are used both to maintain the status quo and to facilitate social change, SIT therefore has the potential to enhance current models of moral panic. However, whilst this approach provides a model that usefully theorises the processes that underlie group responses, it is unable to provide an analysis of the content of moral panic. Despite Tajfel’s insight that “we require not only a theory of the cognitive organisation of stereotypes but also a functional theory of the *contents* of stereotypes” (Tajfel, 1984: 698, italics in original), SIT, like existing moral panic models, prioritises process over content and this does not allow an analysis of the construction of events as a moral panic. As Billig (2002: 178) contends, it is not possible to provide a full account of prejudice using a cognitive account that focuses on categorization processes as this will be unable to account for the “waxing and waning” of prejudice, i.e. why during some periods bigotry is socially acceptable whilst at other times there appears to be a widespread ideology of open-mindedness. Furthermore, the focus of prejudice is also contextually dependent. For



example, Jewish refugees from World War II tend to be positively contrasted with asylum seekers in contemporary media accounts, however when they initially arrived in the UK they were subject to extremely negative media reporting (Kushner, 2006).

Like prejudice more generally, moral panics are embedded in particular socio-cultural circumstances that trigger these responses. As described in Chapter 1 of this thesis, it takes a particular set of political and social circumstances for 'asylum seeker' to become a social category that carries negative connotations and imposes a particular identity upon individuals labelled in this way. To make sense of a moral panic, it is therefore necessary to contextualise this response within ongoing representational systems and identify the power dynamics in the construction and reproduction of cultural knowledge. Whilst Tajfel (1978b) recognised that social identity processes occur in particular ideological circumstances, he placed this type of analysis beyond the remit of a social psychological analysis, arguing:

"The content of categories to which people are assigned by virtue of their social identity is generated over a long period of time within a culture; the origin and development of these ideas are a problem for the social historian rather than for the psychologist."

(Tajfel, 1969: 86)

As such, Tajfel limits SIT to theorising processes without fully embedding them in their social contexts. Despite the stated intentions of the theory, SIT is therefore unable to produce a fully social psychological account of intergroup relations. Furthermore, in eliminating content from an analysis of social identity categories it is not possible to examine the power differentials between groups which create constraints on identity construction or theorise the dialectic between self categorisation and the categorisation of the self by the other. As Jenkins (2008: 95) notes "identification is often a matter of imposition and resistance, claim and counter-claim, rather than a consensual process of mutuality and negotiation".

In order to examine the extent to which individuals who have sought asylum in the UK are able to contest their representation as 'asylum seekers' and cope with threatened social identity it is therefore necessary to adopt a theoretical framework that provides a means of theorising the context in which identities are negotiated. As

Moloney and Walker (2007: xiii, italics in original) contend “social identity is part of social knowledge and, thus, the *processes* and *content* of social identity are inseparable in understanding identity.” It has been argued that the best way of examining the representation-identity relationship is by exploring social identity from a social representations perspective (Moloney and Walker, 2007; Howarth, 2002; Breakwell, 1993, 2001; Duveen, 2001).

### **3.4 THE THEORY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS**

Like SIT, the theory of Social Representations (SRT) was developed in response to concerns regarding the mainstream adoption of an overly individualistic approach to social psychology (Moscovici, 1998) and over the past forty years, it has become an increasingly popular way of exploring social knowledge (Duveen, 2000; Moscovici 2005). In his seminal work on psychoanalysis Serge Moscovici (1961/1976) adapted the sociological concept of collective representations to produce a more dynamic conceptualisation that could be applied to modern societies and would be accessible to social psychological inquiry. The main strength of this approach is that it provides a conceptualisation that is able to accommodate the complexity of social phenomena and which recognises the dynamic interdependence between the individual and collective experience (Howarth, 2006; Marková, 2000). SRT can address issues of power and social knowledge in identity construction and as such is ideally suited to an analysis of the way that ‘asylum seeker’ has been constructed as a category of threat. This approach can therefore contextualise moral panics within ongoing representational systems and examine how particular groups come to be constructed as ‘folk devils’

#### **3.4.1 From collective to social representations**

The concept of ‘collective representations’ was formulated by the sociologist Emile Durkheim ([1898] 1967) to refer to beliefs and values that are shared by a group or society as a whole, as opposed to ‘individual representations’ that he characterised as an individual’s internal psychological responses to external stimuli. Durkheim considered all general concepts, including religion, science and myth to be collective representations. He argued that in the same way that the individual mind



is made up of images and sensations, culture is made up of collective representations, and just as individual representations are irreducible to their neurological elements, collective representations cannot be reduced to their individual constituents; i.e. collective representations do not equal the sum total of individual representations within a given society (Schmaus, 2000). Collective representations reflect the history of a social group and express the collective beliefs and ideas that unify a group or society, and they therefore function to produce social cohesion and solidarity. Therefore, in this conceptualisation, collective representations are static and homogenous, providing stable frameworks for communal life; they tend to originate from a single source of authority and are strongly resistant to change (Jovchelovitch, 2001). This approach characterises individual and collective representations as two distinct forms of knowledge and, keen to establish sociology as a distinct discipline from psychology, Durkheim suggested that the former should be the object of study for psychologists, the latter for sociologists (Purkhardt, 1993).

SRT was introduced to social psychology by Serge Moscovici, with his study of the dissemination of psychoanalytic ideas in French public life in the 1950s (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Moscovici developed Durkheim's concept of collective representations, drawing on the work of a number of European thinkers including Lévy-Brühl, Freud, Piaget and Vygotsky to produce a more dynamic conceptualisation of representation that moves away from the rigid contrast between the individual and the social, and recognises the coexistence of a diversity of representations in modern society (Moscovici, 1984a, 1984b). Moscovici argues that whilst Durkheim's description of collective representations may apply to traditional societies, it does not reflect the plurality of representations in modern societies and fails to recognise the role of group members in the genesis and transformation of representations (Moscovici, 1988). He therefore contends that instead of focusing on the similarities among collective representations there needs to be greater focus on the differences between representations that connect them to particular communities (Moscovici, 1998). The change in terminology from 'collective' to 'social' was made to emphasize the dynamic aspects of shared representations, reflecting that whilst they are shared, representations are not homogenous. Furthermore, rather than

being static entities that are absorbed by individuals, Moscovici's conceptualisation recognises that representations are shaped and transformed in communicative exchanges:

"The word "social" was meant to indicate that representations are the outcome of an unceasing babble and a permanent dialogue between individuals, a dialogue that is both internal and external, during which individual representations are echoed or complemented." (Moscovici, 1984b: 950)

SRT therefore places a much greater emphasis on communication, specifically the relationship between communication, knowledge and the transformation of the content of knowledge (Moscovici, 1988). Communication is the process by which individual thoughts and feelings become social and as such representations are a product of communication. However, without representation there can be no communication and this relationship is therefore an interdependent one, with the stability of representations dependent on the constancy of communication patterns and new representations emerging from new forms of communication (Duveen, 2000). Furthermore, Moscovici (1988: 219) conceptualizes social representations as "a bridge between the individual and social worlds", with reality as experienced by individuals tied to external reality that is shaped by group rules. As such this is a constructivist theory that identifies the role of representation in constituting social reality (Moscovici, 1998)<sup>13</sup>. In contrast to the sociological concept of collective representations, social representations are therefore a social psychological phenomenon in which individual and social representations are considered to have a dynamic interrelationship rather than functioning in opposition to each other (Purkhardt, 1993).

As noted, SRT was developed in response to dominant individualistic and cognitive

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<sup>13</sup> The term 'constructivist' is used here to differentiate this from 'social constructionism' as adopted in discursive psychology. Whilst recognising that representations have a role in constituting social reality, like Cohen's model of moral panic, a social representations approach rejects relativism and therefore does not adopt a radically social constructionist approach in which the idea of truth or falsity is rejected. As Jovchelovitch (2001: 208, italics in original) notes "although we construct knowledge, we do it *in relation* to a reality which permanently escapes our making". Dominant groups have the power to represent others in ways that are 'real' in terms of their impact on social relations and identity but which are not necessarily 'real' in the sense of being 'truthful'. See Rose et al (1995) for further discussion of this issue.



approaches to social psychology, with the aim of producing a social psychology that recognised the interdependence between the individual and society. Moscovici therefore rejects the social cognitive model of the 'lonely cognizer' that juxtaposes individual subjective experience with external objective reality. He also rejects the idea put forward by mass psychology that whilst individuals are capable of accurately perceiving the external world, social factors lead to distortions and inaccuracies in judgement and a shift from moral to immoral or irrational thinking (Moscovici, 1998). Moscovici argues that instead of associating collective thought with pathological thought, we should recognise social thinking as logical, arguing "collective representations are rational, not in spite of being collective, but because they are collective." (Moscovici, 1998: 218). He therefore proposes that we should study a 'thinking society', focusing on the context in which groups communicate their motivations, beliefs and ideologies (Moscovici, 1984a, 1988). In this model, rather than treating individuals as if they were passive receptors, it is recognised that individuals are able to think for themselves, actively constructing social representations and constantly communicating their ideas and solutions to questions thrown up by the social world. As such this approach moves away from a Cartesian paradigm in which the individual is isolated from society to a Hegelian framework that conceives the relationship between individuals and society as a dialectical one, in which individuals are both the producer and product of culture (Howarth, 2001; Marková 2000; Purkhardt, 1993).

The primary focus of SRT is social knowledge, in particular the content of common-sense knowledge and the ways this is expressed in language and communication (Moscovici and Marková, 2000). This represents a shift in focus from traditional psychology which tends to prioritise process over content. Whilst social representations research also focuses on process, it foregrounds the importance of content. As Moscovici explains, "what can we say of thought or knowledge when we know nothing about its content? No more than we can say about language when we do not take meanings into account." (Moscovici and Marková, 2000: 233). From this perspective 'knowledge' is understood in broad terms as shared belief systems and taken for granted practices as well as factual information (Morant, 1998). This approach assumes that knowledge is socially embedded and that an individual's

relationship with a social object will be defined by his or her relevant others. As such knowledge is not the process of individual cognition and any individual's understanding of the world will depend on the social groupings to which they belong (Wagner and Hayes, 2005). Once representations are established, they structure values, emotions, belief and language and construct a social reality that permeates everything perceived and communicated within a society (Moscovici, 1990). From this perspective culture and the individual mind is considered to be interdependent as are thought and language (Moscovici and Marková, 2000). As such, "representations are not mental creations that have social effects; they are social creations, constructed via mental processes, that acquire reality" (Moscovici, 1990: 76).

### **3.4.2 Defining social representations**

There has been much debate surrounding the precise meaning of social representations, and the most frequent criticism of the theory has been that it is too vague and ill-defined (Howarth, 2006; Voelkin and Howarth, 2005). This can be attributed to the complexity of the concept, the reluctance of key practitioners to commit to a restrictive definition and the fact that until very recently Moscovici's original work detailing the theoretical foundations and basic concepts of social representations was unavailable in the English language, and therefore largely inaccessible to an Anglo-Saxon audience<sup>14</sup>. Moscovici himself acknowledges the issue of conceptual clarity:

"It must be added, however, that the concept of social representations is not perfectly clear. It suffers from an all-embracing ill-defined character. It is most easily grasped in an intuitive way and takes on meaning only through actual usage. My present theory delimits the meaning of the concept and its area of application somewhat more narrowly [than Durkheim], but not so accurately as to define the concept according to all the rules of the trade."  
(Moscovici, 1984b: 957)

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<sup>14</sup> Several authors have highlighted problems caused by the unavailability of this text in the English language (see for example, Duveen, 2000; Rätty and Snellman, 1992; Voelklein and Howarth, 2005), but in 2008, over thirty years after the second edition was published in French, *La Psychanalyse: Son Image et son public* was finally published in English.



However he doesn't see this as a major problem, arguing that "the lack of clarity need not prevent concepts from being useful" and he suggests that social psychologists are mistaken in their attempt to reduce complex social phenomena to simple propositions (Moscovici, 1984b: 957). He postulates that the problem that many social psychologists have with the "ill-defined character" of social representations stems from the adoption of an empiricist epistemology that attempts to apply a hypothetico-deductive model with precise guidelines for operationalising and testing theories to social psychological phenomenon. He argues that the adoption of a more descriptive and inductive model, similar to that employed by biology rather than physics, would be better suited to providing an adequate description and potential explanation of specific social phenomena (Moscovici and Marková, 2000). Likewise Marková (2000: 430) suggests that social representations should be "characterised" rather than defined, arguing that as dynamic and relational phenomena, social representations are constantly transforming and therefore "attempts to provide an exhaustive definition of such phenomena are based on a misconception of their nature".

Others, however, suggest that although the provision of a strict definition risks obscuring the dialectical aspects of representations, it is possible to produce a preliminary definition that can be used to guide social representations research (cf Wagner and Hayes, 2005). Furthermore the theory has proved sufficiently clear to have produced a large body of research that has contributed to our understanding of a diverse range of social phenomena, indicating that the issue of conceptual clarity may have been somewhat overstated (Duveen, 2000). Also, despite his reticence to be pinned down to an operational definition, Moscovici has actually provided a clear description of social representations on a number of occasions (cf Moscovici, 1984a, 1988, 2001, 2005). As early as 1963 he provided a definition of a social representation as "the elaboration of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating" (Moscovici, 1963: 251) and in 1973 he provided one of the most often cited definitions, describing social representations as:

“a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history”  
(Moscovici, 1973: xiii)

As such, social representations provide a means of understanding social knowledge that addresses the construction and transformation of this knowledge in relation to different social contexts and across different social groups. As noted, the ‘social’ in social representations is used in the sense of representations that are shared and this does not necessarily mean that they are consensual. The extent to which a representation is shared will depend on the function it serves and the extent of its dispersal within a group (Breakwell, 1993). Whilst the need for understanding and communication necessitates a degree of constancy in social representations, there is also a need for them to respond to different contexts and new information (Gaskell, 2001). Furthermore there will be differences in the way that different people or groups within any given society are positioned in relation to these representations and it is possible to have overlapping and even competing representations of an object (Jovchelovitch, 1996). So, for example, ‘forest’ may have a different meaning for a hiker, a timber merchant or someone who is lost and scared (Raudsepp, 2005). Intra-group and inter-group dynamics are likely to influence the structure and development of any given social representation (Breakwell, 1993) and individuals will be positioned differently in relation to the process of constructing and elaborating social representations (Breakwell, 2001).

Breakwell (2001) identifies five dimensions that describe the individual’s relationship to any social representation: awareness, understanding, acceptance, assimilation and salience. Assuming that an individual is aware of a particular social representation, there will still be differences in the extent to which they understand the representation and there is evidence to indicate that people are able to reproduce dominant representations even in situations where they are unable to explain it or justify it when challenged. Breakwell provides the example of the social representation of the Millennium Bug in the late 1990s. Whilst many people could



elaborate on their beliefs regarding protection from this bug (e.g. avoiding flying) many did not know why they should adopt these procedures. Furthermore, being able to reproduce a representation is not the same as accepting it and individuals will differ in the extent to which they accept dominant representations and are able to reproduce contradictory representations of the same target. To the extent that individuals accept representations they will be assimilated into existing personal representational systems and there will therefore be individual differences in interpretation of social representations. The extent to which a representation is important to an individual or community will have an impact on its salience and the extent to which it will be embedded in their other belief systems

Moscovici (1988) distinguishes between three types of social representation; *hegemonic*, *emancipated* and *polemical*. Hegemonic representations are stable, coercive and consensual, and are likely to be pre-established representations that group members conform to without intervention. These are the sorts of representations identified in Durkheim's account of collective representations, such as myth and religion in traditional societies. Emancipated representations are produced by communication within subgroups that are in close contact with each other and who share and exchange interpretations and symbols with some autonomy, for example, representations of mental illness that combine medical concepts with the experiences and concepts of the population at large (cf Jodelet, 1991). Finally, polemical representations emerge from opposition or struggle between groups, are often expressed in rhetorical terms and several different versions, each shaped by different polemics, will circulate simultaneously. For example, a number of different representations of Marxism have been identified in France, each shaped by the particular perspectives and politics of the groups that have produced them (Moscovici, 1988). As such, social representations can be both conventional and prescriptive but are also dynamic, and their form and content transforms and evolves in the process of communication and interaction among groups and individuals (Howarth, 2006).

Social representations "appear as a 'network' of ideas, metaphors and images, more or less loosely tied together, and therefore more mobile and fluid than

theories” (Moscovici, 1998: 244). The ways in which they are used and the different social conditions they are used in mean that representations are constantly transforming (Jovchelovitch, 1997). In his seminal work on psychoanalysis, Moscovici (1961/1976) traces the way that scientific knowledge is altered as it enters the public domain. For example, terms like ‘complex’, ‘repression’ and ‘neurotic’ have entered into everyday vocabulary and a common sense meaning has developed that is distinct from its original psychoanalytic definition. Similarly, the meaning of the term ‘asylum seeker’, originally a technical legal status, has transformed since entering the everyday language of Britain. Initially it was used interchangeably with ‘refugee’, however, more recently its common-sense usage has become more synonymous with ‘illegal immigrant’ (Kundnani, 2001). As such this is a creative process in which knowledge is re-presented rather than reproduced and information is reworked to meet particular needs (Moscovici, [1961/1976] 2008).

It is also important to recognise that social representations exist in particular social contexts and in relation to networks of other representations and they can be transformed as a result of these relationships (Breakwell, 1993). For example, the increase in asylum seekers arriving in the UK from countries associated with radical Islam, in a period in which this has been associated with terrorism means that representations of asylum seekers are likely to be informed by representations of terrorists and representations of Muslims. The heterogeneity of modern society necessitates what Moscovici ([1961/1976] 2008) refers to as ‘cognitive polyphasia’, the coexistence of different modes of knowledge in the same individual or group. Moscovici (2001) also suggests that given their genesis in communication, it is only to be expected that every representation will occur in pairs - for every affirmation that can be made, we are aware of its equivalent denial.

Whilst people are able to draw on contradictory positions, a group will generally give greater importance to one representation over another and therefore will not experience this as a contradiction. Which form of knowledge is drawn upon depends on the social context, particular group membership and the specific interests that need to be met at that time (Moscovici and Marková, 2000; Jovchelovitch, 2002).



For example an individual may engage in both scientific and religious thinking, and logical as well as metaphorical modes of thought. Social representations theory therefore suggests that individuals do not have difficulty with conflicting forms of thought and in fact the co-existence of diverse or even contradictory forms of thought is considered to be the rule rather than the exception (Moscovici and Marková, 2000; Moscovici [1961/1976] 2008). Furthermore, representations are structured in such a way that they are able to combine heterogeneous elements into what appears to be a coherent whole (Moscovici, 1988).

### **3.4.3 The structure of social representations**

Representations are theory-like constructs that form a multi-dimensional, structured depiction of a social object (Moscovici, 2005; Wagner and Hayes, 2005). A great deal of research has been conducted in relation to the structure of social representations (see for example Abric, 1996, 2001; Flament, 1994; Guimelli, 1998). A structural approach to social representations distinguishes between the central core that constitutes the most stable elements of the representation, fulfilling the need for constancy, and the peripheral elements that are more flexible and allow representations to adapt to different contexts and new information (Abric, 1996). The central core of a representation has two main functions; it generates the meaning of the representation and establishes its organisation. As such, the central core unifies and stabilises more peripheral aspects of the representation and determines the links that unite these different elements. It is therefore the part of the representation that is most resistant to change and if the central core is modified the representation would be transformed. In contrast, peripheral elements of a representation are much more context specific. They are organised around the central core and have several key functions. They permit the representation to be formulated in concrete terms, they allow its adaptation to changing contexts and through this flexibility allow the defence of the core representation by providing a “shock absorber” which enables new information to be reinterpreted in the light of the central meaning or become marginalised as exceptional. In this way peripheral elements are relatively flexible, allowing the integration of individual experience whilst protecting the central nucleus from contextual transformations (Abric, 2001: 45).

In order to compare different representations of a particular social object it is necessary to identify their central cores. It is the organisation around separate central cores that differentiates representations and the same content, organised differently, may therefore have totally different meanings (Abric, 2001). The symbolic value, associative value and expressive value of central elements of social representations are the key characteristics that enable their identification. The symbolic value refers to the fact that central elements appear more characteristic of the representation than peripheral ones. The associative value refers to the fact that as central elements give meaning to a representation, they must by definition be associated with more of the other elements of the representation than any peripheral elements would be. The expressive value refers to the fact that central elements are likely to be salient and as such will frequently occur in discussions of the social object. However, whilst frequency may be used as an indicator of the salience of a particular representation, a quantitative measure alone is insufficient to establish centrality. It is not the mere presence of an element which defines centrality but rather the meaning it gives to the representation.

#### **3.4.4 The function of social representations**

Social representations serve two main functions; they provide a means of making sense of the world and they enable communication and social interaction by constructing a shared frame of reference (Moscovici, 1990). Social representations provide a symbolic environment that constructs and shapes reality, determining the meaning of social objects and providing an order in which individuals can make sense of the world. One of the most important functions of social representations is therefore to stabilize social reality through making “the un-familiar familiar” (Moscovici, 1984a: 29). In what Wagner and Kronberger (2001:148) refer to as “collective symbolic coping”, unfamiliar phenomena are made intelligible and communicable through the related processes of *anchoring* and *objectification*.

Anchoring involves the naming and classification of unfamiliar social objects (including people) in relation to existing linguistic categories. We can only describe, evaluate and give meaning to an object once it has been categorised and labelled.



Classification involves assimilating the unfamiliar object into existing categories by comparing it with a prototype, either by generalization or particularization; the former emphasizing the similarities between the unfamiliar object and the prototype, the latter the differences. If the classification is accepted, properties of the existing category will be transferred to the new object and evaluations of that category will also be applied. The way in which the unfamiliar object is classified depends not only on the actual similarities or differences it shares with the existing category, but also on the values associated with the social representation and the motivations of the group. This is not a neutral process and once a social object has been classified a positive or negative value will be associated with it (Moscovici, 1984a).

The process of naming the object provides a label by which it can be identified and places it in relation to other linguistic categories, locating it in what Moscovici describes as the “identity matrix” of our culture (Moscovici, 1984a: 34). As such this is also a process that lacks neutrality and once a name has become established it is inextricably linked with that object and the object is imbued with any pre-existing associations with that label. For example, the use of ‘seeker’ in ‘asylum seeker’ has connotations of choice as well as emphasizing the unverified status of applicants, and the use of ‘asylum’ has negative connotations with mental health issues. By applying this label, those who are seeking asylum are distinguished from ‘refugees’ and questions about legitimacy are embedded in the labelling process. By labelling a person as an ‘asylum seeker’ we are therefore not simply stating a fact, but making an assessment based on associations with this linguistic category. Concern about negative connotations attached to this label led to The Independent Asylum Commission issuing a report in May 2008 that included a call for the word ‘asylum’ to be replaced with ‘sanctuary’ by ‘those who wish to communicate effectively with the public’<sup>15</sup>. As such, the process of naming and classification does not simply involve labelling persons or objects as distinct entities; rather it promotes the interpretation of characteristics and motivations and facilitates the process of evaluation.

Through the process of objectification, abstract concepts are given a concrete existence and become naturalised as part of symbolic reality. The process of

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<sup>15</sup> Full report available at <http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/>

objectification begins with the linking of words and images into what Moscovici (1984a: 38) terms the “figurative nucleus” of a social representation, which allows us to describe and discuss the unfamiliar object and establish what it stands for. Through this process, social objects become ‘real’ and our role in creating them is forgotten. Once a concept has become naturalized, the representation becomes indistinguishable from reality. For example, in his study of psychoanalysis, Moscovici demonstrates how the term ‘complex’, a vague notion in the psychoanalytic literature, becomes something that we can talk about as if it has a concrete existence when we describe someone as having ‘a complex’ (Moscovici, [1961/1976] 2008). In this way a person’s ‘complexes’ or ‘repressions’ are perceived and identified as if they were physical features rather than concepts. This objectification process may be achieved linguistically through a grammatical shift from the use of verbs to nouns. The very language used gives substance to an abstract form and expresses the concept as a reality. For example, instead of describing an individual who is seeking asylum, we can now talk of ‘asylum seekers’ as a category. In this way “that which was unidentified is given a social identity” (Moscovici, 1984a: 35).

As such, social representations are most likely to emerge in response to new situations and challenging social objects that require explanation and in periods of crisis and upheaval. During these periods in which a representation is undergoing change there is likely to be more discussion of the topic, and the character of social representations are more likely to be revealed (Moscovici, 1984a). Situations that can be characterised as ‘moral panics’ are therefore likely to coincide with the genesis of new social representations and are therefore likely to provide a fruitful opportunity for social representations research. The fact that the term ‘asylum seeker’ only recently entered into everyday vocabulary, following the arrival of increasing numbers of applicants in the late 1990s, means that this is likely to be a particularly appropriate topic for the exploration of social representations.

Once a social representation is formed, it enables communication by providing a shared frame of reference that both directs the actions of an individual or group and enables the interpretation of these actions by others (Purkhardt, 1993). When



individuals or groups share the same social representations they are able to interact with each other more easily and their meanings and behaviours have the same significance for all parties. Moscovici (1990) identifies this role in group cohesion as a secondary function of social representations. Representations tend to be shared amongst particular groups or communities and as such the reality provided by social representations consolidates group relationships and demarcates groups from each other. Social representations originate in social interaction and therefore arise in specific contexts and are constructed from particular perspectives. As such they tend to regulate and justify intergroup relations, drawing the cultural boundaries of a group and determining particular understandings of the world. However, at the same time they originate from communication and as such their form and content are constantly transforming and they are open to contestation and debate.

#### **3.4.5 A social representations approach to social identity**

SRT recognises that the social categories and groups that form the basis of identities are constructed within specific social representational frameworks (Moloney, 2007). These frameworks give meaning and attach value to particular identities, and delimit the range of possible identities (Breakwell, 2001). The common-sense, taken for granted elements of representational contexts that constitute social reality tend to obscure the role of social representations in forging the content of identity (Moloney and Walker, 2007). Consequently, social representations “impose themselves upon us with irresistible force. This force is a combination of a structure which is present before we have even begun to think, and of a tradition which decrees *what* we should think” (Moscovici, 1984a: 9, italics in original). This perspective therefore recognises that identity is as much about being identified as the process of identification and social identity has been defined in this context as “the ways in which individuals or persons or agents come to have a sense of who they are through a recognition of their position within the symbolic space of their culture” (Duveen, 2001: 258).

Consequently, a social representations approach shifts the focus from how individuals identify with particular groups to what it means to be identified as a member of that group and it therefore provides an analysis that is more capable of

addressing issues of power and agency in the construction and experience of social identities (Howarth, 2007; Moloney and Walker, 2007). This approach recognises that there are power differentials in relation to the opportunity to form dominant discourses and that those with the resources and agency to influence public discourse are likely to shape social representations (Rose et al, 1995; Wagner 1998). This can be seen in the role of the media in facilitating the proliferation of particular versions of events and in reproducing and constructing the identities of powerless groups (Jovchelovitch, 1997). When there are limited opportunities for this representation to be contested, the gap between what is reported and the experience of those belonging to the group whose identity has been imposed becomes wider (Moloney, 2007). This is likely to be the case for migrants and refugees who have to form new identities in a pre-established representational environment that they have no means to influence (see for example Philogène, 2000). Refugees and asylum seekers therefore encounter a network of pre-existing social knowledge and beliefs in which the host community have constructed the identity of 'asylum seeker' despite their lack of direct knowledge or experience of the issue (cf Grove and Zwi, 2006; Moloney and Walker, 2007).

However, whilst acknowledging the prescriptive power of representations, as has already been noted, a social representations framework also recognises individuals as active agents in the construction and communication of social representations. Therefore, whilst recognising the role of representations in maintaining particular patterns of social relations, this approach also recognises that it is possible to collectively challenge these social inequities and develop strategies for resistance (Breakwell, 2001; Howarth, 2004; Joffe, 1998). For example, Howarth (2007) discusses situations in which racialised representations are contested and Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) provide examples of situations in which refugees in Australia contest representations of illegality. Therefore, as Duveen (2001: 267) argues "in so far as any identity is as much a system of exclusion as inclusion, identity formation always implies the prospect of points of resistance". A social representations approach therefore recognises the ways that social knowledge is both conservative and transformative, that it is collaborative but can be prescriptive and as such enables an analysis of identity that can identify systems of othering



whilst allowing for the possibility of resistance. As such SRT is ideally suited to exploring the representational context that has enabled a moral panic response to asylum seekers in the UK and which delimits the identities of those labelled in this way.

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

Three key limitations with current models of moral panic were identified in Chapter 2: (1) the prioritisation of process over content which does not allow analysis of how particular issues are constructed as moral panics, (2) the lack of explanation for why the general public are receptive to moral panic discourse, and (3) the lack of theorising about the impact that moral panics have on those labelled as 'folk devils'. This chapter has outlined the ways that these issues may be addressed by developing a model of moral panic based on a social representational approach to social identity. This approach uses SRT to examine the context in which both the host community and 'asylum seekers' negotiate their social identity. It also draws on SIT to examine the extent to which public receptivity to moral panic discourse can be explained by social identity processes and to explore the strategies adopted by 'asylum seekers' to negotiate a positive identity within this representational context. The next chapter will focus on research design and methodology, describing the methods that have been used to collect and analyse the data on which this thesis is based and the procedures that have been applied to ensure good practice in the research design.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 OVERVIEW**

This chapter describes the research design and methodology employed in this thesis in order to (a) provide a rationale for the methodology used by demonstrating links between the research design, research questions and underlying theoretical approach, (b) identify the steps that have been taken to ensure quality management in the research process, (c) describe the methods used to collect and analyse the data on which this thesis is based, and (d) discuss the ethical issues that arise from this research and the ways in which they have been addressed.

### **4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research was designed to address the following research questions:

- To what extent does the concept of moral panic provide an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers?
- How are 'asylum seekers' socially represented in the UK and what does this tell us about the spread and transformation of moral panic discourse?
- To what extent can a social psychological model of moral panic help to explain the cause and impact of the UK response to asylum seekers?

As described in Chapter 1, the theories of moral panic, social representations and social identity have been drawn upon to address these questions. The choices for method, data sources and analysis have therefore been informed by each of these theories. The contribution that these research questions can make to Social Identity Theory and the theory of Social Representations is considered as an additional outcome of this research.



#### 4.2.1 Moral panic methodology

The concept of 'moral panic' was developed by Cohen (1972) as a critical tool to examine the processes by which particular issues and groups become construed as social problems. This perspective adopts a 'weak' approach to social constructionism; that is an approach which recognises that representation has a role in constructing social reality whilst nevertheless rejecting the relativism of radical social constructionism. As such it addresses the social construction of social objects, but does so within the context of a realist framework which assumes that it is possible to make an objective judgement about the magnitude of an issue. Moral panic analyses are therefore based on empirical indicators and tend to adopt a quantitative approach.

As described in Chapter 2, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) have proposed five key criteria for claiming evidence of a moral panic; *concern*, *hostility*, *consensus*, *disproportionality* and *volatility*. By clarifying specific characteristics of a moral panic this approach provides a way of examining societal responses to perceived threats to identify whether they can be characterised as a moral panic. To examine whether the UK response to asylum seekers is consistent with these criteria, it is therefore necessary to establish a systematic way of analysing this response to test whether each of these criteria have been met. To achieve this, a measure of "objectified" interpretation must be established, that is a way of demonstrating that interpretation is not simply arbitrary or idiosyncratic (Bauer, 2000: 133). This indicates the use of a quantitative measure and therefore requires a data source which can be subject to quantitative analysis. One such data source is the media. As discussed in Chapter 2, Cohen (1972) identified the mass media as playing a central role in communicating moral panics and creating folk devils. The media plays a vital role in providing the symbolic vocabulary for a moral panic and in disseminating this rhetoric and consequently most research into moral panics tends to focus on media output. A media analysis therefore provides a good means of accessing rhetoric about asylum seekers and is a logical starting point for examining evidence in relation to the claim that the UK response constitutes a moral panic.

When conducting a media analysis it is important to recognise that 'the media' is not a single, unified source of material. Distinctions need to be made, for example, between print and broadcast media, and between traditional and new media such as the internet (Critcher, 2003). However, despite increasingly diverse media outlets, evidence suggests that mainstream media retain the power to define issues and connect with agents of social control in a way that most new media do not. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, when a moral panic is at its height the variations between different news media and their sources are likely to become negligible (Critcher, 2003). In the case of media coverage of asylum this seems a reasonable supposition given the prevalence of stereotypical representations of asylum seekers across publications with differing editorial positions, different types of media and in government rhetoric (Kushner, 2006).

National daily newspapers were selected for analysis as they are the most widely read print media, they set the tone for public debate and they shape the selection of stories for television news coverage (Greenslade, 2005; Lewis 2005). The focus on print media also allows the examination of a more extensive time period than would be possible if alternative media such as television and radio were also considered. It is important to maximise the period of analysis as it is inevitable that there will be variations in the intensity and type of coverage depending on particular issues of the day. It is also important to focus on a sufficiently lengthy time period in order to establish adequate empirical evidence for the identification of a moral panic to be credible and this has been highlighted as a limitation in existing moral panic research (cf McCorckle and Miethe, 1998). Both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers were selected for analysis as this provided access to publications with a range of editorial stances on this issue. For example, The Daily Mail and The Daily Express tend to cover asylum in a negative way whereas The Guardian and The Independent tend to run more positive copy (Greenslade, 2005).

A content analysis was employed to analyse these articles. Developed within the empirical social sciences, content analysis is a systematic method of reducing large amounts of data into a brief description of features of interest (Bauer, 2000; Berg 2001). This technique enabled the text to be systematically coded using pre-



established categories to test media coverage against the moral panic criteria. Furthermore, content analysis allowed different coders to examine the same texts with the same categories, thus providing the opportunity for reliability checks (Silverman, 2001). This is not to suggest that there is one single valid reading of the text, but rather that this is an approach which is procedurally explicit and replicable. Moreover, this approach is consistent with previous analyses of media responses to asylum seekers (e.g. Buchanan, Grillo and Threadgold, 2004; ICAR 2004) and previous moral panic research (Cricher, 2003), thus allowing meaningful comparison between the current research and existing findings.

Although moral panic research has been criticised for using the media as an indirect measure of public opinion (Ungar, 2001), it can be argued that media analysis is defensible so long as there is recognition that the media is a representation and not a direct reflection of public opinion, and providing research is conducted as part of a wider project which includes other measures such as opinion surveys or interviews. In this thesis the UK national print media was analysed not as a proxy for public opinion but as a key claims maker in its own right and it was therefore necessary to consider other measures to examine public opinion directly. Interviews were considered a more appropriate way of eliciting data than opinion surveys, as the aim was to access ways in which the host community talk about asylum seekers. There are two broad approaches to conducting interviews, group interviews and individual interviews, and it was therefore necessary to decide which would be the most appropriate for this task.

Group interviews are particularly appropriate for research that focuses on issues of public interest or concern, in situations where discussion is unlikely to be inhibited by participants' backgrounds or the nature of the topic and when participants come from sufficiently similar backgrounds as to facilitate participation in discussion of the topic (Gaskell, 2000). Ongoing media focus on the issue of asylum suggests that this is likely to be a topic of interest to the UK public. Whilst the politicization of this subject could indicate that it may be a controversial topic, previous research indicates that it is unlikely to be a topic of personal sensitivity, that the UK public are comfortable expressing a range of perspectives on this issue and that they

believe that fairly strong views are socially acceptable (Pearce and Stockdale, 2009).

Group interviews also have a key advantage over individual interviews in that they involve discussion between group members rather than asking participants to respond solely to direct questions posed by the researcher. This means a more genuine social interaction is produced than is possible in an individual interview (Gaskell, 2000). However, this interaction may pose limitations as well as benefits for this approach, and group interviews may suffer from both conformity effects (where participants do not disclose privately held views) and group polarisation effects (where more extreme views are voiced in the group than would be expressed in private) (Morgan, 1997; Sussman et al. 1991). Conducting interviews with pre-existing groups may reduce inhibition and therefore minimise these effects (Warr, 2005), but it is unlikely that they can be totally mitigated. However, in the current context, as the focus is primarily on the content rather than strength of views, the advantages of using group interviews were considered to outweigh this concern. On this basis, group interviews were used to examine the extent to which moral panic rhetoric is reflected in the way that the host community talk about 'asylum seekers'. The interviews were conducted with naturally occurring groups as this is not only likely to reduce inhibition but should also enhance the likelihood that participants will share backgrounds (Warr, 2005). The use of interviews required a qualitative rather than quantitative content analysis.

The final element of the moral panic analysis was to examine whether individuals who have sought asylum in the UK experience the host community and media response in terms consistent with a moral panic. This indicated the use of methodology that could provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences of these individuals. The most appropriate means of eliciting this information is the use of semi-structured interviews. Despite the advantages of group interviews described above, there are situations in which individual interviews are better suited to the task. Individual interviews are indicated in situations where the aim of the research is to make an in-depth exploration of the life world of the individual, where the topic is of particular personal sensitivity or concerns individual experiences that may provoke anxiety and in situations where participants are difficult to recruit (Gaskell,



2000). This topic is clearly of much greater sensitivity to those who have sought asylum in the UK than members of the host community, both in terms of the circumstances surrounding their asylum claim and the impact this label has on their day to day lives. Consequently there is the real possibility that this topic may provoke anxiety (see 4.5 below for the steps that were taken to minimise this issue). There were therefore clear advantages to conducting individual interviews with this particular target group.

#### **4.2.2 Social representations methodology**

Social representations theory also adopts a constructivist perspective in that it conceptualises individuals as social actors who construct their knowledge and social identity through multiple channels of interpersonal and mass communications (De Rosa, 2006). However, unlike radical social constructionism, social representations theory does not adopt an anti-realist perspective that positions language as a pre-condition of thought and representations as ever changeable in relation to specific situations. Instead a social representations approach recognises that immediate interactions are informed by previous social influences and intergroup relations which orient discursive production (De Rosa, 2006). From this point of view it is therefore possible to distinguish between more or less adequate representations in relation to divergent perspectives (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999). Consequently research conducted from this theoretical orientation tends to adopt a research paradigm that is realist in the sense that it recognises that representations are constructed in relation to the “brute facts” of the world (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999: 169) but which remains critically self-reflective in recognising the possibility that a researcher’s own representations may influence the research process and products (Farr, 1993; Voelklein and Howarth, 2005).

It is notable that the social representations tradition does not privilege any one particular research method (Breakwell and Canter, 1993; Farr 1993; Gaskell, 2001) and the use of multi-method approaches is commonly advocated by researchers working within this field (Breakwell, 1993a; Wagner and Hayes, 2005). However, whilst there are no methodological imperatives associated with this approach, the nature of the theory does indicate some general research strategies. For example, whilst this perspective supports the use of experimental research in

principle, most research is conducted outside the laboratory as social representations are culturally specific phenomena that operate in particular social contexts (Farr, 1993). Furthermore, a social representations approach recognises participants as active social agents rather than passive recipients of representations. This has important methodological implications for the use of experimental manipulations and indicates the use of a research approach that is sensitive to participants' perceptions of the research process (Wagner and Hayes, 2005). Similarly survey methods, whilst potentially useful for mapping the spread of representations, may be unable to fully capture the complexity of the construction of social representations (Rose et al, 1995). The need to capture differences as well as consensus, and the importance of avoiding the imposition of the researcher's own representations on participants' responses mean that qualitative methods are often used (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999; Morant 1998). A qualitative paradigm was therefore adopted to investigate the social representations of asylum seekers in the UK in this thesis.

Social representations are not a distributed property of individual minds, but exist through the joint activities of particular groups or communities, and representation is both a cognitive and a social process (Raudsepp, 2005). Consequently, when conducting social representations research it is important to adopt an approach that considers both interpersonal and collective communications, and formal as well as informal channels of information (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999; Farr, 1993). The use of multiple data sources or 'data triangulation' (Morant, 1998; Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell, 1992) is therefore commonly advocated in social representations research. By mapping contradictions and consistencies this approach can determine the core and peripheral elements of a representation as well as identifying the functions of representations across different mediums. Finding the same representations across different sources indicates a relatively coherent social representation and can verify both the content and structure of representations (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999). For this reason a decision was taken to examine social representations of asylum seekers from multiple sources.

As the aim of this analysis was to examine the content of any moral panic discourse identified in the first stage of this research, it made sense to use the



same data sources if possible. However, before embarking on this analysis it was important to scrutinise the data to establish that it was appropriate in its own right. In contemporary society, the mass media plays an important role in the circulation of knowledge and in the construction of symbolic environments in which informal communications are produced (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999). In producing images that disseminate particular discourses and guide collective symbolic coping the media therefore plays a key role in the construction of social representations. In recognising the importance of the role of culture as well as individual cognitive representations in constituting social knowledge, social representations research therefore often involves the analysis of mass media contents (Farr, 1993).

As already discussed, group interviews provide a setting in which representations arise from naturalistic social communication. The use of group interviews therefore allows research to focus more on the arguments produced than the individuals producing these arguments (Moloney and Walker, 2002). They also provide access to the process of collective sense-making and the types of arguments circulating in society, including conflicting as well as consensual views. This makes group interviews particularly useful for exploring the range of opinions on an issue and for the observation of processes of consensus and disagreement, (Gaskell, 2000) and means that this was a suitable means of accessing informal collective communication about asylum seekers.

Although group interviews can be particularly effective for social representations research, this does not preclude the use of individual interviews for the identification of representations. The effectiveness of individual interviews as a means of obtaining in-depth accounts of the contents of representations and the meanings that respondents give to these representations mean that they can provide more detailed information than it would be possible to obtain using group interviews (Berg, 2001). Consequently, although they inevitably involve a less 'genuine' social interaction than group interviews, individual interviews remain one of the commonly used techniques for studying social representations (Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell, 1992). The use of all three data sources was therefore appropriate and allowed access to all of the key lines of communication

identified as important for social representations research – formal and informal, interpersonal and collective.

Given that the theory of social representations has been established for over forty years there is surprisingly little guidance regarding exactly how to go about identifying social representations, although in recent years there have been attempts to address this issue (see for example Bauer and Gaskell, 1999; Morant, 1998; Wagner and Hayes, 2005). This is part of a wider issue when adopting qualitative research methods in that there is not a set of accepted conventions for analysis that are comparable to those in the quantitative tradition. This is exacerbated by the resistance demonstrated by some qualitative practitioners to the development of these types of guidelines (Robson, 1993) and by the fact that techniques for qualitative data analysis are often utilised without explicit specification of how they have been applied (Boyatzis, 1998). The potential for a lack of methodological clarity has been avoided in this thesis by using thematic analysis (as described by Aronson, 1994, Boyatzis, 1998 and Braun and Clarke, 2006), one of the most clearly specified methods of qualitative data analysis.

Thematic analysis allows the comparison of social units whilst remaining sensitive to the specific contents of individual cases, as it does not attempt to reduce the text to numerical data (Flick, 2009). Furthermore, whilst the analysis of qualitative material is necessarily a subjective process, thematic analysis is a rigorous procedure which provides a formalised approach to analysis that goes beyond intuition (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis is often framed as a realist method, but this approach is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms and has been successfully utilised for critical research projects (see for example, Leavy 2000). It is this theoretical flexibility, along with the potential for rigorous application, that makes thematic analysis such a useful research tool (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and it is an approach which is commonly applied to social representations research (see for example Howarth, 2002; Jovchelovitch, 1997; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009).



### **4.2.3 Social identity methodology**

Social identity theory developed from a positivist tradition which has the aim of establishing universal truths about human behaviour. However, from a social representations perspective social identities cannot be understood outside of the particular representational context in which they develop. Therefore understanding social identity processes within a social representations framework requires a shift in focus from the universal to the particular to allow an analysis of the way that identities have been constructed within a specific context. As such, a social identity analysis conducted in conjunction with a social representational approach will also adopt a constructivist position that recognises the socially embedded nature of identity processes.

The social identity analysis conducted for this thesis had two aims. The first was to identify the extent to which public receptivity to moral panic discourse could be explained by social identity processes and the second was to examine the impact of stigmatised group membership on individuals seeking asylum in the UK. This required the re-analysis of the group and individual interviews which therefore indicated the use of qualitative methods. However, as with the social representations analysis it was important to ensure that this approach was also theoretically sound. As social identity theory is an explanatory model which aims to predict behaviour, research within this tradition tends to adopt experimental or quasi-experimental methods (Breakwell 1993a). However, the incorporation of social representations requires the selection of a method that can contextualise identity processes and move beyond the individual level of analysis offered by experimental research (Howarth, 2002). Qualitative methods are particularly useful for this type of research as they are sensitive to consistency and diversity in responses and elicit data in a way which is context sensitive. It was therefore appropriate to adopt a qualitative approach to the identity analysis conducted for this thesis. As for the moral panic analysis, a qualitative content analysis was conducted using a theoretically driven coding frame. As described above, this allowed a formalised approach which ensured a rigorous method of analysis.

#### 4.2.4 Evaluating a multi-method design

Tailoring the method selection and data analysis to each of these theoretical approaches necessitated the use of a multi-method approach: quantitative methods to examine empirical indicators of moral panic and qualitative methods to provide a social psychological analysis of this response. When adopting a research approach which utilises both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, it is important to establish criteria for evaluation that are appropriate for each element of the research (Flick, 2009). For assessing quality in quantitative research there is a well accepted tradition of applying the criteria of *reliability*, *validity* and *representativeness*, whereby *reliability* refers to the replicability of results, *validity* to the extent to which a method captures what it is designed to investigate and *representativeness* to the possibility of generalising beyond the particular empirical observation (Gaskell and Bauer, 2000). However, the assessment of quality in qualitative research has been more controversial and different approaches have been advocated on the basis of conflicting philosophical perspectives (Seale, 1999). The approach adopted in this thesis is based on Bauer's (2000) recommendations for the quantitative content analysis and Gaskell and Bauer's (2000) recommendations for the qualitative analysis. The British Psychological Society's guidelines for evaluating papers using qualitative research methods (BPS 2007) have also been followed.

Bauer (2000) identifies four criteria for judging the quality of a content analysis; *reliability*, *validity*, *coherence* and *transparency*. As noted, the first two criteria are well-established measures of quality utilised in quantitative research. In the context of content analysis, *reliability* is defined as agreement between interpreters and can be demonstrated by inter-coder reliability checks. Whilst reliability may be limited by the complexity of a coding frame, it is generally agreed to be an important measure of the level of ambiguity of category definitions and coder consistency in the use of these categories (Bauer, 2000). Reliability can be enhanced by clarifying definitions, using examples to illustrate them and by training coders, but perfect reliability would not be expected (Bauer, 2000). *Validity* is the degree to which the analysis is an accurate representation of the text. This is not judged against a 'true reading' but in terms of the extent to which the analysis is grounded in the material, its congruence with theory and in relation to the research purpose. This includes the extent to which



inferences about the theoretical constructs that have been coded for can legitimately be made from the codes that have been applied (construct validity) and the representativeness of the sample (sampling validity). Validity can be enhanced through the use of systematic sampling procedures and the development of an internally coherent coding frame. There is however potentially a trade-off between reliability and validity in that higher reliability tends to be obtained by the simplification of coding frames, but simple coding frames may not yield particularly informative results.

Due to these limitations, Bauer suggests coherence and transparency as additional criteria for the evaluation of good practice. *Coherence* refers to the development of a coding frame in which all codes are derived from a single principle which gives order to the coding frame and prevents a “whatever comes to mind” approach to coding (Bauer, 2000:141). *Transparency* refers to the clear documentation of the coding process, including a codebook which details a summary list of all codes as well as the frequency distribution, an illustrative text unit and an account of coder reliability for each code. This ensures public accountability and allows the possibility of research replication. For this thesis, the following measures were put in place to ensure quality in the content analysis: (1) Reliability was established by the use of a second coder, (2) validity was maximised through the application of systematic sampling methods and the production of a detailed coding frame that clearly links codes to theoretical constructs, (3) coherence was established through the use of a theoretically driven coding frame, and (4) transparency was achieved through the inclusion of a codebook as an appendix to this report.

In comparison to the methods applied to quantitative content analysis, the approach to assessing quality in qualitative analyses is much less standardized and the procedures that are adopted tend to relate to particular epistemological positions (Morant, 1998). For example, methodological triangulation (the use of different methodologies to study the same phenomenon) has been advocated as a possible replacement for validity. This is based on the logic that if findings can be corroborated across different data sets derived from different methods, the potential biases that can exist in a single study will be reduced (Seale, 1999). However, this approach to triangulation has been rejected by some on the basis that this only makes sense within a positivist framework as it is based upon the assumption that

there is a single fixed reality that can be objectively identified (Cho and Trent, 2006). A particularly useful approach to ensuring quality in qualitative research is provided by Gaskell and Bauer (2000) who identify six criteria of good practice that are designed to be functionally equivalent to the classic indicators of reliability, validity and representativeness in the quantitative research tradition. These criteria are triangulation and reflexivity, transparency, corpus construction, thick description, evidence of unexpected findings and (in some circumstances) the use of communicative validation.

In contrast to Seale's interpretation of triangulation, Gaskell and Bauer (2000) consider *triangulation* as a means of building a process of reflection into the research design, the idea being that approaching a problem from different perspectives or using different methods will inevitably lead to contradictions and inconsistencies which require interpretation. As such, this approach forces the researcher to address inconsistencies in their findings as part of the ongoing research process. They argue that without resorting to focusing on the researcher rather than the research, it is important to provide evidence of *reflexivity* in qualitative research as this demonstrates an awareness of divergent perspectives and of the researcher's own position in relation to the research topic. As described in 4.2.2 above, data triangulation was used in this thesis to identify consistencies and contradictions in social representations of asylum seekers that were identified. Reflexivity has been demonstrated in consideration of the research approach described in Chapter 1 and in discussion of the researcher's position in relation to interviewees in 4.5 below.

The second criterion specified by Gaskell and Bauer is *transparency*. As described above this refers to good documentation and clarity in the procedures of data elicitation and analysis. In the context of a qualitative analysis they suggest that this is functionally equivalent to internal and external validity. This has been achieved in this thesis through the detailed documentation of the method of analysis that has been employed for each stage of the research, including descriptions of the ways that the coding frames have been developed and the inclusion of final coding frames with illustrative examples for each code in the appendices to this report.



*Corpus construction* refers to the sampling procedures that should be adopted in qualitative research. In corpus construction sample size is not important, but there needs to be some evidence that an iterative process has been followed whereby additional participants or texts are added until saturation has been achieved (i.e. further data is not going to provide new information). Corpus construction has the aim of maximising the range of unknown representations and like representative sampling in quantitative methodologies can provide reassurance regarding the relevance of results. This approach has been adopted in this thesis. The sampling procedure is described in 4.3 below.

*Thick description* refers to the extensive use of verbatim reports of sources in order to reference the basis upon which claims are made. By allowing the reader direct access to the original source, the interpretation that has been offered by the researcher can be directly assessed against the evidence. This gives credence to claims and acts as a confidence marker. This has been achieved in this thesis through the inclusion of verbatim quotations in the results chapters and through the use of multiple examples to demonstrate that the analysis is not based on selective use of idiosyncratic quotations. In addition to the quotations provided in the main text, additional examples have been provided for all coding frames in the appendices. Full interview transcripts are also available on request.

*Surprise value*, the evidence of unexpected findings, is considered to be a marker of the relevance of a research project in that it demonstrates that the interpretation is not simply based on selective evidence. This should be demonstrated by the documentation of evidence which disconfirmed as well as confirmed expectations. In this thesis coding frames were developed to identify evidence which disconfirmed as well as confirmed expectations. Unexpected as well as expected findings are reported in Chapters 5 to 7 of this thesis.

Finally *communicative validation* (sometimes referred to as 'member validation') refers to validating interview analysis by checking the accuracy of research accounts with participants and providing them with the opportunity to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the way they have been represented by the researcher. This approach is seen to empower participants and provide credibility for research

findings. However, Gaskell and Bauer express some reservations regarding this approach, arguing that participants are not disinterested observers and as such their vantage point is not an objective one. Consequently participants are unable to be the ultimate authority when interpreting their own actions and may want to censor any interpretation which they consider unflattering and this may ultimately threaten the independence of the research project. Furthermore, researchers are likely to interpret interview material in relation to theoretical abstractions which may not be understood by participants. Gaskell and Bauer therefore conclude that whilst communicative validation may be useful for some research projects it should not be a prerequisite for judging the relevance of qualitative research. As all of the issues raised with this approach are relevant when applying moral panic criteria to participants' responses, communicative validation is the only criterion of Gaskell and Bauer's suggestions that has not been practiced in the current thesis.

## **4.3 SAMPLE, MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE**

### **4.3.1 Media**

#### **4.3.1.1 Sample**

The period of analysis of the media coverage of asylum seekers and the asylum issue was from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006. The sample was drawn from the four top selling UK national daily tabloid newspapers and the four top selling UK national daily broadsheet newspapers as indicated by circulation figures<sup>16</sup>. The publications included for analysis (highest circulation first) were *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Publications with the highest circulation figures were selected as the public are most likely to have been exposed to this content. Both tabloid and broadsheet publications were included to maximise the range of editorial positions, writing styles and potential audiences. By selecting publications across the full range of editorial positions and then randomly sampling articles that focus on the asylum issue, the likelihood that counter examples would

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<sup>16</sup> Based on Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) figures for the newspaper industry published on Friday 14 July, 2006.



be included in this sample was maximised. This is important to avoid sample bias (Leavy, 2000; Bauer 2000).

Newspaper articles were sourced from the British Library 'Newsbank' database. The use of a database, rather than accessing articles from newspapers directly, can pose potential problems for this type of research. It is possible, for example, that all articles may not have been included in the database, inaccuracies may have been introduced in the process of transferring articles onto the database and the search criteria may not yield all relevant items. Furthermore, by viewing articles outside of their original context it is not possible to assess the impact of elements like the size of headlines, the position of articles in relation to other stories and the use of accompanying images. However, the disadvantages posed by these issues were outweighed by the enormous benefit afforded by access to the output from multiple publications across a long period of time. As this research focus is so specific (i.e. asylum seekers and the asylum issue rather than immigration more generally), it seems unlikely that an article on this issue would not mention the word asylum. Even if this were the case, the sheer number of articles located in this manner suggests that minor omissions would be unlikely to have a major impact on the representativeness of the sample. A number of articles were checked against an alternative source (the Nexis UK database) and article content was found to be consistent. This, coupled with the fact that the primary source was a database produced for national record, indicates that it was likely to be a reliable source. The fact that the analysis focused on the content of reports meant that limitations posed by loss of context were minimal.

Initial search strategies found the largest number of suitable articles were produced by searching for 'asylum' then disregarding any items that used the word in a non-political context (e.g. references to lunatic asylums) or in a non-relevant way (e.g. in film reviews). The final selection included articles, editorials and readers letters which referred to asylum seekers or the asylum issue in the UK. Articles that referred to 'failed asylum seekers' were retained in the sample for two main reasons. Firstly, although 'asylum seeker' has been qualified by the term 'failed', the fact that newspapers refer to failed asylum seekers rather than failed refugees or unsuccessful asylum applicants sets up an association between the

expression 'asylum seeker' and 'failed', as well as 'asylum seeker' and the negative stories associated with 'failed' asylum seekers. Secondly, whilst 'failed asylum seeker' is ostensibly a more positive label than 'bogus asylum seeker' - an expression that it has largely replaced - it is nevertheless based on the same assumption, i.e. that an unsuccessful application is synonymous with an unfounded application. This represents a failure in the media to consider that changes in legislation have made it increasingly difficult to successfully apply for asylum in the UK. As described in Chapter 1, asylum applications may be rejected due to time restrictions and evidences that are extremely difficult if not impossible to obtain rather than deception on the part of the applicant.

Throughout the sampling period 1,613 articles were identified as meeting the above criteria (see Appendix 1). As it was not possible within the constraints of this research to analyse this number of articles it was necessary to make a decision regarding an acceptable sample to draw from this total. Unfortunately there is no universally accepted set of criteria for identifying an appropriate sample size for content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) so this decision tends to be based on practical considerations such as how many articles a researcher can realistically analyze (Bauer, 2000). It has been demonstrated that a small sample that has been systematically selected is more reliable than a large data set that has been selected on the basis of convenience. For example, twelve randomly sampled issues of a daily newspaper have been shown to provide a reliable indication of its profile across a year (Bauer, 2000). For this research, a sample of twenty-five percent of items was selected using a systematic random sampling method (as described in Berg, 2001) whereby every fourth article was selected for inclusion. For each publication, the number of articles included in the sample was alternately rounded up and down for each month where there were odd numbers of articles. This produced a total of 415 articles for analysis: 220 from tabloid newspapers and 195 from broadsheet newspapers (for a full breakdown of numbers of articles analysed from each newspaper see Appendix 2). The method of selection and number of articles included were therefore designed to obtain a representative sample of print output during this period.



For the social representations analysis it was necessary to further reduce the sample to allow a more detailed qualitative exploration of the content of the articles. Random sampling considerations are not necessarily appropriate for a qualitative analysis and as described in 4.2.4 above it is more appropriate to adopt a corpus construction approach which maximises the spread of representations that are accessed. The media sample used for the content analysis was therefore reduced for qualitative analysis by selecting ten articles from each month. Articles were selected on a purposive basis to ensure that the sub-sample included items that had been coded both positively and negatively in the quantitative content analysis and that articles were drawn from all publications. This sampling procedure maximised the range of unknown representations accessed to achieve meaning saturation (Gaskell and Bauer, 2000). This produced a sample of 120 articles for analysis.

#### **4.3.2 Group interviews**

##### **4.3.2.1 Sample**

Group interviews were conducted with members of the UK 'host community'. There were three main sampling issues to consider in relation to the group interviews: how many people should participate in each interview, specification of inclusion criteria, and the number of interviews to be conducted.

There is no consensus regarding the exact number of participants to include in group interviews, although the range tends to fall between six and twelve individuals for traditional focus group research that recruits strangers. For example, Gaskell (2000) and Asbury (1995) describe group interviews as usually involving six to eight individuals, whereas Frey and Fontana (1993) describe the typical interview as including eight to twelve participants. Krueger (1995) contends that whilst traditionally groups of ten to twelve participants have been employed, smaller groups may actually be more desirable and Morgan (1995) also suggests that very small groups of two to three individuals may be effective depending on the types of participants or the research topic to be addressed.

Regardless of convention, this is an important decision, as group size can have an impact on group dynamics and the type of discussion that is produced. For example, in larger groups there may be limited opportunities for all individuals to contribute and one or two participants may dominate the discussion. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that smaller groups provide more focused discussions and more opportunities for individual contribution (Wibeck, Dahlgren and Öberg, 2007). Whilst the use of small groups has the potential risk of creating a situation in which insufficient material is generated, this is less likely when participants already know each other. In 'natural' social environments conversations rarely occur between very large groups of individuals, and in both natural and group interview contexts larger group discussions have a tendency to break down into a series of smaller overlapping conversations. Within a group interview context this has the disadvantage of making transcription extremely difficult and loses the coherence of group discussion. For these reasons, small groups of three to six individuals were used for this research.

In terms of participant selection, the first decision focused on defining the 'host community'. This is not an easy task when conducting research in the UK which is particularly ethnically diverse compared, for example, to countries like Ireland and Australia, where much previous research into host responses to asylum seekers has been conducted. Due to practical constraints it was not possible to access groups across the whole of the UK so all research was conducted in England (whilst maximizing regional variation as far as possible). However, participants were classified as 'British' rather than 'English' as Englishness tends to have associations with ethnicity and the representational environment that greets asylum seekers in the UK is produced by a population which is ethnically diverse. Being officially British is not necessarily the same as identifying with a British identity. For example, an individual who has held a British passport for a few months is unlikely to identify themselves as 'British' outside of official contexts. In the absence of unambiguous criteria for what it means to be 'British', inclusion in this category was based on self-selection and participants were recruited using an information sheet which specified a research interest in what 'British people' think about asylum seekers (see Appendix 3). In this way participants were able to decide for themselves if they met that criterion.



The traditional approach to selecting a sample for group interviews is to identify relevant socio-demographic variables, calculate the total possible ways these can be combined and conduct a minimum of two interviews for each combination (Gaskell, 2000; Morgan 1995). Alternatively groups can be segmented using 'natural' rather than taxonomic characteristics. The latter approach is particularly beneficial for social representations research as naturally occurring groups may have more in common in terms of values and concerns (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999). Furthermore individuals from the same social milieu are more likely to read the same media and are therefore likely to share a representational framework. Discussion produced in a situation where participants know each other is more likely to reflect 'real world' interactions than responses provided in a situation where participants are strangers and therefore likely to be more self-conscious (Warr, 2005), although this can of course vary according to the level of familiarity amongst participants. For these reasons interviews were conducted with naturally occurring groups.

Whilst, for the above mentioned reasons, it was advantageous to conduct interviews with naturally occurring groups, it was also important to maximise the potential spread of different views and representations. An initial sampling scheme was therefore devised using socio-demographic variables as a guide to targeting particular groups whilst ensuring that each group was made up of people who already knew each other, as friends, colleagues, neighbours or family. A literature review indicated a number of factors that may be likely to have an impact on the way the host community think about asylum seekers. Previous research indicates that the key factors in predicting attitudes towards asylum seekers are age, occupation and level of education (Curry, 2000) and experience of ethnic diversity also seems to be an influential factor (ICAR, 2004). There is some evidence to suggest that the ethnicity of participants may be of relevance (Lewis, 2005), but findings have been inconsistent. For example, Morrison and Statham (1999) found no differences between views expressed by participants from different ethnic backgrounds.

As the sample was drawn from an adult population (i.e. individuals over the age of eighteen years of age) and the evidence relating to age differences is based on

younger age groups this dimension was not included in the sampling scheme, although participants' ages were monitored to ensure that the sample was not drawn exclusively from a narrow age band. The starting point for the first draft sampling scheme was therefore to consider all factors identified from the literature review except for age – i.e. occupation, level of education, experience of ethnic diversity and participant ethnicity. However, if all four of these variables were included and two interviews were conducted for each combination this would require twenty-four group interviews. This is an extremely large number of groups for one researcher to analyse. Gaskell (2000), for example, recommends the ideal upper limit for a single researcher as between six and eight group interviews. It was therefore necessary to reconsider the sampling scheme with a view to reducing the number of variables whilst minimising loss of information. As the evidence for the influence of participant ethnicity is ambiguous, one solution would be to exclude this factor. However given that some research has indicated that this may have an influence this would potentially limit the range of the sample. Furthermore, whilst it is not possible to produce a truly representative sample using a purposive sampling method, it was nonetheless desirable to reflect the diversity of the UK population to maximise the likely range of views that were accessed.

A more satisfactory solution to this issue was achieved by combining occupation and education to produce a single measure of socio-economic status. The rationale for this combination was that the influence of education has been linked to the association between increased education and increased liberalism (Curry, 2000) and the occupations that are linked with increased tolerance are those that are likely to be filled by higher-educated individuals. For example, in Curry's survey, professionals exhibited the least social distance to Romanians and Bosnians, followed by students and white collar workers. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that categorising individuals by their occupation and educational level in combination should not cause too much loss in predicted variation in response.

The initial sampling scheme therefore used three dimensions for stratifying participants; socio-economic status (SES1 v SES2, with SES1 including those who



had a degree or a higher qualification and were in white-collar or professional occupations and SES2 classifying those with lower qualifications in blue-collar or manual employment), experience of diversity (high v low) and participant ethnicity (white v British Minority Ethnic). To meet the minimum requirement of two interviews for each combination, this sampling scheme required twelve interviews to be conducted. Whilst this is still a large number of groups for one researcher to analyse, the three remaining dimensions were considered sufficiently important for maximising the potential spread of representations that a decision was taken to proceed on this basis. However, this decision had to be reviewed following pilot interviews which demonstrated some fundamental issues with this approach.

The first pilot interview was conducted with a group of three post-graduate students who were studying in London. Within the context of the sampling scheme this group was classified as 'high diversity, SES 1, white'. However, once the interview commenced it quickly became clear that none of the participants could be classified in an unproblematic way. Although the interview took place in an institution that has a diverse student population and which is based in an ethnically mixed area of London, these students actually had very little or no direct experience of diversity as they were enrolled on a course with a small, ethnically homogenous group and did not socialise outside of their own ethnic groups. Two participants had also been brought up in low diversity areas and had only been introduced to people from different backgrounds as adults and even then this was not in terms of contact that was meaningful to them. Furthermore, whilst all would be technically classified as SES1 on the basis of the specified criteria (i.e. education and occupation), one participant came from a working class background and read newspapers and elicited views that were much more in line with what might be expected from this background than of a 'typical' postgraduate student. Finally, in the course of the interview it became apparent that one of the participants had Chinese family, despite the lack of obvious visual markers.

This demonstrated a fundamental oversimplification in the categorisation approach that had been adopted, indicating that the distinctions made by this process were illusory. It also highlighted the difficulties in trying to control for particular elements when recruiting participants, a factor that is further complicated by the decision to

recruit naturally occurring groups. The sampling strategy that was eventually adopted was therefore based on an iterative process whereby groups were selected with a view to maximising variation along these dimensions without the rigid application of particular combinations of factors for each group. This had the added benefit of allowing the number of group interviews to be reduced to meet the recommended maximum for optimal analysis.

The final sample consisted of eight interviews with groups of three to six participants with a total of 36 participants (16 males, 20 females), with a good spread of occupations, educational level and experience of diversity. A full list of participant demographics appears in Appendix 4. Although participant ethnicity was initially considered to potentially influence views, the two interviews that were conducted with non-White British participants produced content that was consistent with the other interviews. This is in accordance with Morrison and Statham's (1999) conclusion that ethnicity may not strongly influence views on asylum and indicated that additional interviews with BME participants would be unlikely to reveal novel information. As the aim was to maximise variation with a view to reaching meaning saturation (cf Gaskell and Bauer, 2000), for the remaining interviews participants were targeted on the basis of socio-economic status and experience of diversity.

Interviews were conducted in Birmingham, London, West Bridgford, Nottingham, Doncaster, Rickmansworth and Basildon. In order to maximise the variation in participants' levels of experience of ethnic diversity, interview locations were selected to vary in terms of size, region, ethnic diversity and how rural or urban they were. For example, Birmingham is an ethnically diverse urban city whereas West Bridgford is a small town in Nottinghamshire which is much less ethnically mixed. The final interviews that were conducted did not elicit any new material which strongly suggests that the sample met Gaskell and Bauer's (2000) criteria for corpus construction.

#### *4.3.2.2 Materials*

The interview guide was constructed to cover four key topics: (1) explored participants' understandings of what is meant by the term 'asylum seeker', (2)



focused on public opinion of asylum seekers, (3) explored participants' perceptions of media coverage of asylum, and (4) focused on whether participants felt that 'asylum seekers' could become 'British'. The first section was designed to elicit participants' representations of asylum seekers without moderator intervention. The second was designed to further probe participants' views of asylum seekers and to provide the opportunity to access social representations that participants may be aware of without having assimilated. The third provided the opportunity to explore the extent to which participants were aware of or endorsed media representations of asylum seekers, and the fourth was designed to focus on social identity processes that may underpin responses, providing an indication of the extent to which participants considered intergroup boundaries to be permeable and status differences to be legitimate. The topic guide included probe questions as described by Asbury (1995) to promote further discussion of each theme should it be required, but the number of different subjects and questions were kept to a minimum to ensure that discussion was generated amongst participants rather than it becoming a more formal interview in which participants only responded to direct questions from the moderator (for full topic guide, see Appendix 5).

The topic guide was piloted to test suitability, clarity and breadth of questions. Following the pilot some minor changes were made to prompts to enhance clarity. It was also apparent that given the amount of demographic information required, and the public forum in which it would be requested, that it would be more appropriate to provide a brief questionnaire for participants to complete at the end of the interview rather than asking them to provide this information verbally. A one page questionnaire was therefore prepared to record basic demographic details about participants (i.e. sex, age, education, occupation, family history of immigration) as well as information about their media preferences and the amount of contact they had with people from other ethnic groups (see Appendix 6).

#### *4.3.3.3 Procedure*

Group interviews were conducted between March and August 2008 in Birmingham, London, West Bridgford, Nottingham, Doncaster, Rickmansworth and Basildon, at times and locations that were convenient for participants. Participants were provided with an information sheet in advance of the interview to ensure that fully informed

consent was obtained (see Appendix 7). Prior to commencing each interview, the purpose of the project was reiterated and it was explained that the aim of the session was to promote conversation and discussion of the topic. All participants were encouraged to contribute and it was emphasised that there were no 'wrong or right' answers. Participants were also reminded that their anonymity would be protected and that copies of the transcription would be made available on request. This introduction was designed to ensure that participants were clear about the procedure and to provide them with an opportunity to address any concerns, as a clear introduction facilitates a shared understanding of the task and enhances the likelihood of a successful discussion (Wibeck, Dahlgren and Öberg, 2007). Once the interview commenced, the topic guide was used as a "topical steering" device (as described by Flick, 2009) to introduce new topics and to extend discussion of particular topics. As recommended by Morgan (1995), moderator questioning was kept to a minimum to allow the co-construction of responses in a naturalistic conversational context. At the end of the interview the purpose of the study was reviewed and an opportunity provided for participants to raise any issues that might have been missed in the preceding discussion. Interviews lasted from 52 to 83 minutes, with the majority of interviews lasting approximately one hour. All interviews were digitally recorded and participants were asked to complete the brief demographic questionnaire at the end of their interviews. All recordings were fully transcribed.

### **4.3.3 Individual interviews**

#### **4.3.3.1 Sample**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who have sought asylum in the UK. There were three key sampling issues to consider in relation to the individual interviews: how many interviews should be conducted, specification of criteria for participant selection and methods adopted for accessing participants.

As noted in 4.2.4 above, maximising sample size is not as important for qualitative research as it is for quantitative methodologies and in fact larger sample sizes may bring about a reduction in the quality of the analysis without any great benefit in terms of additional information (Gaskell, 2000). There are a limited number of



possible interpretations of reality and it is therefore inevitable that over the course of a series of interviews common themes will arise and recur until the point that no new or surprising responses are provided. This is what Gaskell (2000: 43) refers to as “meaning saturation”. As such there is a limit to the number of interviews that it is necessary to conduct. Furthermore, to achieve more than a superficial analysis it is important for the researcher to be able to recall each interview vividly in order to be able to effectively compare and contrast different participants’ responses. Inevitably there is a limit to the amount of material any one researcher can competently process. Gaskell (2000) therefore recommends an upper limit of fifteen to twenty-five interviews for any single researcher and it is for this reason that twenty-five interviews were conducted for this thesis.

In order to identify the inclusion criteria for individual interviews it was important to establish a clear definition of ‘asylum seeker’. From the perspective of a strict legal definition this category would only include people who have applied to the government for asylum and are waiting to hear the outcome of their application. However it is clear from the way that ‘asylum seeker’ is applied by the media as a social identification that it is generally used in much broader terms to include those whose applications have failed as well as individuals who have achieved refugee status and are therefore no longer technically asylum seekers. As with the host community in the UK, ‘asylum seeker’ covers a heterogeneous population, with individuals coming from a wide range of different national and ethnic backgrounds and from a broad range of different socio-economic and cultural experiences. As such it is no more possible to identify a ‘typical’ asylum seeker than it would be to target a ‘typical’ British participant.

One solution to this issue is to focus on a particular ethnic or national group, for example Iraqi Kurds. This has the benefit of providing a research strategy which recognises the diversity of refugee experiences and the unique issues that apply to specific groups. However, for this research study the fact that a single identification has been imposed on such a diverse group of people is precisely the issue under consideration. In order to address this question it is therefore necessary to access as broad a range of experiences as possible. As with group interviews, participants were therefore selected using a purposive sampling method designed to maximise

variety with a view to achieving meaning saturation. To this end the most inclusive definition of 'asylum seeker' was adopted to include those who were awaiting a decision, those whose applications had failed as well as those who had refugee status or who had now obtained British citizenship. As with group interviews, participants were included on the basis of self-definition through the use of an invitation letter in which the inclusion criteria was specified as "people who have experience of seeking asylum in the UK" (see Appendix 8).

Conducting research with refugees and asylum seekers requires a number of specific considerations. This includes practical issues to do with language and access, as well as the ethical issues discussed in 4.5 below. Conducting interviews with participants for whom English is a second language poses a number of potential problems including differences in meanings attached to particular words and concepts (Temple and Moran, 2006). Conducting interviews in English makes the process more difficult for participants and excludes those who are not sufficiently fluent to participate and for this reason some researchers suggest that interviews should be conducted in the participant's first language (Temple and Edwards, 2006). However, despite having the potential to provide participants with a better opportunity to articulate their views in a way they may find difficult or impossible in a second language, conducting interviews in participants' first languages may also pose problems. For example, unless the researcher is also fluent in the first language of participants this approach necessitates the use of a translator. Having an additional party involved in the interview process necessarily involves an extra level of interpretation and it is just as likely that meaning may be lost when using a translator as if the participant were translating for themselves.

To some extent it must therefore be acknowledged that cross-language research will always bring with it the possibility of misunderstanding. This can hopefully be minimised through researcher awareness applied to the design of the interview schedule, in the way that the interview is conducted and the way that transcripts are analysed. For this thesis, all interviews were conducted in English and were based on an interview schedule which was devised to take into account the fact that participants had English as a second language. The schedule was applied



with sufficient flexibility to ensure understanding, questions were rephrased if they were unclear and participants' responses were also probed to ensure mutual interpretation of meaning. Participants were also reassured if they were struggling to find the right words, and the fact that they were willing and able to communicate in a foreign language when the researcher was unable to reciprocate was acknowledged.

Another key issue in conducting research with asylum seekers and refugees is access. Unless research is conducted from within the refugee community, access is inevitably established via formal organisations who work in this area (Temple and Moran, 2006). By going through 'gatekeepers' there is the risk of accessing an unrepresentative sample which includes only those who are involved in community organisations and those who have been selected as 'suitable' representatives of the community (Wilson and Wilde, 2003). A number of different strategies were adopted for the recruitment of participants for this research including attending community support meetings, utilising existing email lists set up by refugee support groups, recruiting students via English language classes and advertising in community newsletters. Personal attendance at meetings enabled the researcher to establish relationships of trust and articulate the research purpose directly to potential participants. Using mailing lists and contacts from NGOs enabled access to people living outside of London and broadened the range of participant contact. This combination of approaches proved an extremely effective strategy which enabled the recruitment of participants from a range of backgrounds, with differing immigration statuses living in a variety of different conditions in the UK.

The final sample comprised twenty-five semi-structured interviews with adult asylum seekers and former asylum seekers (15 asylum seekers<sup>17</sup>, 5 refugees and 5 British citizens) from fourteen different countries, age range 19-54, 16 males and 9 females, from a range of different backgrounds (2 unemployed, 6 students, 8 manual or white collar workers, 9 professionals). See Appendix 9 for a full breakdown of participant demographics.

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<sup>17</sup> No differentiation has been made between asylum seekers and 'failed asylum seekers' as this potentially constitutes a value judgement regarding the validity of participants' claims that is irrelevant for the current research.

#### *4.3.3.2 Materials*

The interview schedule was divided into two sections. The first section focused on participants' exposure to and understanding of UK media coverage of asylum seekers and their perceptions of the host populations' views of asylum seekers. The second focused on the impact the label 'asylum seeker' had on participants as individuals, the extent to which they identified with this group membership and considered group boundaries to be permeable. The final question provided participants with an opportunity to raise any issues that had not already been addressed. The questions were designed to be as succinct as possible and to include probes that would clarify and extend participants' responses as recommended by Kvale (1996). The final interview schedule appears in Appendix 10.

A draft version of the interview schedule was initially piloted using immigrants rather than asylum seekers as this provided an opportunity to test suitability, clarity and breadth of questions on a population who were similar to the target population (both in terms of the relevance of questions and in having English as a second language), but were easier to access. Following these pilots some minor changes were made to simplify some of the wording, and the order of questions was adjusted to improve the flow of the interview. Two further pilot interviews were then conducted with asylum seekers to confirm the suitability of the schedule for the target population. No further changes were made to the interview schedule following these interviews.

#### *4.3.3.3 Procedure*

Interviews were conducted between September 2007 and March 2008 in London, Sheffield, Watford and Birmingham, at times and locations that were convenient for participants. Participants were not paid for their contribution but travel expenses and refreshments were provided. As with group interviews, participants were provided with an information sheet in advance of the interview to ensure that fully informed consent was obtained (see Appendix 11). Prior to the start of each interview the purpose of the project was reiterated and participants were reminded that their anonymity would be protected and that the interview was intended to be a non-judgemental exploration of their views. Whilst the interview schedule was followed closely enough to ensure that all topics were covered, the interviews were also



sufficiently flexible to allow exploration of participants' lines of thought that hadn't been anticipated by the questions. Questions were also rephrased if participants were unfamiliar with the vocabulary used. As interviews were conducted in a second language for participants it was necessary at times to provide checks that their meaning was clear. This was achieved by paraphrasing participants' responses whilst being careful to double check that this accurately reflected their account, therefore avoiding 'formulations' that transform the information provided by participants (see Roulston, deMarrais and Lewis, 2003 for a fuller discussion of this issue). Interviews lasted from 23 to 150 minutes, with the majority of interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and participants were asked to provide demographic information at the end of their interviews. All recordings were fully transcribed.

## 4.4 ANALYSIS

### 4.4.1 Identifying a moral panic

Three coding frames were used to identify whether there was evidence for a moral panic response to asylum seekers in the UK. The first coding frame was developed to provide a means of systematically coding the media sample to test media coverage against the moral panic criteria. This necessitated the use of a theoretical coding frame based on the defining criteria for a moral panic proposed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a). This was then used as the basis for developing further coding frames that were used for the qualitative analysis of the group and individual interview data. As detailed below, it was necessary to adapt the coding frames for each particular data source. For example, whilst *consensus* could be measured in both the media and group interviews by examining consistency across sources, for individual interviews this would be inappropriate as the aim was to examine whether participants experienced media or host responses as consensual rather than examining the pattern of their own responses.

The first coding frame was developed based on the defining criteria for a moral panic proposed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a): *concern*, *hostility*, *disproportionality*, *consensus* and *volatility*. Once operationalised, it became

apparent that not all of the criteria could be identified through content analysis of individual newspaper articles. Whilst it is possible to look for direct evidence of *concern*, *hostility* and *disproportionality*, the issue of *consensus* can only be established by looking across publications and *volatility* by looking at coverage over time. *Consensus* was therefore defined by the extent to which different publications, regardless of editorial stance, utilised consistent stereotypes and focused on similar issues and *volatility* was examined by looking at the pattern of coding for the other moral panic criterion across the year.

The coding frame for individual articles was therefore based on three moral panic criteria, *concern*, *hostility* and *disproportionality*. It was developed using a modular method (as described by Bauer, 2000) in which each category of interest (i.e. each moral panic criterion) was specified by a set of secondary codes. For example, the category set *Hostility* was divided into three codes that were designed to capture the key elements of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994a) definition of hostility; '*B01: Threat to shared values*', '*B02: Threat to shared interests*' and '*B03: Classification as "folk devils"*'. This approach is useful as it allows a detailed level of coding to ensure that all important elements are identified, whilst maintaining the primary focus on the moral panic criteria. In addition, disconfirmation codes were used to measure counter moral panic indicators. For example, '*B01: Threat to shared values*' code had a counter code '*E01: Perception that asylum seekers share host values*'. By utilising a coding frame that included disconfirmation codes, positive representations of the issue were also recorded. This allowed for evidence that countered the research hypothesis. This is important in the avoidance of positive research bias and is particularly relevant for this study as research on media portrayals of asylum to date has tended to solely focus on negative portrayals and their effects (Finney and Peach, 2006).

Once the initial coding frame was developed, it was piloted using a one month sample of two newspapers. The Daily Express and The Guardian were selected for this purpose as their different editorial stances increased the likelihood that both confirmation and disconfirmation codes would be used. On the basis of the pilot, five additional sub-codes were added and some minor amendments were made to the wording of codes to increase clarity. For example, an additional sub-



code was added to *Hostility* – ‘*B04: Evidence of public / government hostility*’ – as the original coding frame did not capture instances in which the views of politicians and the general public were reported. This is important as regardless of whether the media constructs or reflects genuine public or political hostility, by reporting their response in this way the media is framing the issue as a moral panic. For all new codes, equivalent disconfirmation codes were also added to maintain the balance of the coding frame (e.g. ‘*E04: Evidence of positive public / government response*’ was added as the counter code to B04).

Following the pilot, the coding frame was expanded to include full descriptions of codes and an illustration for each code. For example, code ‘*B01: Threat to shared values*’ was defined as “*This embodies the ‘moral’ element of a ‘moral panic’ – the idea that the ‘other’ does not share ‘our’ values. This includes descriptions of asylum seekers as criminal and/or deviant*” and the following illustrative example was given from *The Daily Express*: “*Most others are young men from countries with little tradition of civic order. No wonder that almost every day produces new allegations of sexual assaults, burglaries and other serious crimes carried out by failed asylum seekers and illegal immigrants*”. The rationale for elaborating the coding frame in this way was to ensure consistency in the application of codes and to provide a more detailed reference for a second coder. The final coding frame which includes definitions and examples for each code appears in Appendix 12.

The reliability of the final coding frame was then tested with a second coder, with a Cohen’s kappa calculated for each code as a measure of the reliability of ratings. Kappa values greater than 0.75 are generally considered to represent excellent above chance agreement, values between 0.40 and 0.75 fair to good agreement and values below 0.40 poor agreement (Fleiss, 1981). A sample of twenty articles was coded independently and all codes achieved at least a fair to good level of agreement, with *counter concern* and *counter disproportionality* achieving an excellent level of agreement. Coding differences were discussed and clarifications were made regarding the meaning of each concept. Following this discussion the coding process was repeated and inter-rater reliability was increased across all codes, with an excellent level of agreement met for all codes except *disproportionality* which had a good level of agreement (a kappa value of 0.69,

based on 18 out of 20 agreements). The final coding frame was then applied to the full sample of 415 articles. Articles were coded at the category set level, with each moral panic criterion and its counter-criterion coded as either absent or present in each article – i.e. each category set label had a single value attached to each article (0=absent, 1=present).

A second coding frame was developed for the qualitative analysis of group interviews. As with the coding frame used for the media analysis, operationalisation of the moral panic criteria indicated that it would not be possible to examine all criteria directly. This coding frame was therefore also based only on *hostility*, *concern*, and *disproportionality*. *Consensus* can only be measured by looking at responses across interviews to examine the extent to which there are similar moral panic features. *Consensus* was not expected in this sample, as the group interviews were specifically targeted to maximise the range of views elicited. However this was checked, as if there was evidence of *consensus* despite this sampling approach this would provide strong evidence for a moral panic response in the host community. *Volatility* can only be examined by looking at responses across time and it was therefore not appropriate to apply this criterion to the interview data as this accessed opinion at a single point in time.

The coding frame used for the qualitative analysis of group interview data was structured in a similar way to that employed in the media analysis, using the same six category set labels, one for each moral panic criterion that was included and one for each equivalent counter code. Likewise, each category set was comprised of secondary codes. For the qualitative analysis the secondary codes were designed to capture participants' own views but also their perceptions about public opinion and media coverage. For example, *Hostility* was divided into three secondary codes, '*own hostility*', '*public hostility*' and '*media hostility*'. This made it possible to examine whether participants' own responses were consistent with a moral panic response and also whether they perceived the wider UK response in terms consistent with a moral panic, regardless of their own views. This approach was necessary because (as described in Chapter 2) perceptions of a negative public response may be more important in terms of mobilising moral panic than the individual opinions of members of the public (Cricher, 2003). Therefore, if participants described public opinion in



terms consistent with a moral panic, regardless of their own views, this would lend support to the suggestion that the UK response can be characterised in this way. As per the original coding frame, disconfirmation codes were used to capture counter moral panic indicators. For example, '*Own Hostility*' which was defined as "*instances in which participants expressed hostility towards asylum seekers / indicated that they considered asylum seekers to be a threat to shared values or interests / reproduced negative stereotypes of asylum seekers*" had a counter code '*Own Counter Hostility*' which was defined as "*instances in which participants expressed positive views about asylum seekers / indicated that they did not consider asylum seekers to be a threat to shared values or interests*". A full version of this coding frame which includes illustrative examples for each code appears in Appendix 13.

A third coding frame was developed for the qualitative analysis of individual interviews. This coding frame was used to examine whether individuals who have sought asylum in the UK have experienced the UK response as a moral panic. Instead of examining whether participants' responses met the criteria for a moral panic this analysis therefore focused on whether their perceptions of media and host responses were consistent with a moral panic. This meant that the moral panic criteria had to be operationalised differently for this analysis than for the previous two coding frames. For example, in this context it is difficult to differentiate between *concern* and *hostility*, as asking participants to make this distinction would require them to speculate about the feelings of others rather than describe their own experiences. Furthermore it is possible that *concern* may not necessarily be experienced directly, whereas *hostility* is more likely to have been experienced by participants. For this analysis *concern* and *hostility* were therefore conflated into one measure of *Concern/hostility* which coded for descriptions of media and public negativity towards asylum seekers.

*Disproportionality* was included in this coding frame, although it also had to be operationalised differently than for the previous two analyses. In the previous analyses *disproportionality* was identified by comparing articles and responses to objective measures such as population statistics, whereas in this analysis *disproportionality* was identified in relation to participants' perceptions. *Disproportionality* was therefore coded in terms of whether participants perceived

media and host responses to be fair or accurate and therefore examined their experience of this response rather than whether the media and host response can be described as disproportionate in relation to objective measures. Unlike the previous analyses, it was possible to directly code for *consensus* with this sample, as the aim was to examine whether participants experienced media or host responses as consensual rather than examining the pattern of their own responses. As with group interviews, it was not possible to apply the criterion of *volatility* as participants' responses were not measured across time.

The coding frame was therefore based on six category sets; *Hostility/concern*, *disproportionality* and *consensus* and their equivalent counter categories. As with the previous coding frames, each category was specified by a set of secondary codes. In this case these were designed to capture participants' perceptions of media and public responses. For example, *Hostility/Concern* was divided into two secondary codes, '*public hostility/concern*' and '*media hostility/concern*'. As with the previous coding frames, each secondary code had an equivalent counter code. For example, '*Public hostility/concern*' which was defined as "*instances in which participants described the general public response to asylum seekers as a negative one*" had the counter code "*Public counter hostility/ concern*", which was defined as "*Instances in which participants described the general public response to asylum seekers as a positive one*". A full version of this coding frame which includes illustrative examples for each code appears in Appendix 14.

#### **4.4.2 Social representations analysis**

When conducting social representations research it is not possible to know in advance the content or the form of the representations that will be identified in the analysis (Farr, 1993). Consequently it would be inappropriate to apply a pre-conceived coding frame, and the thematic analysis employed in this thesis was therefore based on an inductive approach in which codes were derived from the data.

The development of the coding frame was assisted by the use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which allows data to be organised and linked in a way that encourages in depth exploration and rigorous analysis (Bazeley, 2007). Whilst the



appropriateness of using computers to analyse qualitative data has inevitably been debated, the facility that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has to deal with large quantities of data and the way that it allows text units to easily be coded in multiple categories means that it can provide an extremely efficient approach to developing a detailed and flexible coding scheme (Bringer, Johnson and Brackenridge, 2004). The fact that a text unit can be coded in an unlimited number of categories whilst retaining its position in the original transcript means that text units do not become detached from their original context in the 'cutting and pasting' process. This ensures that the social meaning in the data does not become lost in the attempt to produce manageable data sets and enables theoretical links to be drawn and developed during the process of analysis. Whilst it is neither possible nor desirable for computers to mechanise the process of qualitative data analysis as they are clearly unable to provide the intuitive and creative work that is essential in this approach, they nevertheless provide an efficient procedure which supports the development of a systematic coding scheme (Gaskell, 2000).

There were two main stages in the development of the coding scheme. The initial coding process involved the storage of coded texts into 'free nodes'. At this stage in the analysis no assumptions were made regarding the relationship between nodes. The benefit of adopting this approach is that initial ideas can be captured without the premature imposition of a structure (Bazeley, 2007). As the analysis developed, the connections between nodes became apparent and at this stage a system of 'tree nodes' was set up to reflect the structure of the data. Trees are hierarchical structures in which 'parent nodes' provide connecting points for subcategories. In a social representations analysis the parent nodes are the core aspects of a representation and child nodes are the peripheral elements. The use of trees has the benefit of helping to organize the data, enhancing conceptual clarity by assisting the identification of overlapping codes and patterns in the data (Bazeley, 2007). The conceptual grouping of nodes also facilitated the comparison of nodes, and coded text units were repeatedly checked for consistency in coding and to ensure that each node was conceptually distinct. Again NVivo was extremely useful in this process as it enabled all text units that were coded together to be viewed at one time and allowed for nodes to be easily merged in

situations where it became apparent that two nodes were actually doing the same thing.

The social representations analysis was based on all three data sets; newspaper articles, group interview transcripts and individual interview transcripts. The use of three different data sources necessitated the focus on different units of analysis. For example, group interviews produce data that tends to be less coherent than that generated by individual interviews. Accounts are contested and reworked in the course of discussion and arguments may become fragmented. As a result, the analysis of group interview data can be particularly challenging (Warr, 2005). For this reason, analysis of group interview data focused on meanings that were jointly created and text units were specified in relation to units of meaning rather than in relation to particular individual's responses. The analysis was therefore structured to focus on the social representations that were produced and the extent to which they were consensual or idiosyncratic and not on the individual who produced them. Each data source was coded independently and then the representations identified in the group and individual interviews were compared and contrasted with the representations identified in the media sample. In this way it was possible to build up a picture of the pattern of representations of asylum seekers and to ascertain those elements that consistently appeared and those which changed in response to the particular context.

#### **4.4.3 Social Identity analysis**

The social identity analysis had two key aims (1) to identify the extent to which group interviews indicated that public receptivity to moral panic discourse could be explained by social identity processes, and (2) to examine the impact of stigmatised group membership on those seeking asylum in the UK, including an analysis of the extent to which coping strategies predicted by Social Identity Theory have been adopted. Unlike the social representations analysis it was therefore necessary to adopt a deductive approach in which a theoretical coding frame was developed to test the predictions of Social Identity Theory.

In order to explore the extent to which host group receptivity to moral panic discourse can be explained by Social Identity theory, a coding frame was



developed around the prediction that high status groups will be prejudiced against lower status groups when group boundaries are perceived as permeable and status differences are perceived as legitimate (Reynolds and Turner, 2001). As with the coding frames that were developed for the moral panic analysis, category sets were theoretically determined and specified by secondary codes. For the social identity analysis three key concepts were identified, *social categorisation* (the process by which in-group/out-group classifications are made), *social comparison* (the selective accentuation of intergroup differences that favour the in-group) and *social belief structures* (the extent to which group boundaries are perceived as permeable or impermeable and whether status differences are considered to be legitimate or illegitimate). Each of these were treated as category sets and specified by secondary codes. For example, '*social categorisation*' was divided into '*social categorisation (in-group)*' which was used to identify instances in which participants made comments which indicated that they identified with the in-group and '*social categorisation (out-group)*' which was used to identify instances in which 'asylum seekers' were clearly distinguished as an out-group. As for the moral panic analysis, counter codes were also devised in order to establish whether there was evidence for views that were contradictory to the predictions of Social Identity Theory. For example, the counter code for '*social categorisation (in-group)*' was '*counter social categorisation (in-group)*' which was used to capture instances in which participants indicated that they do not identify with the host community as an in-group. A full version of the coding frame with illustrative examples from the group interviews appears in Appendix 15.

A second coding frame was developed for the analysis of individual interviews. As with the coding frame used to analyse group interviews, the first part was based around the Social Identity Theory concepts of *social categorisation* and *social comparison*. However, in order to apply these concepts to members of the group at which a 'moral panic' has been directed, it was necessary to adapt the coding frame. For example, whilst '*social categorisation (in-group)*' could be examined in the same way in individual as group interviews, examining '*social categorisation (out-group)*' would not be useful in this context, as for individual interviewees this would involve their perceptions of the host group rather than retaining the research focus on the 'folk devils'. Therefore, for the coding frame applied to individual

interviews, *social categorisation (as out-group)*’ was used instead. This examined the extent to which participants felt they belonged to an out-group or were treated as an out-group by the host community and/or the UK media. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 3, Social Identity Theory predicts that *social comparison* processes will be different in the case of minority or stigmatised group members. According to this approach, rather than positively accentuating intergroup differences, minority groups may accept negative images of their group imposed by the majority group. Therefore instead of identifying instances in which participants positively stereotyped the in-group, this analysis focused on whether participants experienced ‘asylum seeker’ as a negative social identity, and the extent to which the majority group definition of ‘asylum seeker’ had been accepted by participants. As with previous coding frames disconfirmation codes were also applied in order to establish whether there was evidence for views that were contradictory to the predictions of Social Identity Theory.

The second section of the coding frame focused on identifying the social belief structures of participants (i.e. whether they considered group boundaries to be permeable or impermeable) and whether there was evidence to suggest that the coping strategies associated with social mobility and social change belief systems had been adopted. Again each concept was specified by a set of codes. For example, *Social Mobility* was comprised of ‘*Social Mobility (disidentification with in-group)*’ which captured responses which indicated that participants did not wish to be associated with the social identity of ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘*Social Mobility (preference for out-group)*’ which identified responses which indicated that participants were more positive about the host community than about asylum seekers. A full coding frame with illustrative examples for each code appears in Appendix 16.

#### **4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Any research which involves interviewing individuals necessitates careful consideration of the ethical issues relating to the impact that the experience of the interview and the research findings produced from that interaction may have on the well-being of participants (Flick 2009; Kvale, 1996). The British Psychological



Society provides clear guidelines regarding ethical principles for conducting research with human participants (available at [www.bps.org](http://www.bps.org)). These guidelines consist of nine key principles; protection of participants, informed consent, no coercion, right to withdraw, confidentiality, appropriate exclusion criteria, welfare monitoring, duty of care and additional safeguards for research with vulnerable populations. This research was conducted in such a way as to ensure that participants were fully aware of the purpose of the research and provided with plenty of opportunities to ask questions about the ways in which their data would be used. No deception was employed during any part of the proceedings and participants were provided with written as well as verbal descriptions of the procedure prior to the interviews to ensure that their consent was fully informed. Participants were aware that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed and were offered the opportunity to have copies of the transcripts. Three individual interviewees made this request and the transcripts were duly forwarded to them. None of these participants provided any feedback or expressed any concerns regarding the quality of the transcripts. Information sheets also included researcher contact details to ensure that participants were able to easily address any concerns that they might have following the interviews. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw their data and that their confidentiality would be ensured. Participant anonymity was protected by the use of pseudonyms and the careful storing of original data until such time as it can be destroyed.

In addition to the ethical considerations attached to any research conducted with human participants, there were particular issues relating to the fact that this thesis is based on research which included interviews with a vulnerable population, both in relation to the experiences which brought about their asylum application and the uncertain circumstances in which they are living in the UK. As well as the BPS guidelines, this thesis therefore also drew on advice set out by the ESRC seminar series for 'eliciting views of people seeking asylum' (available as an Appendix to Temple and Moran, 2006). It was important to recognise that the research was conducted by a member of the host community and that this could potentially exacerbate the inevitable power disparities between the researcher and participants. To some extent this was mitigated by the fact that most participants were introduced through trusted intermediaries who presented the research project as a positive

opportunity for their voices to be heard. Furthermore, prior to each interview the research approach and aims were discussed with participants and during the course of this conversation the researcher's position as a member of the host community was raised where appropriate. By explicitly recognising the power dynamics of this relationship and discussing these issues openly, a positive context was established for the interviews.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that in relation to this topic the participant was the expert and the researcher a novice hoping to learn from their experiences. In this way it was hoped that the interview experience would be empowering for participants. Whilst recognising the potential issues attached to this relationship, being a researcher from outside the community may have advantages as well disadvantages (Twine, 2000). For some potential participants there were definitely issues of trust, for example one participant withdrew at short notice as he was concerned that the interview might have a negative impact on his application despite reassurances that it would remain confidential. Conversely, insider status can create its own barriers and there are advantages to being perceived as an independent but sympathetic researcher. As Twine (2000) contends insiders and outsiders generate different knowledge, but one is not necessarily any better than the other. Participants seemed to be comfortable with the interview dynamic and there was no evidence that the researcher's role as an outsider was detrimental to the research process.

A further issue was the potential for the interviews to raise distressing experiences for participants. To minimise this possibility, the interview schedule was devised to avoid the inclusion of questions about participants' reasons for seeking asylum. These types of questions could revive traumatic memories and it would be inappropriate to do so given that this was not the focus of the current research. Furthermore, given the context of mistrust in the UK regarding 'bogus' asylum claims, questions about participants' reasons for coming to the UK could be interpreted as relating to their legitimacy which could have a negative impact both on the well-being of participants and the success of the interview. As this was considered to be an important issue it was included in the recruitment letter so that potential participants were reassured in advance that the interview would focus



solely on their experiences in the UK.

Despite these precautions, it was not possible to control the issues that participants raised themselves and several participants did in fact choose to disclose their reasons for seeking asylum in the UK and discuss the emotional impact that these experiences had. Clearly this was emotionally difficult for some participants and there were clear indicators that they were upset when retelling these experiences. On these occasions participants were provided with the opportunity to talk about their experiences for as long as they wanted but no probing questions were asked by the researcher. At the end of the interview, the researcher remained with participants until their well-being was established. All participants who had been emotional during the course of the interview subsequently reported that they had found the interview experience to be cathartic and that they were happy to have had the opportunity to share their experiences. All interviews were followed up by an email or text in which participants were thanked again for their contribution and the response from participants was unanimously positive.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter described the research design and methodology employed in this thesis to collect and analyse the data on which this thesis is based. Chapters 5-7 will present the results of these findings.

## CHAPTER 5: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR MORAL PANIC

### 5.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter investigates the extent to which the concept of 'moral panic' provides an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers. This is based on the results of a quantitative content analysis of UK media output and a qualitative content analysis of group interviews with members of the host community and individual interviews with people who have sought refuge in the UK.

### 5.2 'MORAL PANIC' IN THE UK MEDIA

As discussed in Chapter 4, a content analysis was applied to 25% of all articles about asylum which appeared in the four top selling UK tabloid newspapers and four top selling UK broadsheets throughout 2006. The coding frame employed was based on Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994a) criteria for moral panic. Six category sets were examined: *Concern*, *counter-concern*, *hostility*, *counter-hostility*, *disproportionality* and *counter-disproportionality*, with each category set specified by secondary codes. The final coding frame appears in Appendix 12, with illustrative examples for each code. Each category set was coded once per article as either absent or present. *Consensus* was measured by comparing the pattern of coding across the different publications. *Volatility* was examined by looking at the pattern of coding for *concern*, *hostility* and *disproportionality* across the year.

#### 5.2.1 Context for media results

To contextualise the media findings and indicate the intensity and focus of press coverage of asylum seekers throughout this period, a list of the main news stories which appeared in the UK press throughout 2006 was compiled (see Appendix 18 for a full list). The key themes of these stories were cost, crime, numbers, control and terrorism. Some sympathetic stories did appear, but these were infrequent and tended to be generated by press releases from charity groups expressing concern about the treatment of asylum seekers in the UK.

The biggest asylum news story of the year was the 'foreigner prisoner scandal', in which the failure by the Home Office to deport foreign prisoners at the end of their



sentences was blamed on the concentration of resources on asylum seekers. This led to a change of Home Secretary and the setting up of a new immigration and nationality agency. Other stories with particularly high levels of coverage were the ‘sex-for-asylum scandal’, in which an immigration officer was alleged to have offered sex to an asylum seeker in exchange for furthering her application; a high profile court ruling on the asylum claim by nine Afghani men who hijacked a plane to the UK in order to seek asylum; coverage of increased support for the BNP in Barking which was attributed to high numbers of asylum seekers in the area; and the trial for the murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky, in which the accused were linked with asylum seekers. In terms of intensity of coverage, there was a noticeable increase throughout April which peaked in May, when more than twice the monthly average number of articles appeared. It was during this period that both the ‘foreign prisoner scandal’ and ‘Afghan plane hijackers’ hit the headlines. February featured the fewest stories, with less than 4% of analysed articles appearing in this month. The Daily Mail and The Daily Express, the two papers with the most anti-asylum editorial position, had the highest level of coverage of the issue, with a total of 70 articles coded in The Daily Mail and 68 in The Daily Express. The lowest number of articles appeared in The Daily Mirror, from which 26 articles were coded, followed by The Daily Telegraph with a total of 34.

### 5.2.2 Summary of media results

A total of 415 articles were coded; 220 from tabloid newspapers and 195 from broadsheet publications. Table 5.1 shows the percentage of articles where codes were present, broken down by newspaper type. Frequencies and percentages for each code and inter-rater reliability indices appear in Appendix 17.

	Concern	Counter-concern	Hostility	Counter hostility	Disproportionality	Counter-disproportionality
Tabloid	74.5% (164)	5.5% (12)	87.3% (192)	2.7% (6)	30.9% (68)	7.3% (16)
Broadsheet	37.9% (74)	27.7% (54)	63.6% (124)	12.8% (25)	6.7% (13)	47.2% (92)
All newspapers sampled	57.3% (238)	15.9% (66)	76.1% (316)	7.5% (31)	19.5% (81)	26% (108)

Table 5.1: Percentages (and frequencies) of articles coded for each category set.

5.2.3 Concern

Articles were coded as indicating *concern* if they included direct expressions of concern about the asylum issue or the impact that asylum seekers are having on the UK, either in editorial terms or in reporting public or government concern, or when explicit attempts were made to elicit concern (for example, through speculation about negative outcomes that ‘may’ happen). Articles were coded as providing evidence for *counter-concern* if they argued that the asylum issue is not a problem, if they expressed concern on behalf of asylum seekers, if they made explicit attempts to elicit a more moderate response from readers or if they indicated that this is not an issue of concern for the general public and/or the government.

Table 5.1 shows that over half of the total number of articles analysed were coded as expressing *concern*. However there was a difference in newspaper type, with just under three quarters of articles from tabloid publications coded for *concern* in comparison with less than half of the sample of broadsheet newspapers. This table also shows that there were four times as many articles coded as indicating *concern* as *counter-concern*. This disparity was particularly marked in the tabloid press, with only 5.5% of articles coded for *counter-concern* in comparison to 74.5% of articles which expressed *concern*. The coverage in broadsheet papers was more balanced, although there were still more articles that indicated *concern* than articles which countered it.

To assess the balance of evidence for *concern*, the co-occurrences of *concern* and *counter-concern* codes were also examined. These figures appear in Table 5.2:

		Counter-concern		
		Absent	Present	
Concern	Absent	120 (67.8%)	57 (32.2%)	177 (100%)
	Present	229 (96.2%)	9 (3.8%)	238 (100%)
				Total articles: 415

Table 5.2: Crosstabulation for concern and counter-concern showing frequencies of articles coded (and row percentages)



The pattern of co-occurrences indicates that on most occasions when *concern* was expressed this was not countered. This suggests that very few articles were presenting a balanced view – they tended to either frame the issue as a matter of concern or not, and in most cases adopted the former position. Of the 238 articles that indicated *concern*, only 9 provided a counter argument. Seven of these articles appeared in The Guardian and The Independent, which are reputed for being more positive in their coverage of asylum but also have the lowest readership in the sample. The other two articles appeared in The Sun and The Daily Mail: The Sun article was a column by the former Home Secretary David Blunkett discussing public concern but highlighting the drop in asylum figures over the past two and a half years and the need for compassion. The Daily Mail article discussed the British National Party campaign in Barking, London, reporting concerns of both politicians and local residents but also explicitly stating that the “perennial claim” that local people are automatically overlooked in favour of asylum seekers for housing and other services is untrue.

Figure 5.1 shows the pattern of *concern* and *counter-concern* codes on a month by month basis.

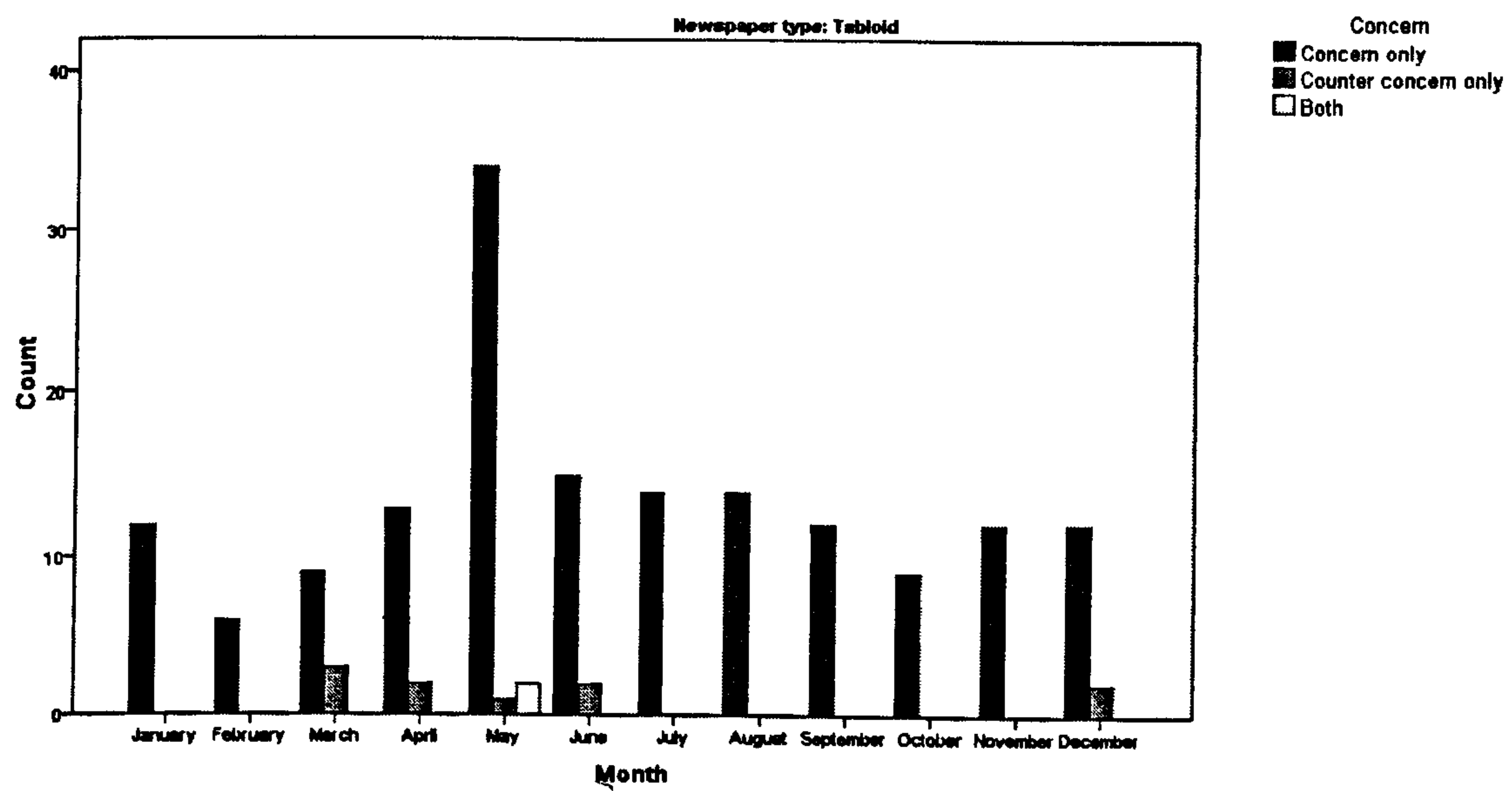


Figure 5.1: Number of articles coded for ‘concern’ only, ‘counter-concern’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for tabloids

This figure clearly shows that, with the exception of a marked spike in May (when 22% of the total concern codes appeared), there was a consistent level of concern expressed in tabloid publications across the year. It is unsurprising that *concern* peaked in May, given that there was substantially more press coverage of the issue during this month prompted by the ‘foreign prisoner scandal’ and the Afghan plan hijacking. Although more articles were also coded as indicating a *counter-concern* response during this period than throughout the rest of the year, there were still only three tabloid articles coded for *counter-concern* during May in comparison with thirty-six articles which expressed *concern*. Therefore during the period in which most concern was raised about this issue, there was very little content in the tabloid press to counter this.

Figure 5.2 shows the pattern of *concern* and *counter-concern* codes for broadsheet publications on a month by month basis.

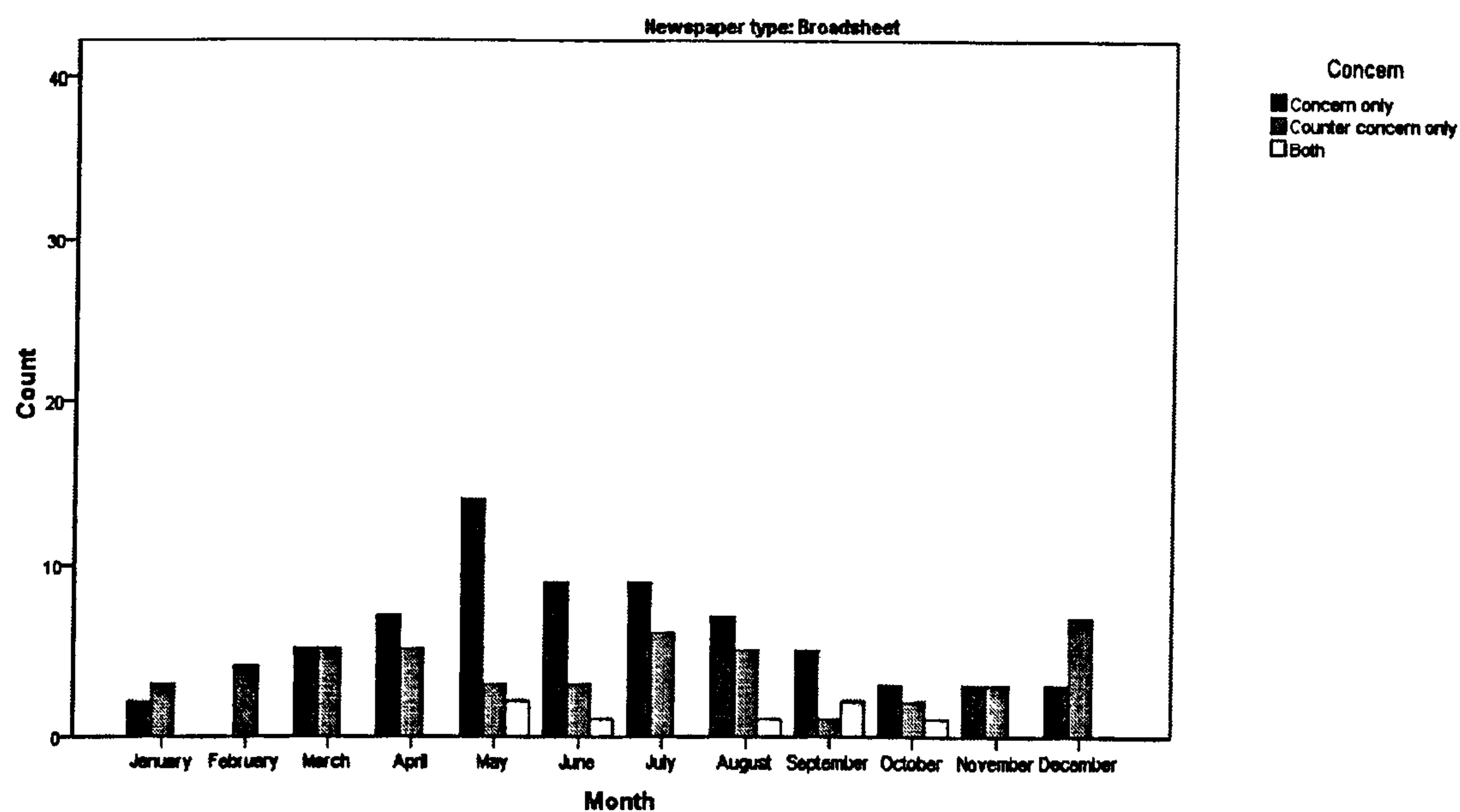


Figure 5.2: Number of articles coded for ‘concern’ only, ‘counter-concern’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for broadsheets

Figure 5.2 shows lower levels of *concern* in broadsheets than in tabloids and that broadsheet coverage was generally more balanced. As in tabloids, the majority of *concern* was expressed in May following the ‘foreign prisoner scandal’ (21.6% of the total *concern* codes appeared in this month). It is notable that this spike in *concern*



was not accompanied by an equivalent increase in *counter-concern*; in fact May provided one of the lowest levels of *counter-concern*, with only 5 articles coded this way in comparison to 16 articles coded for *concern*. All articles that indicated counter-concern appeared in The Guardian and The Independent. Therefore during the most intensive negative newspaper coverage of this issue there was very little even in broadsheets to balance this view.

In summary, these results show that tabloid articles were consistently coded as demonstrating high levels of *concern* and that this was rarely countered. This suggests that tabloid coverage of asylum meets the criterion of *concern*. Broadsheet coverage was more varied and included more instances in which *concern* was countered. However there was still more *concern* than *counter-concern* in broadsheet articles.

#### 5.2.4 Hostility

Articles were coded as indicating *hostility* if they described asylum seekers in terms which suggested that they posed a threat to shared values or interests. This included articles that represented asylum seekers as criminal or deviant and those which suggested that asylum seekers were having a negative impact on UK residents in terms of competition for and unfair access to resources. It also included the use of negative stereotypes like 'bogus asylum seekers', the interchangeable use of 'asylum seeker' and 'illegal immigrants' and the use of inaccurate negative terminology like 'illegal asylum seeker'. Articles were coded as indicating *counter-hostility* if they included positive representations of asylum seekers, if they included descriptions which indicated that asylum seekers share UK values or interests and if they reported public and/or government responses to asylum seekers in positive terms. As for *concern*, articles were coded for editorial opinion as well as for the newspapers' representations of public and government hostility.

The figures presented in Table 5.1 show that the majority of articles analysed contained evidence of *hostility*, with just over three quarters of the overall sample coded this way. *Hostility* was the most frequently applied code and the least countered; there were more than ten times as many instances of *hostility* recorded as *counter-hostility*. Of the 220 tabloid articles analysed, 192 were coded as

indicating *hostility* and only 6 for *counter-hostility*. As such, the tabloid press provided almost uninterrupted hostile coverage of this issue. There were more instances of *counter-hostility* in broadsheets, but there were still five times as many articles coded for *hostility* as *counter-hostility* in the broadsheet sample. Table 5.3 shows the co-occurrences of *hostility* and *counter-hostility* codes:

		Counter-hostility		
		Absent	Present	
Hostility	Absent	84 (84.8%)	15 (15.2%)	99 (100%)
	Present	300 (94.9%)	16 (5.1%)	316 (100%)
Total articles: 415				

Table 5.3: Crosstabulation for hostility and counter-hostility showing frequencies of articles coded (and row percentages)

The pattern of co-occurrences shows that *hostility* was not countered in the vast majority of articles. Of the 316 articles that were coded as indicating *hostility* only 16 also contained content that countered this view. Thirteen of the 16 articles appeared in The Guardian or The Independent, 2 were in The Daily Mail and 1 was in The Daily Telegraph. Therefore in the three top selling tabloid newspapers there were no instances of *hostility* which were directly countered within the same article. Figure 5.3 shows the pattern of *hostility* and *counter-hostility* codes on a month by month basis.

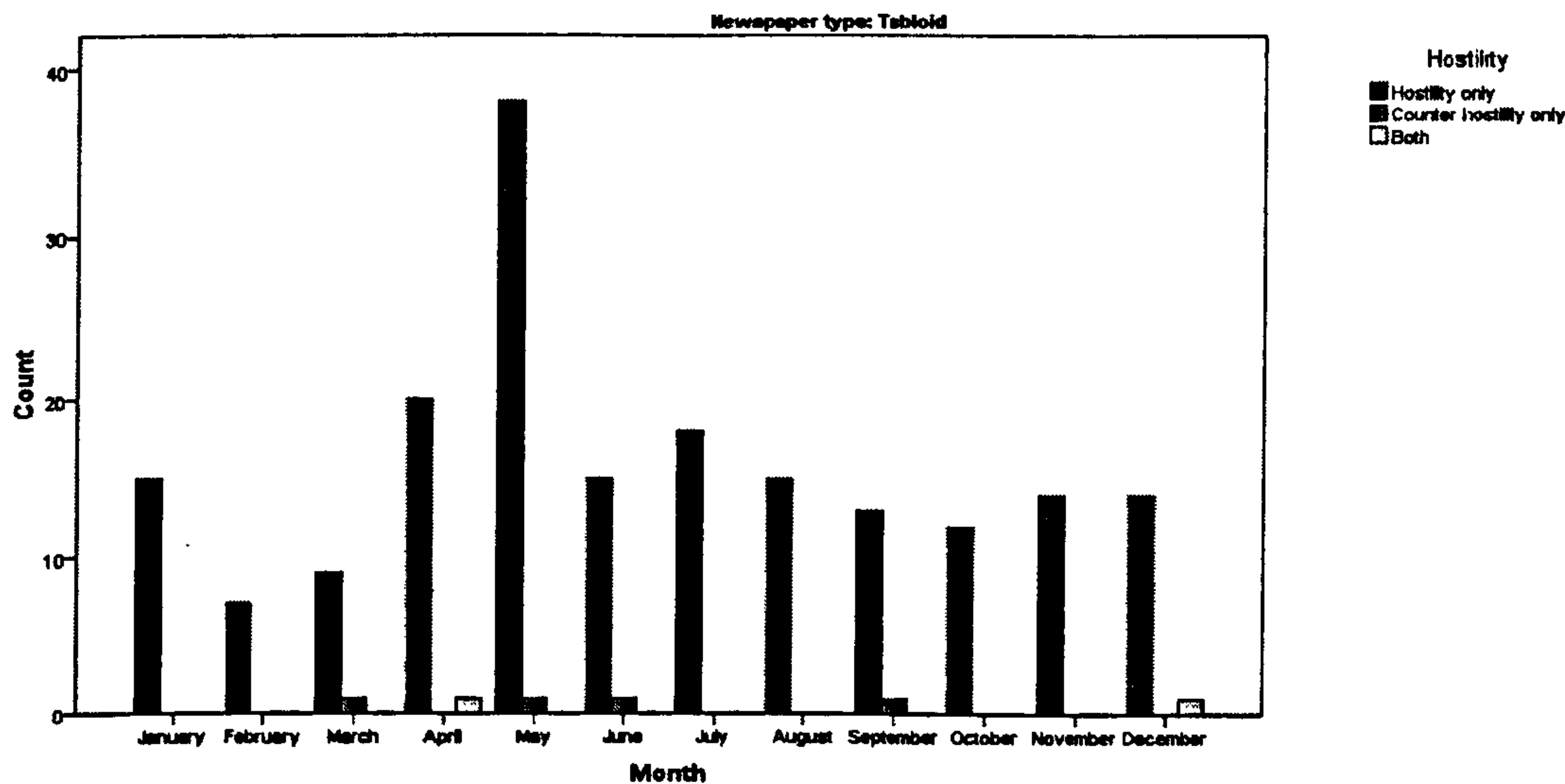


Figure 5.3: Number of articles coded for 'hostility' only, 'counter-hostility' only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for tabloids



As for *concern*, there was an expected peak in articles coded for *hostility* in May, with 19.8% of all tabloid articles coded as demonstrating *hostility* falling in this month, and a slight drop in February when the fewest articles appeared. This graph clearly illustrates the lack of *counter-hostility* in tabloid publications and demonstrates that *hostility* was a consistent feature of tabloid coverage.

Figure 5.4 shows the pattern of *hostility* and *counter-hostility* codes for broadsheet publications on a month by month basis:

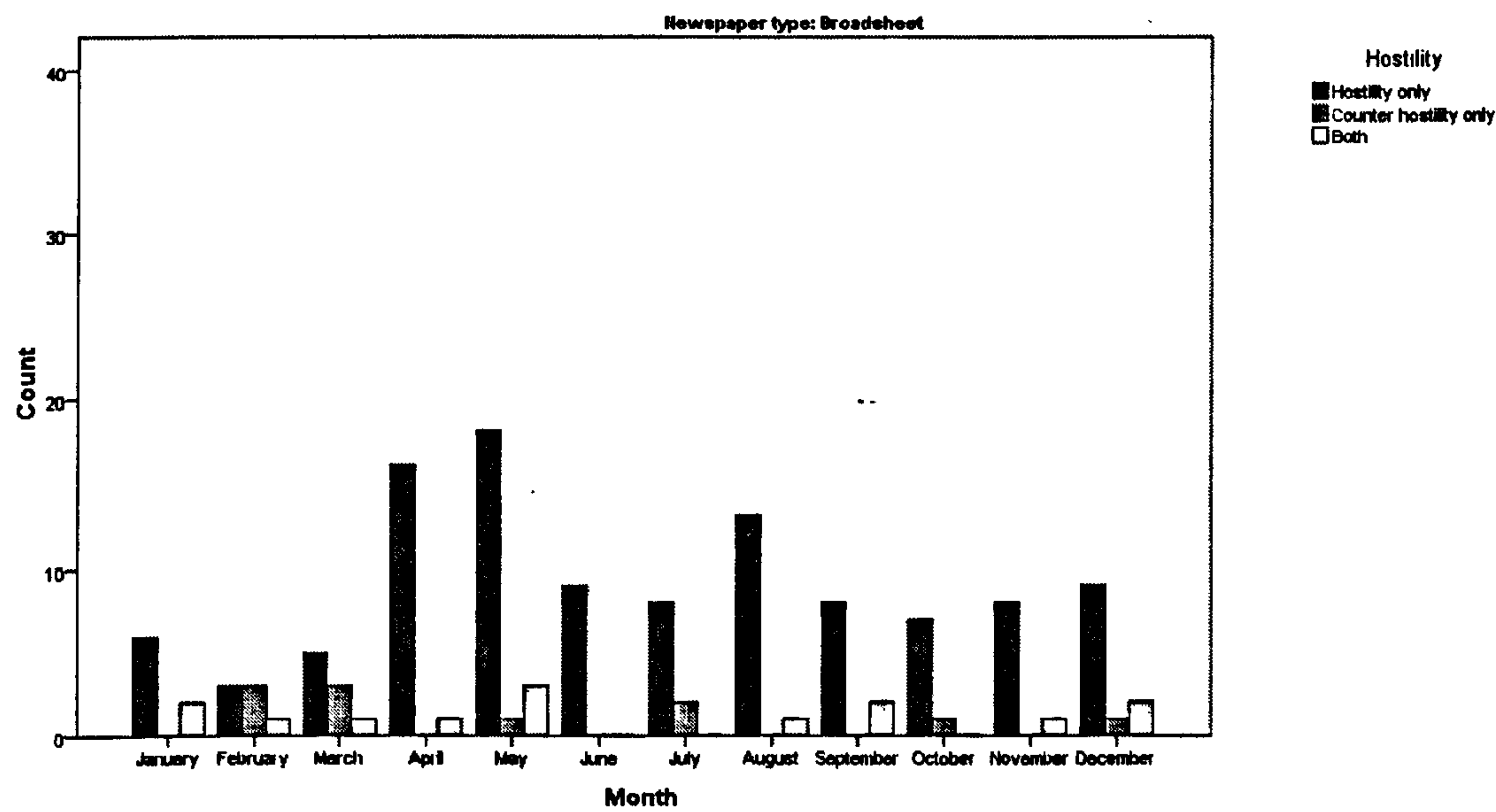


Figure 5.4: Number of articles coded for ‘hostility’ only, ‘counter-hostility’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for broadsheets

Figure 5.4 shows lower levels of *hostility* in broadsheets, but that the coding follows a similar pattern to tabloid coverage with a peak in articles coded for *hostility* in April and May. May also included the highest instance of articles which countered *hostility*, but there were still only 4 broadsheet articles that were coded for *counter-hostility* during this month in comparison with 21 which contained evidence of *hostility*. All articles that countered *hostility* appeared in The Guardian and The Independent.

In summary, these results show that a large percentage of articles in both newspaper types were coded for *hostility* and that there were particularly high levels of *hostility* in tabloid coverage. Furthermore there were low levels of *counter-hostility*

in both tabloids and broadsheets, with particularly low levels in tabloids. This indicates that the criterion of *hostility* was met in both newspaper types.

### 5.2.5 Disproportionality

Articles were coded for *disproportionality* if they contained descriptions that would be likely to create an exaggerated sense of the size of the negative impact of asylum seekers in relation to 'objective' measures of harm. For example, articles that made statements based on extrapolations from limited or peak statistics and those that presented asylum seekers as having an 'enormous' impact on the UK. Articles were coded as indicating *counter-disproportionality* if they provided proportionate coverage of the issue, as evidenced by a 'neutral' editorial stance in which the facts of the situation were stated in a non-sensationalist style and where both positive and negative arguments were given equal weight. It also included articles which expressed concern about disproportionate coverage in other publications or disproportionate responses by the government and/or the public.

*Disproportionality* was by far the least frequently applied moral panic code, with only 19.5% of all articles analysed coded this way in comparison with 57.3% for *concern* and 76.1% for *hostility*. When examining the overall sample, there was little evidence to suggest the criterion of *disproportionality* was met, with figures presented in Table 5.1 indicating that there were actually more instances of proportionate than disproportionate coverage in the sample. However, when considering tabloids and broadsheets separately, there was some support for the criterion of *disproportionality* in the tabloid press, with more than four times as many articles coded for this than its counter code in the tabloid sample. However *disproportionality* was still coded in less than a third of all tabloid articles that were analysed and the majority of tabloid coverage was therefore not consistent with this criterion. There were very few instances of *disproportionality* in the broadsheet sample, with only 6.7% of articles coded this way.

Figure 5.5 shows the pattern of disproportionality codes for tabloid publications on a month by month basis.



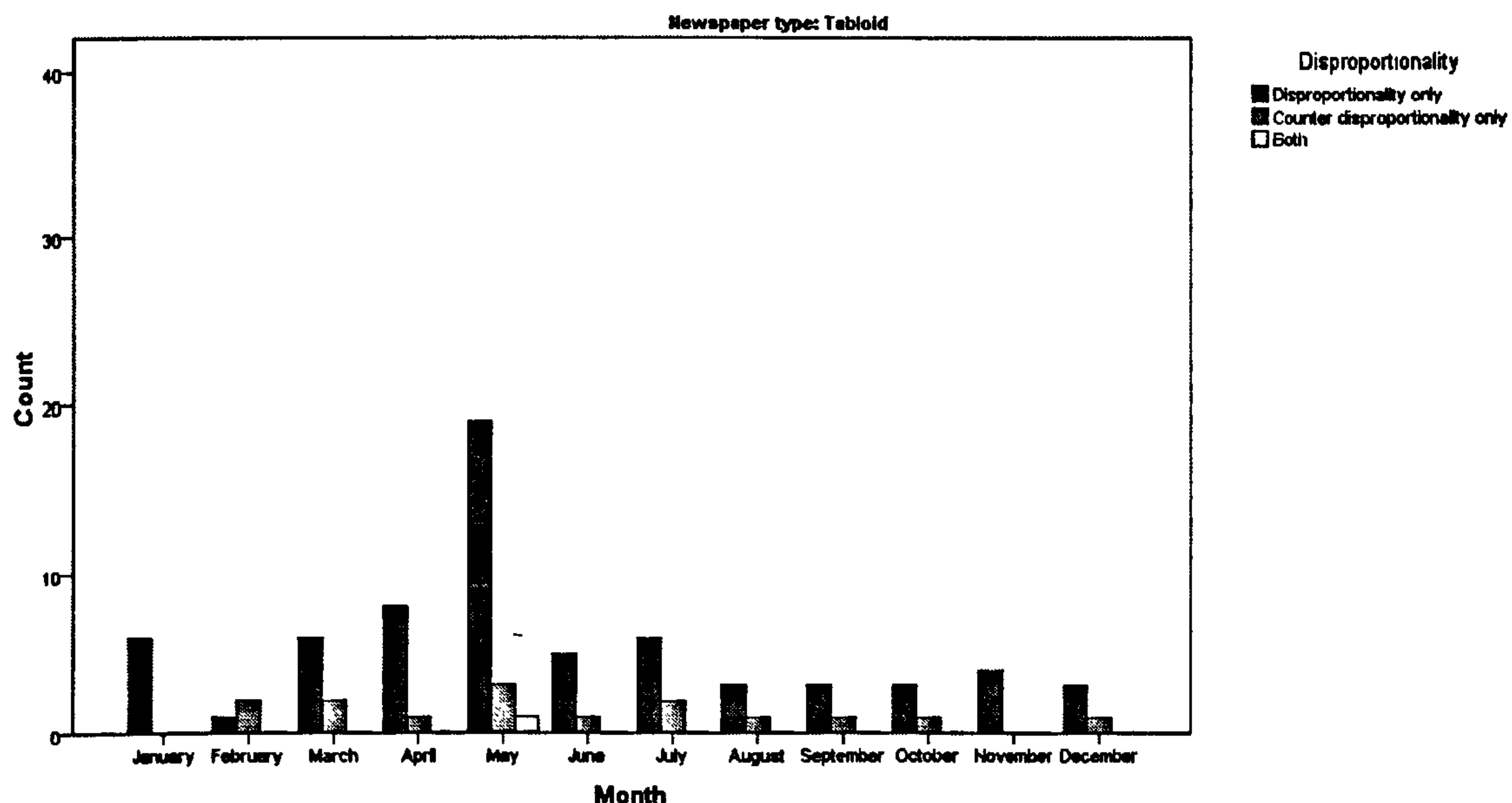


Figure 5.5: Number of articles coded for 'disproportionality' only, 'counter-disproportionality' only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for tabloids

The highest number of articles coded for *disproportionality* appeared during May when negative focus on this issue increased and the least appeared in February when fewer articles on this topic were published. Apart from these expected fluctuations, the level of *disproportionality* was relatively consistent across the year. During the more intense period of coverage in May there was a slight increase in the number of articles coded as indicating *counter-disproportionality*, but this was not as sharp as the rise in number of articles that were coded for *disproportionality*, and for the 20 tabloid articles coded for *disproportionality* there were only 4 that indicated *counter-disproportionality*. It is also apparent from Figure 5.5 that, contrary to expectation, there was one instance in which the two codes co-occurred. This was in The Daily Mail article described in 5.2.2 above that reported increased support for The British National Party in Barking, London. The article included quotations from the public which indicated a disproportionate public response, but the overall tone of the article was balanced.

Figure 5.6 shows the pattern of disproportionality codes for broadsheet publications on a month by month basis.

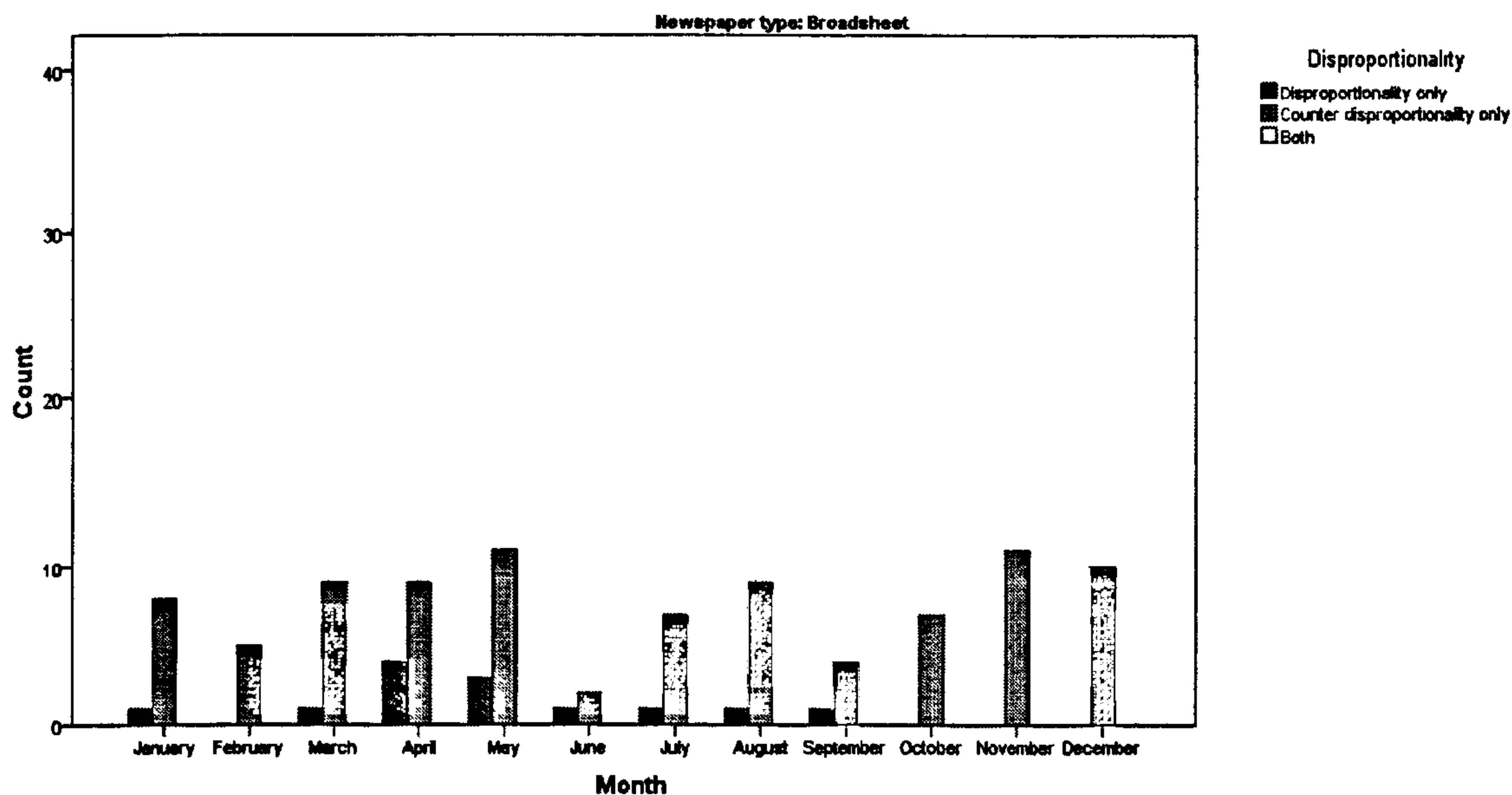


Figure 5.6: Number of articles coded for 'disproportionality' only, 'counter-disproportionality' only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for broadsheets

It can be seen from Figure 5.6 that broadsheets were consistently more proportionate than disproportionate in their coverage of this issue across the year. There was an increase in *disproportionality* during April when broadsheet coverage focused on increased BNP support in local elections, but even at this time there was more proportionate than disproportionate coverage in broadsheet publications and only four articles were coded as indicating *disproportionality* at this time.

In summary, these results show more *disproportionality* than *counter-disproportionality* in tabloid coverage of asylum although overall levels of *disproportionality* were not particularly high. There was very little evidence for *disproportionality* in broadsheet coverage, with a larger percentage of articles coded for *counter-disproportionality* in this sample. There was therefore limited support for the criterion of *disproportionality* in the tabloid sample, but no evidence to indicate that this criterion was met in the broadsheet sample.

### 5.2.6 Consensus

The extent to which there was *consensus* in the coverage of asylum was established by looking across publications at the pattern of coding for *concern*, *hostility*, and *disproportionality*. Table 5.3 shows the percentage of articles where codes were present for each newspaper sampled:



	Concern	Counter concern	Hostility	Counter Hostility	Disproportionality	Counter Disproportionality
The Sun	66.1% (37)	3.6% (2)	87.5% (49)	1.8% (1)	26.8% (15)	3.6% (2)
The Daily Mirror	42.3% (11)	15.4% (4)	73.1% (19)	3.8% (1)	11.5% (3)	34.6% (9)
The Daily Express	83.8% (57)	2.9% (2)	88.2% (60)	2.9% (2)	32.4% (22)	1.5% (1)
The Daily Mail	84.3% (59)	5.7% (4)	91.4% (64)	2.9% (2)	40% (28)	5.7% (4)
The Times	36.5% (19)	13.5% (7)	71.2% (37)	1.9% (1)	9.6% (5)	32.7% (17)
The Daily Telegraph	73.5% (25)	8.8% (3)	73.5% (25)	5.9% (2)	20.6% (7)	26.5% (9)
The Guardian	25.4% (16)	38.1% (24)	55.6% (35)	15.9% (10)	1.6% (1)	66.7% (42)
The Independent	30.4% (14)	43.5% (20)	58.7% (27)	26.1% (12)	0% (0)	52.2% (24)

**Table 5.4: Percentages (and frequencies) of articles that were given moral panic codes, by publication**

The figures in Table 5.3 show a high level of *concern* in articles from The Sun, The Daily Express, The Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph with very little countering in these publications. The Guardian and The Independent were the only two newspapers where more *counter-concern* codes were applied than *concern* codes. The Times and The Daily Mirror had lower levels of *concern* than the other tabloids and The Daily Telegraph, but also had lower levels of *counter-concern* than The Guardian and The Independent. There was therefore *consensus* for *concern* amongst the tabloid newspapers sampled, but less *consensus* in the broadsheet sample.

In every publication, including those that were comparatively more positive about the issue, more than 50% of articles were coded for *hostility*, rising to 91.4% for The Daily Mail. The Guardian and The Independent contained the highest percentage of

*counter-hostility* codes, but there were no publications where *counter-hostility* was more prevalent than *hostility*. This demonstrates consistently negative UK press coverage of this issue and a high level of *consensus* in relation to the criterion of *hostility*.

There was less *consensus* for *disproportionality* than for the other two criteria. The Sun, The Daily Express, The Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph had the highest percentage of articles coded this way, but these figures still represent less than a third of the output from these publications. Furthermore, The Daily Telegraph had more articles coded for *counter-disproportionality* than *disproportionality*. This was in line with the general trend for broadsheet publications, all of which were coded more frequently for *counter-disproportionality* than *disproportionality*. This was particularly marked for The Guardian and The Independent, with *counter-disproportionality* coded in more than 50% of articles for both these publications. In contrast, no Independent articles were coded as disproportionate and only one Guardian article was coded in this way. There is therefore no evidence to suggest that there was *consensus* in *disproportionality* in this sample.

### 5.2.7 Volatility

The extent to which there was *volatility* in the coverage of asylum was established by looking at the pattern of coding for *concern*, *hostility* and *disproportionality* across the year. As discussed above, there was a sharp increase in the amount of negative coverage of asylum during May following the 'foreign prisoner scandal', which was reflected in the higher numbers of articles coded for *concern*, *hostility* and *disproportionality* at this time (presented in figures 5.1 to 5.6 above). Having established that there was more moral panic content at this time, the percentage of articles coded this way were also examined to see if increased coding simply reflected the higher number of articles at this time or if there was also a higher proportion of articles that met moral panic criteria. If this period of more intense focus was accompanied by an increase in the percentage of articles with moral panic content this would provide good evidence that the criterion of *volatility* had been met.



Figure 5.7 shows the percentage of tabloid articles coded as indicating *concern* only, *counter-concern* only and both codes across the year:

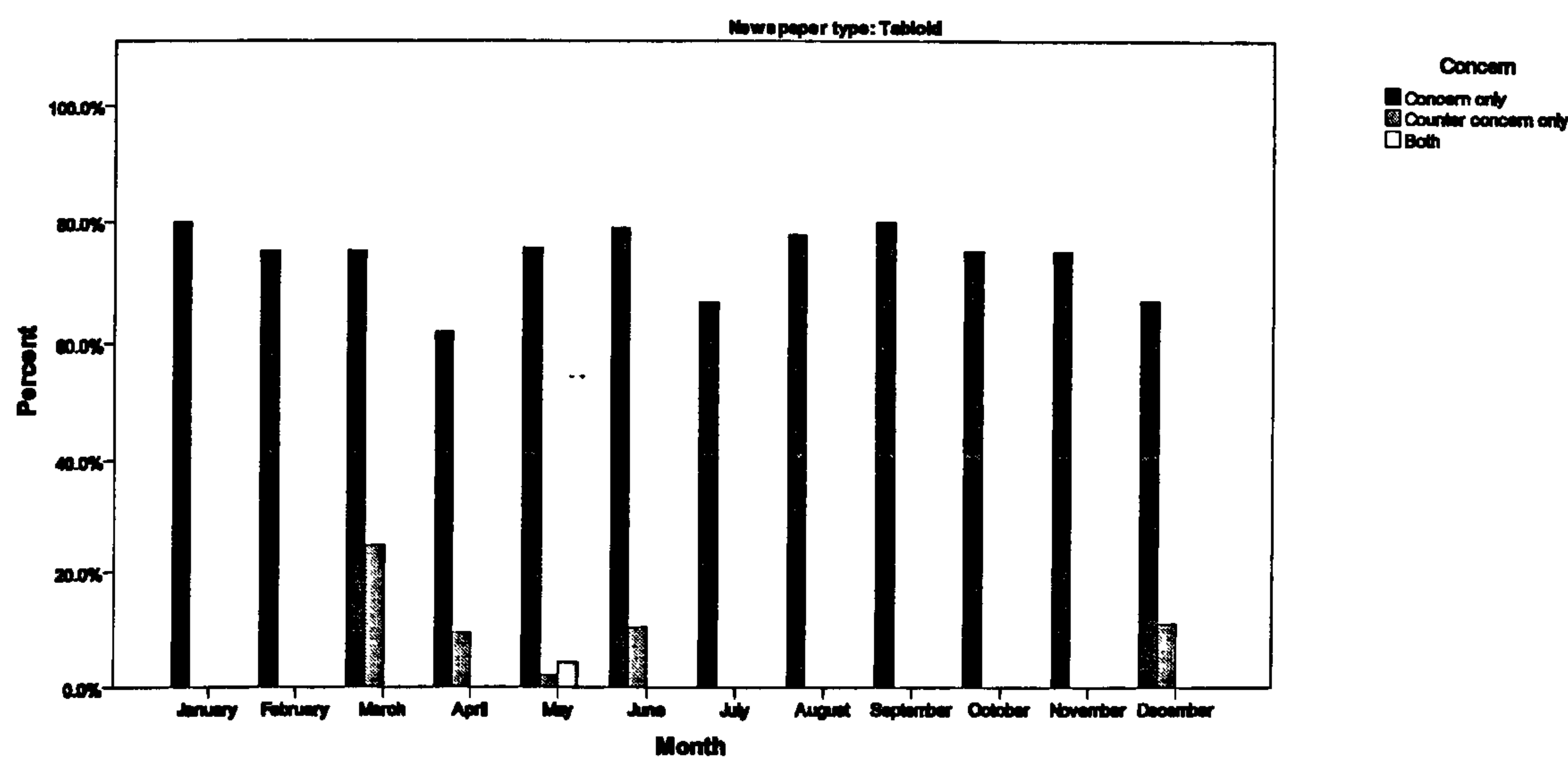


Figure 5.7: Percentage of articles coded for ‘concern’ only, ‘counter-concern’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for tabloids

This figure shows that tabloids consistently expressed high levels of *concern* across the year and there was not proportionately more coverage consistent with moral panic during the period when there was more intense focus on this issue. This suggests that *concern* is a general feature of tabloid reporting of this issue.

Figure 5.8 shows the percentage of broadsheet articles coded as indicating *concern* only, *counter-concern* only and both codes across the year:

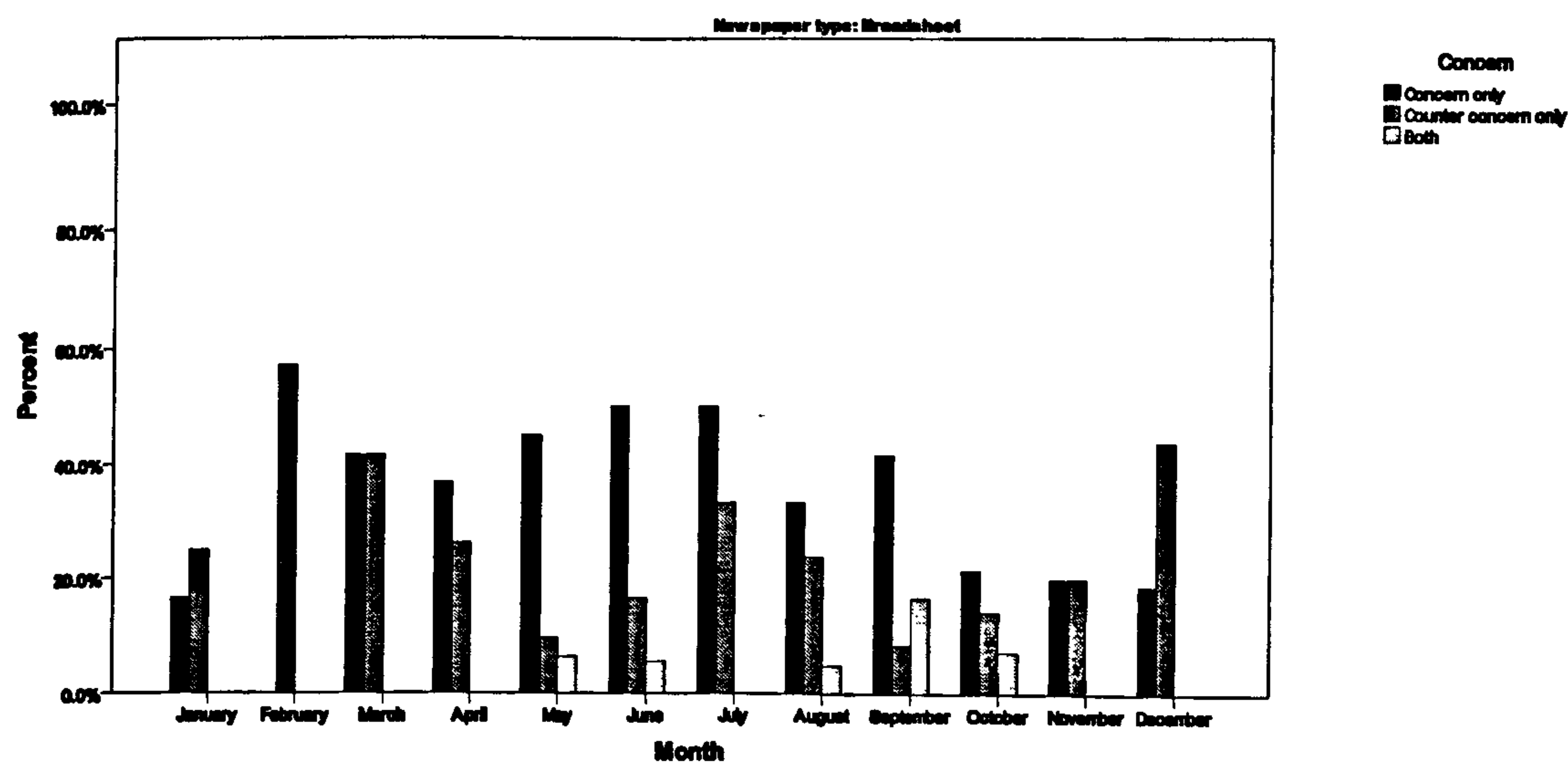


Figure 5.8: Percentage of articles coded for ‘concern’ only, ‘counter-concern’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for broadsheets

This figure shows more variation across the year in the percentage of broadsheet articles coded as expressing *concern*, with the largest proportion of articles indicating *concern* during the middle period of the year. This suggests that there was increased *concern* in broadsheet newspapers following the ‘foreign prisoner scandal’. There was therefore more *consensus* for *concern* during this period which lends support to the suggestion that there was a moral panic response to the ‘foreign prisoner scandal’.

Figure 5.9 shows the percentage of tabloid articles coded as indicating *hostility* only, *counter-hostility* only and both codes across the year:

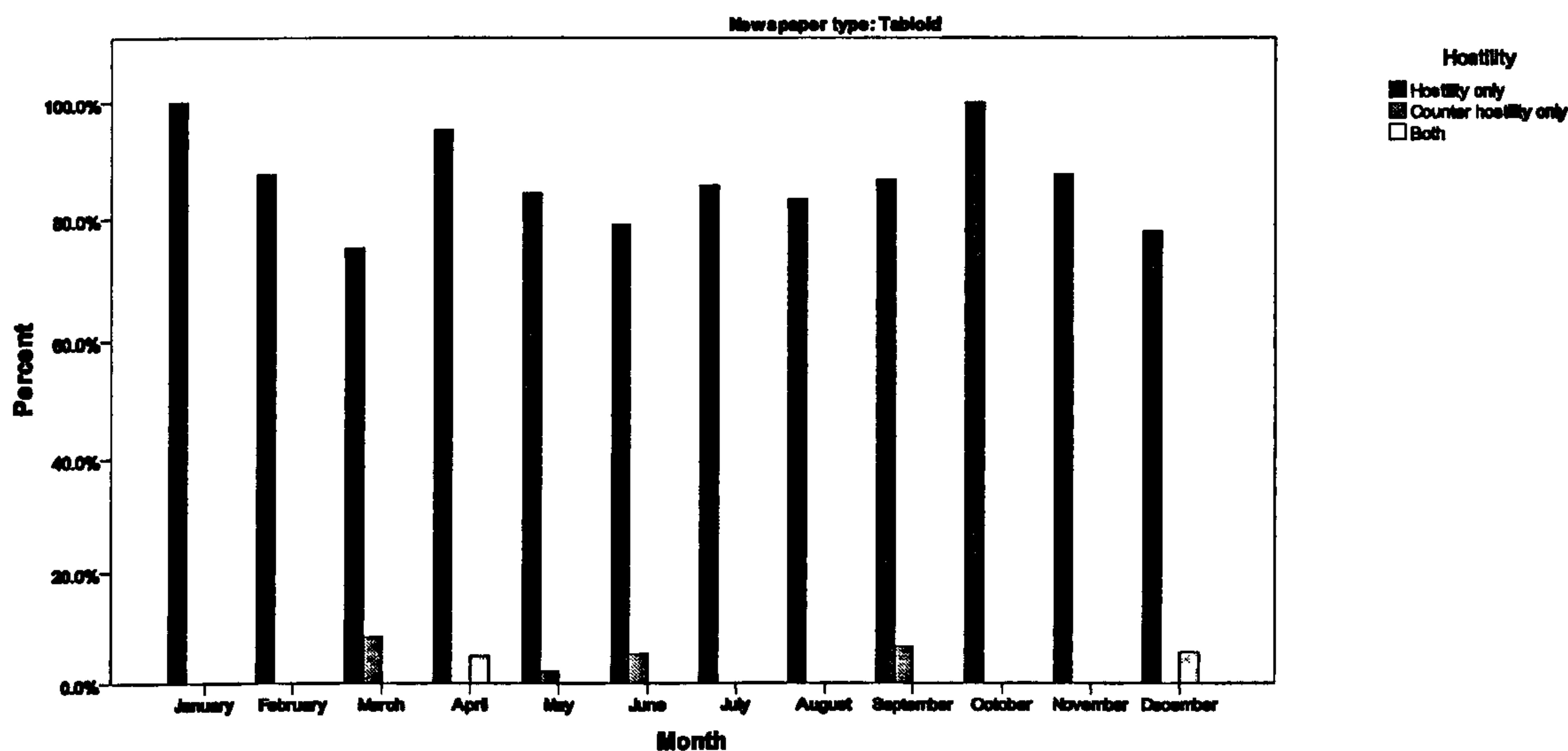


Figure 5.9: Percentage of articles coded for ‘hostility’ only, ‘counter-hostility’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for tabloids

As with *concern*, this figure indicates consistently high levels of *hostility* in tabloid coverage across the year. The heightened focus on asylum in May was therefore not accompanied by an increase in the percentage of articles coded for *hostility*. This suggests that *hostility* was also a consistent feature of tabloid coverage of asylum.

Figure 5.10 shows the percentage of broadsheet articles coded as indicating *hostility* only, *counter-hostility* only and both codes across the year:



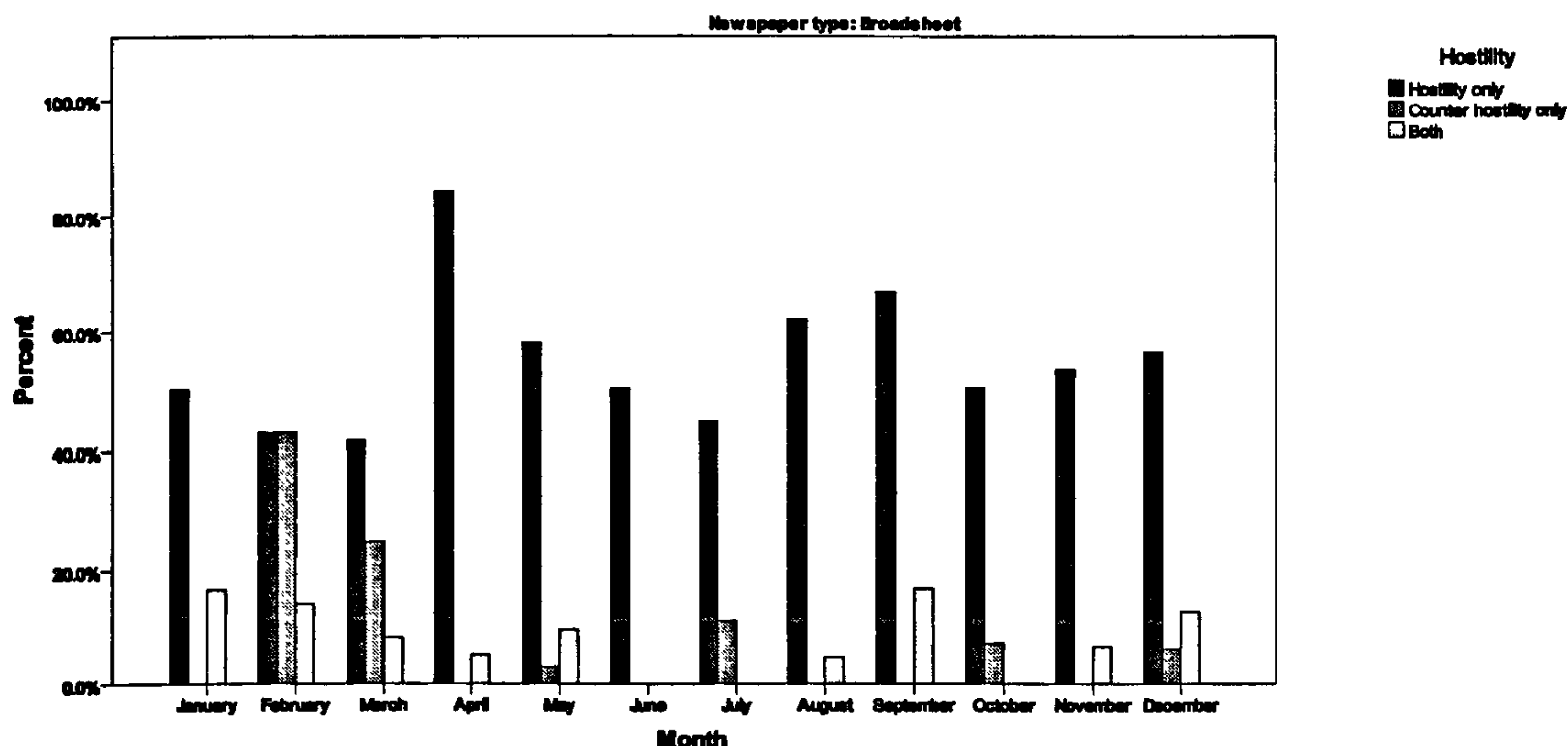


Figure 5.10: Percentage of articles coded for 'hostility' only, 'counter-hostility' only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for broadsheets

As with *concern* there was much more variation in the percentage of broadsheet articles coded as indicating *hostility*. In broadsheet coverage the percentage of articles coded for *hostility* peaked in April. This increase was due to coverage of support for the British National Party in local elections and therefore reflected reporting of public hostility rather than increased hostility in the way that the broadsheet newspapers were covering the issue. There was no evidence to suggest that there was increased *hostility* in broadsheet coverage of asylum in the wake of the 'foreign prisoner scandal'. Figure 5.11 shows the percentage of tabloid articles coded as indicating *disproportionality* only, *counter-disproportionality* only and both codes across the year:

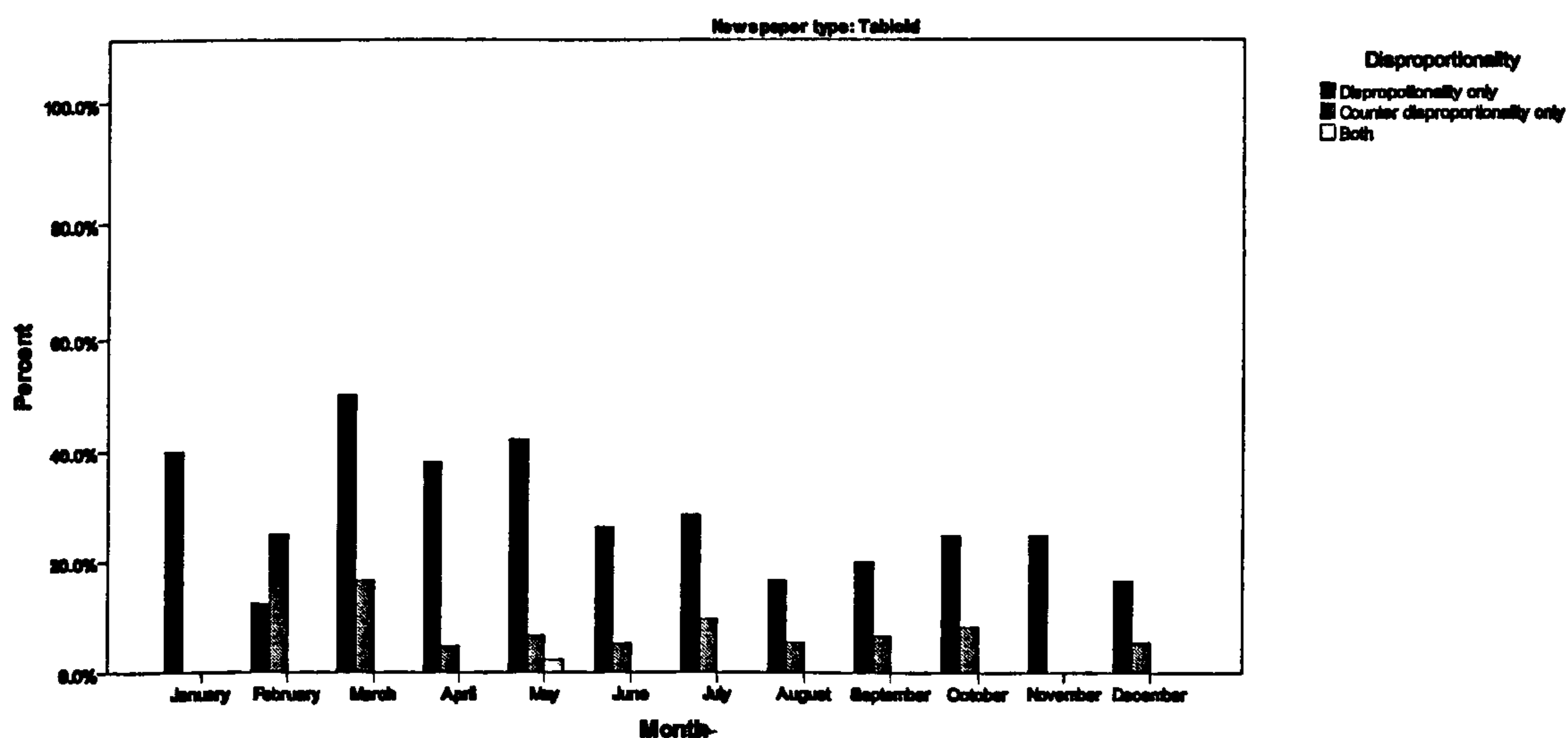


Figure 5.11: Percentage of articles coded for 'disproportionality' only, 'counter-disproportionality' only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for tabloids

This figure shows more variation in *disproportionality* in tabloid publications across the year than for *concern* or *hostility*, with most articles coded for *disproportionality* appearing in the early part of the year. This is due to the nature of the stories that featured during this period, which focused on numbers of asylum seekers and payments that were being offered to encourage asylum seekers to leave the UK. These types of stories featured statistics that could be examined in relation to ‘objective’ measures. *Disproportionality* was also evident in tabloid coverage of the ‘foreign prisoner scandal’, with half of the articles coded for *disproportionality* during May focusing on this story.

Figure 5.12 shows the percentage of broadsheet articles coded as indicating *disproportionality* only, *counter-disproportionality* only and both codes across the year:

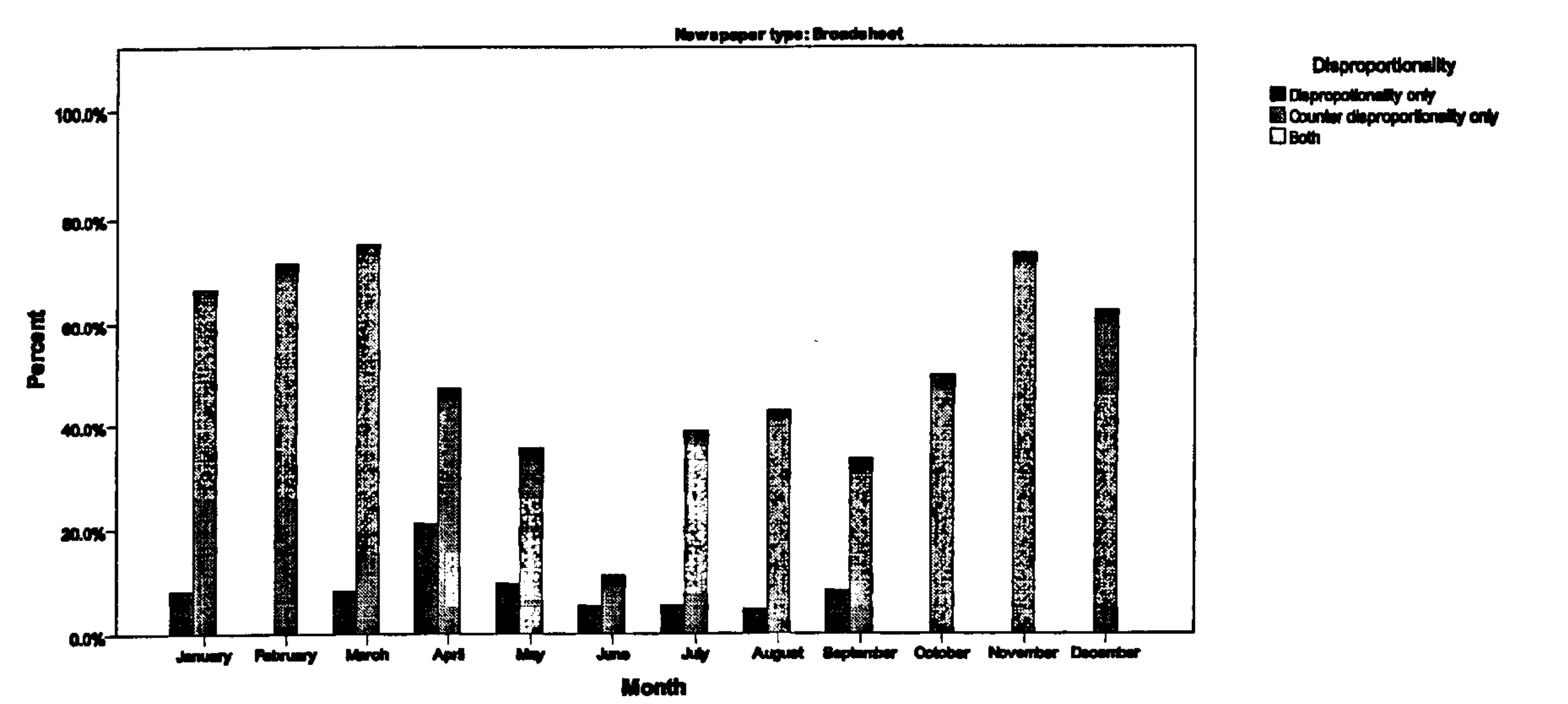


Figure 5.12: Percentage of articles coded for ‘disproportionality’ only, ‘counter-disproportionality’ only and articles where both codes were applied, shown on a month by month basis for broadsheets

As with *hostility* this figure shows a peak in broadsheet articles coded for *disproportionality* during April. However there were only 3 articles coded for *disproportionality* in comparison with 11 coded for *counter-disproportionality* so this does not indicate *disproportionality* in broadsheet coverage at this time.

In summary, these results suggest that although there was an increase in the number of articles coded as indicating moral panic during May, the only change in



the style of media reporting at this time was increased levels of *concern* in broadsheet coverage. As this *concern* was not accompanied by increased *hostility*, and broadsheet coverage was still coded as indicating more *counter-disproportionality* than *disproportionality* there is no evidence for a moral panic response to the 'foreign prisoner scandal' in broadsheet newspapers. There was evidence for a moral panic response to this story in tabloid coverage, as all three criteria were met during this period. However, although there were higher numbers of articles consistent with moral panic during this period, there was no equivalent increase in the proportion of articles coded for moral panic criteria. This indicates that there was *volatility* in tabloid coverage in relation to intensity of focus but that the *hostility* generated during a moral panic episode does not simply subside once the episode is resolved.

#### **5.2.8 Examining the evidence of a moral panic response in the media**

Although some moral panic criteria were clearly met in this sample, for others the evidence was less conclusive. With regards to *concern*, there was compelling evidence that tabloid coverage could be classified in this way, but less evidence in relation to broadsheet coverage. Distinctions between tabloid and broadsheet coverage were also apparent in relation to *hostility*. As with *concern*, there was good evidence for *hostility* in tabloid coverage. However, whilst there was more evidence for *hostility* than *concern* in broadsheet publications, with the exception of The Daily Telegraph, broadsheet articles were very rarely coded as expressing direct hostility. Instead they were far more frequently coded as reporting political and public hostility towards asylum seekers. Whilst this suggests a wider societal response which is consistent with a moral panic, this does not indicate that broadsheet papers are hostile in their coverage of asylum seekers.

Of the three criteria that were directly coded, there was the least support for *disproportionality*. However to some extent it is unsurprising that this criterion was not met. As noted in Chapter 1, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) issued a guidance note in 2003 in response to concerns regarding the inaccuracy of press reporting of asylum, with a view to encouraging more balanced coverage of the issue (PCC 2003). The lack of evidence for *disproportionality* in this sample may therefore simply reflect the success of this measure. The fact that there was some

evidence of *disproportionality* in tabloid coverage of this issue, but the majority of articles did not meet this criterion, is consistent with ICAR's (2007) assessment of the impact of the PCC guidelines, which found an overall reduction in inaccurate coverage but that higher circulation publications continued to be less balanced in their reporting of the issue. As with *concern* and *hostility* it also suggests that moral panic codes are reflecting a general difference in tabloid and broadsheet reporting style.

Whilst the PCC guidance note may be able to account for the fact that newspaper coverage of the asylum issue has become more proportionate in terms of the content that is presented, this does not necessarily mean that the level of media focus on this issue is proportionate. It could be argued, for example, that if asylum seekers are not having much direct impact on the lives of the average UK citizen that the continual reporting of the issue may give the impression that they pose more of a problem than would be suggested by 'objective' measures. However, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate this empirically, as there is no objective measure of what would constitute a 'reasonable amount' of press coverage of this issue. The current sample indicates that there has been a reduction in coverage of asylum in the newspapers in comparison to earlier research. So, whilst Kushner (2003) found 600 articles in The Daily Express across a six month period in 2002/3, this research found 290 articles across the whole year. However, throughout 2006, there was still on average just under one article per newspaper per day which focused on this issue, which indicates that coverage has remained fairly constant since ICAR (2007) measured it in 2005. Asylum therefore continues to feature prominently in the UK press, but the difficulty in establishing whether this level of focus is proportionate or not suggests that it may not be possible to empirically demonstrate whether this criterion has been met.

There was a period of particularly intense focus on the asylum issue following the 'foreign prisoner scandal' in May and during this period the public would have been exposed to more articles with moral panic content, particularly in tabloid reporting of this story. This lends support for the criterion of *volatility*. However, examination of the proportion of articles coded for moral panic revealed there was no increase in the percentage of articles coded as indicating *concern* and *hostility* in tabloid articles



at this time. Whilst this suggests consistency in the style of tabloid reporting of asylum seekers this does not preclude *volatility*. As discussed in Chapter 2, Weeks' (1993) analysis of AIDS coverage suggests that intensity of focus may be used to differentiate a moral panic response to new pieces of information from ongoing hostility. Therefore, despite consistent hostility towards asylum seekers in tabloid reporting throughout 2006 it can be argued that it was only during the period following the 'foreign prisoner scandal' that there was sufficient intensity of focus for this response to be classified as a moral panic. There was some evidence of *volatility* in broadsheet coverage of the issue in so far as *concern* peaked following the 'foreign prisoner scandal'. However, the fact that this *concern* did not translate into *hostility* and there was no evidence for *disproportionality* at this time suggests that the broadsheet response to this story was not consistent with a moral panic.

One of the key features of this analysis is the relative paucity of evidence of counter moral panic material in the UK national press. This lends support for the argument that press coverage indicates a moral panic response as it suggests that the vast majority of *hostility* and *concern* expressed or reported in the press is not contested. The two newspapers that consistently countered this trend were The Guardian and The Independent. However, as these newspapers have the lowest circulation figures of the publications sampled, it seems unlikely that this would be sufficient to off-set the moral panic message conveyed by the higher selling publications. When considering just the tabloid press (i.e. the four top selling national daily newspapers in the UK), there is evidence to support all criteria that have been measured, with a substantially greater percentage of moral panic codes than counter codes recorded for each criteria. Furthermore, of the four top selling daily tabloid newspapers, the three publications that contain the highest proportion of coverage that meets moral panic criteria also carry the highest number of articles that focus on asylum. The Daily Mirror produced half as many articles on the subject as The Sun and The Daily Express, and The Daily Mail published almost three times as many articles on asylum as The Daily Mirror throughout 2006. This is important as it means that negative coverage of asylum seekers appears more frequently in popular newspapers and is therefore more likely to be encountered by casual readers than articles that provide an alternative perspective.

### 5.3 'MORAL PANIC' IN THE HOST COMMUNITY

A qualitative content analysis of eight group interviews with members of the host community was conducted to explore the extent to which their discussion of the asylum issue was consistent with a moral panic response. As for the media analysis, the coding frame employed was based on Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994a) criteria for identifying a moral panic and examined six category sets: *Concern*, *counter-concern*, *hostility*, *counter-hostility*, *disproportionality* and *counter-disproportionality*. Each category set was divided into three secondary codes to capture (a) participants' own views, (b) participants' perceptions of public opinion, and (3) participants' perceptions of media coverage. The final coding frame, with illustrative examples for each code, appears in Appendix 13. *Consensus* was measured by comparing the pattern of coding across interviews. *Volatility* can only be examined by looking at responses across time and it was therefore not appropriate to apply this criterion to the interview data, which elicited views at a single point in time.

#### 5.3.1 Context for the group interview analysis

In order to contextualise the research findings, a brief description of each interview is set out below. A more detailed summary of the tone and content of each interview appears in Appendix 19.

##### *Birmingham*

The first interview was conducted in Birmingham, a large industrial multi-cultural city in the Midlands, with four members of a family group; two sisters, the husband of one and the adult daughter of the other. All participants lived in social housing in the Birmingham area and the couple also received disability benefit. All described asylum seekers in relation to direct competition for resources and in the last year an asylum seeker had moved in next door to the couple, which had not been a positive experience from their perspective. The tone of the interview was predominantly hostile and concerns centred on resource and cultural threat.



### *London 1*

The second interview was conducted with five friends, all students at a university based in a socially deprived area of East London with high ethnic diversity. All participants were first generation British, with little direct experience of asylum seekers. Again the tone of the interview was predominantly hostile, although some counter arguments were provided. Discussion focused on issues of legitimacy and economic impact, and asylum seekers were compared unfavourably with previous generations of immigrants.

### *London 2*

The third interview was also conducted with university students in London. One participant lived in social housing in East London and considered asylum seekers to be in direct competition for resources. The other two were first generation British and like participants in the second interview, compared asylum seekers unfavourably with their parents' generation. This discussion was also hostile for the main part and as in previous interviews focused on resource threat and abuse of the system, as well as concerns about cultural threat and lack of integration.

### *West Bridgford*

The fourth interview was conducted with five neighbours in West Bridgford, a small relatively wealthy town in Nottinghamshire with low levels of ethnic diversity. All participants except one (the elderly mother of one of the participants) were professionals, either semi-retired or close to retiring. This group expressed the least strong opinions on this issue, describing asylum as a small part of what they considered to be a much larger immigration problem.

### *Nottingham*

The fifth interview was conducted in Nottingham, a comparatively prosperous Northern city with mid-levels of ethnic diversity. The participants were four colleagues from a university, three administrators and one academic. The views in this group were polarised, with both hostile and sympathetic positions expressed. Hostility focused on resource and cultural threat and even those who were sympathetic to the principle of asylum expressed concerns regarding the number of people entering the UK via the asylum system.

### *Doncaster*

The sixth interview was conducted in Doncaster, a city situated in the heart of an ex-mining area in the north of England with relatively high levels of social deprivation and some ethnic diversity. The participants were six colleagues who worked in Environmental Health. This was the most consistently sympathetic interview, with discussion focusing on the UK's responsibility to provide asylum and the benefits associated with multiculturalism. However, most participants also expressed concern regarding the numbers of people entering the UK in this way and perceived abuse of the asylum system.

### *Rickmansworth*

The seventh interview was conducted in Rickmansworth, a small town in Hertfordshire with a mostly wealthy and ethnically homogenous population. The participants were six men who socialise together at their local pub. Participants were all employed by or ran small businesses in the building or gardening trade and were predominantly concerned about the impact of foreign labour on this market. With the exception of one participant they all expressed particularly hostile views, with concerns focusing on competition for resources and the perception that asylum seekers are bringing violent crime to the UK.

### *Basildon*

The final interview was conducted in Basildon, a large town in Essex with relatively high levels of social deprivation and low levels of ethnic diversity. The participants were three colleagues who worked in IT support. Again the tone of the interview was principally hostile, although some counter arguments were provided by one participant. Concerns focused on abuse of the benefits system and cultural threat.

## **5.3.2 Concern**

All interviews included expressions of concern about the asylum issue and the majority of interviews also described the topic as an issue of concern to the general public and the media.



### *Own concern*

Participants' own concerns centred on three main issues: economic impact, control and legitimacy. Concerns about the economic impact of asylum seekers related to the cost of providing benefits, perceived competition for jobs and concerns regarding the impact on UK infrastructure, in particular schools, hospitals, transport and housing. For example:

"I suppose really the issues I see are how limited our resources are in the country anyway... the fact that they're maybe taking our jobs, maybe taking our houses, they may be taking resources away from National Health"

(Gary<sup>18</sup>, Basildon)

Concern about lack of control focused on the numbers of people entering the UK via the asylum system and concerns about the legitimacy of applicants. Perceived abuse of the asylum system was raised in all interviews and participants repeatedly expressed the view that the majority of people who entered the UK through the asylum system were not 'genuine' asylum seekers, but rather using the system as a means of gaining access to the NHS, benefits and a 'better life' in the UK. Concerns about numbers and legitimacy were also expressed by participants who indicated a sympathetic response to asylum seekers, suggesting that concern extended to those who do not exhibit hostility:

"I feel that we're quite an affluent country, we should be offering our help and my concern is I suppose, why England? Why Great Britain? Do they see us as an easy sort of route in? Because you read about people travelling across many sort of countries to get here, so how come we seem to be taking quite a lot of the asylum seekers in? But I do also feel that they have a lot to offer society as well."

(Simon, Doncaster)

Whilst concern was expressed in all interviews, some participants indicated that the issue was not of concern to them. Most attributed this to lack of personal impact, although others empathised with those wanting to 'better their lives':

"I just feel if people want to come to our country and better themselves then why not?"

(Judy, Nottingham)

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<sup>18</sup> All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity

### *Public concern*

Asylum was described as an issue of concern to the general public in the majority of interviews. Public concerns were described as focusing on similar issues to their own, with control, costs, competition for resources and jobs flagged as particular issues of public concern. Although the majority of participants identified these as 'legitimate' concerns, some suggested that public concerns may be fuelled by fear of the unknown and the conflation of asylum seekers and economic migrants in public perceptions. For example:

"I think there's some confusion as well between asylum seekers and migrant workers... I think they get tarred with the same brush. Because not all asylum seekers have the right to work, do they? From what I know about it and they're not coming here to automatically take the jobs they want, just generally fleeing aren't they?"

(Graham, Doncaster)

Although the majority of interviews included references to public concern, in half of the interviews at least one participant also suggested that asylum is not an issue of particular concern to the UK public. As with their own lack of concern this was attributed to lack of direct impact:

"That's the most common view everyone has I think, that if it doesn't concern me at this moment... that's the news and if it doesn't concern them then it's just in one ear and out the other"

(Maria, London 1)

### *Media concern*

The majority of interviews also characterised media coverage as representing asylum as an issue for concern. Numbers, control, abuse, economic impact, resource threat and terrorism were identified as key areas of media concern. Reports of the extent of media concern varied, with some describing asylum as "always in the media" whilst others argued that there was little media focus unless it was a 'quiet news day' or during the run up to a political election. Some participants suggested that whilst the media used to focus on the issue that recently there had been less media concern. For example:



"I think the media have quietened down a lot on asylum seekers and are concentrating more on immigration. I mean if we could get the headlines from about three or four years ago it was really making a thing of it wasn't it" (Maureen, West Bridgford)

The extent to which the media has an impact on public concern was also debated. Whilst participants tended to describe the media as an important influence on the public, they did not consider it to be important in terms of their own views and a small minority suggested that the media was also unlikely to influence public views.

### **5.3.3 Hostility**

#### *Own hostility*

Responses that indicated hostility were expressed in seven of the interviews and all interviews included descriptions of public opinion and media coverage as hostile. Participants' own hostility centred on threat to shared interests (competition for and unfair allocation of resources), threat to shared values (religious, cultural and standards of living) and asylum seekers were represented as a deviant group, both in terms of criminality and being associated with terrorism.

One of the most common manifestations of hostility was the perceived threat that asylum seekers pose to UK resources and the perception that resources are unfairly allocated. Whilst for some participants this was simply a concern (see 5.3.2 above) for others a sense of unfairness or the belief that they had been personally disadvantaged by this situation led to overt hostility. For example:

"I went to work and so does me mum and so does me brother and it's us that keep getting all the backlash. My husband's disabled and they're trying to, all disabled people have got to go back to work, which is wrong, why? Because all the foreigners or the people that shouldn't been in here have got them jobs and we can't afford to keep them, plus look after the elderly people and the disabled people and like I said being heavily pregnant when I had my son, over six years ago, over at the Heartlands there was not one white face in the smoking room where I was. They were just full of Asians and not one white person except for myself and you are feeling alienated. You can't go down Small Heath at any time, regardless of what anybody says I'd like to see an MP, a counsellor of any description go down there, because they would not go down there without security. It's just overtaken"

(Karen, Birmingham)

Hostility also focused on perceived threat to shared values. Participants who expressed the most overt hostility towards asylum seekers tended to associate asylum seekers with Islam, a religion they associated with negative cultural change. Key issues for participants were the building of mosques and the perception that asylum seekers are trying to introduce Sharia law to the UK. For example:

"If you're going to come to our country you go by our standards and that's it, abide by our laws, none of this Sharia law rubbish" (Darren, Rickmansworth)

Another key element of the perceived threat to shared values was the perception that asylum seekers will reduce UK standards of living and that they do not want to learn to speak English or integrate into British culture. Several participants in different interviews also suggested that asylum seekers were 'dirty' and would 'spoil' neighbourhoods. For example:

"They set up their own culture and they do things necessarily which we would find unacceptable you know leave trash, make a mess of the countryside, don't respect our laws and basically do things very, very differently and that's because of their own culture. When it boils down to it they live very differently and the countries that they come from are mostly Third World countries and it's a very different world out there. So the things that they come across and do, why? That is the question and why do we put up with it? Because they're coming to live in England and they should be aware of what they're accepting when they come to England and they should be you know, these are the laws of the land so this is what you do whilst you're here" (Michaela, Nottingham)

The issue of needing to 'abide by our laws' was frequently raised in interviews and this was exacerbated by the perception that asylum seekers are culturally predisposed to violence and are likely to have a negative impact on crime rates. For example:

"Then you get little enclaves of, I don't know whatever, Asians, Arabs, whatever, Africans and then they bring their own little culture over so you go in there, like you get the honour killings and I know that's widespread throughout the Asian community... and then that causes like the race riots in Bradford, you get the little communities building up... and then you get people stabbing each other for a laugh or over someone looking at you" (Luke, Basildon)



Whilst there was evidence of hostility in all but one interview, in every interview there was also at least one participant who provided counter arguments when hostile views were expressed. For example, several participants spoke out in support of 'genuine asylum seekers', both in terms of sympathising with their situation and the need to help. However, these same participants expressed concerns about the difficulty in ascertaining who was 'genuine' and many went on to represent 'genuine asylum seekers' as being in a minority. These comments therefore do not suggest unqualified support for asylum seekers or that those who provided counter arguments in response to extreme hostility did not also hold more moderately hostile views. It was also notable that in most interviews there was only one participant providing counter arguments to otherwise consensual hostility.

A number of participants who expressed personal hostility were keen to communicate that this was not due to racism. For example, Sharon (London 2) said that her views are "not out of racism" and when asked if anyone had anything further to add at the end of the interview Luke (Basildon) responded "I'm not racist". Likewise, all participants in Birmingham were keen to emphasise that they weren't "skin colour prejudiced", distinguishing themselves from a "racist" sister they had chosen not to invite to the interview and providing repeated examples of members of other ethnic communities in their acquaintance about whom they felt positively. These participants were therefore clearly aware that one possible explanation for hostility towards asylum seekers is racism and they wanted to distance themselves from what was perceived as a socially unacceptable basis for negativity. Interestingly, no participants expressed any concern that hostility towards asylum seekers as a group might be interpreted as socially unacceptable; they were simply concerned not to be considered skin-colour prejudiced. The assumption that hostility towards asylum seekers would be either shared or approved lends further support to the suggestion that there is a negative climate of opinion regarding asylum seekers in the UK and is consistent with previous research findings (see Pearce and Stockdale, 2009).

The only interview without any personal expressions of hostility was that which was conducted in Doncaster, where participants were generally very positive about the principle of asylum and expressed support for asylum seekers in the UK. However

the initial statement of one participant indicated that he might go on to represent asylum seekers negatively:

“Like what Simon said, how come we read about so many coming to England? What is it about England? And like Graham mentioned, people say about the jobs, they’re taking jobs and people are unemployed that live here, struggling to get jobs”

(Kevin, Doncaster)

Interestingly, Kevin’s summary of the previous participants’ comments focuses only on the negative elements of their descriptions. Graham’s comment was made in relation to public perceptions that he described as “people’s prejudices” which he then went on to contest, and whilst Simon expressed some concerns about media reports that the UK was hosting more asylum seekers than other countries, he was nevertheless keen to emphasise that he was expressing minor concern rather than hostility and that he was generally very positive about asylum seekers. For the remainder of the interview Kevin continued to raise negative issues that he had read or heard, but in the context of asking other group members to clarify the truth of these statements and it was therefore difficult to ascertain whether he was expressing personal hostility or if he was unknowledgeable about the issue and was interested in understanding why it was negatively represented by others. His comments were therefore coded as descriptions of media and public hostility rather than as indicating personal hostility, although this illustrates the contextual dependence of responses as it is possible that in a less positive environment he might have expressed more personal hostility.

### *Public hostility*

Public opinion was described as hostile by at least one participant in all interviews. Most participants attributed public hostility to the economic impact of asylum seekers and perceived inequity of resource distribution and these were presented as ‘legitimate’ reasons for hostility. For example:

“I think a lot of the arguments are coming because the British people do feel they’re getting a back seat, they’re getting the bad end, do you know what I mean? The foreigners, asylum seekers are coming over, they’re getting the newer properties because they’re entitled to it but people that have been waiting years are not entitled to it because they



haven't got enough kids or your flat's big enough. No it should be move the people who have been here for years into the newer accommodation, house these people into these estates, not out of horribleness, but we all have to start in them places, so what's fair for one should be fair for the other." (Sharon, London 2)

It was also suggested that these impacts have been exacerbated by lack of control of the asylum system leading to large numbers of asylum seekers in the UK. For example:

"Maybe that's what the problem is, that they're just coming in in leaps and bounds and maybe the people that are largely affected I think, I've certainly got friends that live in Sunderland and round that neck of the woods and they've got a huge problem up there and they're very, very angry that they've, really what they say invaded their part of the country and been given quite you know substantial housing and everything like that so I think it's difficult and maybe I think it would be better in this country if we actually did say well we will take X number of people and we can't take any more.... so I think that the problem. We could reduce the problem by having maybe a bit more control" (Pat, West Brigford)

The perception that asylum seekers choose to come to the UK rather than stopping in safe countries en route was also cited as a reason for public hostility. For example:

"I mean the perception is that they come across, as Simon said, from many countries to come to England and we're an island so it's not an easy trip to get here and I'd rather be safe in the South of France than here so why have they come here and not stayed in France when people get fed up of England they go and live in France" (Graham, Doncaster)

Cultural threat, lack of integration and the perception that asylum seekers are dangerous were also seen as contributing to public hostility. For example:

"They're just mixing with their own which is causing a lot of tension and that because they're feeling segregated but the people around them are also feeling the tension because they're afraid of them because they're not mixing..... I think that's the big part is the fitting in, they've got to try to fit in and at the moment I think where they're putting them in to sort of segregation parts they're not mixing. So they're seen, instead of being seen as individuals they're seen more as gangs and I think that doesn't help but give a sort of a more biased opinion from our perspective" (Sharon, London 2)

As with concern, public hostility was linked to the extent to which individuals are directly affected by the issue. The focus of hostility was also seen as varying according to the specific impacts that asylum seekers may have on different areas. For example Sharon and Padma (London 1) considered competition for housing and perceived inequity of resource allocation to be important factors for people in East London, whereas Jeanne suggested that people in Surrey would be more worried about crime and the negative impact of asylum seekers on the NHS as there is not the competition for social housing in this area. As well as linking public hostility to 'legitimate' issues, as with concern, some participants linked hostility to an exaggerated sense of the impact of asylum seekers based on confusion over the differences between asylum seekers and economic migrants. For example:

"Like Graham was saying it's the blurring of the differences between and how they're all perceived as one, personally I think if the government was getting more of a grip on immigration then the population might be more welcoming as a general public to the asylum seekers"

(Sarah, Doncaster)

Public hostility was also linked to racism, particularly amongst those who did not personally express hostility. For example:

"I think being English we are slightly prejudiced in the first place"

(John, Rickmansworth)

No participants described public opinion towards asylum seekers in positive terms. The nearest to a positive description of public opinion was offered by Gary (Basildon) who suggested in response to Luke's characterisation of the public response as extremely hostile that "I think it might be negative but it's not negative enough for them to do anything about it, because if it was that strong then people would be marching along the streets and you don't see that so I think it's something that we have accepted". In this account, whilst not positive, public opinion may be more tolerant than hostile.



### *Media hostility*

All interviews characterised media coverage as hostile. Media hostility was described as focusing on numbers, abuse, costs, resource threat and violent crime. For example:

“People trying to sneak in using underhand methods. They [the media] don't show them coming in legitimately, turning up and presenting papers they show them jumping over fences and climbing into back of lorries... and the facilities that they have, you'll get somebody who's on the dole worrying about the fact they've got access to all these things and the media just jump on that really, your Daily Mails of the world and concentrate on the negativity”  
(Graham, Doncaster)

As with concern, negative media coverage was described as exacerbating public hostility. Even those who indicated there wasn't much media coverage of the issue described what coverage there was as predominantly hostile. For example, Salma (London 1) suggested that there was little coverage but went on to suggest that the press creates “negativeness towards asylum people... they want the public to feel like these people are not part of us, they shouldn't be here so have a negative attitude towards them”. Participants recognised that there was some variation in media coverage but concluded that positive coverage could not compete with negative coverage of the issue. Although media coverage was characterised as predominantly negative, this hostility was interpreted in the context of a general style of reporting aimed at maximising sales figures and consequently was not interpreted as indicating targeted hostility towards asylum seekers:

“I don't think it stands out as asylum seekers being abused if you like, the papers are never a happy read are they?”  
(Michaela, Nottingham)

### **5.3.4 Disproportionality**

#### *Own disproportionality*

At least one participant in every interview provided responses that were consistent with the criterion of disproportionality. Key indicators were exaggerated perceptions of the number individuals seeking asylum in the UK and the perception that there are few or no immigration controls in the UK.

In relation to the numbers of asylum seekers in the UK, there were two ways in which disproportionality was identified; perceptions of the absolute numbers of asylum seekers living in the UK, and perceptions regarding the comparative numbers of UK asylum applications in relation to other countries. Most recent figures indicate that the UK is currently host to just under 300,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2009) and that there were 14,500 new applications to the UK during the first half of 2008, the period in which the interviews were conducted (UNHCR, 2008a). Participants who provided figures estimated far greater numbers than this. For example, Steve (Rickmansworth) speculated “I would think there’s a lot more than a million... there’s at least you know maybe probably three million” and Kevin (Doncaster) mentioned “several hundred thousand came over I think it was last year”, despite the fact the total number of arrivals in 2007 was actually less than thirty thousand (UNHCR, 2008b). Whilst Luke (Basildon) acknowledged that “official figures say it’s only a couple of hundred thousand people”, he disputed this saying “we all know it’s far more than that, because when I was young... to hear someone talk a different language in this country was quite a rare thing, but now it’s common. English seems to be on the back foot”.

In comparative terms, there was a clear perception amongst many participants that “all” or “most” asylum seekers come to the UK. For example:

“It’s just gone totally out of control. I mean why out of everywhere in Europe they’re all here  
I don’t know”  
(Paul, Rickmansworth)

Furthermore, participants repeatedly compared the UK to France, the USA, Canada and Australia, suggesting that the UK is host to many more asylum seekers than these other countries and that more stringent legislation is therefore needed. Other Western European countries including Germany, Spain and Sweden were also provided as examples of countries with stricter policies and less asylum seekers. For example:

“All the EU countries they don’t contribute the same amount as we contribute, not in the slightest. You wouldn’t get this kind of treatment in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal... so we’re dictated to by a country that wants to go to war and we’re dragged to war when we don’t



agree with going to war in the first place and then they [asylum seekers] don't want to go to America because they don't get the benefits they do when it's too strict a law to get in there"  
(Michaela, Nottingham)

Participants also frequently expressed concern that France may have adopted a deliberate policy of encouraging asylum seekers to cross over to the UK. For example:

"There's plenty of countries in Europe with just as much money and a damn sight more space than the UK, but France put em all together right next to the Channel Tunnel port, knowing that they're all going to jump on there and get across, someone else's problem then and we're stuck with them"  
(Luke, Basildon)

However, whilst the UK is in the top five destinations for asylum seekers amongst industrialised nations, it is by no means the largest recipient of asylum applications and plays host to fewer refugees than any other country cited by participants as taking less asylum seekers, with the exception of Australia. In fact UNHCR figures indicate that when these interviews were conducted, the USA was "by far the largest single recipient of new claims" of the 44 industrialised countries included in their analysis (UNHCR, 2008a), with 25,400 applications in comparison with 14,500 to the UK and the second largest recipient was Canada with 16,800 applicants. Furthermore France, the largest recipient of asylum applications amongst all industrialised nations between 2003 and 2006, whilst dropping to third place in the first half of 2008 remained ahead of the UK with 15,600 applicants. Sweden, also described by participants as having less asylum seekers than the UK was actually the largest recipient of asylum seekers amongst industrialised nations in 2007, the period immediately prior to the interviews (UNHCR, 2008b), although they received slightly less applicants than the UK during the first half of 2008.

These figures show that with the exception of Australia, correctly identified by participants as receiving comparatively few asylum seekers, the countries that are most frequently characterised as having strict asylum policies and not taking "their share" were actually amongst the highest receiving countries amongst industrialised nations. Furthermore the perception that asylum seekers "head for Europe" is also inaccurate, as developing countries are host to four fifths of the world's refugees,

with Pakistan hosting the largest number of refugees worldwide (1.8 million in comparison to 292,100 in the UK), followed by the Syrian Arab Republic (1.1 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (980,000), whilst Europe as a whole hosts only 15% of the world's refugees (UNHCR, 2009). Furthermore, UNHCR (2009) figures show that more than three quarters of the world's refugees seek asylum in neighbouring countries or the immediate region, contradictory to participants' perceptions that the majority of asylum seekers pass through safe countries to get to Western Europe. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the perception that the UK receives all or most asylum seekers and that it is a destination the majority of asylum seekers target is an inaccurate one, based on a disproportionate sense of the numbers of asylum seekers entering the UK in comparison with other nations.

The exaggerated perception of the number of asylum seekers entering the UK was also clearly connected to the ongoing perception that the UK has ineffective immigration controls and a "lax" or "soft" approach to processing applications. For example:

"Our country is too soft and it's not got its procedures in place and it's not got its laws up to date"  
(Michaela, Nottingham)

However, as described in Chapter 1, there has actually been increasingly frequent and punitive legislation to restrict entry to the UK via the asylum system. In fact, since the refugee convention was first incorporated into domestic law in 1993 until the time that these interviews were conducted there were five major pieces of legislation relating to controlling immigration and asylum in the UK (Ward, 2004). This suggests that public fears regarding lack of control and legislation are also disproportionate.

### *Public disproportionality*

Public responses to asylum seekers were characterised as disproportionate in only two interviews. For example:

"In people's minds they only come to England, but I'm sure they go elsewhere as well"  
(Graham, Doncaster)



Whilst participants did not explicitly describe the public response as proportionate, public opinion was generally described as being in line with participants' own views and in cases where concern and hostility were described, as discussed above, this was mostly interpreted as a response to legitimate issues. As noted in 5.3.2 above, there were also instances when participants indicated that the general public were not overly concerned about the issue, which also positions the public response as a moderate reaction. The fact that public opinion was therefore largely described as proportionate, despite having been characterised as featuring both concern and hostility indicates that participants consider moral panic to be an appropriate response to asylum seekers.

### *Media disproportionality*

UK media coverage of the asylum issue, particularly the tabloid press, was characterised as disproportionate in seven of the interviews in that it was described as inaccurate and sensationalist, in some cases with the aim of amplifying public hostility and concern. For example:

"It's just to stir it up a bit isn't it? The papers just try and create some controversy and get us all fired up"  
(Dan, Basildon)

Only two participants indicated that they thought that UK media coverage of the asylum issue was fair or balanced. For example:

"I think they [the UK press] have to be [fair and accurate]. I think they're forced to because if they don't they'll be done on some grounds of something or other"  
(Sharon, London 1)

These participants also reproduced negative media stereotypes of asylum seekers and expressed particularly hostile views consistent with less critical reading of the media.

### **5.3.5 Consensus**

As the sample was specifically targeted to maximise the differences between participants in order to obtain as much variation in representations of asylum seekers as possible, there was no expectation that there would necessarily be consensus in the expression of views consistent with the features of a moral panic. It is therefore notable that despite adopting this approach, there was surprisingly little variation in the views that were expressed. Even in interviews where more positive views were apparent, all participants voiced concerns about the asylum issue, particularly in relation to numbers and the perception that the asylum system is being systematically abused by people who want to enter the UK for economic reasons. Furthermore, both concern and hostility were expressed even in interviews where participants had been selected on the basis of socio-demographic features that were expected to correlate with more positive perspectives. Therefore whilst, as expected, participants' responses were not totally consensual, there was a surprising amount of consensus in the expression of views that were consistent with moral panic criteria.

### **5.3.6 Examining the evidence of a moral panic response in the host community**

Whilst there were individual differences in the extent to which participants supported the principle of asylum, a large majority expressed views that were consistent with all three moral panic criteria examined. Concerns were raised in all interviews, and every participant expressed some concern regarding the numbers of asylum seekers entering the UK or abuse of the system. This indicates consensus that asylum is an issue of concern. However, as concerns were expressed by those who were generally sympathetic towards asylum seekers as well as those who exhibited hostility, these findings suggests that concern does not predict a moral panic response. As the media analysis also indicated that concern does not necessarily translate into hostility, this raises questions about whether concern should be considered a key indicator of moral panic. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

There were clear links between issues that were raised as personal concerns and those which produced hostility. For example, the numbers of people entering the UK



via the asylum system and the economic impact of playing host to asylum seekers were issues of concern that for some tipped over into hostility. One key factor in the shift from concern to hostility seemed to be the extent to which participants felt that they were personally affected by the issue. Individuals who experienced direct competition for resources, in particular participants who lived in social housing and those who worked in industries that had been affected by cheap foreign labour that they attributed to asylum seekers, consistently expressed hostility rather than just concern about the economic impacts of asylum seekers. For those who were not directly affected by asylum seekers, hostility was more frequently expressed in relation to perceived cultural and religious difference and the perception that asylum seekers do not wish to integrate within the UK. This perceived threat to national identity and way of life produced an emotional response similar to that expressed by those who experienced direct economic threat. These interviews suggest that it is this emotional element which transforms concern to hostility.

There was much more compelling evidence for disproportionality in the host group interviews than in the media sample. This may be because the PCC guidance effectively curbed disproportionate press reporting or because the general public are not particularly knowledgeable about the asylum issue and their understandings are therefore more likely to be inaccurate. For example, the majority of participants in group interviews were unaware that asylum seekers are unable to work and they therefore had a disproportionate sense of their impact on the job market. Alternatively it could be that inaccuracies in media reporting prior to the PCC guidelines had been assimilated by the public as there is evidence to suggest that hostility expressed by participants towards asylum seekers is linked to media coverage of this issue. Several participants, for example, directly quoted from the media and there was also evidence for the reproduction of negative media stereotypes of asylum seekers including references to “spongers” and “illegal asylum seekers”. For example:

“I think the problem is, is where asylum seekers come over and they don't actually do any work and they just sponge off of the system. I think that's where you get a lot of the problems and they have the housing and they get more benefits to pay for the housing and

food. Like I read in the paper that this one woman had sixteen thousand a year for child benefits and that's just child benefits without housing"

(Suzanne, London 1)

There was also a surprising amount of consistency in views expressed in line with moral panic, despite the fact that participants came from different socio-economic backgrounds, different parts of the country, had differing levels of experience of the issue and a range of media preferences. The prevalence and consensus in views expressed that met the criteria for identifying a moral panic provides strong evidence for a moral panic response in the host community. Furthermore, regardless of their own views, the majority of participants characterised media and public opinion in negative terms, suggesting that participants perceive a negative climate of opinion towards asylum seekers in the UK. This is important in the context of moral panic, because as described in Chapter 2, perceptions of a negative public response may be more important in terms of mobilising moral rhetoric than the individual opinions of members of the public (Cricher, 2003). Therefore, the fact that participants described public opinion in terms consistent with a moral panic, regardless of their own views, lends support to the suggestion that the UK response can be characterised in this way

#### **5.4 THE 'FOLK DEVILS' PERCEPTIONS OF A 'MORAL PANIC'**

Twenty-five semi-structured interviews with individuals who have sought asylum in the UK were analysed to explore the perspectives of those who are the focus of what has been described as a moral panic (i.e. the 'folk devils'). Two key areas were examined: (1) participants' exposure to and perceptions of media coverage of 'asylum seekers', and (2) participants' perceptions of the host community response to their group. As discussed in Chapter 4, the shift in focus from whether participants' own responses indicate a moral panic to whether participants perceive the UK media and host community response as a moral panic necessitated a different approach to examining Goode and Ben Yehuda's (1994a) indicators of moral panic than was employed in the previous two analyses.



The coding frame employed in this analysis conflated *concern* and *hostility* into one category which measured whether individual interviewees experienced the UK media and host responses in negative terms, as asking participants to differentiate between *concern* and *hostility* would require them to speculate about the feelings of others rather than describe their own experiences. *Disproportionality* was examined in relation to participants' perceptions of disproportionality in media coverage and host responses rather than in relation to objective measures, as again the focus was on their experiences rather than whether these responses were actually disproportionate. *Consensus* was examined in each interview as it measured participants' perceptions of whether media and host responses were consensual rather than whether there was consensus across their own responses. As for the previous analyses, disconfirmation codes were used to capture counter moral panic indicators. The coding frame that was employed therefore examined six category sets: *hostility/concern*, *counter-hostility/concern*, *disproportionality*, *counter-disproportionality*, *consensus* and *counter-consensus*. The final coding frame with illustrative examples for each code appears in Appendix 14. As with group interviews *volatility* was not measured in this analysis as participants' responses were not measured across time.

#### **5.4.1 Context for the individual interview analysis**

All participants were aware of media coverage of asylum seekers, albeit to differing degrees and all, except one, regularly looked at newspapers, particularly free publications such as *The Metro* that are available on public transport. Three participants had more limited English language skills and therefore tended to access news via the television. Unsurprisingly those who came from a journalistic background or who were involved in groups who met to discuss media issues tended to read a wider range of newspapers and were aware of tabloid coverage, even if they did not access this content directly. A full list of media sources for each participant appears in Appendix 20.

#### **5.4.2 Hostility/concern**

##### *Media hostility/concern*

UK media coverage of asylum was described by all participants as predominantly negative. As with participants in group interviews, media hostility was described as

focusing on numbers, resource threat, abuse of the system and criminality. For example:

"If you read The Sun about asylum seekers, in main they say for instance asylum seekers they take the tax for people and everybody who is not introduced in this they say 'oh asylum seekers, why they come here? They took my money' and something like that"

(Sadik<sup>19</sup>)

There was much more emphasis on criminality as a focus of media hostility than in group interviews, with seventeen participants in individual interviews raising this issue in comparison with only one participant in one of the group interviews. This may have been due to the timing of the interviews, as they were conducted shortly after the 'foreign prisoner scandal' broke in May 2006 (see 5.2.1 above for more detail about this story) whereas group interviews were not conducted until the early part of 2008, when media focus had shifted away from this issue.

A further difference in the characterisation of media hostility between group and individual interviews was that individual interviewees suggested that negative media coverage tends to focus on detention and removals. For example:

"When they [the media] are talking about asylum, they try to pushing asylum in right to deport"

(Raman)

This may reflect the difference in priorities between the host community and people who have sought asylum in the UK: the host community noticed the reports of how asylum seekers were negatively impacting on their own community whereas those seeking asylum attended to stories about deportation, an issue that was obviously of great concern to those who had not been awarded refugee status. Deportation also represented further rejection for individual interviewees, who clearly perceived media coverage as indicating that their group was not wanted in the UK. For example:

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<sup>19</sup> As with group interviews, all names have been changed to protect participant anonymity



"Every time anything mentioned [in the media] about migrants or refugees or asylum seekers we all feel affected, we feel we're all being rejected and this accusation is thrown at all of us and this is what people think of us"

(Rashida)

Unlike group interviewees who described negative media coverage of asylum seekers as part of a general tendency to negativity in the UK press, individual interviewees perceived this coverage as specifically targeted against their group. For example

"In general I think that the media, the paper are against us unfortunately"

(Ali)

In particular, they felt that there was a tendency in the media to deliberately associate asylum seekers as a group with the negative actions of individuals. For example:

"If the things is bad they use asylum seeker or immigrant, if the news is good, if the asylum seeker saves someone lives, they don't say 'asylum seeker saves someone lives', just the name saved someone, that's all"

(Adil)

This was contrasted with media coverage of crime committed by members of the host community in which criminals are treated as individuals rather than representatives of their community. For example:

"When I read a newspaper about something happen in the United Kingdom, some problem between a refugee or asylum seeker and English people they wrote down the refugee from this country, they did this thing wrong. Any time I heard a news about English people they did something wrong they just say for example 'Tony from Chesterfield killed his mum'"

(Raman)

As with group interviewees, participants recognised variation in media coverage, commonly distinguishing between tabloid and broadsheet coverage and suggesting that broadsheet coverage tends to be more positive. For example:

"Different newspapers they have a different view of asylum seekers... there are newspapers which I think have a history of being quite negative towards asylum seekers and refugees and even migrants, like Daily Mail, but there are on other side there are newspapers like Guardian, Independent who have taken other sides, despite that it's not really a popular decision to be on asylum seekers side because we are condemned by most of media really"

(Amin)

However, like group interviewees, these participants suggested that positive coverage tends to appear infrequently, either in publications with low circulations or towards the back of newspapers and therefore does not balance out the hostile coverage. For example:

"The power of negative footage is enormous and whatever success stories are hidden in Amnesty International pamphlets and that has no impact whatsoever... it is a duty of The Sun for two million times that they have done negative story to now do two million times positive story. Is that going to happen? No. So the balance is something we cannot even talk about"

(Mila)

Whilst recognising that there is variation between different publications, all participants characterised media coverage of asylum seekers primarily in negative terms. The descriptions of the UK media in these interviews therefore suggest that these participants have experienced the UK media in terms consistent with the criterion of *hostility/concern*.

#### *Public hostility/concern*

Public opinion was also characterised as predominantly negative in over half of interviews. Resource threat, cultural threat, control, numbers, legitimacy, crime and terrorism were identified as key features of public concern and hostility. For example:

"They [the UK public] have a general idea about asylum seeker as a scrounger or criminal people or uneducated people coming to this country just looking for more monetary life"

(Temen)

These were the same issues identified in group interviews, but group interviewees also highlighted perceived inequity of resource distribution whereas this issue was



not raised in individual interviews. Whilst similar factors were identified as the focus of public hostility, unlike group interviewees these participants attributed public hostility to lack of awareness of the 'truth' rather than 'legitimate' concerns. For example:

"So I know everyone who know the meaning of asylum seeker they don't abuse you. When they abuse you they no know the meaning of asylum seeker" (Bako)

Media influence and personal experience or knowledge of asylum seekers were identified as the two most important factors underlying public hostility and negative media coverage was seen as a key cause of public hostility. For example:

"It [the media coverage of the 'foreign prisoner scandal'] was really negative and it linked criminality to migrants and to refugees and those people are seen as possible criminals... this was really a worrying time for us. Negative media coverage does promote attacks on people on the streets" (Rashida)

Higher levels of knowledge or direct personal experience of asylum seekers were described as mitigating negative media influence and associated with more positive host responses. For example:

"It took us so long to get some of the British people to understand what really is going on and when they understood, funnily enough, a lot of people who were so negative towards asylum seekers when I approached them and I gave them the facts they have become the biggest force against their own government" (Amin)

In summary, whilst participants recognised individual differences in host responses, the fact that public opinion and media coverage was characterised as predominantly negative in a majority of interviews indicates that interviewees have experienced the UK public response to asylum seekers in terms that are consistent with the criterion of *hostility/concern*.

### **5.4.3 Disproportionality**

#### *Media disproportionality*

Responses in twenty-two of the interviews described the UK media coverage of asylum seekers as inaccurate and sensationalist. Like group interviewees,

participants primarily identified these features in relation to tabloid coverage and some suggested that the amplification of public fear and hostility was intentional. For example:

"[Media coverage] is inaccurate because they tend, most of them they tend not to report something that is right because it's the tabloid, it wants to pump fear into people so it's always going to get something that is, makes sure that people going to get worried about"

(Latasha)

The predominant focus on negative issues was seen to be disproportionate in relation to the behaviour of the majority of asylum seekers and was described as a misrepresentation the group. For example:

"Well like what I said I don't think it's fair because it's when they talk about asylum seekers as a group there's more good people than bad people in this group"

(Hawraz)

Furthermore, when describing issues that were the focus of media concern or hostility, the majority of participants contested these representations. For example:

"When we say we are asylum seeker people already they have made up their minds which is led by media, so in order to change their views is going to be really hard for an asylum seeker to say 'I'm not what they represent of me', we're just a decent people, a lot of us highly educated, we are ready workforce to contribute to the economy. A lot of them are doctors, engineers you know"

(Amin)

Participants also described lack of fairness in relation to their perception that the media places the blame with asylum seekers for problems they perceived to be inherent in the UK system and which actually disadvantage asylum seekers. For example:

"Mostly the newspapers in their presentation of the asylum cases, asylum issues, they blame the asylum seekers rather than the system. The system have also its own defective conditions that allow asylum seekers to stay long here, to suffer... newspapers they have social responsibilities, they have to see the public interest... but at the same time they have to be fair in their presentation, they shouldn't consider themselves as if they are decision



makers. They have to leave open the situation to the public for public decision and you don't see in most of the newspaper when they do that with regard to asylum seekers"

(Bikila)

As with comments about the overall tone of media coverage, participants distinguished between different publications and television channels in relation to the accuracy of reporting. For example:

"In general from my point of view in a very intelligent way media wants to segregate society, Muslim people from non-Muslim people and refugee people from British people, especially tabloid papers, Sun and these I don't know. The Guardian say the truth or at least sometimes they say all the truth... but the tabloid papers they just want to show off the negative sides unfortunately I don't know why... in general I wish the media says the truth"

(Ali)

### *Public disproportionality*

It was more difficult to ascertain whether public opinion was experienced in terms consistent with the criterion of *disproportionality*, as asking participants to assess disproportionality in relation to the public would require them to speculate about the public's knowledge about asylum which they may not have directly experienced. However there is some indirect evidence for this criterion in so far as (as discussed in 5.4.2 above) public *hostility/concern* was largely attributed to lack of knowledge and negative media influence and was therefore seen to be based on inaccurate information. However whilst the majority of participants attributed public hostility to lack of knowledge about the 'truth' of the situation, a small minority of participants described public concern and hostility as having a legitimate basis. For example:

"If he's not working, not studying and not contributing anything to this country, why shall the government keep this person in my country? As a native, I'm speaking as, feeling about like a native person, somebody come from somewhere not contributing anything to my country why shall I respect this person? Why shall I speak to this person or shall I waste my time with such a person?"

(Temen)

Although Temen accepted this as a legitimate basis for negativity, he emphasised that asylum seekers are not allowed to contribute and that this experience is extremely distressing and not of their choice. In this way although public negativity

was described as understandable it was seen to be based on misdirected blame. Only one participant presented British hostility as legitimate and interpreted this in a similar way to group interviewees:

"Sometimes it's fair and sometimes I tend to agree with them, you know these negative portrayals they are true, they are not without grounds. There is reason for concern and if I am an eighty year old pensioner and I can't get care or help whereas if I'm an asylum seeker I'm getting them I'll be bitter too. I have heard these complaints from a lot of British people 'look at the roads, our roads are dirty, when I stand at the bus stop it's because of all these Somalis and Sri Lankans and these things'. It is also true because you are coming from a Third World country where you are fleeing for your life and you have all, you know they're not middle class, most of them are from the low, I would just say low class not lower-middle where hygiene and these thing they take second place to surviving. First survival, so you are looking at a group of people who are survivors so table manners and how to behave in public they don't matter, they don't mean a thing to them"

(Rose)

Therefore, although it was difficult to assess participants' perceptions regarding the accuracy of public understandings of this issue, the fact that the majority of participants described public responses as based on disproportionate media coverage suggests that public responses were experienced in terms consistent with the criterion of *disproportionality*.

#### **5.4.4 Consensus**

##### *Media consensus*

As described in 5.4.2 above, whilst recognising some differences between tabloids and broadsheets, participants described the majority of media coverage as consensual in its negative focus on this issue. Furthermore although broadsheets were generally characterised as more positive than tabloids, some participants suggested that broadsheets also present the issue in negative terms. For example:

"Even the quality papers cannot resist from reporting these issues and sometimes talking a lot about it but you see more negative things coming out more than the positive things"

(Rashida)



This suggests that participants experienced media coverage of asylum seekers as predominantly consensual in relation to *hostility/concern*. In terms of accuracy and fairness in reporting, as described in 5.4.3 above, participants also distinguished between media types, describing more *consensus* in relation to *disproportionality* in tabloid than in broadsheet coverage. However the majority of coverage was described as unfair or inaccurate which suggests that they also perceived reasonably high levels of *consensus* for *disproportionality*.

### *Public consensus*

In terms of perceptions regarding public opinion, perhaps because of their own experiences of being generalised as a group, a large majority of participants emphasised that it was not possible to describe a single unified response. Participants were reticent about generalising and emphasised individual differences, arguing there are “good” and “bad” people in all communities. For example:

“Some people don't know about asylum seeker, some people understand asylum seeker. There are some English people very good, some people is no good, but some people like Health Visitor, it is not enough to say its very, very good, so it's not all English people bad”  
(Aamina)

Key factors associated with variation in public responses were regional and class differences. For example:

“You know this question will differ, if you take it in Scotland, because I was recently there. In that area the society had not been as such exposed to the asylum seekers. Whenever they see you they consider you're an asylum seeker and sometimes even they abuse you, they insult you on buses... and in some areas people would not consider you, here in London especially because it is has now turned out to be a multicultural society, nobody thinks that you are asylum seeker”  
(Bikila)

However, despite recognising individual differences, in twenty-two of the interviews the majority of the public were described as deriving their views of asylum seekers from negative media coverage. For example:

“The Daily Mail and The Sun are read widely in the UK, because I look out some figures about the distribution for that matter they do have, they really do have impact and they're

going to actually shape how peoples perspective towards asylum seekers and immigrants for that matter... Brits do actually give attention to the media... many people don't have proper access to us so they don't know you, they don't know me so they just tend to believe what's available to them... so I don't blame them for that because at the end of the day it's just given, so whenever they see asylums they think oh this is a guy who actually takes my, who is actually sharing my homes, my other benefits, the NHS, making crowd in the bars, making crimes and so on and so forth... because these people have access only to the media"

(Abebe)

The majority of the UK public were therefore described as holding views consistent with *hostility/concern* which suggests that participants perceive a reasonably consensual response amongst the general public at large. In terms of personal interactions with members of the host community, the experiences that were reported tended to be very polarised. Some participants described good friendships and positive experiences with British individuals. For example:

"It depends on how you present yourself to them. If you are nice, people will be nice to you, if you are rude, people look at you. So it depend and sometimes you meet rude people, as for that I won't let this be a case because it's everywhere. You don't know, maybe the person has got a bad day... but on my case British people are very nice and they've been very good to me"

(Mary)

However, the frequency of reports of both physical and verbal attacks provided a shocking reminder of the extremely hostile response of some members of the host community. For example:

"For no reason they assault me and they kick me for ten minutes and I have a medical assessment report, I have a police statement. I didn't fight these people. It's shame for me to fight. Why should fight? I am a doctor. I am not able to fight and when they kick me, as they punch me, they all continuously told me 'fucking asylum go back' and these kinds of things"

(Ali)

When dealing with British people on an individual basis participants therefore had very mixed experiences. However regardless of whether their experiences with the host community had personally been positive or negative, all participants characterised 'asylum seeker' as a stigmatised label. For example:



“When you come here and say ‘I’m an asylum seeker’ they will start looking at you in different ways. Some people will not even like talking to you” (Amadou)

It would not be expected that participants would experience a wholly consensual response in their dealings with individuals, but the fact that they described the majority of public opinion in these terms combined with the fact that all participants were aware of belonging to a stigmatised group indicates that they have experienced reasonably high levels of *consensus* for *hostility/concern* amongst the host community. As described in 5.4.3 above there was some evidence to suggest that this was considered to be a disproportionate response as it was attributed to a disproportionate sense of the harm caused by asylum seekers based on inaccurate media coverage of the issue. However it was not possible to directly measure whether there was *consensus* in *disproportionality* amongst the public without asking participants to speculate about the feelings of others rather than reporting their own experiences. It was therefore not possible to make a clear assessment in relation to this criterion.

#### **5.4.5 Examining the ‘folk devils’ perception of the UK media and host community response to asylum seekers**

Whilst participants had mixed experiences with the host community, including good friendships on an individual basis, their perceptions of media coverage and public opinion more generally indicated that they had experienced the UK response to asylum seekers in terms consistent with what would be expected during a moral panic. There was particularly strong evidence in relation to *hostility/concern* in the media, with all participants describing media coverage of asylum seekers as predominantly negative. Even those who identified more supportive elements in the media suggested that this was rare and in publications with low readership that did not offset the dominant negative representation of asylum seekers. Whilst participants were wary about making generalisations about the views of individuals, they indicated that the majority of the UK public would be unlikely to have had direct experience or knowledge about asylum seekers and were therefore likely to be strongly influenced by negative media coverage of the issue. Furthermore, several participants had experienced physical and verbal abuse as ‘asylum seekers’ and

the majority described 'asylum seeker' a stigmatised label and indicated that they would prefer not to be labelled this way.

In applying moral panic criteria to the subjects of the panic rather than to the 'panickers' it became apparent that some criteria were more easily identified than others. Once *hostility* and *concern* were conflated into one measure of *hostility/concern* it was possible to directly examine whether participants' responses indicated that they had experienced the UK response to asylum seekers in negative or positive terms. However it was more difficult to assess whether the host community response met the criterion of *disproportionality* from these interviews as this would require participants to have knowledge of the basis for public opinion which is not something they would necessarily experience directly. There was however some indirect evidence that public opinion was experienced as disproportionate in so far as it was considered to be based on inaccurate media reporting. Similarly for participants to experience *consensus* would require higher levels of interaction with the host community than most individuals seeking asylum in the UK have experienced. Therefore whilst participants speculated there would be reasonably high levels of *consensus* in negative public opinion based on the assumption that most people in the UK have little direct contact with asylum seekers and would therefore base their opinions on hostile media coverage, most participants were uncomfortable making generalisations as they felt they did not really know the answer to this question. Participants who were knowledgeable about the different editorial stances of UK national newspapers and who accessed a wide range of different opinions were much more comfortable discussing their experience of media coverage of this issue. Amongst these participants there was consensus that tabloid but not broadsheet coverage of asylum was disproportionate. This is consistent with the results of the media analysis conducted for this thesis.

## 5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter investigated whether it is reasonable to characterise the UK response to asylum seekers as a 'moral panic'. Evidence was examined in all three data sources in relation to five criteria proposed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) as indicating a moral panic: *concern*, *hostility*, *disproportionality*, *consensus* and



*volatility*. There was good evidence for both *concern* and *hostility* in all data sources analysed. There was also some evidence of *disproportionality* and good evidence for *consensus* in the tabloid sample, but not in broadsheet coverage of this issue. There was good evidence for both *disproportionality* and *consensus* in group interviews. *Volatility* was examined in relation to media coverage and despite ongoing hostility there was evidence for a moral panic response to the 'foreign prisoner scandal' in the tabloid sample in so far as this represented a period of intense focus on asylum seekers. There was however no evidence for *volatility* in broadsheet coverage of this story. Therefore whilst some moral panic criteria were clearly met, for others the evidence was less conclusive. Despite this variation, there was evidence to support all criteria measured in the tabloid sample and in group interviews and there was also good evidence to suggest that individuals who have sought asylum in the UK have experienced this response as a moral panic. There was also very little evidence of counter-moral panic discourse in the media sample or group interviews. This suggests that it is reasonable to characterise the UK response to asylum seekers as a moral panic. However, this analysis also revealed the complexity of empirically testing for moral panic, an issue that will be further discussed in Chapter 8. The next chapter will map the social representations of asylum seekers to explore the representational context that has enabled this response and which delimits the identities of those labelled as 'asylum seekers'.

## CHAPTER 6: CONTENT, SPREAD AND TRANSFORMATION OF MORAL PANIC

### 6.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis which examined how asylum seekers are represented in the UK. All three data sources were utilised in this analysis.

### 6.2 SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

A coding frame was developed using an inductive process in which codes were derived from the data. No initial assumptions were made regarding the relationship between codes, but as the analysis developed connections were established and used to identify social representations<sup>20</sup>. Each data set was analysed separately and they were then synthesised in order to examine the commonalities and differences between and within the different components of the representations. This allowed the examination of the spread and transformation of moral panic discourse as it is communicated in the media and understood by the public, as well as those who are the focus of the panic.

A preliminary analysis identified six core representations across all data sources, although some peripheral elements of these representations were particular to each source. These representations operate as oppositional pairs and have been labelled as follows; asylum seekers as *bad people* versus *good people*, *threatening* versus *threatened* and *legitimate* versus *illegitimate*. This is consistent with Moscovici's (2001) prediction that, given their genesis in communication, it is likely that every positive representation will have a negative counterpart. These features were identified as core elements because they provide the overarching meaning of each representation by linking a set of peripheral elements<sup>21</sup>. For example, representing asylum seekers as *criminal*, *spongers*, *ungrateful* and *cowardly* are all ways of representing asylum seekers as *bad people* and *bad people* therefore links all of these representations. *Bad people* also gives meaning to this representation by indicating how each of these peripheral elements is being used to represent asylum seekers as a group of people who can be distinguished by shared

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<sup>20</sup> See Ch 4, Section 4.7.2 for a more detailed discussion of this process

<sup>21</sup> See Ch 3, Section 3.3.3 for further discussion of the structure of social representations



negative traits. Figure 6.1 shows the pattern of representations across each data set.

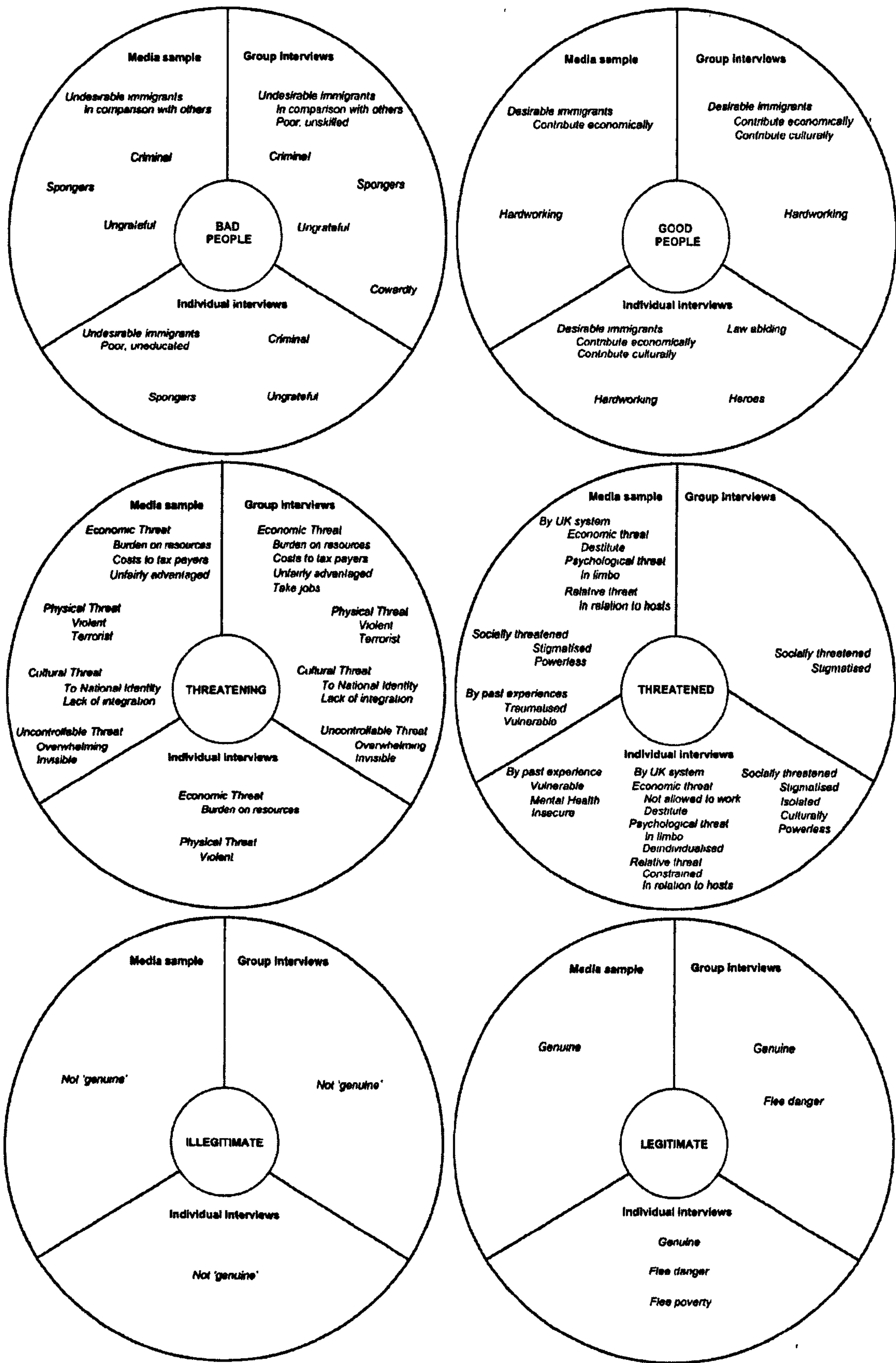


Figure 6.1: Social representations of asylum seekers across each data set

From this diagram it can be seen that although core elements of each representation have been identified in all data sources, there are differences in the extent to which these representations are elaborated in each source. For example, the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening* was more fully elaborated in group interviews than in individual interviews, with four categories of threat identified in group interviews in comparison with two categories of threat in individual interviews. This is consistent with structural models which predict that peripheral elements of representations will be context dependent (cf Abric, 2001) and would be expected given the differences in the way that these two sets of interviewees are positioned in relation to this social object – i.e. group interviews were conducted with members of the host community with little or no direct experience of ‘asylum seekers’ whereas individual interviews were conducted with people who have been labelled as ‘asylum seekers’.

On further investigation, it became apparent that some elements of these representations were serving a number of different purposes. For example, the representation of asylum seekers as *criminal* was used to represent asylum seekers as inherently bad or violent individuals, but was also used to position asylum seekers as illegal and therefore *illegitimate*, as well as to reinforce arguments that positioned them as *threatening* to the host population. To suggest that *criminal* is solely a feature of any one of these individual representations would therefore fail to capture the multiple functions of this representation. This is more than simply the challenge of developing an adequate labelling scheme. Rather this investigation indicates that attempts to conceptualise each representation as a distinct entity are unlikely to produce an analysis that corresponds with the way that representations are actually being used. This thesis is therefore based on an analysis which recognises that particular representations are part of more complex representational networks and consequently it is unlikely that there will be clear boundaries between differing representations of the same social object. This is important, as the existence of social representational networks have been theoretically recognised for some time (cf Breakwell, 1993), but for research purposes social representations tend to be depicted as distinct entities. The relationships between the six core representations that have been identified in this analysis are illustrated in Figure 6.2. In the interests of clarity, whilst this interconnectivity is acknowledged and



discussed as it arises, the following analysis will consider each representation in turn.

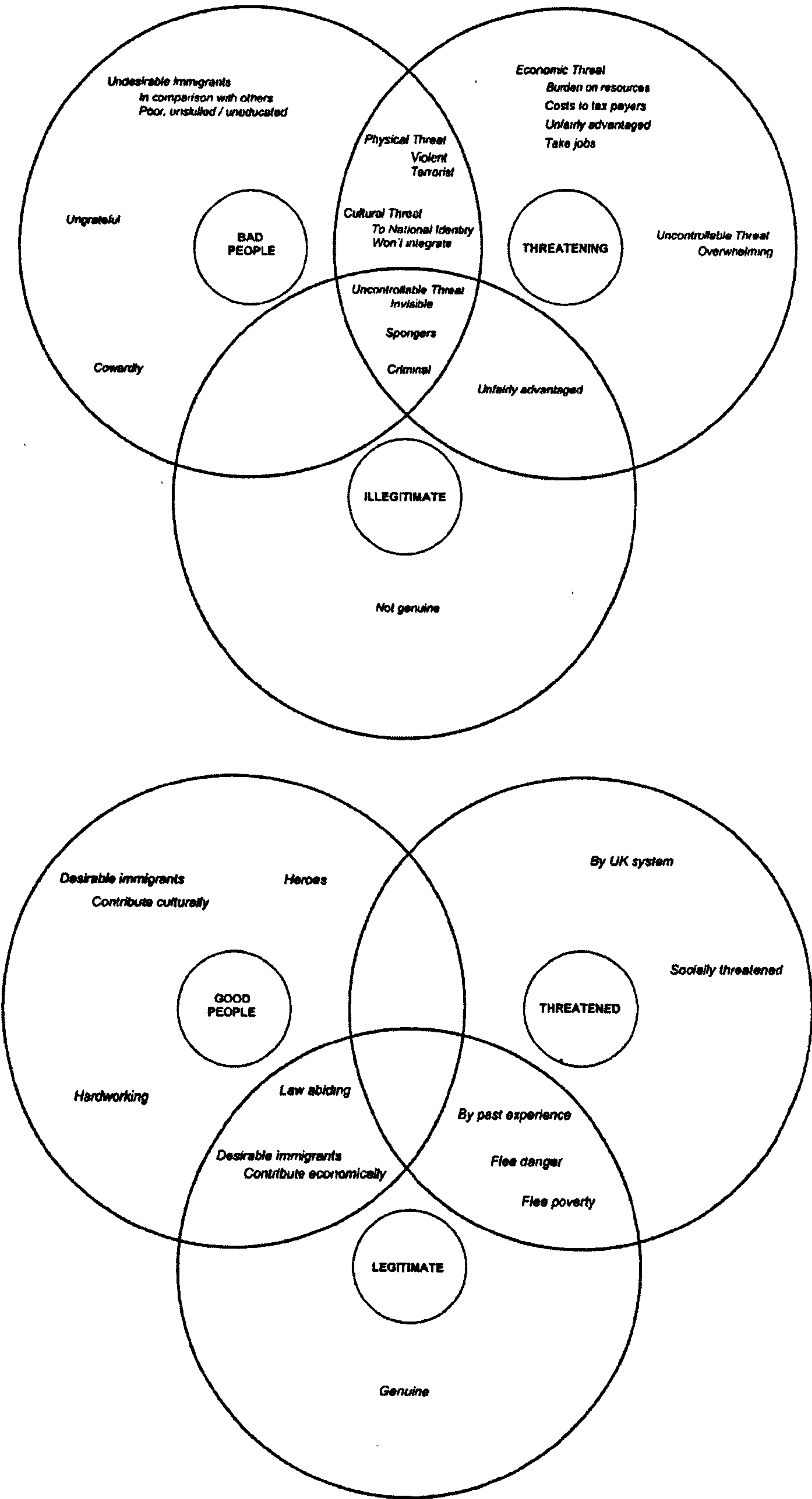


Figure 6.2: Relationship between social representations of asylum seekers (irrespective of source)

### 6.3 ASYLUM SEEKERS AS ‘BAD PEOPLE’ VERSUS ASYLUM SEEKERS AS ‘GOOD PEOPLE’

This pair of representations positions asylum seekers as inherently ‘bad’ or ‘good’ in terms of their personal characteristics. This includes direct references to asylum seekers being bad or good people, as well as the attribution of characteristics to the group that have positive or negative value judgements attached to them, such as industriousness or laziness.

Figure 6.3 illustrates this pair of representations, showing the core of each representation centrally (i.e. the stable element that defines the meaning of the representation) and the peripheral elements for each data source (i.e. the context specific manifestations of these representations) in the outer sections of the diagram. This figure shows that all sources drew on similar representations of asylum seekers as *bad people* and that this representation is more elaborated than the representation of asylum seekers as *good people* in that it involves more peripheral elements. It also shows that the representation of asylum seekers as *good people* was most elaborated in individual interviews.

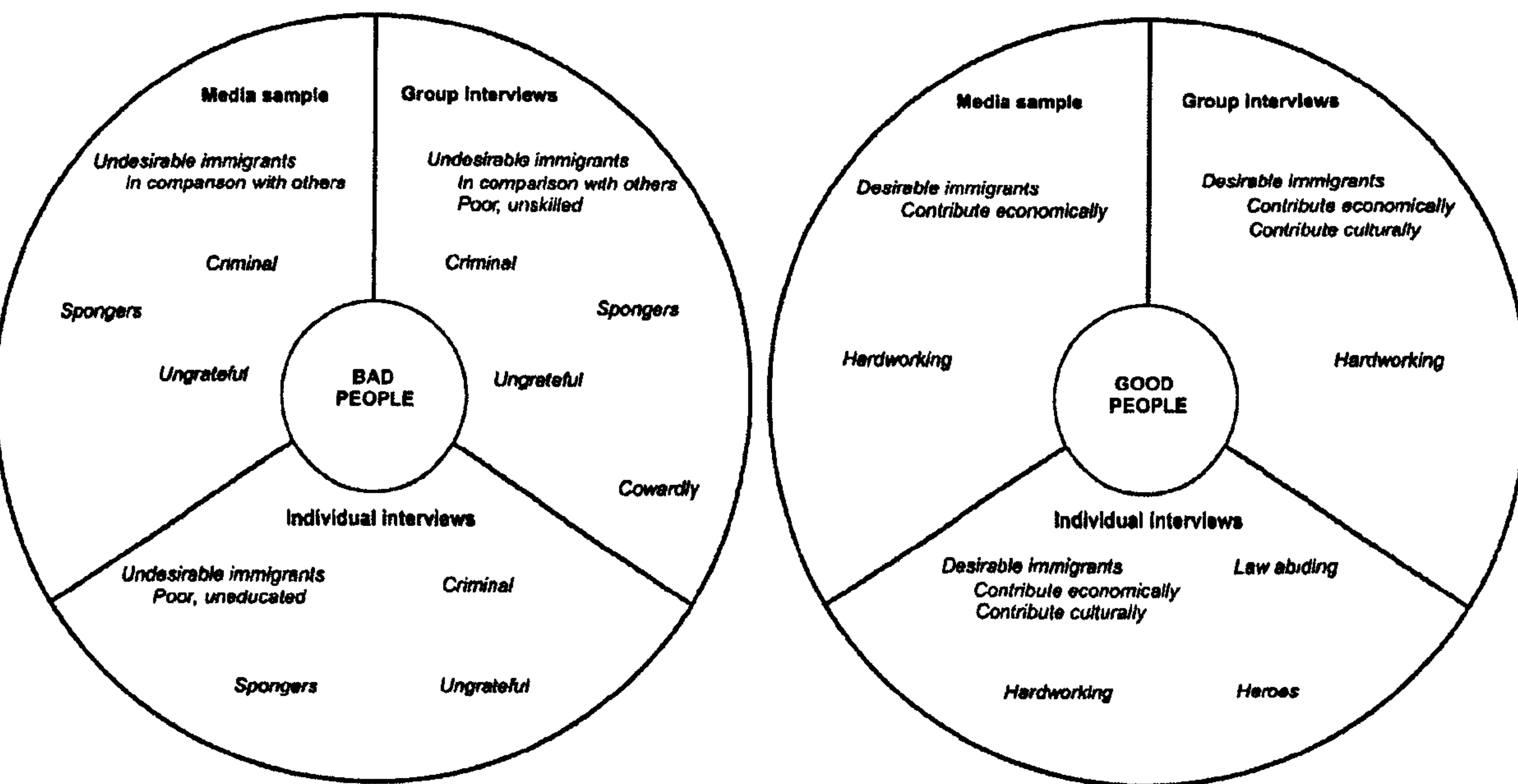


Figure 6.3: Social representations of asylum seekers as ‘bad people’ and ‘good people’

#### 6.3.1 Asylum seekers as ‘bad people’

There were no direct references to asylum seekers being *bad people* in the media sample, but this representation was implied through the association with asylum



seekers and other **bad people**. For example, in discussing the application of human rights law The Guardian (1st July) listed asylum seekers with “suspected terrorists, prisoners and suspected paedophiles” as “unpopular minorities” and commented “Life would be much simpler if victims of injustice were always attractive or nice people”. There was also a tendency, particularly in tabloid reporting, to associate asylum seekers with negative news stories even when the links were tenuous or involved reviving an old story. For example, in the description of a “foiled terrorist plot” on 11th August, The Sun interviewed a neighbour of one of the accused. This neighbour suggested that the accused “disappeared to Pakistan for a couple of months and came back with enough money to buy the bungalow opposite” and went on to say “they rented out the bungalow to asylum seekers. At one point there were fifteen people living there”. In this way the term ‘asylum seekers’ was linked to the story about terrorism, despite the fact that there was nothing to suggest that the tenants had any relevance to the story or any evidence beyond the hearsay of neighbours that they actually were asylum seekers. Similarly, a Daily Express article reporting the outcome of the trial of a British woman convicted of deliberately infecting a number of partners with AIDs, included the following post-script, referring to a story that was three years old, despite not referencing more recent examples of British people who have been sentenced for this crime:

“In 2003, married Somali asylum seeker Mohammed Dica was jailed for eight years for grievous bodily harm - deliberately infecting two lovers with HIV. Dica was called the “Aids assassin” for tricking the women into unprotected sex, promising that he loved and treasured them”  
(Daily Express, 20th June)

There was a much more direct characterisation of asylum seekers as **bad people** in group interviews than in the media sample and this representation frequently appeared in these interviews. For example:

**Gino**

It seems like we're getting all the bad the countries don't want, so we're getting all the rubbish

**Paul**

We're a tipping ground, that's what worries us... we're losing the good people for the bad

**Ken**

When you're not controlling it [the immigration system] you're not able to get the good from the bad

(Rickmansworth)

Group interviewees also described the media as representing asylum seekers as **bad people**. For example, Gary (Basildon) suggested that tabloid coverage gives the impression that "asylum seekers are bad" and Ken (Rickmansworth) said "all that's portrayed is the bad side of asylum seekers".

Unsurprisingly, given that they were discussing in-group members, individual interviewees did not tend to characterise asylum seekers as **bad people**. Ali did suggest that "the bad person" would be more likely to be given asylum than someone with skills. However this was clearly linked to the fact that he was a doctor and his application had been rejected as the authorities suspected he was using the asylum system to enter the UK for professional reasons. Whilst there was no evidence for the assimilation of this representation more generally, the majority of individual interviewees demonstrated awareness of this representation. For example, Amadou suggested that the media "talk about us as refugees or asylum seeker and tell you 'you are bad people'" and Latasha suggested that the UK public think "all asylum seekers are bad".

Five peripheral elements to the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people** were identified in this analysis, asylum seekers as (1) *undesirable immigrants*, (2) *criminals*, (3) *spongers*, (4) *ungrateful*, and (5) *cowardly*.

#### *Asylum seekers as 'undesirable immigrants'*

Asylum seekers were represented as *undesirable immigrants* in terms of being unwanted in the UK (with a particular focus on the need for more deportations) and in relation to other immigrant groups (i.e. asylum seekers were differentiated from immigrants who bring positive benefits to the UK).

This was one of the most common elements of the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people** in the media sample and was identified most frequently in



articles which focused on the need to deport more asylum seekers. Both public and political opinion was represented as supporting this position. For example:

“As John Reid, the new Home Secretary, came under fresh pressure over border controls, the Government insisted that increasing numbers of asylum-seekers and other immigrants were being expelled from Britain”  
(The Independent, 18th May)

In the occasional stories which focused on ‘desirable’ immigrants, asylum seekers tended to be used as a negative comparison. For example, when reporting on what was described as the unfair deportation of an American citizen, The Daily Mirror suggested:

“If she had come here claiming political asylum... leeched off the state with a huge family, this government would welcome her with open arms”  
(The Daily Mirror, 23rd January)

Group interviewees frequently compared asylum seekers unfavourably to existing ethnic communities in the UK and to economic migrants perceived to contribute more to the UK. For example, participants in Birmingham referred to the Jamaican community as “nice people” who have “earned the money, they’ve put it into the system” in contrast to asylum seekers who are “spoiling it”. Again this characterisation tended to be expressed more explicitly in group interviews than in the media, and group interviewees frequently talked about the difference between ‘wrong and right’ or ‘good and bad’ migrants and for the most part represented asylum seekers as the ‘wrong’ sort of immigrant. Group interviewees also represented asylum seekers as *undesirable immigrants* by representing them as people who are poor and unskilled and therefore have little to offer the UK. For example:

“The difference between asylum seekers and immigrants is the immigrants are the ones that generally come through with skills and want to work and actually get jobs and work and settle, as opposed to asylum seekers who just come here, allegedly to escape persecution, execution... and it's not always valid”  
(Gino, Rickmansworth)

There were no references to asylum seekers generally being *undesirable immigrants* in individual interviews, but there was evidence for awareness of this representation, and several individual interviewees suggested that neither the media nor the public want asylum seekers in the UK. Like group interviewees, a small minority of individual interviewees represented asylum seekers as having little to offer in terms of generally being poor and unskilled, although individual interviewees tended to focus more on education than skills. For example:

“Generally speaking most of the people come to England are uneducated people”

(Temen)

### *Asylum seekers as criminal*

Asylum seekers were represented as *criminal* in terms of being directly associated with criminal acts (most frequently violent crime), by being associated with criminals (i.e. references to ‘asylum seekers and criminals’) and by being represented as or associated with illegal immigrants. This has been defined as a peripheral element of the representation of asylum seekers as ***bad people*** because criminality is represented as an inherent characteristic of ‘asylum seekers’. However, as described in 6.2 above, this representation clearly serves a number of different purposes, and there are obvious overlaps with both the representation of asylum seekers as ***threatening*** and the representation of asylum seekers as ***illegitimate***. As such it would be possible to include *criminal* as a peripheral element in any or all three negative representations that have been identified in this analysis, despite the fact that there are clearly aspects of these representations which distinguish them from each other. This highlights the complexity of representational networks and suggests that it is likely that any schematic presentation of representations such as that employed in this analysis will necessarily be a simplification of the way that representations are actually used.

The representation of asylum seekers as *criminal* featured predominantly in the media sample and asylum seekers tended to be associated with violent crime, making this a particularly powerful representation. For example:



"Killers and rapists flooded on to our streets because ministers lost control of the asylum system years ago"  
(The Sun, 1st May)

Furthermore, articles that reported criminal acts performed by individuals who had entered the UK via the asylum system tended to highlight their immigration status and refer to 'asylum', even if the accused were now refugees or British citizens. For example, on 1st April, The Sun opened an article with "A Libyan asylum seeker appeared in court yesterday charged with possessing a "recipe book" for making bombs". However the article concluded with a reference to the fact that he claimed asylum in 2002, which would mean that he would have either been a refugee or British citizen at the time of reporting. Similarly, in their reporting of the 'sex-for-asylum scandal' on 28th July, the accused immigration officer Joseph Dzumbira was described as "himself an asylum seeker" despite the fact that he couldn't be working in this role unless he had refugee status or British citizenship.

The repeated references to 'asylum' or 'asylum seekers' in tabloid crime coverage, regardless of the current immigration status of the accused, reinforced the representation of asylum seekers as posing a criminal threat to the UK. This criminalisation was further underlined by repeated references to asylum seekers whose applications have failed as 'illegal immigrants', despite the fact that those appealing their cases remain asylum seekers and have a legal right to be in the UK while the case is decided. For example, there was a lot of press coverage in the early part of the year of a government initiative offering financial incentives for asylum seekers whose applications had failed to return home rather than appeal their cases. The following extract is a typical example:

"Millions of pounds of taxpayers' money is to be spent 'bribing' illegal immigrants and failed asylum seekers to return home... Last night, critics attacked the initiative because it means thousands of criminals - people who have broken the law as illegal immigrants - will be given taxpayers' money to aid repatriation"  
(The Daily Mail, 12th January)

This clearly represents those who have entered the UK as asylum seekers but had their application rejected as 'illegal immigrants' and 'criminals', despite the fact that in claiming asylum they had entered the UK legally. It also assumes that rejection is synonymous with a claim being unfounded, which fails to recognise the difficulty in

obtaining sufficient evidence to meet the very stringent guidelines for successful applications.

At the height of negative media focus on asylum during the 'foreign prisoners scandal', instead of differentiating asylum seekers automatically detained as part of the application process from foreign nationals in prison for committing crimes, the media frequently discussed "asylum seekers and criminals" as if these were categories that went together. In the same way that "bogus asylum seeker" and "illegal asylum seekers" have been described as forming descriptive conglomerations, in which the terms are so frequently associated that they become inextricably linked in readers' minds, it is likely that an association was formed between 'asylum seekers' and 'criminals' during this period. For example:

"The Tories will also stress the negative effects of failed asylum seekers and criminals on the country's pressurised public services" (The Daily Mail, 8th July)

Furthermore, as with reporting of 'asylum seekers and criminals', there was a tendency, particularly in tabloid coverage, for references to "asylum seekers and illegal immigrants" as if these terms went together, and despite PCC (2003) press guidelines which cautioned against the use of misleading and distorting terminology, in an article on 2nd November The Sun referred to "an illegal asylum seeker", a meaningless term that reinforces the representation of asylum seekers as criminal. This expression also appeared in a letter in The Daily Express on 19<sup>th</sup> May without editorial clarification.

Although this representation was less frequent in group interviews than in the media sample, group interviewees similarly associated asylum seekers with violent crime and expressed concern that asylum seekers have a negative impact on crime figures. Group interviewees also tended to represent asylum seekers as people who don't have any regard for UK law and commonly argued 'they need to abide by our laws'. Asylum seekers were associated in particular with gangs and the use of knives. For example:



"Unfortunately people you perceive as being asylum seekers, by the very fact they're coming out of their own nation because they can't live there. So one assumes it's because something has happened, so they're coming across, the Somalis and the Eastern Block in particular and they come from a totally different culture and what they accept as good values are different from our own and the knife thing which is coming out on our streets which is now predominant, it emanates from that area"

(Ken, Rickmansworth)

Like the media, group interviewees also clearly associated asylum seekers with illegal immigration. For example:

"The view to closing perhaps some of the borders to stop asylum seekers coming in, because there is too many illegals and they're even spoiling it for the ones that came in legally, not just for the people that was born in this country"

(Anne, Birmingham)

Individual interviewees demonstrated awareness of the representation of asylum seekers as *criminals*, and a large majority expressed concern that the media frequently reproduce this representation and that this may impact negatively on host community perceptions. There was evidence to suggest that a minority of individual interviewees had assimilated this representation of the group. For example:

"Many of them [asylum seekers] are involved in the crime and bad situations... some of them are involved in many crimes and horrible crime actually you know, drugs or killing... unfortunately I can say that the system here would be more sympathetic with a criminal, more than with innocent people, yeah I can assure you about this, more interested and more sympathetic, especially the government with people fled from gangs, fled from you know kind of criminal regimes or militias, they will be more sympathetic and they will be hurrying give them the right"

(Temen)

However, when individual interviewees associated asylum seekers with criminality it was more usually in relation to illegal working or theft and criminal activity was attributed to necessity rather than inherent 'badness' in the group. For example:

"The government they said they work illegal and they are criminal and absolutely we disagree with the Home Office because if you in his place or anyone in his place, if he hasn't got any shelter, any accommodation, any support from anywhere how he feed

hissself and how he live? Do the Home Office mean the asylum seeker they die on the street? And how can he say they are criminal they work illegal?" (Nozer)

Criminalisation was also linked to the use of detention centres and prisons to hold asylum seekers while their applications are being processed. For example:

"The problem with the system is that the system, the government mix asylum seekers together with prisoners or maybe should I say foreign prisoners or those that have committed crimes, those who have criminal records... I don't have a criminal record, I don't have anything with anyone here, I have no grief, I came here to seek an asylum. I have my reasons why I came to seek asylum but I seeked asylum at the point of entry and I was detained, I was mixed with criminals, I was even in prison so at the end of the day they think, people in the public just think everyone as long as asylum seeker you are a criminal" (Ndulu)

### *Asylum seekers as spongers*

A further element of the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people** is the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers*, in which asylum seekers are represented as people who have travelled to the UK with the sole purpose of claiming support from the UK benefits system. Like *criminals*, *spongers* is a powerful representation in that it is connected with and amplifies all three negative representations of asylum seekers. Whilst it clearly relates to the representation of asylum seekers as **threatening**, in particular as an *economic threat* (see 6.4.1 below), *spongers* focuses on the characteristics of asylum seekers, whereas *economic threat* focuses on their impact on the host community. Similarly whilst it also relates to the representation of asylum seekers as **illegitimate** (see 6.4.1 below), *spongers* focuses on the aspect of choice and that this choice is driven by the desire to 'free load'. It is this element that transforms this representation into a negative value judgement, positioning asylum seekers as **bad people** rather than as individuals from impoverished backgrounds who are technically illegitimate but using the system from desperation rather than greed, or who have entered the UK illegitimately but plan to work on arrival. Therefore despite its connections with **threatening** and **illegitimate**, in positioning asylum seekers as a group with a shared negative trait, *spongers* is a peripheral element of the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people**.



This was a dominant representation in tabloid coverage, particularly in The Daily Express and The Sun. For example, The Daily Express (12<sup>th</sup> July) described “asylum seekers looking for handouts” and The Sun (2<sup>nd</sup> June) referred to “asylum cheats... scroungers who haven’t contributed a penny”. This representation also dominated group interviews, which contained multiple references to ‘spongers’ or ‘sponging’. Furthermore, even more sympathetic participants who used less inflammatory language, tended to represent asylum seekers as people who have chosen to come to the UK specifically to utilise the benefits system. For example:

“I think the NHS and the fact that it is free is a huge draw, and the council housing, things like that”  
(Sarah, Doncaster)

This representation was particularly prevalent amongst group interviewees who had recent family history of immigration, and all participants from this background compared asylum seekers unfavourably to previous generations of immigrants. For example:

“My grandfather came over and all his 82 years of life he didn’t take one day off the state... that’s the way it should be done. Not come and ‘oh you’ve got to give me this, got to give me that, I’ve got rights to your money that I didn’t earn, I didn’t put in”  
(Gino, Rickmansworth)

A small minority of individual interviewees also assimilated the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers*, differentiating themselves as individuals from a group which they described using language that reproduced negative media stereotypes. For example, Ali distinguished himself from “the bad person who is just a sponger” and Hawraz, despite having no decision on his case after five years, argued that “it’s been good thing to make people stay here as asylum seeker you know rather than just flood to this country and they granted them and they sit on their back, sitting on benefit or whatnot”. Others suggested that only a minority of asylum seekers could be described in these terms and in this way demonstrated awareness of this representation without assimilation For example:

“Refugees and asylum seekers as well as British people are good and bad and there are people who are abusing the system and they are in a minority but their stories come across”  
(Mila)

### *Asylum seekers as ‘ungrateful’*

Asylum seekers were represented as *ungrateful* in relation to the perceived benefits that they gain from living in the UK. This emphasised their positioning as **bad people** – not only do they commit bad acts but they are committing them against a country that has helped them. This element of the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people** was mentioned infrequently, but appeared across all data sets, which suggests that it is a reasonably widespread representation. In the context of media reporting, asylum seekers tended to be represented as *ungrateful* in relation to committing criminal acts. For example, The Daily Mail (16<sup>th</sup> May) suggested that a convicted heroin dealer had “repaid Britain’s hospitality by running a violent crime racket” and a reader’s letter published in The Sun (1<sup>st</sup> August) suggested that the officer accused during the ‘sex-for-asylum scandal’ “is cheating the system in a country which gave him a proper home and a job. If he is guilty he should be deported”.

In the group interviews, asylum seekers were represented as *ungrateful* in relation to committing terrorist acts. For example:

“He’s took all the benefits of living in a democracy, in a free-speaking country and then he turns around and he wants to blow people up, now that I find, it’s more than scary, it’s obscene”  
(Anne, Birmingham)

A small minority of individual interviewees also represented asylum seekers as *ungrateful*. However, in these interviews lack of gratitude was described in much milder terms - i.e. as a tendency to complain rather than to commit crimes or acts of terror. The focus in these interviews was lack of gratitude in relation to the financial support provided by the UK. For example:

“Asylum seekers should know how lucky they are... there are people here paying taxes so that you can live like human beings and they should learn that... you should be grateful”  
(Rose)



### *Asylum seekers as cowardly*

A further element of the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people** was the representation of asylum seekers as *cowardly*. This representation was only identified in group interviews, but as it appeared in two separate interviews it is unlikely that this is an individual representation (i.e. it is not simply one individual's internal psychological response to asylum seekers). In both interviews this representation focused on the perception that asylum seekers are the sort of people who choose to run away from their problems rather than staying at home to fight. For example, Dan (Basildon) described asylum seekers as "the people you don't want, because they've given up and just thought sod it lets go over there because it's an easy option" and Gino (Rickmansworth) criticised asylum seekers "because I believe in fighting for what I believe in not running away". When this representation appeared in the Basildon interview it was uncontested. However, in Rickmansworth, Ken countered this argument suggesting "if they try to fight for their cause they're asylum seekers and therefore that's why they come out of the country".

### **6.3.2 Asylum seekers as 'good people'**

There were very few direct references to asylum seekers as **good people** in the media sample, which included just one or two examples for each element of this representation in comparison with up to fifty examples for each element of the representation of asylum seekers as **bad people**. There was only one instance in the media sample in which asylum seekers were directly characterised as **good people**, which was a quotation from Nick Clegg (the Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesman at that time) in The Independent (18th May) in which he described asylum seekers as "decent people". It was notable that no group interviewees directly characterised asylum seekers in this way.

In contrast, this representation appeared in eleven individual interviews. For example, Rose described asylum seekers as "really, really nice people" and Hawraz said "there's more good people than bad people in this group". As well as direct descriptions of asylum seekers as 'good' or 'decent' people, individual interviewees also commonly represented asylum seekers as **good people** in terms of their charitable contributions, arguing that there is a particularly high level of voluntary work within this community. Most frequently the representation of asylum seekers

as **good people** was produced in response to the perceived media and host characterisation of asylum seekers as **bad people**. For example:

"Is going to be really hard for an asylum seeker to say 'I'm not what they represent of me',  
we're just a decent people" (Amin)

This highlights the importance of argumentation in the production of social representations (cf Billig, 1987, 1988). Many of the positive representations of asylum seekers were clearly produced in response to negative representations that individual interviewees had encountered in the UK media. As many of these representations were only apparent in individual interviews it is likely that these representations emerged as a defence against media and host negativity rather than being shared representations in the wider community.

Four elements of the representation of asylum seekers as **good people** were identified in this analysis, asylum seekers as (1) *desirable immigrants*, (2) *law abiding*, (3) *hardworking*, and (4) *heroes*.

#### *Asylum seekers as desirable immigrants*

This element of the representation of asylum seekers as **good people** refers to those descriptions that directly reference their contribution as immigrants – i.e. the positive aspects of having asylum seekers coming in to the UK, both in economic and cultural terms. It also refers to representations of asylum seekers as contributing more to the UK than other immigrant groups.

There were very few instances of this representation in the media sample, which focused on economic contribution and individual case studies that highlighted educational achievements. For example, on 16th March, in an unusually sympathetic interview in The Daily Express with a British woman who provides holiday respite for victims of torture, her guests were described as "very well educated and articulate" and their children as "doing well in school" and "very keen to learn". Whilst these stories provide an important counterpart to the more frequent negative coverage of asylum seekers, the use of case studies means that they can



be read as exceptional and therefore do not necessarily challenge the dominant media representation of asylum seekers as *undesirable immigrants*.

In fact, in the publications that tended to produce more negative coverage the exceptional nature of these individuals was particularly highlighted. For example, Allison Pearson in her column in The Daily Mail criticised the impending deportation of Farhat Khan, who she described as “a wonderful woman” who “wanted to make a contribution to her new homeland”. However she then went on to argue “of course if she’d dodged the authorities and slipped quietly into the black economy, they’d never bother trying to track her down”. Consequently not only are positive attributes attached to individuals rather than asylum seekers as a group, the representation of the group which emerges from these descriptions reinforces the representation of asylum seekers as *bad people*. There were some examples in which contributions were generalised to the wider community. However there were very few examples and all appeared in The Independent, the lowest selling publication in the sample. For example:

“People who are sent back face persecution and torture. They have built their lives in this country, they pay their bills”  
(The Independent, 6th September)

Like the media, some group interviewees characterised asylum seekers as making an economic contribution to the UK. The economic contribution made by asylum seekers was generally raised as a counter argument to comments which highlighted their lack of contribution. For example, participants in both London 2 and Rickmansworth argued that asylum seekers make a tax contribution to the UK in response to the suggestion that they send money home rather than ploughing it back in to the UK economy. The most frequent way in which asylum seekers were represented as contributors in the context of group interviews was in relation to taking jobs that ‘we’ don’t want and this representation appeared in the majority of interviews. For example:

“The fact is a lot of them want to work or they do the jobs that people in this country are just not prepared to do”  
(Pat, West Bridgford)

At the other end of the spectrum, some group interviewees represented asylum seekers as *desirable immigrants* due to the perception that they are “highly skilled”. For example, Charlotte (Nottingham) suggested that “they are quite skilled people, like doctors and teachers” and David added “and academics”.

The other way in which group interviewees represented asylum seekers as contributing to the UK was in terms of cultural contribution. For example, Gary (Basildon) suggested that whilst he didn’t believe that asylum seekers financially benefit the UK, he did believe that “it broadens our mind as to how other people think”. However this representation was less well developed than those which focused on negative issues. For instance, when Luke challenged him by asking “what social benefit has it had?” Gary responded “it gets us to realise what other people think and the way other people think has got to be better for us hasn’t it?” but was unable to provide any specific examples to clarify this point. Similarly, participants in Doncaster appeared to struggle to provide substantive examples when asked to specify positive aspects that asylum seekers bring to the UK and resorted to similarly generic ideas of “cultural diversity”. This may be due to the relative inaccessibility of positive representations of asylum seekers. This is supported by the fact that even those who did not endorse negative stereotypes were nevertheless easily able to reproduce them when asked to discuss public or media views of this issue. This suggests that regardless of evaluative position, negative representations of asylum seekers are more salient than positive ones, which is consistent with previous research findings (cf Pearce and Stockdale, 2009). Alternatively difficulties in specifying the cultural contribution of asylum seekers could result from the diversity inherent in the category ‘asylum seeker’ which precludes the possibility of specifying cultural features of this group.

The representation of asylum seekers as contributing or having the potential to contribute positively to the UK was the most frequent representation of asylum seekers in individual interviews. There was more focus on potential contribution in individual interviews than in group interviews as these interviewees were obviously aware that asylum seekers are not allowed to work, in contrast to the majority of group interviewees who seemed unaware of this fact. Like group interviewees,



participants in individual interviews highlighted both economic and cultural contributions, with most focus on economic contribution. For example:

"We are a ready workforce to contribute to the economy. A lot of them are doctors, engineers you know" (Amin)

Many individual interviewees also expressed frustration that asylum seekers are not allowed to work and that this potential contribution remains untapped. For example:

"So what we are doing? We are all losing because I'm sitting... [they are] feeding me, paying my accommodation, if I'm working also I can pay the charity because I see there is lot of people in need" (Bako)

The potential contribution of asylum seekers was also emphasised by the representation of asylum seekers as successful, both in terms of their background and their ongoing successes in the UK. A number of individual interviewees described asylum seekers as coming from affluent backgrounds. For example, Mila suggested "a lot of us are from aristocratic families back home" and Ali talked about asylum seekers earning "good money" back home and being in the "highest socio-economic group". Similarly Amin suggested "a lot of us highly educated". This is clearly a counterpart to the representation of asylum seekers as poor and unskilled.

Individual interviewees also highlighted the cultural contribution that asylum seekers make to the UK, although as in group interviews this representation was not particularly well developed. For example:

"Everyone who living together it's very nice, different colour, different culture and we can have a very great country in the world" (Raman)

The final aspect of the representation of asylum seekers as *desirable immigrants* was the representation of asylum seekers as desirable in relation to other immigrant groups. This representation only appeared in individual interviews, in which asylum seekers were compared favourably with Eastern European economic migrants. For example, Amin talked about Polish workers coming to the UK solely for economic reasons, having no loyalty to the UK or plans to settle here permanently. In contrast

he suggested that asylum seekers are “a source that British government could always rely on, but the migrants they always come and they go”.

### *Asylum seekers as law abiding*

This element of the representation of asylum seekers as *good people* represented asylum seekers as moral people who are particularly inclined to uphold the law. For example:

“These people are so dignified, look thousands and thousands of them are being put in destitution but how many asylum seekers in this country you find out to become a burglar or I don’t know a rapist or I don’t know a criminal? They intend to suffer and scavenge through the rubbish bins and live in a dreadful life but still they have the decency to not become a criminal”

(Amin)

This representation did not appear in either the media sample or group interviews, but was referenced quite frequently in individual interviews. This representation was clearly a counterpart to the representation of asylum seekers as *criminal* and was also used to represent asylum seekers as *desirable immigrants*. For example:

“In reality you never see or its very unlikely to see asylum seekers committing crimes, you don’t see that... the majority, more than 99% never because they just need to be careful”

(Abebe)

Some individual interviewees also expressed disappointment at what was perceived to be a disproportionate focus on the criminal activities of the few in comparison to the non-criminal activities of the majority of asylum seekers. For example, Nozer suggested that crime committed by asylum seekers receives a lot of local media attention, whereas crime prevention work carried about by voluntary organisations run by asylum seekers does not receive the same attention and he questioned:

“Why they don’t show anything about that? We stop many crime in Sheffield exactly before it’s happened and prevents this happen, maybe few people they get killed, but we stop it before it’s happened with help from the police, why they don’t put it in newspaper?”

(Nozer)



### *Asylum seekers as 'hard-working'*

Asylum seekers were represented as *hard-working* in their willingness to conduct voluntary work when they are not allowed to take paid employment, to take menial jobs to support themselves and their family, and in comparison with the host community (i.e. they were represented as having more of an intrinsic work ethic than people born in the UK). Like *law abiding*, this representation was used in a number of different ways. It acted as a counterpart to the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers* and also reinforced the representation of asylum seekers as *desirable immigrants* who make an economic contribution to the UK.

This representation was identified very infrequently in the media and tended to feature in case studies rather than being generalised to the group. For example:

"Mohammed Samad fled violence in his home country seven years ago... His wife said they were now pinning their hopes on a final appeal. "We have been left distraught and now we have an anxious wait to see what will happen," she said. "Apparently, Mohammed does not fulfil the right criteria, despite being a hard-working husband and father who pays taxes."  
(The Daily Telegraph, 8th July)

A minority of group interviewees also drew on this representation, comparing asylum seekers favourably to 'lazy' British people. For example:

"They work exceptionally hard for menial wages and I agree with you the money's going back to their own countries which is not great but if they didn't do the jobs I'm actually not sure right now in this country who the heck would do them, because we're a bone idle society and I genuinely do believe that youngsters today they don't want to work you know"  
(Pat, West Bridgford)

This representation appeared more frequently in individual interviews. This included direct references to asylum seekers as hard-working people who take jobs that British people don't want or aren't willing to do and references to asylum seekers having to work particularly hard in order to succeed in the UK. For example:

"Because they have been constantly moving from place to place and when they come here they are given every opportunity to make money, get better education for their children they have become sort of competitive....working you know, working so hard... For them to get a

job at Tesco they have to go for English classes first, learn to say grammar, the adults... most asylum seekers speaking in English is a big thing for them and they're paying lots of money going for English tuition classes, they're paying lots and lots of money, so you work somewhere for three, four pounds and then you pay twenty pounds for your child to take a one hour class, you know. It's a struggle" (Rose)

It also included references to the frustration that asylum seekers experience at not being allowed to work and concern that they are represented as lazy as a result of the host community not understanding their desire to work. For example:

"Not being able to work is a label, but this is a label that is forced on you so I wasn't allowed to work but I didn't chosen this life it was given to me... I know in my mind that I love working because I'm working all the time now, although I know that I want to work but I know I am not allowed and as a result people are seeing me as someone who is a bad one, a strain on the society, someone who doesn't work" (Babir)

### *Asylum seekers as 'heroes'*

Asylum seekers were also represented as **good people** by being described as 'heroes' or 'freedom fighters' on the basis that individuals only need to seek asylum when they have challenged injustice. This represents asylum seekers as brave people who are willing to suffer for their beliefs. As with *law abiding*, this was an element of the representation of asylum seekers as **good people** which only appeared in individual interviews, but as it appeared in three separate interviews it is not simply an individual representation. In these interviews, asylum seekers were described as "people fighting for freedom" (Raman) and "freedom fighters" (Amin). Amin went on to say "I really don't call them asylum seekers, because that would not represent those heroes, unknown heroes". Interestingly Rashida suggested that historically the host community also used to represent asylum seekers as heroes, questioning "how come at one stage people were seen as heroes and were looked after and respected and then what happened suddenly that everyone turned against them and then they were seen as trouble-makers?" Rashida's comment is consistent with Robinson's (2003) suggestion that in the initial years following the 1951 Geneva Convention, refugees tended to be represented as *desirable immigrants* in contrast with 'undeserving' economic migrants. This may also explain the lack of examples of this representation in the current analysis – this may be a



representation that is no longer in common usage, having been largely supplanted by the negative representations that now frequently appear in media and host descriptions of asylum seekers.

6.4 ASYLUM SEEKERS AS ‘THREATENING’ VERSUS ASYLUM SEEKERS AS ‘THREATENED’

This pair of representations refers to asylum seekers as a threat to the UK and/or the host community versus the representation of asylum seekers as threatened themselves (both in relation to the circumstances which forced them to seek asylum and also by their experiences in the UK).

Figure 6.4 illustrates this pair of representations, showing the core and the peripheral elements for each data source. This figure shows that the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening* is more elaborated in the media sample and group interviews than in individual interviews. It also shows that the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened* is most elaborated in individual interviews and least in group interviews.

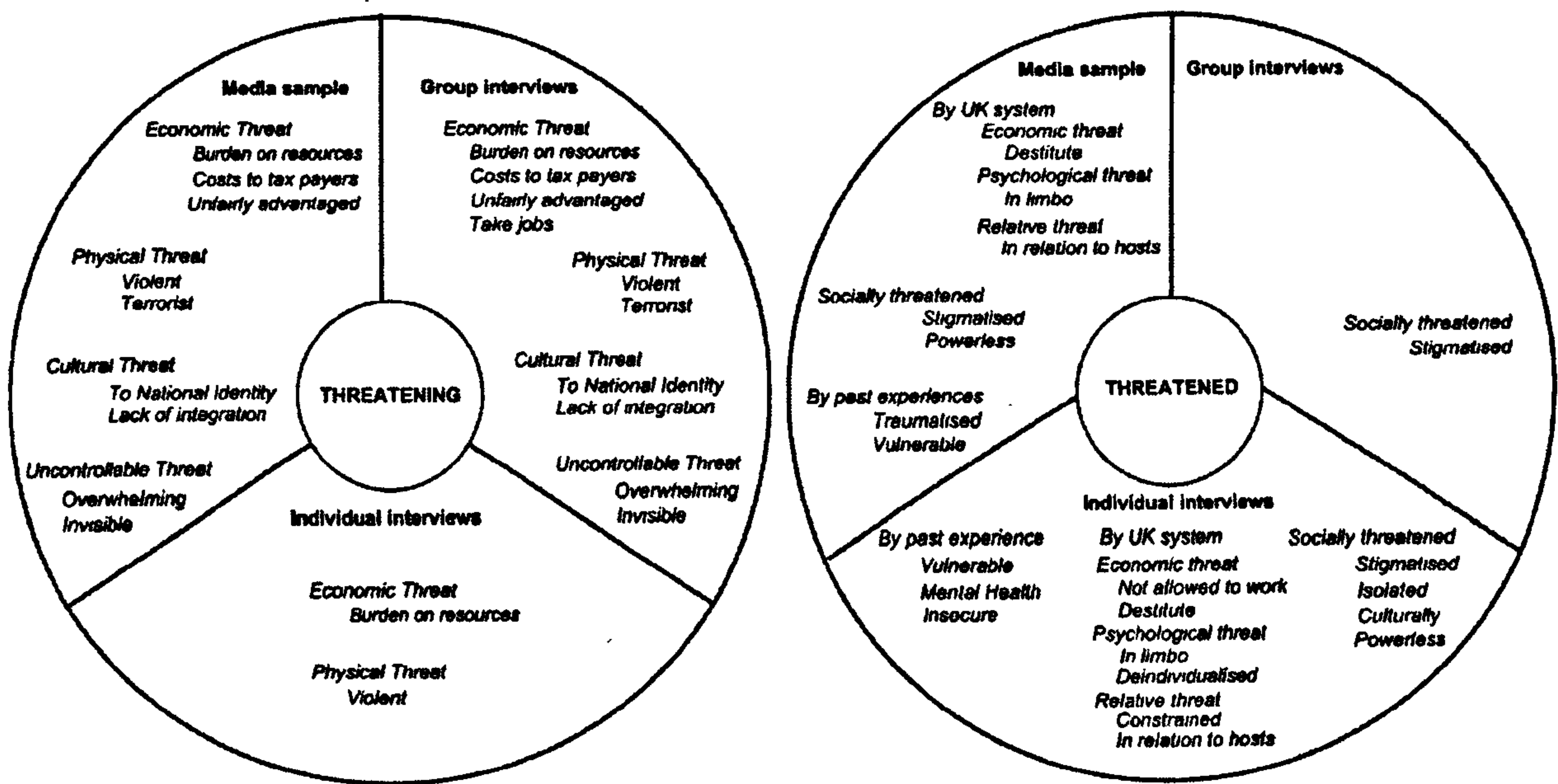


Figure 6.4: Social representations of asylum seekers as ‘threatening’ and ‘threatened’

#### 6.4.1 Asylum seekers as ‘threatening’

Like the representation of asylum seekers as *bad people*, this is a negative representation, but what distinguishes *threatening* from *bad people* is that this representation focuses on asylum seekers’ relationship with and perceived negative impact on the host community rather than on personality traits. Perceived negative traits clearly inform and interact with some representations of threat. For example, as discussed in 6.3.1 above, the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers* whilst being part of the representation of asylum seekers as *bad people* impacts upon and amplifies the representation of asylum seekers as an *economic threat*. However, the representation of asylum seekers as an *economic threat* also exists independently of the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers* – i.e. housing and supporting asylum seekers is represented as an *economic threat* regardless of asylum seekers’ motivations for taking this provision. This illustrates that representations can be separate but interconnected. There were four peripheral elements to the representation of asylum seekers as threatening, asylum seekers as an (1) *economic threat*, (2) *physical threat*, (3) *cultural threat*, and (4) *uncontrollable threat*.

##### *Asylum seekers as an ‘economic threat’*

In the media sample this representation focused on (1) burden on resources, (2) costs to the UK tax payer, and (3) perceived unfairness in the allocation of resources.

Asylum seekers were commonly represented in the media sample as placing a burden on UK resources such as the NHS. For example, in an article published on 4th March, which suggested that there had been a recent increase in asylum seekers arriving in the UK via France, The Daily Express suggested that as a result “unbearable pressure is based on our public services” and similarly Leo McKinstry’s column on the 12th April in the same newspaper described “a huge drain on the welfare state”.

One of the most frequent themes of media coverage of the asylum issue was the cost to the UK taxpayer. For example, The Daily Express followed their 23<sup>rd</sup> May headline “Asylum seekers can sue Britain” with the statement “tax payers face bills



for hundreds and thousands of pounds in compensation to asylum seekers after yet another Home Office blunder”. The media sample also tended to represent public opinion as indicating concern about economic threat. For example the following letter was published in The Daily Mail:

“I can't believe that a woman has been allowed to stay in this country because she claims she's 'too tall' to be sent home ...What gives this woman the right to claim asylum in this country so she is able to live at our expense, including getting NHS treatment for diabetes?... I hope common sense prevails and she is sent back to Pakistan as soon as possible. Or will the Home Office once again fall for her sob story (supported by lawyers) and allow her to stay here and benefit from my continued work to support her?”

(Daily Mail, 19th October)

Similar views were expressed in the following letter published in The Daily Express, which also illustrates the third element of the representation of asylum seekers as an *economic threat*, the perception that asylum seekers are unfairly advantaged in relation to the host population:

“Failed asylum seekers can get benefits while perfectly able students are killing themselves because of debt. Since when did law-abiding, tax-paying citizens like ourselves become the pariahs of society, punished at every turn (financially)?”

(Daily Express, 2nd February)<sup>22</sup>

Very similar representations appeared in the group interviews, which also focused on burden on resources, costs to tax payers and perceived unfairness in the distribution of resources. In addition, group interviewees also frequently represented asylum seekers as an *economic threat* in relation to ‘taking our jobs’. This representation did not appear in either the media sample or individual interviews, as asylum seekers are not allowed to work and individual interviewees and the media would both be aware of this fact. The prevalence of this representation in group interviews demonstrates the way that knowledge is transformed once it enters the public domain and that social representations, whilst providing social reality in the

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<sup>22</sup> This was one of two letters published in The Daily Express expressing unhappiness that ‘failed asylum seekers’ and ‘illegal immigrants’ receive benefits. No editorial comment was provided to counter this misperception in either of these cases.

sense of framing a community's understanding of an issue are not necessarily factually accurate.

In individual interviews, *economic threat* was also represented in relation to asylum seekers placing a burden on resources, but unlike the media sample and group interviews, individual interviewees emphasised that asylum seekers do not choose to receive benefits and suggested they would much rather work. For example:

"They always say they are a burden on our system and honestly we might be a burden on a system but we didn't choose this... we may be a burden on the society but at least give us a work permit in order to pay tax and don't be a burden on society, so simple as that just work permit, very simple"

(Ali)

### *Asylum seekers as a 'physical threat'*

The representation of asylum seekers as a *physical threat* focused on the association with terrorism and violent crime. The idea that terrorists are using the asylum system to enter the UK was a recurrent theme of media coverage of this issue. For example:

"Terrorists able to commit mass slaughter are using our lax asylum and immigration systems to plot outrages, the Home Secretary warned yesterday... John Reid said "unconstrained" terrorists had access to "means of mass destruction", including chemical and biological weapons. And he admitted that some posed as asylum seekers or students to penetrate our "porous" borders and were "ruthless in their misuse of our freedoms"... The Daily Express reported last year how a quarter of terrorist suspects seized by British security services since the 9/11 attacks were asylum seekers."

(The Daily Express, 10th August)

As described in 6.3.1 above, representations of asylum seekers as *criminal* focused on the perception that asylum seekers are predisposed to committing violent acts. This representation clearly overlaps with the representation of asylum seekers as a *physical threat* and positions asylum seekers as a danger to the UK community. For example:



"We keep them safe, to carry on making our country more dangerous! ...It certainly is a magic circle for those rapists and murderers who should be on the next plane home."

(The Sun, 4th May)

In the group interviews representations of asylum seekers as a *physical threat* also centred on perceived links to terrorism and violent crime and like the media sample, group interviewees linked violent crime to gang violence and the threat this poses to UK citizens. For example:

"The knife people are Somalians. They won't fight because they can't so they'll stab you and that's where it comes from and you go out to Rayners Lane and that, you'll see them all over the place and they'll knife you"

(Paul, Rickmansworth)

In addition group interviewees also felt threatened by the perception that areas with large numbers of asylum seekers are 'unsafe'. Participants in Birmingham discussed how a local area had changed since asylum seekers had moved in and indicated that they now felt scared to go there. Similarly:

"If I go into like Barking I feel so unsafe. That was a place I wandered when I was a kid, do you know what I mean? I felt perfectly safe wandering there as a kid and I'm not saying there wasn't other ethnic backgrounds there, Asians were there when I was growing up, but now I honestly don't feel safe walking through Barking and places like that which is a high amount of asylum seekers there"

(Sharon, London 2)

Individual interviewees demonstrated awareness but not assimilation of the representation of asylum seekers as a *physical threat* in relation to terrorism. For example:

"When this bomb on the 7th July took place... we were all terrified and upset because first of all it's wrong and secondly our children are out there, we go on the tubes and stations, we are there and our children are there and other people's children so you live in a place you want to be safe... after that event we organised a workshop and lots of young people came and they said our life has been made really hard... the police stopping us the whole time... I mean one guy has been stopped few times every day for few days and he said we can't go out anymore we're treated like criminals, like terrorists"

(Rashida)

A small minority of individual interviewees had assimilated the representation of asylum seekers as a *physical threat*. For example, Bikila described “crimes increasing... and in some areas there are gangsters on the road, with a knife killing each other”, but this representation was far more frequently recognised but contested. For example:

“Even if I’m an asylum seeker in this country I did not come here to violate nobody you know. I come to treat people the right way possible”  
(Amadou)

### *Asylum seekers as ‘cultural threat’*

The third element of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening* was as a *cultural threat*. In the media sample this mostly focused on issues to do with lack of integration and perceived negative impact on national identity. For example:

“As millions stream into the country, the very concepts of nationhood and citizenship have been destroyed”  
(The Daily Express, 4th March)

However there was much more focus on the representation of asylum seekers as a cultural threat in group interviews than in the media sample. This representation centred on issues to do with national identity and integration, and also on the perception that asylum seekers do not want to abide by UK laws and conventions. For example:

“Well I think the biggest thing is religion, because that starts all issues... people come across here and build their own churches and create their own little world and I think they have to remember that they are on British soil and they should remain British and that’s the point for me. They should accept, if they’re accepted to come into the country with the benefits that we’re giving them they should accept our culture”  
(Michaela, Nottingham)

This representation was clearly linked to the representation of asylum seekers as *bad people* who are not law abiding and who ‘spoil’ the UK by failing to conform to ‘UK standards’ (see 6.3.1 above).

Individual interviewees also focused on integration. Some suggested that asylum seekers want to integrate in the UK, whilst others differentiated themselves from



those who choose not to, thus demonstrating awareness that asylum seekers have been represented as people who don't want to integrate. For example:

"Honestly when I live here from my point of view before everything you should learn the language and you should integrate into society. If you cannot integrate into society why you are here? I'm quite surprised when I see some people they have British citizen but still they have a Burqa. If you have this why you living here? There are so many other areas you can live"

(Ali)

### *Asylum seekers as an 'uncontrollable threat'*

The final element of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening* was as an *uncontrollable threat*. This was comprised of two elements, the representation of asylum seekers as (1) an *overwhelming threat*, in terms of the numbers arriving, and (2) an *invisible threat*, 'sneaking in' and then 'disappearing'.

In the media sample asylum seekers were represented as an *overwhelming threat* through the use of metaphors like 'floods', 'tides' and 'armies', and the backlog of applications was routinely described as a 'mountain'. For example:

"The Home Secretary will admit that his department has not been able to cope with the flood of people into Britain, a trend that has intensified because of Labour's open borders. The announcement comes as figures show the number of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants caught working in Britain has soared nine-fold over three years"

(The Daily Express, 19th July)

The representation of the threat posed by the sheer numbers of asylum seekers was compounded by the fact that it was often accompanied by the representation of asylum seekers as an *invisible threat*. Asylum seekers were frequently described as 'sneaking in' to the UK undetected. For example:

"Many of the refugees are thought to have slipped through customs in Dover and vanished... Critics have repeatedly warned that Labour's immigration chaos has left Britain with a "porous border" and a magnet for illegals across the world"

(Daily Express, 21st January)

Furthermore even those who are identified at the point of arrival are described as being likely to subsequently 'disappear'. For example:

"Asylum seekers are failing to show up at reporting centres for one-fifth of appointments. Critics say the absence rate paves the way for applicants to disappear if their bid for shelter is turned down, adding to the hundreds of thousands already hiding here illegally."

(Daily Express, 2nd October)

*Invisible threat* was heightened by the suggestion that the government don't know how many asylum seekers there are or where 'failed' asylum seekers are:

"There is another, equally worrying, question: how many more are there? Mr Spanovic's case [referring to a Serbian war criminal living in the UK] came to light only because he was caught in a minor, and presumably atypical, act of shoplifting. For all we know, there are dozens more wanted criminals among the recent asylum seekers, living safely in suburbia for want of proper checks. It is cases such as this that show precisely why people in Britain feel so insecure about asylum and immigration - because the Government has demonstrated, over and over again, that it has little grasp of the numbers, identities and backgrounds of those entering this country."

(Daily Telegraph, 28th October)

This also demonstrates the link between the representation of asylum seekers as an *invisible threat* and representations of asylum seekers as *criminal* and a *physical threat* in relation to terrorism. It is not simply a case of not knowing who is in the UK, but that asylum seekers have chosen to 'disappear' for nefarious purposes. In this way the different threats overlap and also interact with representations of asylum seekers as **bad people**. This amplifies the overall perception of asylum seekers as **threatening** and makes this a powerful representation.

Representations of asylum seekers as an *uncontrollable threat* identified in group interviews were very similar to those identified in the media sample and also focused on *overwhelming threat* and *invisible threat*. For example:

"A lot of them come over and disappear so who knows where they are?"

(Mike, Doncaster)

As with the media, the sense of threat attached to the idea of asylum seekers 'disappearing' is linked to the assumption that a rejected application is an



unfounded claim and no participants suggested that asylum seekers may 'disappear' because they are terrified of being returned to a dangerous situation. For example:

"It's, when they become illegal, so they've applied for asylum and then they've had it rejected and I think to stay in this country, well of course you should have an appeal, that's fine, it's like any legal system, but if you've been rejected then there's obviously a reason why you've been rejected and therefore you should go through other means and not sort of stay around here flying under the wire and that's what I object to, because you don't know what they're doing, they haven't got any national insurance, things like that so you kind of don't have any way of tracking what they're doing and the reason why they're the worst is, well they could be doing anything"

(Jeanne, London 2)

This representation was not drawn upon in individual interviews.

#### 6.4.2 Asylum seekers as 'threatened'

The counterpart to the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening* is the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened*. This was less frequently produced in the media sample than the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening*, but it was the most common 'positive' media representation of asylum seekers. It featured particularly in The Independent and The Guardian, whose coverage tended to focus on concerns raised by organisations working in support of refugees and asylum seekers. This representation rarely appeared in group interviews, but was the most frequent representation in individual interviews. There were three elements of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened*, asylum seekers as (1) *threatened by the UK asylum system*, (2) *socially threatened*, and (3) *threatened by the circumstances which led to their asylum claim*. Taken together these components represent asylum seekers as vulnerable people who need help.

##### *Asylum seekers as 'threatened by the UK asylum system'*

This element of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened* highlights the role of asylum seekers as victims of a system which provides inadequate or, in the case of those whose applications have failed, no support. There were three elements to representation of asylum seekers as *threatened by the UK asylum system*, (1) *economically threatened*, (2) *psychologically threatened*, and (3)

*relatively threatened*. This representation appeared in a minority of media articles, did not feature in group interviews but was the most frequent representations in individual interviews. All three elements of this representation appeared in the media sample as well as individual interviews, but each of these threats was more fully elaborated in individual interviews than in the media sample.

In the media sample the representation of asylum seekers as *economically threatened* centred on the lack of support for those whose asylum applications have failed and the extreme poverty suffered by these individuals as a result. For example:

“Thousands of rejected asylum seekers have been abandoned by the government and are sleeping rough in parks, public toilets and churches, leading to record levels of destitution across the country, according a report published today” (Guardian, 7th November)

In individual interviews, *economically threatened* primarily focused on asylum seekers having inadequate or no support and asylum seekers were frequently characterised as ‘destitute people’. For example:

“There are many things which we do not really get but what the media perceive that asylum seekers are entitled to you know housing benefit, whatever, we are entitled to nothing, especially if you are seeing the destitute asylum seekers part of which I am, you get nothing” (Abebe)

Individual interviewees also focused on the economic threat resulting from not being able to work. For example:

“If you are an asylum seeker no matter how much educated you are you can’t go to university, if you are an asylum seeker and you have no work permit no matter how much experience you have you can’t work, the benefit that you get is lower than Jobseeker allowance and you have to stay on it” (Babir)

Individual interviewees frequently indicated that these constraints, coupled with the very long decision making process, mean that asylum seekers effectively live in limbo, unable to make plans and without purpose or structure in their daily lives. For example:



"The limbo of not knowing what you're, that is the most important thing for an asylum seeker, the papers, getting the permanent residency, making you legal, making your stay legal here. I think that will solve a lot of problems. The uncertainty is what's eating up most asylum seekers"

(Rose)

Not being allowed to work and having no clear role during this period was also described by some as producing psychological threat. In particular, asylum seekers were characterised as being prone to depression and to feelings of deindividualisation. For example:

"I've almost lost my personality since I have arrived here in the UK, you just lose your personality, the moment you know that you are an asylum seeker for that matter... someone with a very good experience, good academic background you know, work experience, family background and so on and so forth, flee persecution, seek protection... and then you just lose yourself... only today never know what's going to happen tomorrow, so it's all about living for a particular minute so same is happening to thousands of individuals and because we are all at the same, we just share the same feeling"

(Abebe)

In the media sample, asylum seekers were represented as *psychologically threatened* in relation to the experience of living 'in limbo'. The length of time it takes for applications to be processed combined with the threat of removal was described as resulting in asylum seekers suffering from depression. Lack of financial support for those whose applications have failed and the use of detention centres were also described as contributing to mental health issues. For example:

"Driven to Desperate Measures, a recent report from the Institute of Race Relations, catalogues the deaths of 221 asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers in the UK in the past 15 years -suicides, racist attacks and accidents in the hidden economy account for many. In the past five years alone, as immigration legislation has got increasingly tough, there have been 41 suicides, 17 in detention centres and prisons... In a report published in the British Medical Journal last February, Mina Fazel, an Oxford academic, and her co-author Derrick Silove found that refugees "warehoused" and confined for long periods in immigration detention suffered from hopelessness, despair and suicidal urges."

(Guardian, 2nd Dec)

Individual interviewees also suggested that the long wait for a decision leads to mental health issues. For example:

"I have seen how obsessed they get... after a while they just get hooked on this status that they don't have and they get depressed and all kinds of problems and they even find physical problems because it's just very difficult to be in that situation for many years"

(Lilith)

The media also represented asylum seekers as *threatened by the UK asylum system* in relative terms, for example in terms of lacking the support that would be provided to members of the host community. For example:

"The series of measures to harass asylum seekers, imprisoning them, depleting their legal aid, making failed asylum seekers homeless and taking their children away from them, all make it clear that these are expendable semi-humans who should not expect rights or quality of life in the same way as indigenous British people"

(The Independent, 22nd April)

In individual interviews asylum seekers were represented as *relatively threatened* in relation to refugees and members of the host community and several participants suggested that asylum seekers are given worse accommodation than other people living in social housing. For example:

"Asylums don't get their accommodation from council they get it from NASS and NASS usually has accommodation that no-one wants so if you go there they are old and terrible inside, no-one wants those accommodations in the private sector"

(Babir)

### *Asylum seekers as 'socially threatened'*

Asylum seekers were represented as *socially threatened* by belonging to a stigmatised group and not being able to easily integrate into UK society as a result. This representation was not common in the media sample, but some newspapers drew attention to the way that asylum seekers are socially rejected in the UK. For example:

"The lucky ones make it to our borders. And for what? To be demonised mainly"

(The Independent, 24th July)



Asylum seekers were also represented as being powerless to challenge social threat. For example:

“Whereas people from racial groups and of a particular faith have some protection from hostility directed at them, asylum-seekers have none. Yet asylum-seekers have become hate figures in some quarters and are targeted specifically because they're claiming asylum, not because of their race or religion... the best way to reduce this hostility would be for politicians and other opinion formers to show greater moral leadership (and to carefully consider their own language when talking about this issue). But it may also be time to consider some legal protection from abuse for asylum-seekers and to look at tightening the Press Complaints Commission code”  
(The Times, 4th July)

A minority of group interviewees also recognised the difficulties that asylum seekers experience in relation to being socially rejected and belonging to a stigmatised group. For example:

“I've got a friend and her job is actually purely dealing with asylum seekers... interviewing these people and I said 'yeah but they just let anyone' and she said 'actually that's not true, they have to be really sort of genuinely in need' and therefore sometimes I think well if that is the case we should actually be maybe a bit kinder to them. I think we're such a diverse cultural population now, sometimes you think 'I wonder if they're British?' and they might have been born here but you actually think in your mind 'well they're not English, they haven't got English you know our values or whatever' but I do think they're human beings and at the end of the day if they're here then they have to be treated with the respect they deserve. I don't think they necessarily are actually “  
(Pat, West Brigford)

The representation of asylum seekers as socially disadvantaged was elaborated in far more detail in individual interviews than in group interviews or the media sample. As in other data sources asylum seekers were described as a stigmatised group and in individual interviews not only was this described as leading to social exclusion it was also linked to physical threat. For example:

“I give one example, one family I worked with three years ago the father was stabbed... He nearly died, he spent three months in hospital, more and some of it in coma. He was badly stabbed so they want to kill him as an example maybe to scare people off because, I mean it's not common but this is happening all the time, on average at least one person a year is killed, asylum seeker, by someone they don't know and lots of people are attacked and the attacks are more common”  
(Rashida)

In individual interviews social disadvantages were also described in relation to the difficulties asylum seekers experience in adapting to cultural change. For example:

“You cannot really communicate with British people in a proper manner so really you can't find friends anyway in the first place because you haven't been given the tools to learn the basic communication skill and on other hand then when you are isolated you, you do not develop the social skills either. That would deprive you having friends or even understanding culture too. So in every way you are deprived, I mean then you are labelled with somebody who do not, people who do not want to integrate into society, which make me laugh and if I could think of asylum seekers, always there are four words would come to my mind in this society, the first, and maybe other societies too, is the four words would be this... separation, isolation, violation, desolation. They first separate you and then when you are separated you are isolated, when you are isolated you are vulnerable, they violate you and when they violate you they leave you in desolation. That's how we feel as asylum seeker or how I feel or most of asylum seeker feel in this society” (Amin)

As with the media, individual interviewees represented asylum seekers as *socially threatened* in terms of being powerless. This relates to their lack of power over the representation of their own group. For example:

“This individual is talking about me but I'm not this individual you know this media is talking about this and it means me but I'm not whereas they saying you're like this and I have nowhere to go and complain” (Abebe)

Asylum seekers were also described as having no-one to speak for them. For example, Nasih commented in relation to negative media coverage “well asylum seekers and refugees, if they are targeted there is no-one who can speak for them” and Nozer argued “asylum seeker they have got not one represent in this country”. Other participants talked about asylum seekers' fear of speaking out. For example, Bako said “you are just quiet because you think they're going to contact Home Office and Home Office, when they contact Home Office they will say ok we stop your accommodation or we stop your voucher”.



### *Asylum seekers as victims of the circumstances which led to their asylum claim*

The third element of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened* involves the emotional impact associated with the circumstances that cause individuals to seek asylum.

In the media sample this representation consisted of two elements, the representation of asylum seekers as *traumatised* and as *vulnerable*. Trauma was linked to mental health issues and was seen to interact with elements of the UK system which led to depression. For example:

“Of 56 “failed” asylum seekers in four detention centres whom the group examined, 33 showed evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder or depression; many had harmed themselves or made suicide attempts; and nearly half had been tortured”

(Guardian, 2nd December)

Asylum seekers were also directly characterised as *vulnerable*. For example:

“The organisation has a long tradition of practical and emotional help to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK. With so many people displaced by war and natural disaster, the Red Cross traces the relatives of newly arrived refugees in Britain who have left behind family in conflict regions such as Darfur.”

(Times, 2nd December)

Group interviewees rarely discussed the reasons that people seek asylum and when this was considered tended to focus either on pull factors associated with the UK, such as social housing and the NHS, or on poverty as a push factor. Some group interviewees described asylum seekers as people fleeing danger (see 6.5.1 below), but the psychological impact of this situation on asylum seekers was not a focus of group interviews.

Individual interviewees also represented asylum seekers as *traumatised* and as *vulnerable*. As in the media sample trauma was associated with mental health issues. Six participants discussed their own mental health issues and described periods in which they had suicidal urges and others flagged this up as a general issue for asylum seekers. For example:

"I have come across a lot of asylum seekers, they ended up in mental hospitals, they trying to finish their lives in every possible way" (Amin)

Individual interviewees also characterised asylum seekers as *vulnerable*. For example, Amin described asylum seekers as "the most vulnerable members of society". They also represented asylum seekers as insecure individuals and suggested that the fear and insecurity resulting from the circumstances that led them to seek asylum never really go away. For example:

"Asylum seekers always needs security, it's the main issue... Even when you get the citizenship you don't feel secure... you're waiting for passport to feel secure and when you get it after that it comes a kind of piece of paper. It doesn't supply security again in your mind... If the country where you grow up always pressurised you and you don't rely on the government, if you thinking anything might happen any time and nobody can look for you, you are disappeared it becomes a like a fascism or police state situation if you grow up and it doesn't go away...we don't feel secure anywhere" (Adil)

## 6.5 ASYLUM SEEKERS AS 'ILLEGITIMATE' VERSUS ASYLUM SEEKERS AS 'LEGITIMATE'

This pair of representations refers to the representation of asylum seekers as economic migrants entering the UK in an illegitimate manner versus the representation of asylum seekers as people genuinely in need of help.

Figure 6.5 illustrates this pair of representations, showing the core and peripheral elements for each data source. There are clear overlaps between the representation of asylum seekers as *illegitimate* and the representation of asylum seekers as *bad people* as indicated by the number of shared elements of these representations (shown in square brackets). However, what distinguishes this representation is that legitimacy is not solely determined by positive or negative traits. Although the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers* and *criminal* clearly positions asylum seekers as *illegitimate*, asylum seekers are also represented as *illegitimate* in terms of being economic migrants coming to the UK to flee poverty and find work. This representation does not necessarily position them as *bad people* – in fact some group interviewees expressed empathy for individuals in this position – however, this nevertheless positions them as



*illegitimate* in relation to their claims. This representation was also linked to the perception that the UK is ‘full’ and therefore only those perceived as being in the small minority of ‘genuine refugees’ should be allowed to stay in the UK. This was a particularly dominant representation in the media sample and in group interviews regardless of evaluative opinion of asylum seekers. Figure 6.5 shows that all sources are drawing on very similar representations of asylum seekers in relation to perceptions of legitimacy but that individual interviewees are using the broadest definition when it comes to representing asylum seekers as *legitimate*.

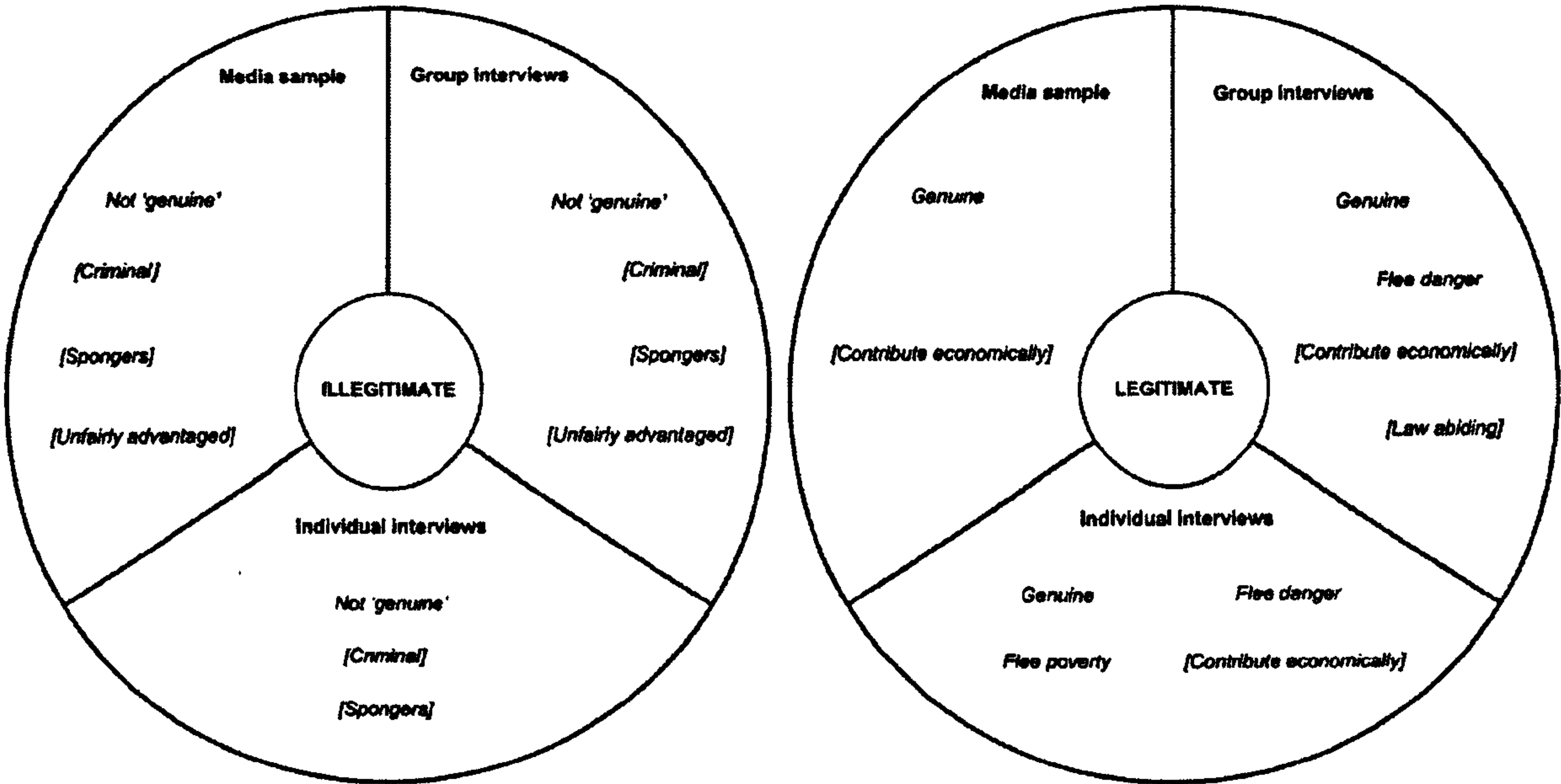


Figure 6.5: Social representations of asylum seekers as ‘illegitimate’ and ‘legitimate’

### 6.5.1 Asylum seekers as ‘illegitimate’

This was one of the most frequent representations of asylum seekers in the media, and the tabloid press in particular tended to represent the majority of asylum seeker as *illegitimate*. For example, on the 25th January, The Daily Mail quoted Mr Justice Collins, the High Court's senior immigration judge as saying “the ‘vast majority’ of asylum appeals had ‘no merit at all’ and were brought by economic migrants trying to delay their deportation from Britain.” There was also a tendency in the media sample to draw comparisons between “genuine” refugees and “failed” asylum seekers. For example:

"Shadow immigration minister Damian Green, who unearthed the figures, said: "No wonder there are more than 250,000 failed asylum seekers in this country. This failure slows down the system even further, which not only costs the taxpayer money but is also unfair on the genuine refugee."  
(Daily Express, 2nd October)

Similarly, on 20th April, The Daily Express printed an article claiming that the UK topped the European league for providing refuge and quoted Shadow Home Secretary David Davis as saying "the problem lies not with the number of genuine refugees but with the large backlog of failed asylum seekers" and went on to describe the need for a credible system that is "fair to the genuine refugee, who everybody wants to help, and fair to the British taxpayer". The article continued, "the government last night insisted the level of asylum seekers continues to fall" and a Home Office spokeswoman was quoted as saying "the Government is fully committed to the UK's proud tradition of offering a safe haven to refugees; refugee communities have made an enormous contribution to British life over the years. However, the Government has dramatically cut the number of unfounded asylum claims since their peak in 2002". In this way, 'refugees' are represented as contributing to the UK, whereas the term 'asylum' is linked with 'unfounded claims'. By routinely prefacing the term 'asylum seeker' with 'failed' and contrasting these individuals with 'genuine refugees', the media positioned asylum seekers as *illegitimate*.

The representation of asylum seekers as *illegitimate* was also one of the most common representations in group interviews and like the media sample, interviewees contrasted asylum seekers with refugees rather than recognising them as refugees at an earlier stage in the application process. For example:

"An asylum seeker is someone who puts themselves up whereas a refugee is someone who like you know had to be helped out, which is a bit different"  
(Gary, Basildon)

As described in 6.3.1 above, group interviewees frequently moved between talking about 'asylum seekers' and 'illegal immigrants' or 'illegals' and treated these as synonymous labels. This was clearly linked to perceptions of illegitimacy and even those who represented asylum seekers as people who want to work in the UK



rather than 'spongers' saw them as illegitimate due to perceived impacts on the host population. For example:

"I think that one other factor is the matter of illegal asylum seekers. There's asylum seekers and then you have the people that become illegal as well after they've overstayed. I think that number is growing vastly and the government isn't doing enough about those illegal asylum seekers... you need to really crack down and differentiate who needs to stay here and who doesn't because... yes they need to work here to give money back home but, you kind of think to yourself why don't you just go back home and then try and make something of yourself there. I know it's more money here compared to there and everything but I think asylum seekers don't understand what they're doing, meaning we as people who are observing them, who are living in this country and born, being brought up here and seeing that these people are coming in and not invading our country but like we said leeching off us, we need to educate them in the sense of saying 'look what you are doing to our economy, what you're doing to our like housing, money, benefits, this is what you're doing, it's not right'"

(Salma, London 1)

Group interviewees tended to support the principal of asylum, but nevertheless perceived the majority of asylum seekers as 'not genuine'. For example:

"I haven't got a problem with anybody coming to this country who is genuinely seeking asylum. I think the one thing that we've touched on today is that we all agree on is the way it's managed and the process and I don't know enough about what the criteria is and what the process is for somebody who wants to come to the UK to seek asylum but I think it's very important that process is managed, because I think there's a general feeling that it's abused"

(Lisa, Nottingham)

In contrast, asylum seekers were very rarely presented as 'not genuine' in individual interviews and even when they did talk about people using the asylum system to enter the UK for economic reasons individual interviewees tended to suggest that this should not be interpreted in terms of illegitimacy arguing instead that these people also need help:

"In any, in any society, in any community you have people that lie, you have asylum seekers yeah, I'm saying this to you, yes there are some people who lies, they do, but why they lying for? They come for better life, but you don't have to look at these people and tell them they're bogus. Why they? You see on the TV what is happening, how people don't

even have food to eat, how people are suffering, why they have aids to help people? Why?  
It's because of the way people are suffering" (Amadou)

### 6.5.2 Asylum seekers as 'legitimate'

As with other positive representations, most instances in the media sample in which asylum seekers were described as *legitimate* focused on individual case studies rather than generalising this characteristic to the group. The only articles that attributed legitimacy to the majority of the group appeared in The Independent and The Guardian. For example:

"The number of days after a final refusal when support for failed asylum seekers is cut off is 21 days after a final refusal is made on their claim, and although there is limited support available after that point, people have to agree to return to their country of origin to access it. However, the report says that many failed asylum seekers are unable to return either because it is impossible to travel to their home country or because they fear they would be tortured or killed when they get there." (The Guardian, 7th November)

This article therefore suggests that a refused case is not necessarily a 'bogus' case. Similarly the following article, written by a barrister dealing with asylum cases, highlighted difficulties in decision making which may mean that rejection is not synonymous with illegitimacy:

"In many asylum cases, some, even most, of the claimant's story might seem inherently unlikely but that did not mean that it was untrue. The ingredients of the story, and the story as a whole, had to be considered against the available country evidence and reliable expert evidence, and other familiar factors such as consistency with what the claimant had said before and with other factual evidence, where there was any. Inherent probability, which might be helpful in many domestic cases, could be a dangerous, even a wholly inappropriate, factor to rely on in some asylum cases. Much of the evidence would be referable to societies with customs and circumstances which were very different from those of which the members of the fact-finding tribunal had any, even second-hand, experience." (Independent, 27th July)

Most group interviews involved discussion of 'genuine' asylum seekers. For example:



"If you think about asylum seekers, if they're genuine then that is a very valid reason for wanting to move country I would say"  
(Ian, West Brigford)

However, 'genuine' asylum seekers tended to be presented as being in the minority. For example:

"I think there are some genuine people within asylum seekers but I think they are a vast minority"  
(Salma, London 1)

Group interviewees represented asylum seekers in relation to the legal definition but also used a broader definition of legitimacy, indicating that they considered anyone 'fleeing danger' from a war torn country to be legitimate. For example, Gary described 'genuine' asylum seekers in terms of "anybody that's classed as unsafe where they live" and Dan responded "Yeah I thought the definition of asylum was if a country was war-torn or in a bad state of affairs and it became justifiable that the person, their life was not in a good way to the way it could be, then they would be able to go to another country and claim asylum".

In contrast to group interviewees, a large majority of individual interviewees represented asylum seekers as *legitimate*. For example:

"There's no reason why people to my belief, leaving the particular area, leaving their home country if they really do not face problems... the media should actually I think be in a position to know these individuals who have actually sought protection. I don't even like the word asylum seekers. I have never known it until I came here, so those who seek protection for that matter, why do they need protection, there is things that really makes them leave their particular country"  
(Abebe)

As in group interviews, individual interviewees described asylum seekers not just in terms of those who are individually persecuted but also in relation to fleeing dangerous countries. For example:

"We run from Iraq, what is the reason, the reason it was war, the reason it was biology chemic, halogen"  
(Nozer)

In addition, individual interviewees also described poverty as a legitimate reason for people seeking asylum in the UK. For example:

“At the moment a lot of these people who are coming they are economic migrants really, they’re not asylum seekers. So therefore the Geneva Convention act doesn’t apply to them so that I think angers people on this side as well because they’re saying “ok if you’re not being persecuted why are you here?” But I would also use the term forced asylum seeker for them because if you’re in Iraq and you’ve got nothing to eat and your home has been bombed and somebody’s offering you a trip to the UK I mean who wouldn’t go?”

(Lilith)

## 6.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The representations of asylum seekers identified in the media sample were predominantly negative and clustered around the idea that asylum seekers are *bad people, threatening* and *illegitimate*. The majority of more sympathetic coverage represented asylum seekers as *threatened*, which whilst challenging the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening* can nevertheless be considered negative in that it focuses on weakness, emotionally as well as in terms of status, and represents asylum seekers as victims rather than as people who are equal to the host community. There were some instances in which asylum seekers were represented as *good people* and *legitimate*, but these were rare and it was only in The Guardian and The Independent, the publications with the lowest circulation figures, that these unambiguously positive representations were generalised to the group rather presented as human interest stories which focused on exceptional individuals.

Representations of asylum seekers identified in group interviews were remarkably similar to those identified in the media sample, both in terms of content and in the balance of positive and negative representations. This demonstrates the spread of negative representations from the media into the host community and also indicates that these are likely to be core representations of asylum seekers. The key difference between the representations identified in the media sample and those identified in group interviews was that the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened* was less well elaborated in group interviews. Furthermore, whilst some participants recognised the disadvantages asylum seekers face in the UK, they did



not represent asylum seekers as *threatened* in relation to the impact of the circumstances that had led to their asylum claim. When asylum seekers were described as fleeing persecution or torture the impact of these experiences were rarely discussed. In the few instances where this did happen, instead of evoking sympathy, fear was expressed that these experiences may have produced violent or criminal individuals. This demonstrates the power of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatening*, which was a much more dominant representation in these interviews than the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened*. The other difference between representations in the media sample and in group interviews was the transformation of 'factual' representations once they entered public discourse. This included the elaboration of the economic impact of asylum seekers to include the representation of asylum seekers as 'taking our jobs', but also included the widening of the representation of legitimacy to include anyone 'fleeing danger'.

The representations of asylum seekers in individual interviews were much more positive than those in either the group interviews or media sample. This was not unexpected, given that all individual interviewees had sought asylum in the UK. What is more notable is that whilst their definitions of legitimacy tended to be broader than either the media sample or the group interviews and their representations of asylum seekers as *good people* and *threatened* were more elaborate, they nevertheless drew on very similar representations to the media and group interviewees. For example, in relation to asylum seekers as *bad people* or *good people*, both group and individual interviewees tended to represent asylum seekers in very polarised terms, as either highly educated individuals - with 'doctor' a frequently cited profession - or as unskilled individuals from impoverished backgrounds. It is also notable that where negative representations were apparent in individual interviews negative media terms like 'flood' and 'sponger' were reproduced. Furthermore, where there were differences in the representations drawn upon in the individual interviews, these additional elaborations tended to be in response to negative representations of the group. For example the representation of asylum seekers as *law abiding* was clearly a response to what many individual interviewees described as a dominant media representation of asylum seekers as *criminal*. Therefore by contesting negative representations

participants demonstrated awareness, if not assimilation, of these representations. This demonstrates the spread of representations from the media and provides further support for the suggestion that these are core representations of asylum seekers in the UK.

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the findings of a thematic analysis conducted in order to map the social representations of asylum seekers as evidenced in newspaper articles and transcripts of interviews with members of the host community and with individuals who have sought asylum in the UK. These findings, together with the analysis presented in Chapter 5 have established the extent and content of the 'moral panic' about asylum seekers in the UK. The next chapter explores the possible processes underlying host group receptivity to this moral panic discourse and examines how individuals who have sought asylum in the UK seek to cope with stigmatised group membership.



## CHAPTER 7: CAUSE AND IMPACT OF MORAL PANIC

### 7.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative content analysis of the 8 group interviews with members of the host community and 25 individual interviews with people who have sought asylum in the UK in order to (a) identify the extent to which public receptivity to moral panic discourse can be explained by social identity processes, and (b) examine the impact of stigmatised group membership on those seeking asylum in the UK, including an analysis of the extent to which coping strategies predicted by Social Identity Theory have been adopted.

### 7.2 EXPLAINING THE HOST RESPONSE TO ASYLUM SEEKERS

The qualitative analysis of the group interviews focused on the extent to which host receptivity to moral panic discourse can be explained by Social Identity Theory. As discussed in Chapter 4, the coding frame employed was based on the prediction of Social Identity Theory that high status groups will be prejudiced against lower status groups when group boundaries are perceived as permeable and status differences are perceived as legitimate (Reynolds and Turner, 2001). Five category sets were examined: ***Social Categorisation***, ***Counter Social Categorisation***, ***Social Comparison***, ***Counter Social Comparison*** and ***Social Belief Structures***. Each category set was specified by secondary codes. For example, ***Social Categorisation*** was comprised of two codes, *Social Categorisation (in-group)*, which was used to capture instances where participants indicated that they identified with the in-group (i.e. as members of the host community) and *Social Categorisation (out-group)* which captured instances where asylum seekers were distinguished as out-group members. Each secondary code had an equivalent disconfirmation code. For example, the disconfirmation code for *Social Categorisation (in-group)* was *Counter Social Categorisation (in-group)*, which was used to identify instances where participants indicated that they do not identify with the in-group. The final coding frame appears in Appendix 15, with illustrative examples for each code.

## 7.2.1 Social Categorisation

### *Social Categorisation (in-group)*

In seven of the eight group interviews participants unambiguously identified with the host community. This was evident in references to “our” country and what “we” do or think. For example:

“I think they need to have a level of understanding of our culture to be able to know how we behave and the basic things that we live to and understand how we work”

(Simon, Doncaster)

Group interviewees also frequently made references to “our” culture, and in half of the interviews participants used the expression “when in Rome” to describe a shared set of practices that they felt should be adhered to by ‘outsiders’. For example:

“Because in our culture it's very much, if you're covering your face up to that extent you're obviously hiding something and then people are paranoid about what you're hiding and it's just, I'm a big fan of the phrase ‘when in Rome do as Romans do’. So I go to other countries, I've been in a mosque, I did all the covering myself up because that was respectful and I just don't like it when people, asylum seekers, immigrants anything like that comes over to this country and just carries on as they would in their country”

(Jeanne, London 2)

The only group interview where participants indicated that they did not identify with the host community was London 1. These participants identified more with their ethnic than national identity:

***Paula***

See I'd always say I'm West Indian although I'm British, I'd say more say I'm West Indian

***Ama***

I would say that as well

***Paula***

Yeah I do say and I think a lot of people I know they don't say they're British. I think someone asked me the other day, you know, ethnic origin, I said ‘West Indian’ and she



goes 'are you British?' I said 'yes' but do you know what I mean? I would more say that I'm West Indian.

**Maria**

That's the true, you can say it's so subconscious you can find out how people actually perceive themselves just by saying a simple questionnaire, 'what are you?' and by their response I know that I'd say I was Sri Lankan, I wouldn't, it's sub-conscious I wouldn't say I'm British, that's the thing you wouldn't think about it

**Paula**

Yeah, yeah and then as well because our tradition, my mum's, you know like the Jamaican traditions we do them here. I suppose if we didn't do them, like the food and stuff like that and different things then maybe

(London 1)

However, despite explicitly characterising their identity in this way, these participants also talked about what "we" do in the UK and referred to asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants accessing "our" resources. They also discussed the fact that they could be identified as British by other people regardless of how they personally chose to identify themselves:

**Ama**

Actually when I went to Ghana I was sitting in a car, I didn't say, I had my sunshades on and I was wearing the clothes that they were wearing because sometimes they wear shirts and trousers and stuff

**Paula**

But they knew you were

**Ama**

And they'd say 'wow she's British' just by looking at me, I didn't even talk

**Paula**

Yeah when I went to Jamaica, they just knew I was, they were shouting out 'Manchester' and London [all laugh] They just knew and I said but how do they know? I'm wearing the same clothes

**Ama**

How do they know?

**Suzanne**

A lot of it is the way we walk, your mannerisms. Like in the West Indies it's very laid back and I'm tearing it down the road [all laugh] like I've got a bus to catch sort of thing and it's like 'slow down' and they're like 'they're from London' and everything, in sign language [makes gesture] that means 'London' you know 'mad' sort of thing. So we're very fast paced compared to other people and even the way we stand is completely different to other cultures as well. So the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you stand, it's completely different.

(London 1)

This suggests that although they may prefer to identify with their ethnic group, they nevertheless recognise that they share features which identify them as members of the host community.

There was therefore evidence across the full range of group interviews to indicate that group interviewees categorised themselves as part of the host community.

### *Social Categorisation (out-group)*

In every group interview, asylum seekers were categorised as a distinct group from the host community, with group boundaries drawn on the basis of cultural differences. For example:

"It would be no good us go and sitting and trying to eat Asian, well we don't eat Asian food anyway, but you know sitting in their house they probably don't watch soaps and all that that I watch and you know they do different things don't they"

(Joan, Birmingham)

Language and religion were the most common factors identified as distinguishing asylum seekers from the host community. For example:

"I think the major thing is the language. They don't learn the language. I'm quite happy for someone to come over here, willing to learn the language, live by our rules, yeah if they want to worship someone else, fine, I am not religious at all so I couldn't give a monkeys who you worship, but this country is a Christian country, it has been for nearly a thousand



years and maybe even earlier, certainly for a thousand years and then for these communities to try and turn it into a Muslim state, I'll pick on Muslims because they're the flavour of the month [others laugh] but they seem to be the biggest offenders of trying to push their law and their religion onto other cultures where they have no tolerance of any other culture or religion at all and that's what's causing the biggest problem is the religion... that's my biggest gripe and the language, not learning English" (Luke, Basildon)

Group differences were seen to be exacerbated by physical separation in living arrangements and lack of integration in cultural practices, and group boundaries were perceived as both literal and metaphorical:

**Michaela**

You put all these people in this place they're going to set up as they've lived in their own country and they're going to do what they do because they're together whereas if they was put next door and the trouble is nobody wants them next door, so they think they're doing a favour but then they create a problem in a concentrated area.

**Charlotte**

Putting a fence around them, segregating them in a way initially isn't it so there's that barrier's already been created

**Michaela**

No but whether you're fencing them in or not they, they create this like space around them

**Charlotte**

A little area of their own

**Michaela**

I think that's part of the problem

**David**

I think the thing is that there's always going to be, when you've got real or perceived barriers you're always going to get that when there are people with differences and I think that the difference is actually seen as a problem rather than necessarily in some ways a positive. Ultimately everybody's different to somebody else and it's the classic sort of thing is that you often gravitate towards those people you actually have more in common with, that's why people do group together, whether they're actually made to group together or they naturally would do that

(Nottingham)

Asylum seekers were represented as an out-group regardless of the extent to which participants personally identified with the 'in-group' (i.e. the host community). For example, Paula (London 1) who identified more with her ethnic than national identity nevertheless suggested that asylum seekers are "ripping off our country, they're taking our money and they're abusing the system". Furthermore, even those who were sympathetic towards asylum seekers indicated that they perceived them as belonging to a distinct group. For example, when asked if they thought they had anything in common with asylum seekers, participants in Doncaster responded:

*Graham*

No

*Sarah*

Probably not

*Graham*

I think it would be a strange situation to be in, what to talk about or I mean first of all you've got the language barrier haven't you and it's trying to relate to that person isn't it? When you've grown up in nice cosy England and they're fleeing a violent regime or something like that, it's quite difficult to relate I think.

(Doncaster)

At least one participant in half of the group interviews indicated that they did not personally distinguish asylum seekers as out-group members. These participants emphasised the need to deal with people as individuals and that we are all humans. For example:

"I just think about individuals and just feel if they want a better life either for themselves or their families, I mean you know they can get that in this country then I would do the same if I were in their situation"

(Judy, Doncaster)

However, all of these participants also felt that individuals who have sought asylum in the UK tend to be categorised as an out-group by the wider host community. For example:



"I think there is a red-top view of what asylum seekers are and that perception is only broken down where you've talked to somebody who is an asylum seeker and tells you their personal story and you see the issues that drove them to leave their homeland and seek refuge somewhere else, and it's only then that it bites home. If you haven't got that background information and you can't have it on everybody and I guess most people's stories are different anyway. If you haven't got that background information then it becomes a blur and you do get a red-top you know headline 'asylum seekers' you know fifty, five hundred thousand or fifty thousand more asylum seekers pour over the channel tunnel again"

(Mike, Doncaster)

Despite individual differences in the extent to which participants categorised asylum seekers as an out-group there was therefore evidence from across the full range of group interviews to indicate the categorisation of asylum seekers as an 'out-group' in relation to the UK host community.

### **7.2.2 Social Comparison**

#### *Social Comparison (in-group)*

In line with the predictions of Social Identity Theory, group differences tended to be interpreted in favour of the in-group. The host community were positively contrasted with asylum seekers as being people with 'good standards', who are hard-working and contribute to the UK economy.

The host community were represented as having 'good standards' in relation to politeness and cleanliness. In several interviews participants characterised the British as people who are tidy and look after their gardens in contrast to asylum seekers who were described as not meeting these standards. For example:

"Whatever they do in their country, in this country we keep things tidy. Her next door she just opens the door, throws rubbish out and that's where it stays for months. Now if they're going to live like that, why do they give them a brand new property which is only ten years old at the most and abuse it and turn it into a slum? So if they're going to come to this country they must actually act like we do and keeping places tidy and live like we do instead of like they want to live in their own country"

(Dennis, Birmingham)

The host community were also represented as having 'good values' and adopting these values was seen as key to being accepted into this community. For example:

"All I'm saying is if someone does come across and has good values, no matter what their nationality is, then their child goes to school and they want to learn English and become British and they'll try to go home to teach their parents to speak English, they'll become British eventually"

(Ken, Rickmansworth)

The host community was also characterised as being tolerant and open to other cultures in comparison with asylum seekers. For example, Luke (Basildon) criticised asylum seekers for "not being as tolerant as we are" and David (Nottingham) defined Britishness as "this wider acceptance of the variety of different cultures". The host community were also characterised as people who make more of an effort to understand and respect other people's cultures. For example:

"They come over, they want to live here, but they don't want to live the way we live. When we go abroad on holiday or whatever, like if you're going to Thailand for three months or however long it is, you're going to immerse yourself in that culture, aren't you? ...That's what I can't understand, when Brits go abroad they try to immerse themselves in the culture of where they are, but what's wrong with people immersing themselves in our culture? We've got a pretty good culture, we've been going a couple of thousand years, haven't we?"

(Luke, Basildon)

The host community were also characterised as hard-working in comparison to asylum seekers who were described as coming to the UK and unfairly benefiting from the contributions of the host community. For example, Darren (Rickmansworth) defined 'Britishness' as "working hard to provide" and participants frequently emphasised the contributions that they and their families had made to the UK economy. For example:

"I've been earning since I was sixteen and I've been paying stamp since I was sixteen, so that's twenty-one years I've been paying in, my mum and dad have been paying in for forty, fifty years. They come over now and get exactly the same benefits and they've been paying, they haven't, may not even been paying into the NHS. I mean, we pay most of the money into Europe, UK, Germany and France are the most contributors and yet we get bugger all back"

(Luke, Basildon)



This perception of positive group distinctiveness led some participants to demonstrate pride in their group membership. For example Sarah (Doncaster) said “I’m proud of being British” and both Maureen and Ian (West Brigford) said “we are a good country”. However, half of the interviews also included less positive representations of the host community, in particular in relation to the perception that the ‘English work ethic’ has been lost. For example:

“We’re not prepared to do the jobs they’re prepared to do, and they work exceptionally hard for menial wages and I agree with you the money’s going back to their own countries which is not great but if they didn’t do the jobs I’m actually not sure right now in this country who the heck would do them, because we’re a bone idle society and I genuinely do believe that youngsters today they don’t want to work”  
(Pat, West Brigford)

This led some participants to characterise the host community as being ‘as bad’ as ‘them’. For example when Padma (London 1) was complaining about asylum seekers working ‘cash-in-hand’, Jeanne responded “Well yeah but then British people do that too, in all fairness” and both Paul and Steve (Rickmansworth) responded to complaints about asylum seekers abusing the benefits system by pointing out that they knew British people who did the same thing.

Some participants also expressed negative comments about the culture of the host community, both in terms of suggesting “Britain hasn’t got a culture any more” (Suzanne, London 2) or in terms of it not having a good culture. For example:

“Whilst our culture is not as strong as other countries, we do have a culture, it might not be the best culture in the world [laughs] but we do have one and by saying that they want to stay here they should accept that. I’m not saying they have to go and get drunk every Saturday night and be arrested on Sunday morning [all laugh]... we should appreciate other cultures but we have our own”  
(Michelle, Nottingham)

However, most participants characterised the host community in positive terms and where direct comparisons were drawn between asylum seekers and the host community the vast majority of these favoured the in-group. Where the in-group was not favoured, it was in terms of saying ‘we’re as bad as them’ and there were no occasions where the host group were characterised as being ‘worse’ than asylum

seekers. There was therefore evidence to support the contention that group interviewees tended to make social comparisons that favoured the in-group.

### *Social Comparison (out-group)*

Social comparison processes predicted by Social Identity Theory include the tendency to treat out-group members as undifferentiated, to negatively stereotype them and make negative judgements about their behaviour. Out-group comparison processes are therefore very similar to those identified in *hostility* in which the 'out-group' are designated as 'folk devils' and their behaviour is judged to be harmful to societal values and interests. Consequently much of the evidence for social comparison processes in relation to the out-group has already been discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. These findings are summarised below.

As discussed in Chapters 5, group interviewees tended to reproduce negative stereotypes of asylum seekers, for example describing them as 'spongers' and 'illegal', and most participants treated 'asylum seekers' as a homogenous group, talking about what 'they do' rather than differentiating them as individuals. For example:

"They come over here and start imposing their religions, beliefs, laws, I mean Sharia law, for example, on this country" (Luke, Basildon)

As discussed in Chapter 6, there were very few instances in which asylum seekers were positively represented as a group, and positive representations were generally produced in response to hostility expressed by other participants. There was also very little counter-evidence in relation to treating asylum seekers as a homogenous group and only one participant in one group indicated that he was uncomfortable making generalisations about 'asylum seekers'. Whilst he categorised asylum seekers as an out-group in the sense of being people who should not automatically have the right to live in the UK, he argued that asylum seekers do not share any particular features and suggested that they are no different from members of the host community:



"I don't think asylum seekers are any different from immigrants. They're people who come in from outside and we've got too many people here already, They're not better or worse than we are, they're just the same, but they're here and we shouldn't be here in quite such large numbers, it's just silly"

(Ian, West Brigford)

Responses in group interviews were therefore consistent with the predictions of Social Identity Theory in that the out-group (i.e. 'asylum seekers') tended to be negatively stereotyped and undifferentiated as group members.

### **7.2.3 Social Belief Structures**

#### *Permeability of group boundaries*

The permeability of group boundaries largely depends on the extent to which individuals have a choice in their group membership and identify with that group. For example, some identities, such as those based on race or gender, are difficult to change and individuals are likely to be identified with these groups by others regardless of their own feelings. As such these group boundaries tend to be impermeable. Other identities, such as those based on peer-groups are likely to change across time and involve more individual choice, as do identities based on preferences like political affiliations, and these group boundaries are therefore more permeable. 'Asylum seeker' is an interesting identity in that it is one which is imposed rather than chosen. At the same time, it is a temporary status and group members have the potential to become British citizens so the group boundaries between asylum seekers and the host community are permeable at least in principle. However, obtaining the status of British citizen does not necessarily equate with an individual identifying themselves as 'British', nor does it necessarily reflect acceptance into the group from the host community.

This was born out in the group interviews in which the majority of interviewees described group boundaries as impermeable, arguing that it was not possible for asylum seekers to become British. For example, Maria (London 1) commented "you can't become British you just are" and Graham (Doncaster) argued "I think if I went to live abroad I'd still be British". The primary barrier to 'Britishness' was described in terms of cultural differences. For example:

**Dennis**

I mean it's like 'when in Rome do as the Romans do'. Now any foreigner can't be a Roman can he? You know what I mean? It's, they come from a different culture altogether don't they

**Joan**

You see it's all the culture thing isn't it

(Birmingham)

This led a number of participants to associate Britishness with being born in the UK. For example:

**Ken**

I don't think the first generation could do, I think you've got to look at the second or third generation

**Darren**

But they've got to be brought up that way as well

**Ken**

They will do because they'll get integrated in schools

(Rickmansworth)

For some participants, even individuals who hadn't been "brought up that way", being born in Britain was enough to convey Britishness. For example, David (Nottingham), when discussing cultural boundaries to becoming British argued that some established ethnic communities in the UK are no more integrated than asylum seekers and commented "those people were actually born here therefore they are British" to which Charlotte responded "but they're not carrying on like what we would think of as British". Whereas for others, being born in the UK wasn't sufficient in itself, there had to be cultural integration. For example:

"If someone does come across and has good values, no matter what their nationality is, then their child goes to school and they want to learn English and become British and they'll try to go home to teach their parents to speak English and they'll become British eventually"

(Ken, Rickmansworth)



Participants who described barriers as permeable also emphasised the importance of integration and indicated that this was necessary for asylum seekers to become British. For example:

“I think they could become Anglicised if they wanted to, if they were committed to being a member of the society, to learn how we have evolved, to learn the language, to not necessarily adopt the same religion but to ensure that their religion is not in conflict with the main religion of Britain”  
(Sarah, Doncaster)

Similarly, Sharon, Jeanne and Padma in London (2) discussed the fact that they considered Padma’s parents to be British, despite not being born in the UK and attributed this to the fact that they had “made an effort” to integrate and Sharon concluded that “I think they [asylum seekers] can [become British] if they put the effort in to do it as well. Your mum works, your dad works, like you say they’ve worked to get where they are”. This idea of “making an effort” was linked to making a financial contribution to the UK as well as integrating culturally. For example:

**Luke**

I think they can [become British] if they learn to speak the language

**Gary**

Pay into the National Health and that, pay into the system

**Luke**

Yeah, pay their dues

(Basildon)

Interestingly, these findings indicate that contrary to the predictions of Social Identity Theory, perceptions regarding the permeability of group boundaries do not predict whether participants will respond negatively towards asylum seekers. Furthermore, responses indicated that rather than fuelling identity threat, permeability of boundaries is actually something that the host group consider to be desirable and it is the sense that asylum seekers do not want to integrate with the host community that is perceived as threatening rather than the fact that they may be assimilated into the in-group. Individuals seemed to be less concerned about social mobility than the idea that asylum seekers were living in the UK as a separate group that does not

wish to be assimilated, and this view was expressed by those who were generally more positive about asylum seekers as well as those who more negative. For example:

"I think because that goes back to the kind of like willingness of the asylum seeker actually wanting to integrate or the opposite which actually causes the problems where they actually would appear if there are massive, particular areas, who don't want to integrate, so why do you actually come here in the first place?" (David, Nottingham)

### *Legitimacy of group boundaries*

Unsurprisingly, given the amount of hostility expressed towards asylum seekers in the group interviews, there was an overwhelming impression that status differences were for the main part considered to be legitimate. Only one participant in one interview suggested that asylum seekers were treated poorly in the UK and should be accorded more respect:

"I think also that you don't take into account the kind of life they've left behind and they've come here because they think it's better and they'll be treated better so I think as well, as much as I agree with everything you said about the housing and everything, I still think they're human beings and we should treat them with a little bit more respect and dignity than perhaps they have been treated and the ways and means that they travel to get to this country is horrific anyway and the grass isn't always greener on the other side. I don't think when they get here they necessarily have as, an easy a time of it... we should actually be maybe a bit kinder to them" (Pat, West Bridgford)

The majority view was that asylum seekers were unfairly advantaged in relation to the host community and that their treatment should be more in accordance with that of a lower status group. For example:

"They have to start at the bottom of the list the same as what we do... it's alright the council saying 'no we don't do this, we don't give them houses, we don't do this'. Yes they do, I had a family move in just across the road from me, they get a three bedroom house, private so it's like £600 a month paid for, you know, why when there's people who have lived in a dive on a big council estate for ten years, they've done their rights, they've got three kids sleeping in one bedroom but they're not entitled to that house. They're coming over here to better conditions so as horrible as it may sound, putting two kids into a two bedroom flat so the adult's got a room, the two kids have got another, that's not destroying



their human rights, that's giving them more of a life than what they had at home... Straight away the government are funding them you see so this is where the problems kick in. So straight away, I think they're only entitled to about thirty pound a week, whatever, the same as a British person who has been here who you know they're entitled to equal, it's like an equal amount" (Sharon, London 2)

Similarly participants in Birmingham suggested:

**Joan**

I think the whole thing with the, it's like the National Health. They know they can come here and get free health service and that, you go to another country you've got to start paying. I think there's a lot and they know they can get all the benefits and stuff. I sometimes think, perhaps they should live in the country X amount of months or whatever before they're entitled to all that.

**Dennis**

They should give them a low rate when they come in the country and then

**Joan**

As long as they've got somewhere to live

**Dennis**

Yeah and then make them go to work and then keep themselves

**Joan**

The thing is if you went to Australia you've got to have somewhere to live, you've got to have a job and you've got to have so much money in the bank. They can come here with just what they stand up in

**Dennis**

Yeah, with nothing

**Joan**

And you don't, it don't always seem right to me

**Dennis**

I mean I think when asylum seekers, if that's what they are and they're going to be tortured or murdered or whatever

**Joan**

Somewhere should be found for them yeah

**Dennis**

Something should be found for them but they must have the lowest money to live on until they get a job and they shouldn't be given the best of housing when our own have to wait in the system

(Birmingham)

The idea that asylum seekers should receive lower benefits than host community members was also taken up by participants in Rickmansworth who argued that access to the NHS should be based on a points system which privileged those who were born in the UK:

**Paul**

And you've got to put in to take out. It should be on a points system. If you've worked all your life and paid in you should be top of the list of anything and you get someone coming in from a different country no matter how ill they are they get put in front of them, that's rubbish.

**Ken**

It's not only ill, it's the housing benefits, it's all the benefits that go with it that we as a democratic country actually have got a good ethos that people can actually use for the wrong claims and that's, that's the way, you bring your kids up the best way you can, you'd like to think that they can go out and stand on their own two feet and buy a home, things are very difficult so the opportunity of getting council property comes in but then they get behind the pecking order of things which can't be right, which can't be right.

**Gino**

No, no

**Paul**

It should be continued through your parents, all the points, there should be a points system

(Rickmansworth)

Participants who indicated the most hostility towards asylum seekers also tended to highlight the legitimacy of status differences and expressed concerns that not



enough distinction was made between the groups in terms of relative privileges. This is consistent with the predictions of Social Identity Theory.

#### **7.2.4 Examining the evidence for a social psychological explanation for host receptivity to moral panic discourse.**

As discussed in Chapter 3, Social Identity Theory provides a model of intergroup relations that recognises an association between identity and group membership. From this perspective, social identity is based on social categorisation, whereby others are classified according to whether they belong to the same category (in-group) or a different category (out-group) as oneself. The need for positive identity combined with this categorisation process leads to social comparisons that enhance positive and distinctive in-group images, whilst also giving rise to negative and homogenised out-group images (Turner, 1999). There was good evidence to support both social categorisation and social comparison processes in the group interviews.

In terms of categorisation processes, it is unsurprising that there was evidence in relation to in-group categorisation as participation in this research was based on self-selection as 'British'. It was therefore unlikely that participants would not identify themselves in this way (although as described above, for some participants their ethnic identity was more salient). What is more useful for establishing the role that intergroup dynamics may play in underpinning host group receptivity to moral panic discourse is that there was also good evidence for out-group social categorisation. Furthermore there was also evidence that this had led to social comparison processes which involved the selective accentuation of intergroup differences that favoured the in-group. This supports the predictions of Social Identity Theory regarding the intergroup dynamics that may play a role in host receptivity to moral panic discourse.

However, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, *concern* and *hostility* were not solely attributed to perceptions about negative group characteristics associated with 'asylum seekers'. Concern about the economic impact of asylum seekers and perceptions regarding unfair distribution of resources were also key issues. This

analysis therefore suggests that material as well as psychological factors have contributed to the experience of threat. It is therefore necessary to assess the relative weight of these factors. Whilst there is some indication that competition for resources is likely to play a part in the host response to asylum seekers, particularly amongst those who are on benefits or work in industries that have been affected by foreign labour, the perception of competition for resources seems to be disproportionate to any direct material effect that asylum seekers are having on the UK population. The majority of participants interviewed had no direct experience of asylum seekers and provided no evidence that they had been adversely economically affected by asylum seekers living in the UK.

Furthermore, the dominant role that discussion of culture and values played in group interviews suggests that concern about identity issues and the effect of asylum seekers on British culture play a central role in negative responses to asylum seekers. Asylum seekers were strongly associated with cultural otherness, in particular radical Islam and gang violence, and provided a focus for the perception that immigration is having a negative impact on the UK. Concerns about the impact of asylum seekers on the identity of the host community focused on the idea that British cultural identity is being eroded and concern that the in-group position as the dominant group is under threat. Therefore whilst the desire to protect the financially privileged position of the in-group is clearly an important issue for participants, these findings indicate that identity concerns may also play a role in host receptivity to moral panic discourse.

At the same time these findings also highlight some limitations in applying Social Identity Theory to analyse a moral panic response and support Breakwell's (1993) contention that classical Social Identity Theory lacks predictive validity when applied to real world issues. Contrary to the predictions of Social Identity Theory, perceptions regarding the legitimacy and stability of group boundaries did not distinguish between those who experienced threat and demonstrated discrimination and those who were more sympathetic towards asylum seekers. Furthermore, the majority of participants perceived group boundaries to be impermeable, but instead of supporting positive group distinctiveness and group security this fuelled concern



that the out-group members were not willing to assimilate into the in-group. This indicates that social identity processes are likely to have an important role in host group receptivity to moral panic discourse but that a classical Social Identity Theory analysis may be unable to fully predict the circumstances in which this response will occur.

### 7.3 IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN A STIGMATISED GROUP

The qualitative content analysis of the individual interviews focused on how individuals who have sought asylum in the UK seek to cope with stigmatised group membership. As discussed in Chapter 4, the coding frame employed was based on the prediction of Social Identity Theory (SIT). Eight category sets were examined: ***Social Categorisation, Counter Social Categorisation, Social Comparison, Counter Social Comparison, Social Belief Structures, Social Mobility Strategies and Social Change Strategies***. As with previous coding frames, each category was specified by secondary codes and disconfirmation codes were used to examine whether there was evidence for views that were contradictory to the predictions of Social Identity Theory. The final coding frame appears in Appendix 16, with illustrative examples for each code.

#### 7.3.1 Social Categorisation

##### *Social categorisation (in-group)*

In half of the individual interviews participants identified as 'asylum seekers'. This was attributed to the fact that asylum seekers provide a support network for each other. For example:

"They have a good communication. If something happening for asylum seeker, good and bad, everyone have reaction about, like if something bad happening for asylum seeker maybe asylum seeker is, we can't say organisation, no any organisation for asylum seeker, for asylum seeker they have an automatic organisation, they have a good contact between them. If anyone need help, they helping" (Raman)

The shared experience of being an 'asylum seeker' also meant that participants felt they could be more open with other 'asylum seekers' as they would be less likely to

ask questions or make judgements than members of the host community. For example:

"If you're with an asylum seeker you feel more confident. That's one thing I know because you know that he knows what you know, both of you are in the same categories, even if on different cases but both of you are from the same level. There's nothing to worry about, there's nothing to hide about, there's no secretive, because he knows we're both asylum seekers, we understand just like two black guys talking to each other, we know we're black guys there's nothing to be shy about. So yeah, you have a lot in common if you meet an asylum seeker, you feel more free" (Ndulu)

Some participants felt they had no choice but to identify as 'asylum seekers'. This was attributed to the restrictions imposed upon individuals who seek asylum in the UK. Not being allowed to work or study was described as having a detrimental impact not only financially but also in terms of the lack of opportunity for alternative identifications. For example:

"I just want to get a work permit to start work and to show that I can be a beneficial member of society. I can be like other people be. I can show that I'm not a criminal, I'm not asylum seeker, I'm not a sponger, I am just, I am a person, I want to live. Unfortunately I cannot live in my country I want to live here but no chance, we never have given a chance to show ourself. There is no any way even to show to express ourself so how people know what's inside you" (Ali)

Participants were also aware that they were identified by others as 'asylum seekers' regardless of whether they wished to be part of this group:

"You come to realise that you are this label, so one must be really, really strong to keep saying to oneself that well I am not this label, this is a temporary thing but when you keep getting bombarded by the way you are treated on the basis of this label yeah you identify and I did identify with that label and I did find it very dispowering, I found it really, really dispowering" (Babir)

They also indicated that although 'asylum seeker' should be a temporary status they felt they would be identified this way even if they were to achieve refugee status or gain British citizenship. For example:



"Yeah I feel as if, not only now as a failed asylum seeker, even if I am given the refugee status to live here for a limited period or indefinite, I will keep on considering myself as an asylum seeker because I am labelled that. It, probably not even me I doubt, even my children, my children who are not here or those who will be, they would consider themselves, they would label themselves as asylum seekers and refugees"

(Bikila)

This was supported by the fact that most participants who were now refugees or British citizens still identified as 'asylum seekers'. For example:

"Yes, yeah I do, all of us do, even we live here, we settle down here, we live for many years, but every time anything mentioned about asylum seekers we all feel affected, we feel we're all being rejected and this accusation is thrown at all of us and this is what people think of us"

(Rashida)

However, other participants, including those who were still waiting for a decision on their application did not identify as 'asylum seekers'. For example:

"I'm a human being, I have my own identity as everybody else has. I'm not an asylum seeker and I'm not a refugee, I'm just the world resident as anybody else."

(Amin)

Participants who did not identify with the group described 'asylum seeker' as a label that is applied to a disparate group of people who at best have nothing at common and at worst come from opposing sides of conflicts and therefore proactively do not like each other. For example:

"When I saw first stories about refugees and asylum seekers what I understood is immediately is that people in this country do not know who refugees and asylum seekers are. We have nothing in common except our status. We don't even like each other because refugees and asylum seekers are usually people from opposite sides of the conflict somewhere who knows and you know within our community, we are even 'community' we have nothing in common and then we are a 'community'. It's totally ridiculous. People have different ranks and status, age and background, thinking, religion. Do you really think that because I'm a refugee I can walk into the mosque where men are coming in and talk to a rabbi or whatever? I have nothing to do with these people and they have nothing to do with me. And also they are refugees who arrive in this country ages ago so the conditions they

are in here, they were in then were, we have nothing in common. So when I saw first articles about asylum seeker who is a Black Zimbabwean, what do I know about Zimbabwe? What it has to do with me? But what it said in that newspaper is that he is an asylum seeker and he did whatever with the system and I couldn't get from the system what I was entitled to. I just got offended of course, because at that time I just thought who is reading these newspapers? Is that person actually having access to any other stories? Because if this is the only story that person has, that person would think that this is who I am and it has nothing to do with me. They're talking about an African man in a country I don't even know where this is and it's just yeah it was very disturbing to also understand how uneducated British people are"

(Mila)

Other participants did not identify as 'asylum seekers' because they did not see themselves as different from anyone else. Participants who expressed this view emphasised the importance of being treated as individuals rather than as group members. For example:

"Every individual is a different one and we should respect their differences because that's the beauty of creation, but we intend to, because of what we read on the papers or what we're told on the society to be so fearful of one another... What I would like to say is, you and other people who hear our voices, not only you personally, should, we need to get more people on our side, because we don't have many on our side unfortunately in this society. Just to hear us, just hear our stories as individuals. Do not count us as numbers, we are human beings, we are individual with the history and see how painful, just put yourself in my shoe for one minute"

(Amin)

They also emphasised that as with any social group 'asylum seekers' will include both good and bad people. For example:

"Different backgrounds you know and some people are good, some people are bad. Even here you meet good English people, you meet not nice English people, that is everywhere, but you have to differentiate people how they are"

(Amadou)

For these participants, other factors such as upbringing were perceived to have more impact on identity. For example:



"It's just a name. So an individual, the way you were brought up and the way you are is you. I will treat everyone how they are but the asylum is just a name"

(Mary)

This view was most frequently expressed by those who felt they had successfully integrated with the host community. The perception that they had been accepted and were therefore not identified as 'asylum seekers' by the host community was an important factor in enabling them to interact as individuals rather than group members.

"Well I never feel that way. I've always been treated like one of them, I never feel that way, they don't ever think about me as an asylum seeker... I never felt that way because nobody you know when I socialise with people, go to shops, to supermarket or you know go out night club or go to movies I've never been you know spoken to that way or been treated that way. That's why when I read the news and things I feel differently, I don't think it you know it's applying to me"

(Hawraz)

Others recognised that they were identified as 'asylum seekers' by the host community but rejected what they felt to be a negative social identity and therefore did not personally identify with the group. For example:

"I don't even like the word asylum seekers you know I have never known it until I came here... you don't know who is who for that matter, unless it is written on our forehead... however, sometimes you feel somehow fourth place... I just feel that I'm labelled asylum seeker which was not to my favour to be honest... you just run away from being known as an asylum seeker for that matter... it's not about deceiving, it's just you feel it, should you communicate with these individuals... it's all about getting back your personality and when we are friends I will tell you... those media will have an influence on the public... so once they know [you are an asylum seeker], when they have that in their mind, they will associate us, so I don't want to be labelled to be honest"

(Abebe)

There was however recognition that regardless of whether they choose to identify with this label they cannot prevent others from categorising them as asylum seekers. For example:

"They look at us, asylum seekers, they look at us as a non human being"

(Sadik)

This limited the extent to which they felt they were able to reject this identification:

"Because when, most of the times when the newspapers come out and then they say something about refugees or asylum seekers and then my heart just says 'oh God what are they talking about now' I go and I buy the paper and I read and at the end of the day after reading it through just find out that they're not actually talking about me, they're talking about the other side of the coin but then because I am an asylum seeker so I still have to know what is going on. I'll think they're talking about me, even if they're not talking about me I always keep on looking over my shoulders see who is coming next, what is coming next you know even if it's not, even if I have no reason to be worried about, but I still have to be worried because I am one of them, yeah"

(Latasha)

Participants frequently expressed concern that they were identified as 'asylum seekers' as they experienced this as a stigmatised identity. Consequently it was common for participants to prefer not to disclose their immigration status when interacting with members of the host community. For example:

"Because this label that is put on this group is a negative label I definitely didn't feel proud of being part of this group. That's the first thing. I definitely didn't feel proud of belonging to this group, that's the one thing and I definitely tried to hide this identity as much as I could, not to show it"

(Babir)

However, a minority felt that they had more choice in the identification process and suggested that they identified in different ways depending on the context. For example:

"Anyway, what people also don't know is that majority of refugees are refugees for couple of years and then they get British citizenship and this is exactly, this is my situation for last four years or so, so I can be refugee when I want if I want to address this thing and I say I am a refugee but actually I'm not, I'm a British person. So it is totally up to me who I want to be"

(Mila)



The potential fluidity of identification processes was also apparent in the way that participants tended to move between different positions throughout the interviews depending on particular arguments they were making. For example, Rose explicitly stated that she had recently chosen to re-identify as an 'asylum seeker' as she felt this should be reclaimed as a positive social identity. However, at another point in the interview she said that she felt that 'asylum seeker' does not work as a social category because individuals who seek asylum have different needs and have little in common with each other. She also tended to talk about 'asylum seekers' as a group and reproduce negative stereotypes of asylum seekers as 'dirty', 'criminal' and as failing to integrate into British culture and practices. When making these arguments she talked about "them" and distinguished herself as atypical due to her middle-class background and good education. The extent to which she did or did not identify as an 'asylum seeker' was therefore also context dependent.

There was therefore no outstanding trend in terms of the majority of participants identifying or disidentifying as 'asylum seekers', but all were clearly aware that they were categorised as 'asylum seekers' and only a minority felt that their interactions were unaffected by this group membership.

#### *Social categorisation (as out-group)*

All participants had at some point experienced host and media responses in terms consistent with having been categorised as an out-group. This was evident in the perception that the host community interacted with them on the basis of their status as 'asylum seekers'. For example:

"British people, unfortunately, not all of them but mostly the majority, once they define you with that label they always see you with that label and there is always a barrier between you and them because you are an asylum seeker" (Amin)

It was also apparent in the fact that many felt they were treated as 'foreigners' by the host community, regardless of how long they had lived in the UK. For example:

"I was late for the class at university and I went from St Pauls to Tate Modern, there is a bridge. You can't ride a bike on it... I was late and I'm not going to be knocking people off

but I didn't get off the bike... so I walked it but I stayed on it and by the time I almost got off, maybe it was like two steps and there was this woman who turned around and said 'you shouldn't be riding bike' and I said 'I know'. I already felt guilty and I was late and I didn't want to do it, but it was just like argh and I said 'I know' and I don't know how I said 'I know' but as I walked in front of her she just said 'foreigner' and I turned around and said 'I'm actually British'. And it was important at that point for me to say that, but actually I wanted to have a proper conversation with her because it wasn't even refugees or asylum seekers it was a foreigner and that was said as an offence. Actually I'm really happy to be a foreigner and I'm really happy not to be English if this is who you are. And this is where the issue lies. It's with people who think narrow"

(Mila)

Participants also felt that the behaviour of individuals were generalised to the group. For example:

"Part are criminal but not the whole generation, not the whole people who come to the Europe are a criminal people... so because sometimes one of three peoples can cover the innocent people... yes it reflects, if you live in a family and one person of this family is odd, the whole family will be pointed as the family is not a good family it's got an odd person in the family"

(Temen)

A large majority of participants also suggested that the media fail to take into account individual differences amongst asylum seekers, both in terms of generalising the behaviour of individuals to the group and in failing to differentiate asylum seekers from refugees and other migrants. For example:

"They [the media] all treating as other people and they don't distinguish between a refugee and asylum seekers, although asylum seeker really are vulnerable people and they really want help but they all being seen as other, refugees and asylum seekers they don't differentiate between them"

(Ali)

In terms of tabloid reporting, this was described as a deliberate strategy:

"They [the media] want to stop the support for refugee and in meantime they want to make a different between an English citizen and the refugee... they want to make something different between an English citizen and a citizen from a different background"

(Raman)



The experience of being treated like an out-group extended beyond the period when participants were officially 'asylum seekers' and those who were now refugees or British citizens felt that they continued to belong to an out-group. For example:

"In few years time I would have lived here more than I lived in my country or the same time and you still, how long, one lady asked me "so how long does it take a refugee to stop being a refugee and to become a citizen?" and I said "I don't know". I think probably for my generation it's never, but maybe for my children it's different which is good, now other childrens have different experience, those who experienced discrimination they'll have a different attitude, different view of the whole situation, different reaction to things"

(Rashida)

Rashida acknowledged that there were some contexts, particularly the work place in which she felt that she was not treated as an out-group member, but as with other participants who had lived in the UK for a long time she said that most of her friends were also immigrants and that she did not feel fully accepted by the host community:

"I still don't feel I belong here. Its home because I work here and my house is here and my husband's job is here, my children are working here and that's where I'm living but I never felt I'm British, even though I've got British passport and I mean there are few times when I felt welcome and I felt treated like one of the crowd but only very few moments... but everywhere else you go you are recognised as a foreigner and you are always treated like that. There's always this caution, this thing between you and even the people who are friendly to you they still feel they're not talking to someone from their country"

(Rashida)

Several responses suggested that identification processes were not the sole explanation for intergroup dynamics and material differences between asylum seekers and the host community were frequently described as playing a key role in creating barriers between these groups. Poverty, lack of access to education and jobs, were all described as making it difficult for individuals who seek asylum in the UK to meet members of the host community or to have anything in common with them. For example:

"If you haven't got the right to work and you haven't got right to study where you going to meet them? In the street? There's no such social life in the street and nobody talk to

anybody in the street, even in the bus or even in the public transport so unless you working with you or studying with you and have some kind of contact between you and him, this is the only way you're going to have an idea about this person" (Temen)

There were also some participants who felt at least in terms of personal interactions that they were not treated like out-group members. For example:

"Like my friends [from the host community]... no-one think of you like an asylum... how I think they think the same, we are all human being, so they don't look at, no, no, we are they look we are all equal... You see this is only what they feel. They feel equal and they feel sorry for my situation" (Bako)

Like group interviewees, these participants considered language to be a key element in successful integration. For example:

"I think the main reason why they're not treating me as asylum seeker or they not talk to me as asylum seeker is because I can speak their language, you know we chat and we discuss things... it's no hard for them to speak to me, but you know if they want to talk to somebody else and they don't understand English so from their point of view this person is not, is asylum seeker or refugee so they look on him as a refugee or asylum seeker. It doesn't matter about your colour if you black, red, white anything so when you speak English language properly you can talk to them, communicate with them so they don't look at you that way" (Hawraz)

However, even those interviewees who felt their identity as an asylum seeker had no impact on their interpersonal interactions with members of the host community nevertheless perceived media coverage and wider public opinion to be based on negative group stereotypes. For example, whilst Mary felt she was not treated as an asylum seeker in terms of her every day interactions, she was conscious that the media make negative generalisations about asylum seekers and that she may be judged on this basis by people who do not know her personally:

"They [the media] make you sound like you were a criminal. They treat you like a criminal but you just come here to seek refuge... There's no point of criticising me for coming, we have good people and bad people. Some people have got their motives come and maybe claim and some people have come for refuge... take myself for instance, I'm not a bad



person, I help everybody, I'm always nice with people... I came to seek an asylum so if they mention asylum seeker definitely it's my name but I'm not a criminal... so you shouldn't treat me like a criminal because you don't know me back home before I got this problem"

(Mary)

These interviews also revealed the complexity of categorisation processes in terms of multiple group memberships and participants indicated that other social categorisations may have equal or more influence in terms of their interactions with the host community. This was apparent not only in direct descriptions but also in the way that some participants responded to questions about 'asylum seekers' with answers describing their experiences as other group members. For example, Nozer and Akam tended to treat 'asylum seeker' and 'Iraqi Kurd' as interchangeable in their responses, describing media coverage of Kurds in response to questions about coverage of asylum seekers. Other participants talked about 'asylum seekers and Muslims' as if these categories went together. For example:

"People think exactly what's written in the paper. For example, there's no talk about asylum or Muslim in general. I am Muslim but I never in my life, not only me those who I know, never support suicide bombing or something like that, but the government talking about like majority, ninety-nine percent of Muslim people support this terrorist and this suicide but honestly this is not true. Now these groups just they want to destroy the name of Islam to be honest. Now it's a shame for us even to say we are Muslim. When you say Muslim for example the people they don't want even to communicate with you they think you maybe hurt them or you may kill them"

(Ali)

Several participants suggested that skin colour was a key issue in terms of the way that asylum seekers are perceived by the host community:

"I'm from Turkey and there are more hostile attitudes against African and Asian and Arabs asylum seekers I can say, because I read a lot of news about asylum seekers who has AIDS or some other illness which they blame them... the opinion against Asian, Arab and then African, especially African people is more hostile... the colour is a very important issue as well. If your skin colour is whiter than others you feel more secure and then you despise other."

(Adil)

Participants also suggested that the host community conflate 'asylum seeker' with particular religious or national identities. For example:

"Religion and asylum seeker in this country are the same people, that's the way people judge people. They think 'ok they come here and seek asylum and they are Muslims'. They do that in the papers all the time"

(Amadou)

Being identified as Muslim and Middle Eastern was described by many participants as being more problematic than simply being identified as an asylum seeker. For example:

"Of course, to be honest when you, when you see people you try to avoid as much as you can to say 'I'm asylum seeker' even myself I personally try to avoid to say I am Iraqi as well to be honest. Because now even Iraqi is a hatred figure. I don't know why, because I agree there are British people killed daily, being killed in my country but I don't kill them and even I don't support these terrorist people who kill them... I want to avoid as much as I can to say I'm Iraqi. Most people when say "where are you from?" I say "just guess". Some people will say "you from Italy or from Greece" I say "yes I am from somewhere down", I do not want to say or answer this question honestly because now it's become like a bad thing in your background something like this... when I said I was Iraqi some people even didn't want to see me again, but when I refuse to have the discussion we are friend, after long time when they find out I'm Iraqi they accept it, they knew me as a person before knew I'm Iraqi"

(Ali)

When asked whether he would be more concerned about people knowing where he was from or knowing he was an asylum seeker he responded:

"First of all I'm more concerned about both to be honest, but... I'm more concerned to say, I'm more avoid to say I'm Iraqi rather than asylum seeker. Now Iraqi is like a nightmare for people to be honest from my point of view and from my experience... when you say Iraqi people all think about beheading people, killing people and Muslim people and so on. Honestly, Muslim in general are hate but Iraqi and Afghani are most hateful group in that society"

(Ali)

There was therefore evidence from all interviews to indicate that participants experienced host and media responses to asylum seekers in terms consistent with social categorisation processes predicted by Social Identity Theory. However this



was not the only or necessarily the most important factor in their interactions with members of the host community.

### 7.3.2 Social Comparison

#### *Social comparison (by out-group)*

All individual interviewees felt that the UK media and public negatively stereotyped 'asylum seekers' and failed to differentiate between individuals categorised in this way. As discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, participants characterised the majority of media coverage, particularly the tabloid press, as hostile and suggested that the media negatively stereotyped asylum seekers as 'criminals' and 'spongers'. They also felt that the media generalised the negative behaviour of individuals to all group members. For example:

"If I take one example, I think it was last year here in Sheffield area, I'm not sure asylum seeker what he did wrong, he was crime and he came to the court and he's been charged... after few days when they published in the newspaper and people they read it, and after few days another English man he write this article it said 'kick asylum seeker out'. Why you kick asylum seeker? ...We are agree asylum seeker, some of asylum seeker, they did something wrong, but if we check the prison it's not just asylum seeker there. There are also many English people there and when the English people they did something wrong the English they say 'kick English out'?"

(Nozer)

It was suggested that as a consequence of negative media stereotyping 'asylum seeker' had become a stigmatised social identity. For example, Ali suggested "asylum seeker is now a figure of hate". The host community were seen to be influenced by negative media stereotypes and to interact with 'asylum seekers' on this basis. For example:

"Like the issue with the criminal migrants fiasco I call it [laughs] this is when things could spiral out of control and intentionally or unintentionally the coverage... its overwhelmingly against migrants and it does, it did back then actually have a really huge impact on migrants and refugees, it was really negative and made people look, it linked criminality to migrants and to refugees and those people are seen as possible criminals, if they're not convicted you know they are possible criminals I think there was too much attention, too much coverage and too much link between crimes and migrants and I think this was really worrying time for us"

(Rashida)

This was described as having an extremely negative impact on host responses to asylum seekers:

"The feeling of lots of asylum seekers mainly... 'how do they hate us so much when they don't even know us?'...I mean we have one user he came to last media group meeting he was living in NASS accommodation and this accommodation was known to the local people that this housed asylum seekers and they were under attack the whole time and then when his application was refused he became destitute, he moved and stayed for eight months at Victoria coach station, he felt safer then he said it was safer in a way because people couldn't tell he was an asylum seeker so people stopped attacking him and abusing him as an asylum seeker"

(Rashida)

There was no evidence to suggest that participants felt that the host community considered 'asylum seeker' to be a positive social identity or generalised positive interpersonal interactions to 'asylum seekers' as a group.

There was therefore good evidence from all interviews to suggest that host community responses were experienced in terms consistent with social comparison processes predicted by Social Identity Theory.

#### *Social comparison (minority group acceptance of negative social identity)*

There was evidence that a small minority of participants had accepted the mainstream representation of 'asylum seeker' as a negative social identity. For example:

"I have heard that people move out, house prices fall when there is an asylum community and I don't think the British should do that, I mean they should be allowed to live with dignity and in the place where they want to be. They shouldn't be forced to integrate with asylum communities at all. I mean they should but that doesn't mean they can't live in the way they want with their privacy which they cherish and without disturbance or any kind of social misbehaviour. They shouldn't be afraid of burglars and thefts and other crimes"

(Rose)



However, other participants indicated that they felt proud of being asylum seekers and rejected this representation. For example:

"I'm proud to be one, I don't have a problem with, as long as I'm safe where I am. All I wanted to do is just to be happy where I am and to be safe. I don't care what people think, refugee is not stamped on my head, even if they asked me to stamp it on my forehead and go about with it, I don't have a problem with that... it's not something to be really worried about"

(Ndulu)

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 6, the majority of individual interviewees contested negative representations of asylum seekers. For example, participants responded to the representation of asylum seekers as criminals by arguing that the majority of the group are law-abiding. They also argued that contrary to the stereotype of asylum seekers as 'spongers' that individuals who seek asylum in the UK are actually immensely frustrated at not being allowed to find employment as they are hard-working people who want to contribute to the UK economy. Where stereotypes were acknowledged to have some basis in truth it was argued that they only applied to a minority of asylum seekers. For example:

"They [the media] over generalising because sometimes it's true, some people come here because they don't work in their country, they are so used to the government feeding them. So because of them they generalise everything to all of us, but they are different from most of us"

(Mary)

There was therefore evidence to suggest that a minority of participants had assimilated the majority group representation of 'asylum seekers', but this was contested by the majority of participants.

### **7.3.3 Social belief structures**

Unlike group interviewees, the majority of individual interviewees described group boundaries as permeable or at least potentially permeable. For example:

"I'm telling you, I just feel it, I just feel I am British here"

(Abebe)

Like group interviewees, these participants related permeability to the extent to which individuals successfully integrated in the community. For example:

"I actually I do think because where you come from, like if you're educated and you know grown up with educated people and you always trying to get involved with the community and you know to change things... it is different between me and somebody else who's sitting there and not trying you know to study anything to not get involved with the news or the community, don't socialise with other people they're just like, they're not, never open so I think yeah there is a big difference... when you socialise with the community you are more involved with these people that we are living with you forget about what you are actually and you forget that you are asylum seekers because you are more involved with other people than asylum seekers... That's the main important things and getting involved with more people, socialise more... I think I belong now"

(Hawraz)

Feeling accepted was a key factor which distinguished those who experienced barriers as permeable from those who felt that they were impermeable. Individuals who mixed with the host community, regardless of whether they had been given refugee status had started to view the UK as their home and therefore felt that they had become British. For example:

"My father taught me wherever you live is your home. I just want acceptance that I belong here. I supposed to be here, what British mean it don't mean only you, even me has the right to do everything. I am not supporting no team in this world today is not England. I know all the players. When they're playing I want them to win. That's the game I like football, I like watching football, so I support them 100%. So to be, to say you are British is, all my friends are English... so if those people show you that we are accepted people here, why am I not to accept them back? Acceptance, when somebody accept you, you accept him back. Here is my place no matter what, that's who I am"

(Amadou)

As with group interviewees language was identified as a key factor in enabling integration. For example:

"I can speak in English very good so I am English, it's my country. I have anything you have"

(Raman)

For others boundaries were seen as permeable in time but not immediately. For example:



"For me it would be a little bit hard to accept that I'm British. Why? Because I wasn't born here in the first place, I came here under circumstances that were not favourable for me and then all these circumstances were lifted. Fine, yeah the government accepted for me to stay, but then because you were British you were born here and everything so it's going to be a little bit different for how you feel and how I feel is going to be different, it's going to be harder for me to adapt to the Britishness than you, who's just going to take it at first hand and say 'oh yeah that what it is'. For me it'll take a little bit longer to accept because there's so many things I need to go through at end of the day... Yeah, it takes time but of course at the end of the day you're going to have to, but not just like that, just like from nowhere 'oh I'm British', no it takes time"

(Latasha)

For others this meant that it was not possible for them to become British, although they felt it may be a possibility for their children. For example:

"I don't know because still I'm African I don't think so British but for example maybe for my daughter, my son they can say they're British but I don't think so for myself"

(Aamina)

For those who saw permeability for their children but not for themselves, identification with their home countries, lack of integration with the host community and the fact that they were marked out as being foreign due to their accent regardless of how fluently they spoke English were given as reasons. For example:

"They [her children] are more, they feel more. They see themselves as both British and Lebanese but more British than Lebanese, because when we came here my son was three, my daughter was four and when they were seven I think, I don't know what age, we put them in private schools.... I think they were protected from that much and because they went to schools with all their friends and they grew up with them and they went to universities and they graduated and so now my daughter her boyfriend is English and we're fine with that... my son was upset when England lost and he went to the pub with this friends because he is more. I mean my children I must admit they're more British than I am and they are more able, they go out clubbing a lot and to pub more and they have more English friends, more than us and they see themselves as yeah they see themselves British... I think unless you speak with the correct accent you still foreign."

(Rashida)

Others considered boundaries to be impermeable, even for their children. This was attributed to lack of acceptance by the host community and discrimination. For example:

"Discrimination towards employment, education or things like... even towards the colour. It's that discrimination which means not me but my children would not even assume that they're British. Born here, grown up here, educated here... there is a lot difference between UK and United States, there not only the law they are practically implemented anybody is considered regardless of his race, his sex, his religion or things like that, because now religion is coming to take some sort of feature, but there is no discrimination, it is only your qualification matters whether you are Black American or White American... the Black as well as the White will tell you that he's an American and they do have that feeling but here... one white, clearly English or Scottish, Irish or Welsh and the other one's Black African who had been live here, given the citizen, even not only those who are given old ones but if you ask them I will not tell you that I'm British"

(Bikila)

Others considered race to be an impermeable barrier. For example:

"I'm proud to be a British because the people have been very good to me. They've been very kind to me, but I'm black so there's no way I'm a British"

(Mary)

Like group interviewees, some participants emphasised that you have to be born in the UK to be British:

"No I'm not British... I'm still not British even if I'm here in fifty years time, I'm still not British because I know I'm not British and I know I cannot be British even if I have a British residence doesn't mean, doesn't make me a British, you know I wasn't born here, I don't think I can even in fifty years time I can be British... I think the where you were born, the environment you grow up with makes a big impact in your lifestyle, you know to me I just believe I'm a black boy and I know there's a lot of black British born here but the British black British born here are different from me"

(Ndulu)

Several participants highlighted the lack of opportunity to integrate for asylum seekers, particularly in relation to not being able to work. For example:



“Always there’s a red line between you and the British people but if you’re not allowed how you can do that? From the first thing when I came to this country I studied and I wanted to re-qualify in order to live as a person, as other people living here paying tax and serving country and serving yourself and other people, proud of yourself when you say I am working and not I’m on benefit, but if you’re not allowed, how you can even have idea you’re a Britain... I don’t believe one day I can be a British because there’s no way no chance to be. I wish if I can but there’s no way” (Ali)

In addition to barriers resulting from their material situation and host responses, existing national identifications and loyalties were also frequently cited as an impermeable barrier. For example:

“I wouldn’t want to think of myself [as British] as so I can’t speak for other people, but the Sri Lankans, even though they’ve got a British passport they go to all their local cultural things and they always reminisce about home you see. You can tell them they’re a British citizen but deep inside they’re Sri Lankans” (Rose)

These interviews also indicated that attempts to classify participants’ perceptions of boundaries as either permeable or impermeable produces an over-simplistic analysis. Almost a third of participants’ responses could not unambiguously be classified as falling into either of these categories. For example Bako’s initial response suggested that he perceived boundaries to be permeable as he said “I know the British before and I am friends with them and we just mix, that’s me that’s it I’m also British now”. However he then went on to say that he could not be British as “normally even the colour show you are not British” which would indicate that he perceived boundaries as impermeable. Similarly Akam initially said that he could not be British because of his ethnicity, but then went on to say that his children could be British because they were born in the UK.

#### **7.3.4 Social mobility strategies**

There was evidence to suggest that, as predicted by Social Identity Theory, the perception of group boundaries as permeable led to individual assimilation and disidentification with the category ‘asylum seeker’. These participants indicated that they did not feel like ‘asylum seekers’ as they had successfully integrated with the host community. For example:

"It's different between me and somebody else who's sitting there and not trying to study anything, to not get involved with the news or the community, don't socialise with other people they're just like, they're not, never open so I think yeah there is a big difference ...when you socialise with the community you are in and you more involved with these people that we are living with you forget about what you are actually and you forget that you are asylum seekers because you are more involved with other people than asylum seekers"

(Hawraz)

For others, disidentification was not based on successful integration but rather on the basis that they had assimilated negative representations of asylum seekers as a group, but rejected this in relation to themselves. For these individuals a social mobility strategy was only partially successful as there was tension between their lack of identification with the category 'asylum seeker' and the recognition that they may be identified in this way regardless of their feelings. For example:

"I don't care what they say about asylum seekers because I know that I'm different and I don't want, I don't even like to be an asylum seeker, but situation brings you here, makes you become an asylum seeker, you don't have a choice... I don't tell people I'm an asylum seeker, I don't know why I just feel very, very different like if you tell someone you're an asylum seeker they treat you different, you cannot socialise very well with them"

(Ndulu)

This demonstrates the role of social representations in delimiting the possibilities for identity construction. Whilst rejecting the dominant representation of asylum seeker in relation to themselves these individuals were nevertheless aware that they are unable to control the way that they are identified by others. The limitations to the success of social mobility strategies were highlighted not only in relation to their own attempts but in their observation of the behaviour adopted by other asylum seekers. For example:

"So one thing that asylum seeker can do is to change their clothes or introduce themselves with different nationality. I know many asylum seekers they don't say where they are from. I know many they say they are from Italy and from France but they are not, I know many. Because they know if they say where they are from they have lost their friends, as simple as that. I know many they go to nightclubs, but they say I'm from Italy, I am from France



and sometimes they face funny situation when the person knows that language but they don't and then they end up in a very embarrassing situation where they have to stop going to that nightclub [laughs] accusing them liar or something" (Babir)

### **7.3.5 Social change strategies**

The range of social creativity strategies that can be adopted by 'asylum seekers' are limited by the fact that this is a heterogeneous group and as such people who have sought asylum in the UK do not share a culture or particular features that they can easily draw upon to emphasise positive aspects of their 'community'. There were therefore no instances in which participants described dimensions in which they considered their 'group' to be more successful than the host community. Instead those participants who adopted social creativity strategies based re-evaluation on countering negative stereotypical representations of the group, for example through representing asylum seekers as law-abiding and as people who make a large economic and cultural contribution to the UK. There were also examples where individual interviewees compared asylum seekers favourably with other groups, suggesting that these groups may be more of a 'problem' than their own. These comments focused primarily on Eastern Europeans, with respondents suggesting that the pressure on the UK infrastructure and job market is due to EU expansion and not asylum seekers. For example:

"The system cannot afford more, infrastructure of this country not afford more but not asylum seeker did that honestly that Eastern Europe did this to infrastructure not us" (Ali)

There was also evidence to suggest that some participants adopted social change strategies, for example by drawing attention to the ways in which 'asylum seekers' are different, but equal:

"I think we shouldn't insist on being integrated you know, because I have my kind of food, you have your kind of food, you might happen to like mine and I might happen to like yours which is great when it happens, but apart from that we are just different, by definition or by background or by whatever so it is just mutual respect and peaceful co-existence really with other groups and accept that these are British, yeah Asian British or whatever British, they are British but they are not exactly like" (Lilith)

In adopting these types of strategies participants attempted to reclaim 'asylum seeker' as a positive social identity:

"Actually I have started to develop a kind of pride that I'm an asylum seeker...I no longer look on it as something to be ashamed about... I thought I'm going to get others to admit its ok to be asylum seeker. It's not your fault. So first I started feeling quite proud about it because I was persecuted for my belief so why feel ashamed about it"

(Rose)

There was therefore evidence for the use of a variety of coping strategies, both at the individual and group level.

### **7.3.6 Examining the impact of stigmatised group membership**

As discussed in Chapter 3, Social Identity Theory provides a way of examining how individuals respond to stigmatised group membership and the circumstances in which they may act collectively to challenge the situation. These interviews suggested variation in the extent to which individuals who have sought asylum in the UK identify as 'asylum seekers'. Many participants were uncomfortable with this identification due to the negative associations with this label. However they recognised that they were identified by others as 'asylum seekers' regardless of their self-definition. A small minority of participants indicated that they were proud to identify as 'asylum seekers' however more preferred to be considered as individuals rather than group members. There was a perception amongst all individual interviewees that the host community negatively stereotype 'asylum seekers' and fail to differentiate between individuals labelled this way. Consequently it was common for participants to prefer not to disclose their immigration status when interacting with members of the host community. There was evidence for positive social interactions with the host community, however these tended to be with individuals who were knowledgeable about the asylum system and the majority of participants felt that the wider public were hostile towards asylum seekers as a group.

This analysis suggests that individuals who are categorised as 'asylum seekers' adopt a variety of strategies for coping with stigmatised group membership, at both an individual and group level. Whilst successful integration with the host community



led to the perception that barriers were permeable and the adoption of social mobility strategies, many recognised that integration could only be achieved through concealing their status as asylum seekers. Acceptance was therefore contingent on maintaining a deceit which was described as both difficult and stressful and social mobility strategies were only partially successful. Group level strategies largely focused on contesting negative representations of the group with a view to re-evaluating what it means to be an 'asylum seeker'. However awareness of the fact that the host and media continue to represent 'asylum seekers' in negative terms and show no signs of accepting this re-evaluation meant that participants were also aware of the limitations of this approach. These interviews also demonstrated the limits to social change strategies that can be adopted by a group which is inherently heterogeneous. For example there was no evidence for the use of social creativity strategies in which a new dimension for comparison was adopted as this would involve highlighting shared group features.

This analysis therefore demonstrates the impact of stigmatised group membership on individuals labelled as 'asylum seekers'. However, these interviews also revealed that participants felt that being labelled as 'asylum seekers' was not the only or necessarily the most important factor in terms of host community responses. Racial, religious and national identities were seen to be equally important, although it was difficult to separate out their influence as participants felt that the host community tended to conflate these different identities. This perception was supported by responses in group interviews. Group interviewees tended not to differentiate between asylum seekers and other immigrant groups such as economic migrants from the European Union and 'asylum seeker' was clearly associated with being culturally and ethnically other, with much discussion focusing on concerns regarding the potential Islamicisation of the UK. As discussed in Chapter 6, for many group interviewees 'asylum seeker' seems to have become a catch all label for any undesirable immigrant and as such their representations of asylum seekers clearly overlapped with their representations of other groups such as Muslims, terrorists and criminals. This demonstrates the difficulty in practice of separating out the impact of one particular social identity.

This raises the question of the feasibility or desirability of assessing the relative importance of the impact of these different elements of identity and the extent to which it is possible to isolate the impact of one particular social identity like 'asylum seeker' on the personal identity and self esteem of an individual labelled in this way. Classical Social Identity Theory was developed and tested using experimental paradigms utilising simple two-group situations and a key issue in recent years has therefore been its applicability in real world situations which involve multiple and overlapping identities (Crisp and Hewstone, 2000). Social Identity theory provides an additive model of multiple categorisations which predicts that belonging to more than one out-group will increase negative evaluation exponentially. To some extent this analysis supports this contention as the majority of participants perceived other features of their identity as playing at least as important a role as their status as asylum seekers in exacerbating host negativity. In this way 'asylum seekers' can be seen to experience a multiple burden by being identified with more than one stigmatised group identity. However, as with Howarth's (2002) analysis of teenage identities in Brixton, this analysis suggests that different elements of identity are far more interconnected than a traditional Social Identity model would suggest. Consequently the experience of being, for example, an Iraqi Muslim asylum seeker in the UK is not equivalent to the sum of the identities of 'Iraqi' plus 'Muslim' plus 'asylum seeker' as these are not mutually exclusive aspects of identity either for the identified or for the identifiers. This indicates the need for a more integrated approach which recognises both the multiplicity and interconnectedness of identities.

## **7.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a social psychological analysis of the cause and impact of a moral panic. This analysis examined the extent to which intergroup processes specified by Social Identity Theory underpin host community responses to 'asylum seekers' and explored the impact of stigmatised group membership on those labelled in this way. Although these findings highlight the key role that intergroup processes play in host receptivity to moral panic discourse, they also demonstrate that material factors as well as psychological processes need to be taken into



consideration. The impact that a moral panic has on the social identity of 'folk devils' showed that although there was some resistance to negative representations, the possibility for positive identity construction was clearly limited by dominant social representations of the group.

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter reviews the key findings from the thesis in relation to the existing literature and considers the implications for theory and methodology. Recommendations for future research are also considered and final conclusions drawn.

### 8.2 THE UK RESPONSE TO ASYLUM SEEKERS AS A MORAL PANIC

The first aim of this thesis was to examine whether 'moral panic' provides an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers, and the extent to which this is empirically testable. Drawing on an analysis of media output, group interviews with the host community and interviews with individuals who have sought asylum in the UK, this was tested against the five criteria identified by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) for claiming evidence of a moral panic; *concern*, *hostility*, *disproportionality*, *consensus* and *volatility*. The results of this analysis were presented in Chapter 5.

#### *Concern*

*Concern* was in some ways the most straightforward criterion to operationalise as it could be measured directly in both the media sample and group interviews. *Concern* was overtly expressed in both sources and consequently the amount of interpretation required by the researcher was minimal. This supports the use of *concern* as an empirical indicator of moral panic and this criterion was therefore applied in this research.

*Concern* about asylum seekers was clearly evidenced within the media and amongst the host community. Tabloid coverage in particular was consistently coded for *concern*, included few instances of *counter-concern* and there was strong *consensus* across publications that asylum seekers are 'a problem'. There was also evidence for *concern* in broadsheet publications, although there was more variation in this coverage. For example, the majority of *concern* appeared in The Daily



Telegraph, whilst both The Guardian and The Independent included more instances of *counter-concern*. Responses in group interviews were more in line with tabloid coverage and all participants, regardless of their level of support for the principle of asylum, expressed *concern* in relation to the number of asylum seekers entering the UK and perceived abuse of the asylum system.

Whilst this analysis demonstrated that *concern* could be empirically measured and that this criterion was met, it also raised questions regarding the usefulness of *concern* as an indicator of moral panic. Although *concern* is clearly a prerequisite for moral panic – it is hard to see how a response to an issue would become a moral panic without heightened concern – without the co-existence of *hostility*, *concern* does not necessarily indicate or predict a moral panic response. For example, *concern* was found in broadsheet publications where there was no evidence for *hostility* and was also expressed by group interviewees who were otherwise sympathetic to asylum seekers. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, Critcher (2003) argues that even where there is no evidence for *concern* in the general public, there may still be a media driven moral panic which represents public opinion in these terms. This suggests that even if there had been little evidence for *concern* in host community responses this may not have precluded the existence of a moral panic. This raises serious questions about the usefulness of *concern* as an empirical measure for moral panic and suggests that *hostility* may be more important for identifying a moral panic response.

### *Hostility*

Like *concern*, *hostility* can be directly measured as there are clear indicators such as the use of negative stereotypes and descriptions of ‘folk devils’ which position them as a threat to shared interests and values. However, unlike *concern*, which is based on manifest attributes, *hostility* is rarely directly expressed. Identifying *hostility* therefore requires the researcher to make inferences about latent meanings. This necessarily involves an extra level of interpretation and makes it more difficult to apply *hostility* as an ‘objective’ measure of moral panic. This issue was highlighted in the early stages of this research when using a second coder to assess the reliability of the coding frame used for the media content analysis.

The second coder was provided with a detailed coding frame which included illustrative examples for each code with a view to reducing ambiguity and ensuring consistency in coding (see Appendix 12). This coding frame included a secondary code for *hostility*; “B04: Evidence of public / government hostility”. The description of this code included “detention and electronic tagging” as examples of government policies that criminalise asylum seekers. However, the use of this code was questioned by the second coder. Detention was included as an example for *hostility* as the researcher felt that locking up asylum seekers potentially criminalises individuals who have sought refuge in the UK. Furthermore, in labelling these establishments ‘detention centres’ rather than a label which places less emphasis on detainment, such as ‘immigration centres’, an association is made between this process and prisons. Similarly electronic tagging was considered to promote associations between asylum seekers and criminals. In contrast, the second coder considered detention and electronic tagging to be necessary and practical first steps in the asylum process and therefore felt their use did not indicate *hostility* towards asylum seekers.

Consequently, despite carefully operationalising what appeared to be clear indicators for *hostility*, it became apparent that it was not straightforward to empirically measure this criterion. Whilst any analysis involving the identification of latent features will be subject to these difficulties, it is possible to minimise this issue through ensuring reflexivity and transparency in the research process. Reflexivity ensures that the researcher reflects on his/her own position in relation to the research topic and increases their ability to minimise the impact of their own representations on this process. The incorporation of corroborative techniques, such as the provision of multiple examples for each interpretation allows the reader to assess the validity of the interpretation (Berg, 2002). This coupled with transparency in relation to the development and documentation of coding frames ensures public accountability (Bauer, 2000; Gaskell and Bauer, 2001). This research was conducted on this basis and *hostility* was therefore retained as a potential empirical indicator for moral panic and was applied in this research.



Tabloid coverage was characterised by consistently high levels of *hostility* and very little *counter-hostility*, and the majority of broadsheet articles were also coded for *hostility*. However, *hostility* identified in broadsheets involved the reporting of political and public hostility rather than direct expressions of *hostility*. There was evidence for direct *hostility* in all except one of the group interviews, and media and public opinion were described as hostile in every group interview. Furthermore, group interviewees who expressed *hostility* felt their views were representative of public opinion more generally, whereas those who were more sympathetic suggested their views were exceptional. Public opinion was therefore perceived as hostile regardless of the individual views of participants. Individual interviewees were clearly aware of the high levels of *concern* and *hostility* in tabloid coverage. The majority of individual interviewees also described public opinion as consistent with negative media reporting, although individual differences in host community responses were acknowledged.

Issues that were identified in the existing literature as underlying public *concern* and *hostility* towards asylum seekers were also evident in this research. For example, the five issues highlighted by Lewis (2005) - negative impact on employment, housing, welfare, crime and British identity – were also the main factors described by group interviewees as underlying their own as well as public *concern* and *hostility*. In addition to these factors, group interviews suggest that *concern* and *hostility* are also fuelled by perceived unfairness in resource allocation and the perception that asylum seekers do not abide by UK laws and conventions. This analysis also indicated that the perception of threat has been enhanced by an association between asylum seekers and terrorism, an issue which was raised in the media as well as in group and individual interviews. Despite *concern* and *hostility* expressed about 'asylum seekers', the vast majority of group interviewees supported the principle of asylum for those they considered to be 'genuine' asylum seekers. This supports Kushner's (2006) contention that moral panic about asylum seekers does not extend to the concept of asylum provision.

Whilst there was good evidence for *hostility* in tabloid coverage, this analysis raised the question of whether this indicates a moral panic response or whether *hostility*

was simply recording a general style of tabloid reporting. This question is supported by differences in the way that group and individual interviewees characterised media coverage. Individual interviewees considered negative coverage to be specifically targeted towards 'asylum seekers'. However, group interviewees considered this negativity to be symptomatic of a general tabloid style of reporting which they characterised as negative and sensationalist regardless of the issue. One way of determining whether the *hostility* identified in the media is a reflection of tabloid reporting style or an indicator of moral panic is to use data triangulation to examine whether *hostility* is also evident in other sources, such as broadsheet coverage or the wider community.

As already described, there was little evidence for direct hostility in broadsheet coverage, which lends support to the contention that in relation to the media *hostility* may simply be measuring differences in reporting style between publication types. There was evidence for *hostility* in group interviews. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, host responses and newspaper coverage are not independent and without being able to establish whether the media is reflecting or producing public opinion this does not rule out the possibility that group interview responses are reflecting hostile tabloid coverage.

A further possible solution would be to conduct a broader analysis of the tabloid media which examines *hostility* in stories that have not been identified as moral panics, as well as those which have, to establish whether there are any systematic differences between these articles in relation to *hostility*. This approach has the potential to establish whether *hostility* can distinguish moral panic in the tabloid media. As it stands, having identified *hostility* in tabloid coverage we have not unequivocally established whether a moral panic has been identified. However, as the presence of *hostility* is necessary for a moral panic response - unlike public concern, the absence of media *hostility* would rule out a moral panic - this measure remains a useful starting point. This demonstrates the usefulness of measuring multiple criteria for moral panic.



### *Disproportionality*

As discussed in Chapter 2, the use of *disproportionality* as a key indicator for moral panic and the implications this has for judgements about 'objective reality' have made this a central element of concern for critics of the moral panic approach (Ungar, 2001). However, defenders of this approach have argued that it is possible to empirically test for this criterion and that assessments as to whether a response is proportionate do not have to be based on value judgements (Cohen, 2002). To this end, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) have provided four measures for disproportionality, (1) exaggeration of figures, (2) fabrication of figures, (3) disproportionate focus on the issue in relation to other more harmful conditions, and (4) changes in the amount of focus on the issue over time that do not reflect changes in the issue.

It is possible to examine evidence for both the exaggeration and fabrication of figures directly, for example by comparing claims about the number of asylum seekers residing in the UK against 'objective' measures such as population statistics. It was on this basis that *disproportionality* was operationalised for the coding frames used in this thesis. This analysis found some evidence for the exaggeration of figures in the tabloid media. However, accurately identifying *disproportionality* in relation to this measure was problematic, as these publications tended to use unsourced figures. This made it difficult to verify or challenge the claims that were made, and this also posed problems for identifying whether figures were fabricated. It was more straightforward to identify *disproportionality* in relation to exaggeration or fabrication of figures in group interviews, as group interviewees made more obviously factually incorrect statements. For example, they frequently suggested that the UK plays host to many more asylum seekers than France. There was good evidence for *disproportionality* in group interviews, where much of the *concern* and *hostility* was based on misperceptions regarding the absolute and relative number of asylum seekers entering the UK and on the perception that the UK has little or no immigration legislation.

These findings were consistent with previous research which found an exaggerated perception regarding the absolute numbers of asylum seekers in the UK (Lewis,

2005; Saggar and Drean, 2001), the relative numbers of asylum seekers in the UK (Kushner, 2003; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009) and misperceptions regarding asylum legislation (Pearce and Stockdale, 2009). There was some indirect evidence that individual interviewees experienced media and host community responses as disproportionate in so far as media coverage was described as unfair and public perceptions were perceived to be largely based upon this coverage. However, *disproportionality* was not measured directly as this would require participants to have knowledge of the basis for public opinion and access to 'objective measures' for comparison with media coverage.

This analysis highlighted difficulties in applying the third measure for *disproportionality* – the disproportionate focus on the issue in relation to other more harmful conditions. When illustrating this measure, Goode and Ben-Yehuda used the example of illegal drugs versus legal drugs like cigarettes and alcohol. They convincingly argued that there is disproportionate US media and government focus on illegal drugs in comparison with legal drugs given their relative potential harm. To apply this measure to asylum it would therefore be necessary to identify an equivalent comparison – i.e. a group which poses the same type of threat as 'asylum seekers' but which receives relatively less attention. However, the analysis of the content of moral panic discourse presented in Chapter 6 indicated that asylum seekers are associated with multiple 'harms' – i.e. they are represented as economically, physically, culturally and uncontrollably threatening. Whilst it is possible to identify groups who may be comparable on one of these dimensions, there is no group that would be obviously comparable across all of these threats. For example 'UK benefit scroungers' may pose an equivalent economic threat, but not a cultural threat. Similarly, economic migrants may represent a cultural threat, but may be perceived as economically beneficial rather than threatening. The representation of asylum seekers as posing a multiple threat is likely to amplify the perception of harm. This renders these groups incomparable and without a clear comparison, it is not possible to identify what would constitute a reasonable amount of press coverage of this issue.



The final indicator of *disproportionality* - unexplained changes in focus on the issue over time - can be examined more easily, but is unlikely to have been met in the case of asylum. As described in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the increased focus on asylum seekers coincided with a sharp rise in the numbers of people independently applying for asylum in the UK and it is therefore unsurprising that there was a changed focus at this time. The continued focus on the asylum issue, despite the subsequent drop in applications provides some evidence for a disproportionate response. However, as previously discussed, the lack of an objective measure for what would constitute a proportionate focus on this issue means that it is difficult to substantiate this claim.

These findings demonstrate that whilst not all measures for *disproportionality* can always be applied to all 'moral panics', in principle there are 'objective' measures that allow this criterion to be empirically tested.

### *Consensus*

The key issue with empirically measuring *consensus* is how much agreement is required to establish whether this criterion has been met. For example, *consensus* in relation to *hostility* was evident in six of the eight publications examined, and alternative perspectives only appeared in publications with the lowest circulations in the sample. Importantly there was very little countering of *concern* or *hostility* in publications without particularly high levels of *concern* or *hostility*. Even in The Guardian and The Independent, where there were comparatively high levels of counter codes, less than half of the articles sampled were coded for *counter-concern* or *counter-hostility*. It was also only in these publications where pressure groups supporting asylum seekers were provided with a platform. This calls into question McRobbie and Thornton's (1995) suggestion that the mass media has become increasingly fragmented and consequently provides greater opportunities for the defence of 'folk devils'. Rather it supports the argument put forward by Cohen (2002) and Thompson (1998) for a homogenised mass media that enable the proliferation of moral panic discourse.

This interpretation was supported by the fact that individual interviewees were aware that The Guardian and The Independent provide alternative perspectives, but felt that these publications were unable to counterbalance the dominant negative coverage across more popular newspapers. However, as the aim is to make an 'objective' measurement of *consensus*, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that discounting these publications as 'exceptions' is effectively ignoring inconvenient counter-evidence. Furthermore it is difficult to imagine how an 'objective' measure could be established for what constitutes *consensus* in terms of the percentage of articles coded as indicating a moral panic response. Certainly it seems reasonable to suggest that a majority of articles would need to be coded this way, but would fifty-one percent be sufficient or would this need to be a larger figure? It could be argued that true consensus would require one hundred percent agreement, but this is clearly not a realistic expectation.

Therefore, once again what initially seems to be a measurable criterion starts to look less straightforward on further examination and it seems unlikely that an unequivocal numerical measure can be established for *consensus*. As with *hostility* it therefore seems likely that the only 'proof' that can be offered is through the provision of a convincing argument which is supported by the transparent documentation of evidence that allows the reader to assess the basis on which claims are made. However, arguments for *consensus* can be enhanced by the use of data triangulation in conjunction with a qualitative exploration of the content of moral panic discourse. If there is evidence for *consensus* across different data sources and there is also evidence that the content of moral panic discourse is shared, this provides a much stronger case that there is a sufficient level of agreement to constitute *consensus* than a numerical measure alone.

In the current analysis, in addition to *consensus* for *hostility* in the tabloid media, there was also *consensus* for *hostility* in seven of the eight group interviews. This was particularly notable as participants were specifically targeted to maximise the range of views elicited. Furthermore, as already discussed, group interviewees also perceived *consensus* for *hostility* in the wider general public. Similarly, individual interviewees speculated that there was *consensus* in public *hostility*, based on the



assumption that the majority of the host community would be unlikely to have had any direct contact with asylum seekers and would therefore base their opinions on negative tabloid coverage, which was also described as consensual. Therefore looking across all data sources analysed there is increasing support to suggest that the criterion of *consensus* has been met. Additionally analysis of the content of moral panic discourse found core negative representations across all data sources, indicating that there are socially shared understandings and representations of 'asylum seekers' in the UK. Taken together it therefore seems reasonable to suggest that there was evidence for *consensus* in tabloid coverage and host community responses to asylum seekers.

### *Volatility*

As with *consensus*, it is difficult to numerically measure *volatility*, as it requires the researcher to make a subjective judgment regarding how long a response would have to last before it could not be considered volatile. Also *volatility* is defined as a particularly intense period of coverage but again it is difficult to see what would constitute an objective measure of intensity – i.e. how much coverage would there need to be for a period to be identified as *particularly* intense? Although there are no independent measures of intensity, this issue was dealt with in this research by focusing on a sufficiently lengthy period to allow the relative intensity of coverage to be mapped by comparing media reporting from one month to the next. This allowed relative peaks and troughs to be identified and also the proportion of moral panic codes during these different periods to be compared. This approach was successful in so far as it allowed the identification of one particular story within the ongoing hostile narrative about asylum seekers which followed the trajectory of a 'classic' moral panic.

Tabloid coverage of the 'foreign prisoner scandal' followed the expected trajectory of a moral panic as there was increased focus on the issue in response to this story, a large majority of articles were coded for *concern* and *hostility* at this time and the story concluded with the appointment of a new Home Secretary and the setting up of a new immigration directorate. This represents the "change in the law or the procedures governing its application" that according to Critcher (2003:153) provides

the “narrative closure” necessary for a moral panic to end. However, although there were higher numbers of articles consistent with moral panic during this period, there was no increase in the proportion of articles coded for moral panic criteria at this time – i.e. the percentage of articles coded in this month as meeting moral panic criterion was the same as for months where there was less coverage of the issue. This indicates that it was only the intensity of focus which distinguished this reporting from tabloid coverage during the rest of the year. This suggests that *volatility* is about increased intensity of coverage rather than increased negativity in the response to the issue.

This supports Weeks’ (1993) contention that moral panics do not arrive from nowhere, but instead flare up in response to new pieces of information or rumours that feed into ongoing hostility. Whilst the intensity of focus at the height of a panic is unsustainable for long periods of time, the hostility generated during these episodes does not go away, but instead provides a receptive environment for future panics. *Volatility* may therefore not be so much an indicator of what a moral panic is per se, but rather provides an indication of the current manifestation of a hostile response which is much more ongoing. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, Weeks (1993) identified a succession of panics about AIDs that tapped into ongoing fears about homosexuality. Similarly the recent succession of panics about ‘asylum seekers’ can be linked to ongoing fears about threatening ‘others’, which can be traced back to earlier panics such as those surrounding Black youth identified by Stuart Hall and colleagues in the early 1970s. This suggests that whilst *volatility* may identify the latest manifestation of a particular type of panic it may be more useful to look at patterns of moral panics to identify the interdependencies between moral panics.

### **8.3 DEVELOPING A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF MORAL PANIC**

The second aim of this thesis was to determine whether social psychological theory can be used to enhance the explanatory power of the moral panic concept by providing a model which can (a) theorise the content as well as the process of moral panic, and (b) understand both the cause and the impact of this response. This model drew on social representations to examine the content, spread and



transformation of moral panic discourse and social identity theory to explore whether social psychological processes may help explain the cause and impact of moral panic.

### 8.3.1 Social representations of asylum seekers

#### 8.3.1.1 Content of moral panic discourse

Chapter 6 presented the results of further analysis of the group and individual interviews, along with a subset of 120 newspaper articles, conducted to identify the social representations of asylum seekers. Six core representations were identified; *bad people* versus *good people*, *threatening* versus *threatened* and *legitimate* versus *illegitimate*. All representations appeared in all data sources, although there were differences in the peripheral elements of each representation according to source, and also differences in the extent to which group and individual interviewees demonstrated awareness or assimilation of these representations. The representations identified in the media sample and group interviews were predominantly negative and remarkably similar, both in terms of the content and balance of positive and negative representations. The individual interviewees demonstrated awareness of these media representations and produced positive representations as counter-arguments to hegemonic negative representations. The following discussion focuses on the three core negative representations that were identified as it is these representations that allow the content of this moral panic discourse to be examined.

The representations of asylum seekers as *bad people* identified in this analysis were consistent with the existing literature. For example, the representations of asylum seekers as *spongers* and *criminals* have both been identified in previous research (see Lewis, 2005; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009). Furthermore, the representation of asylum seekers as *undesirable immigrants* supports Greenslade's (2005) observation that asylum seekers are treated as different from both the white English community and existing immigrant groups. For example, in the media sample, 'desirable immigrants' who contribute to the UK were frequently contrasted with 'asylum seekers' who were represented as people who have come to the UK

solely with a view to claiming benefits.

There was also evidence to suggest that this distinction goes beyond media reporting, as group interviewees also compared asylum seekers unfavourably with both the white English community and existing immigrant groups. Group interviewees referred to a variety of 'undesirable immigrants' as 'asylum seekers'. For example interviewees in Rickmansworth used this term to describe European migrant workers who were perceived to be an economic threat, whilst in Birmingham it was used to describe the local Asian community who were considered to be culturally threatening. The term 'asylum seeker' was therefore used to express open hostility towards 'undesirable immigrants' whilst allowing interviewees to maintain the position that they were 'not racist'. This supports existing research which suggests that the apparent racially neutrality of this term allows discussion that would be otherwise socially unacceptable (see Greenslade, 2005; Lewis, 2005).

Representations of asylum seekers as *threatening* were also consistent with existing literature and drew on the same images identified in previous research. For example, six years on from Buchanan and Threadgold's observation regarding the power of media images which appeared during the 'Sangatte' coverage, the image of male asylum seekers attempting to board trains to Britain clearly continues to resonate, as when asked to describe what the term 'asylum seeker' calls to mind, several group interviewees described people climbing on lorries or directly referenced Sangatte. Representations of *economic threat* and *cultural threat* were also consistent with previous research which found that asylum seekers were perceived as a threat to employment, housing and British identity (see Lewis, 2005) and the representation of asylum seekers as a *physical threat*, particularly in relation to violent crime was also in line with previous findings (see Pearce and Stockdale, 2009).

Finally, representations of asylum seekers as *illegitimate* were also largely consistent with the existing literature. There was less evidence for the distinction between 'bogus' asylum seekers and 'genuine' refugees in this analysis than in



previous research findings (cf Buchanan, Grillo and Threadgold, 2004; ICAR, 2004). In fact the expression 'bogus refugees' appeared more frequently than 'bogus asylum seekers' in the media sample analysed for this thesis. However, there was evidence that the media continue to distinguish between asylum seekers and 'genuine refugees' in so far as there was a marked tendency to refer to anyone who had sought asylum in the UK and subsequently committed a criminal act as an 'asylum seeker' regardless of whether they were currently a refugee or British citizen. Furthermore, whilst 'bogus asylum seeker' has largely been replaced by 'failed asylum seeker' in media reporting of the asylum issue, this has not threatened the core representation of asylum seekers as *illegitimate*. 'Failed asylum seeker' is an ostensibly less negative term, which has been adopted following PCC 2003 guidance regarding the inaccurate use of terminology. However, the frequent prefacing of 'asylum seeker' with 'failed' coupled with the assumption that unsuccessful applications are illegitimate means that the term 'asylum seeker' continues to be associated with non-genuine applications. The shift in terminology therefore meets the requirements of this guidance without producing a meaningful change in the way that the media represents asylum seekers.

The influence of the PCC guidance note was also apparent in the reduction in references to 'illegal asylum seekers' in this sample in comparison with previous research. In fact there were only three instances of this expression in the media output sampled, two of which appeared in readers' letters. However, no editorial comment was provided to counter the use of this language in these letters. This supports Robinson's (2003) contention that readers' letters are used to promote viewpoints that would be unacceptable in editorial content. There was therefore evidence to suggest that despite some changes to peripheral elements of the representation of asylum seekers as *illegitimate* resulting from the PCC guidance that the core representation has remained constant. This is consistent with Abric's (1996, 2001) structural model of social representations which suggests that peripheral elements provide a 'shock absorber' which protects the central core of representations from change.

This resistance to change was also demonstrated by the way that group interviewees assimilated contradictory information without this posing any threat to the core representations they held. For example, Sharon (London 1) looked up 'asylum seekers' on the internet the evening before the interview because "I know my opinions but it's also nice to know a bit of facts" and in the course of this reading she encountered information which contradicted her existing beliefs. For example, she had been unaware that people who seek refuge in the UK are not allowed to work whilst their applications are being processed. This information challenged her belief that asylum seekers are 'spongers' who do not want to work. However, this new information did not threaten the core representation of asylum seekers as *bad people*. Instead she suggested that the lack of opportunity to work explained why asylum seekers become criminals who threaten the host community by 'hanging around' on the streets. She also felt this explained why 'asylum seekers' "go down" her bins – which she assumed was either for "scraps of food" or "trying to do your identity" – and argued that if the host community were able to live on benefits without resorting to this type of behaviour it was unacceptable that asylum seekers could not<sup>23</sup>. In this way, whilst new information necessitated adjustment of the peripheral element of asylum seekers as *spongers*, the core representation of asylum seekers as *bad people* was protected as this information was interpreted in the light of the central meaning of this representation.

#### **8.3.1.2 The spread and transformation of moral panic discourse**

Despite the tendency towards constancy described above, as discussed in Chapter 3, social representations have their genesis in communication and they therefore constantly evolve (Jovchelovitch, 1997). Social knowledge will inevitably be transformed in the process of being communicated and social representations are also transformed as a result of their relationship with other representations. Both of these processes were apparent in these findings. For example, the content of the representation of asylum seekers as *economic threat* altered from the way it was communicated in the media as it entered the public domain. Whilst the media representation focused on costs to UK taxpayers and burdens placed on the welfare

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that when questioned, Sharon explained that she had identified the individuals sorting through her bins as 'asylum seekers' solely on the basis that they were 'foreign' and did not speak English.



state, by the time it was reproduced by group interviewees this representation also focused on asylum seekers as 'taking our jobs'. This element did not appear in either the media or individual interviews as it was factually incorrect, but it had clearly become a dominant part of the representation of asylum seekers as an *economic threat* amongst the host community as it frequently appeared in group interviews.

As discussed in Chapter 1, representations of asylum seekers have changed across time due to the increased association between asylum seekers and radical Islam and terrorism (Crisp, 2003). This association was also apparent in these findings, with both group and individual interviewees moving between discussing 'asylum seekers' and 'Muslims' and both groups also discussed the impact of terrorism on the representation of asylum seekers in the UK. As with the previous transformation, the perceived threat associated with asylum seekers was amplified by these associations.

As already noted, the negative representations of asylum seekers identified in this analysis were remarkably consensual. For example both the media and group interviewees focused on the economic impact of asylum seekers and on 'pull' rather than 'push' factors as the key motivation for individuals to seek asylum in the UK. It is likely that these representations originated in the media as they were reproduced by group interviewees who had no direct experience of asylum seekers or alternative sources of information about this topic. This suggests that moral panic discourse produced in the media has been widely dispersed. Furthermore, group interviewees used tabloid media terminology like 'bogus asylum seekers', 'illegal asylum seekers' and 'spongers'. Consistent with previous research (see D'Onofrio and Munk, 2003, 2004; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009) this language was also reproduced by those who reported that they did not read tabloid publications, which again demonstrates the power and spread of negative representations.

Group interviewees also directly cited the media and used information from newspapers to support their arguments. This included the reproduction of inaccurate media reporting, which also indicates that the media was the source of

these representations. For example, consistent with previous research (see Pearce and Stockdale, 2009), participants reproduced inaccurate media reports that France plays host to few asylum seekers. The media was only used to support negative representations, and group interviewees who quoted from the media had clearly assimilated these representations. This supports previous findings regarding the role of the media as a source of information and misinformation (Kitzinger, 1999) and indicates that the media plays an important role in disseminating moral panic discourse.

Negative media representations that converged with existing opinion or experience were particularly powerful. For example, group interviewees who lived in social housing and were concerned about asylum seekers being housed in similar properties were particularly receptive to the representation of asylum seekers as *spongers* which frequently appeared in the tabloid media. Although it was not possible to establish whether it was through the influence of the media or the selection of newspapers which supported their existing views, there was evidence to support the link between media consumption and the ways that the host community represent asylum seekers. For example, group interviewees who read *The Guardian* or *The Independent* or who tended to access their news via the BBC rather than newspapers were aware of negative representations of asylum seekers but had not assimilated them.

This research also lends some support to existing findings regarding factors that influence the extent of media influence. This includes ICAR's (2004) suggestion that the media may have least influence on those who have access to alternative sources of information and who are sceptical about the media. For example, group interviewees who had direct experience with asylum seekers or who knew people who worked with asylum seekers often countered misinformation that other participants reproduced from the media. Also consistent with ICAR (2004), the assimilation of negative representations was associated with individuals who were less sceptical about media reporting and therefore reproduced these accounts uncritically. However as with previous research (see D'Onofrio and Munk ,2005; Pearce and Stockdale, 2009) negative media representations were reproduced



even by individuals who expressed doubts regarding the truthfulness of media reporting. This is consistent with Kushner's (2006) findings and suggests that the extent to which modern audiences critically engage with the media should not be overstated.

As would be expected given their different positions in relation to 'asylum seekers', group interviewees produced more negative representations and individual interviewees produced more positive representations. What was more notable, was that negative representations produced by the media, group interviewees and individual interviewees were remarkably similar in content, and that even those who had not assimilated negative representations could easily reproduce them. This demonstrates the role of the media in facilitating and proliferating moral panic discourse and indicates that this discourse is widely dispersed.

### **8.3.2 Can a social psychological model of moral panic explain the cause and impact of the UK response to asylum seekers?**

Chapter 7 presented the results of a qualitative re-analysis of the group and individual interviews which examined whether intergroup processes predicted by Social Identity Theory (SIT) underpin host community responses to asylum seekers, and the extent to which 'folk devils' adopt coping strategies predicted by SIT in response to stigmatised group membership.

The first part of this analysis explored whether host receptivity to moral panic discourse can be explained by intergroup processes predicted by Social Identity Theory (SIT). If intergroup processes were found to underlie moral panic responses in the public this would not only provide a more satisfactory explanation for moral panic than simply attributing this response to unspecified anxiety, but would also place moral panics within the context of 'normal' group behaviour which could help explain the frequency and repetition of these events.

The results of this analysis support both social categorisation and social comparison processes in group interviews. Group interviewees categorised 'asylum seekers' as an out-group and there was evidence that this had led to social comparison

processes predicted by SIT - i.e. the selective accentuation of intergroup differences that favour the in-group. Furthermore, concern about the perceived negative impact of 'asylum seekers' on British identity and culture played a central role in negative responses to asylum seekers. This supports the predictions of SIT regarding intergroup dynamics that may play a role in host receptivity to moral panic discourse. However, *concern* and *hostility* were not solely attributed to perceptions about negative group characteristics and these findings indicated that material as well as psychological factors are likely to have contributed to the experience of threat. It can therefore be concluded that intergroup processes can help to explain a moral panic response, but that a purely social identity approach to understanding the host community response to asylum seekers is likely to provide an oversimplified analysis.

Furthermore, this analysis also revealed the limits to the predictive validity of SIT as it was unable to predict the circumstances in which members of the host community would be more or less hostile towards asylum seekers. SIT predicts that high status groups will experience threat in situations in which positive group distinctiveness is undermined and that this will translate into discrimination against lower status out-groups when status differences between groups are perceived as legitimate but unstable (Reynolds and Turner, 2001) – i.e. when the dominant group consider the maintenance of inequitable intergroup relationships to be acceptable, but group boundaries are not of sufficient strength to guarantee that the status quo is maintained. Although the majority of group interviewees indicated that they considered the maintenance of inequitable intergroup relationships to be acceptable – in fact the perception that asylum seekers were receiving the same privileges as members of the host community was an important factor in *hostility* - there did not seem to be a desire for boundaries to be maintained. Conversely impermeable group boundaries were associated with the fear that asylum seekers did not want to adopt 'British' cultural practices and assimilate into the host community 'way of doing things'.

One possible explanation for the lack of predictive validity with this approach is that the classification of the host community as a high status group is somewhat over



simplistic. Although it seems reasonable to characterise the host community as high status in relation to asylum seekers, as described in Chapter 4, the host community is made up of a heterogeneous group of individuals. Amongst this group were many who would not necessarily classify their position as high status and who certainly consider themselves to be in direct competition for resources with asylum seekers. Furthermore, many group interviewees considered asylum seekers to be relatively privileged. However, hostility towards asylum seekers and concern regarding the impermeability of group boundaries were expressed by group interviewees from a broad spectrum of backgrounds, including those who would more easily fit into the classification of high status group members.

Another possible explanation is that the characterisation of boundaries as permeable or impermeable is an over simplistic representation of the way that groups operate in practice. There was evidence to suggest that group interviewees wanted boundaries to be initially impermeable – i.e. they did not want newcomers to the UK to immediately have access to the same privileges as the host community. However, they were keen that if asylum applicants were successful that they should then assimilate into the host community, adopting the same cultural practices and values which would eventually lead to them becoming part of the in-group.

There was also evidence from individual interviews to suggest a more complex understanding of group boundaries than would be indicated by a simple permeable/impermeable distinction. Interviewees suggested that boundaries were permeable in some contexts but not others. For example, several interviewees when asked if they considered themselves to be British agreed with this statement and argued that they felt accepted in the UK and that this therefore made them feel British. However, later in the interview these same interviewees suggested that it was not possible for them to be British due to their ethnicity. This suggests a more flexible perception of group boundaries which defines belonging differently according to the context in which they are considering the question. As with group interviewees, individual interviewees also stressed the importance of time and argued that barriers that were initially impermeable may become permeable if they were to live in the UK for long enough. This suggests that in practice there may not

be a straightforward dichotomy in social belief structures. However, further research is required to explore the complexities of these boundaries and to provide a more conclusive assessment of the reasons for the lack of predictive validity with regards to this aspect of intergroup relations.

The second element of this analysis focused on the impact of a moral panic on 'folk devils'. This analysis similarly revealed some of the difficulties and limitations in applying a classical SIT analysis in the 'real world'. 'Asylum seeker' is a complex identity as it is a label that is imposed rather than chosen, is applied to a disparate group of individuals with no obvious shared features and is, at least technically, a temporary identity. The fact that 'asylum seeker' is an identity that is applied to individuals who are for the most part ethnically and culturally different from the host community means that it is very difficult to separate out the impact of this social identity from other racial and religious identities. For example, when asked about their experiences as 'asylum seekers' it was common for participants to respond with answers about their experiences as Kurds, Muslims or Black Africans. This made it difficult to establish to what extent their experiences of the host community response were as a result of their status as 'folk devils' in the moral panic about asylum seekers or as a result of different features that are also stigmatised. Despite this it was clear that participants felt that 'asylum seeker' was a particularly negative label and consequently many sought to hide or reject this identity. However they were also aware that they were likely to be identified as 'asylum seekers' and associated with the negative stereotypes this entails, regardless of their self-definition. This clearly had a negative impact in terms of their self esteem and their ability to form relationships, particularly with members of the host community.

SIT proved particularly useful for identifying the strategies adopted for coping with stigmatised group membership. Both social mobility and social change strategies were identified in this analysis, with the former adopted by those who felt they were able to successfully integrate with the host community and the latter by those who felt that this was not possible or desirable. However this analysis also revealed that both types of strategy were only partially successful and were limited by negative host community responses. Social mobility strategies tended only to be described



as successful to the extent that it was possible for participants to conceal their identity as 'asylum seekers' and the range of social change strategies were limited by the extent to which it was possible to challenge hegemonic negative representations of 'asylum seekers'.

The power of the representational environment in this process was demonstrated by the dominance of the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened* in these interviews. Individual interviewees clearly wanted to communicate the poverty of asylum seekers in the UK and convey that their accommodation is of a comparatively very poor standard. They were also very keen to communicate their experiences in detention centres, in particular how degrading this is and distressing for those who have sought asylum following imprisonment and torture in their home countries. They frequently highlighted the fact that asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the UK and the negative impact this has on their identity and psychological wellbeing as well as the more obvious financial impacts. Therefore as well as providing a counter argument to the hegemonic representation of asylum seekers as *spongers*, the representation of asylum seekers as *threatened* was also drawn upon with a view to bringing about social change. There was clear perception amongst individual interviewees that if the public were aware of the difficulties faced by asylum seekers they would not support the use of detention centres and the ban on working. This representation was therefore used with a view to eliciting sympathy in order to achieve social change, which demonstrates the links between social representations and strategies adopted to cope with stigmatised social identity. A social representations approach to social identity can use SIT to provide a framework for examining the coping strategies that 'folk devils' may adopt in response to belonging to a stigmatised group, whilst also recognising the role of social representations in delimiting the options for identity negotiation.

## 8.4 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 8.4.1 How useful is the concept of moral panic for understanding the UK response to asylum seekers?

Whilst it has been established that there are some empirical indicators for moral panic, the question remains as to whether this tells us any more about the UK response to asylum seekers than simply characterising it as a negative climate of opinion. In the introduction to this thesis, three key reasons for why it is important to identify and study moral panics were discussed, (1) the potential for moral panic analysis to draw attention to the power dynamics in society, in particular to identify those with the capacity to define social problems, (2) the role moral panics may play in social change, including influencing legal and social policy, and (3) the role moral panics play in drawing group boundaries and determining those who do or do not belong.

For a moral panic analysis to draw attention to the power dynamics in society it must be able to identify the origins of the moral panic in question. As discussed in Chapter 2, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a, 1994b) identified three potential sources of moral panic that have been theorised in the literature to date and classified these as the *grassroots model*, the *elite-engineered model* and the *interest group model*. The first locates the origins of moral panic with the general public, the second with powerful elites and the last with middle-level claims makers such as the police or media. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994a) conclude that instead of providing discrete explanatory models, these approaches actually draw attention to different dimensions or factors in moral panics. In particular they suggest that the grassroots model identifies the receptive audience necessary for a moral panic to occur and the interest group model elucidates the way in which this audience is mobilised for particular projects.

This can be seen in the moral panic response to the 'foreign prisoner' story identified in this analysis. What was particularly interesting about this story was that it was possible to see the way that the media positioned 'asylum seekers' as central to this story by suggesting that foreign prisoners were only released because of the



government focus on asylum, despite the fact that it would have been quite possible to report this story without any mention of this group. This demonstrates the role of the media in defining 'asylum seekers' as the source of this problem and in mobilising public opinion against them. The analysis of group interviews demonstrated that there is clearly a receptive audience for this moral panic rhetoric which further supports Goode and Ben-Yehuda's conclusions regarding the roles of the media and the public in the development of a moral panic.

This analysis also demonstrates the power of the media to define a social problem and prescribe the solution to this problem, namely increasingly punitive legislation. As described in Chapter 1, the 'moral panic' response to asylum seekers in the UK has already led to legal and social changes, and since the 1990s government legislation has focused on the detention and containment of individuals seeking refuge in the UK. In using moral panic criteria to examine the current response to asylum seekers it was possible to demonstrate the links between media reporting of asylum and government action. This was apparent in the way that the 'foreign prisoner scandal' led to a change in Home Secretary and the setting up of a new immigration directorate. This demonstrates the role of the media in pressuring the government towards legal and social change. The application of a moral panic analysis therefore revealed the power of moral panic discourse in the media both in defining the problem and prescribing the solution.

Finally, moral panics have been identified as playing an important role in drawing boundaries around communities and determining those who do and do not belong. Whilst this is clearly an important function of moral panic, a traditional moral panic analysis is unlikely to do more than simply identify where these boundaries lie and who these 'folk devils' are. It has been argued in this thesis that to develop the usefulness of moral panic in relation to understanding the causes and consequences of these group boundaries it is necessary to develop a model of moral panic that takes into account the social psychological processes involved in intergroup relations. The extent to which this model has been able to enhance the usefulness of moral panic for examining the cause and impact of these group divisions is discussed below.

#### **8.4.2 How useful is a social psychological model of moral panic?**

There are a number of ways in which the content of moral panic discourse could be analysed. For example, content analysis could be employed or as Critcher (2003) suggests, discourse analysis could also be used. However, SRT has a number of advantages over these approaches that proved particularly useful for this thesis. Firstly, SRT provides a way of understanding social knowledge that recognises its genesis in communication, but unlike discourse theory also acknowledges wider psychological factors beyond the immediate context, such as the role that group membership plays in the development of social representations. SRT therefore recognises that awareness, acceptance and assimilation of representations will vary according to group membership and allowed the commonalities and differences in the way that representations were used by the host community and individuals who have sought refuge in the UK to be mapped.

This approach also allowed the spread and transformation of social representations to be analysed. This enabled identification of the widespread dispersal of moral panic discourses about asylum seekers and also identified the way that these discourses developed as they entered the public domain. SRT recognises that representations can be conventional and prescriptive but that their form and content also transform and evolve in the process of communication and interaction amongst groups and individuals. This is therefore a dynamic conceptualisation of social knowledge which produced an analysis which could identify both core elements of representations that are resistant to change and peripheral elements that are more context dependent. This resulted in a more nuanced analysis than would be provided by a content analysis which just identified straightforward themes.

Mapping the social representations of asylum seekers also established the representational context in which 'folk devils' negotiate their identities and highlighted the factors that delimit the possibilities for identity construction. This is important as it draws attention to the role that moral panic discourse plays in maintaining particular patterns of social relations. It also means that this approach worked particularly well in conjunction with SIT as it identified the framework in which social identity processes occur. SIT was integrated into this model in order to



examine intergroup processes that may help explain the cause and impact of moral panic. This analysis demonstrated the usefulness of this approach in that it confirmed that it is likely that social psychological processes are one of the contributory factors to host receptivity to moral panic. Importantly, this approach also allowed the extension of moral panic theorising to include an assessment of the impact of moral panic on 'folk devils'. This was a unique element of this thesis and one of the key contributions of the adoption of a social psychological approach to moral panic.

However, there are also likely to be some limitations in the application of this approach. One obvious limitation is that the focus on intergroup processes means it would not make sense to apply this model to moral panics that do not have a 'folk devil', for example moral panics about 'video nasties' or 'dangerous dogs'. Furthermore, the development of a model of moral panic which focuses on the impact of stigmatised identity on 'folk devils' raises questions regarding the extent to which we would be interested in applying this model to all 'folk devils'. The rationale for extending moral panic theorising to examine the impact of moral panic on 'folk devils' was based on the fact that, as discussed above, moral panic is often used to explore power relationships with a view to exposing power inequity. It is therefore unsurprising that the subjects of moral panic tend to be vulnerable members of the community who lack access to cultural capital. As one of the stated goals of moral panic research is to expose social injustice, it is vital that this type of analysis can examine the impact of moral panic on these individuals. However, whilst there is a clear case for examining the impact on these groups, it is less clear whether there would be the same interest in applying this model to less sympathetic groups. For example, to what extent would researchers be interested in examining the negative impact of a moral panic on paedophiles? This once more raises questions about the extent to which moral panic is an ideological or analytic concept and suggests that there is a moral element in the research process as well the social processes that are being explored.

Whilst it is important to recognise the limitations to this approach and that as with previous models it will not be able to provide a universal explanation for moral

panic, this analysis has nevertheless demonstrated the potential for social psychological theory to extend the explanatory value of moral panic. In re-focusing moral panic to include an analysis of the impact on 'folk devils' this approach also further develops the critical edge of moral panic through theorising the impact of asymmetric power relations on those without access to cultural capital.

### 8.4.3 Implications for future research

Through operationalising and applying the five criteria for moral panic this thesis has developed some clear recommendations for future moral panic research. Firstly, although *concern* was relatively straightforward to empirically measure, this analysis found that the presence of *concern* did not predict a moral panic response. As Critcher (2003) has already demonstrated that the absence of public *concern* cannot rule out a moral panic, this strongly supports his suggestion that *concern* should be dropped as an empirical indicator for moral panic in future research. Despite revealing that it is more complicated to measure the remaining four criteria, this research demonstrated that it is nonetheless possible to empirically examine these criteria and when considered together they provide a useful measure of moral panic. It is therefore recommended that these criteria should be retained for future research, but that the following measures need to be adopted if moral panic is to be developed as an analytic tool that can be used for systematic empirical examination of evidence.

*Hostility* and *consensus* both highlighted the importance of using data triangulation in moral panic research. For *hostility* data triangulation provides a means of establishing whether *hostility* observed in the tabloid media is more than simply a reflection of a particular style of reporting. This is important, as whilst *hostility* may be observed in many stories which appear in tabloid newspapers clearly not all of these stories constitute moral panics. Furthermore not all moral panic discourse generated in the tabloid media goes on to become a fully fledged moral panic. This may be because this agenda is not taken up by the wider media or because public receptivity to these particular stories is lacking. It is therefore important to identify *hostility* in sources other than just the tabloid media. It may also be useful for future research to compare *hostility* in coverage of an issue identified as a 'moral panic'



with coverage of other stories in the same publications. This may establish whether there are specific features that allow the application of *hostility* to distinguish between moral panic discourse and a more general style of tabloid reporting.

Identifying *hostility* in public opinion as well as media discourse not only supports the contention that *hostility* can identify more than a tabloid style of reporting, but also allows *consensus* in *hostility* to be established more conclusively than could be achieved by looking at the amount of *hostility* in either media coverage or public opinion alone. This is important as this analysis revealed the difficulty in establishing numerical evidence for *consensus* and data triangulation may therefore play a key role in allowing this to be empirically demonstrated. The difficulty of establishing 'objective' numerical measures for moral panic criterion was also apparent when examining *disproportionality* and *volatility*. This highlights the importance of examining the content as well as the process of moral panic and the advantages of conducting qualitative as well as quantitative analyses in moral panic research.

Examining the content of moral panic was shown to enhance the likelihood of identifying process criteria such as *consensus*, as evidence for the spread of moral panic discourse indicates that representations of an issue are shared. This research therefore supports the argument put forward by Thompson (1998) and Critcher (2003) that future moral panic research should focus on the content as well as process of moral panic. However, unlike Thompson and Critcher this thesis points to the benefits of utilising the theory of social representations (SRT) rather than discourse theory for this purpose. As discussed above, there were clear benefits in using SRT, but this approach has yet to be tested beyond the current context so future research which explores the utility of SRT across a range of moral panics would be beneficial. It would also be useful to examine the spread as well as the content of these representations, as this would allow examination of the extent to which the representations identified in the current analysis can be generalised to the wider UK public. This could be achieved by using the representations identified in this thesis to develop a survey measure which could be applied to a much larger random sample of participants.

This thesis demonstrated that it is important to examine responses over a reasonably long period of time for *volatility* to be successfully identified. This supports McCorckle and Miethe's (1998) argument that future moral panic research should not simply focus on brief periods of analysis. This research also suggests that whilst *volatility* may identify the latest manifestation of a moral panic, it could be more useful to look at patterns of moral panics to identify their interdependencies. For example, this thesis argues that the moral panic response to asylum seekers should be understood in the context of ongoing fears about threatening 'others'. When this is added to the interconnectivities identified by researchers such as Critcher (2003), Jenkins (1992) and Weeks (1993), a pattern seems to be emerging in which specific moral panic episodes can be placed within ongoing narratives. These analyses suggest that there may be a finite set of narrative themes that each 'new' moral panic fits into. For instance, moral panic clusters that have been identified to date include youth, sexuality and threatening 'others'. Future research might therefore usefully seek to examine whether a complete set of themes for moral panics can be identified and what forms they are currently taking. This would establish whether 'new' moral panics are simply the latest manifestation of ongoing narratives or if they represent newly emerging threats.

In addition to empirically testing the concept of moral panic, this thesis also proposed a social psychological model for enhancing the explanatory power of this concept. As discussed above, this research has demonstrated the usefulness of this approach in that it confirmed that it is likely that social psychological processes are one of the contributory factors to host receptivity to moral panic. However it also identified some limitations that need to be further explored if this model is to be successfully applied in the future. In particular, although host community responses were consistent with some intergroup processes predicted by Social Identity Theory (SIT), this approach was unable to predict the circumstances in which members of the host community would be more or less hostile towards asylum seekers. A number of possible explanations have been proposed, however further research is required to establish a definitive assessment of the reasons for the lack of predictive validity with regards to this aspect of intergroup relations.



The role of social psychological processes in host community receptivity to moral panic was examined in this thesis using qualitative analysis of group interview data. This approach was necessary in order to explore the reasons for such receptivity and enable an explanatory model of moral panic to be developed. This methodology necessarily required the use of a sampling scheme which means it would not be appropriate to attempt to generalise this response to the wider host community. Such a quantitative approach would require a sampling scheme and size which was developed for this purpose. However, it is an interesting development of the current research which could form the basis for future studies by extending the means of identifying moral panics to provide a quantitative measure of moral panic criteria which could be applied to assess the size and scope of any moral panic response.

One of the key advantages of developing a social psychological model of moral panic is that it also allows the impact of moral panic on folk devils to be examined. This approach should be pursued in future research as theorising the impact of asymmetric power relations on those without access to cultural capital enhances the critical edge of moral panic and increases the likelihood that moral panic research can achieve Cohen's (2002) aim of exposing social injustice. However, as with applying a social psychological model to public opinion, further work is needed for this approach to be able to fully account for the impact of moral panic on 'folk devils'. SIT proved useful for identifying strategies asylum seekers adopted to cope with their stigmatised group membership. However this analysis also highlighted the complexities of identity processes and the role of multiple identities in intergroup relations. Whilst these findings clearly demonstrated that 'asylum seeker' is experienced as a stigmatised social identity by those labelled in this way, it also suggested that other identities may have an even more negative impact. Consequently the idea that we can deal with the implications of moral panic on the basis of one single label may be an oversimplification. There is therefore more work that needs to be done to establish the impact of moral panic on 'folk devils' in situations where there are a number of different stigmatised identities involved.

Finally, if moral panic research is to remain relevant it is important that it not only identifies power dynamics in society, but that it can also identify ways of addressing

these issues. This aspect of moral panic research may be developed through paying more attention to the impact moral panics may have on those labelled as 'folk devils'. It may also be achieved by examining the content of moral panic discourse in the public to identify whether it is possible to challenge these representations. For example, a notable aspect of host community responses to asylum seekers was that *hostility* and *concern* were for the main part based on inaccurate information. There were four key misperceptions identified in this analysis (1) asylum seekers were conflated with economic migrants, which created both an inflated perception of the number of asylum seekers living in the UK and also led to the misperception that 'asylum seekers' are having a negative impact on employment in the UK, (2) participants believed that the UK plays host to more asylum seekers than other EU countries, (3) they also believed that the majority of asylum seekers come to Europe, and (4) there was a misperception that there is little or no asylum legislation in the UK. These concerns were not only based on lack of knowledge about the asylum system, but also on lack of trust in official statistics. For example, although Luke (Basildon) was able to cite accurate figures about asylum seekers he disputed these figures, as he did not consider the government to be a credible source of information.

This research therefore indicates that not only is there a need for more accurate information to be communicated to the public, but also the ways in which this information is communicated and the credibility of the source of this communication need to be taken into account. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, core elements of social representations are notoriously resistant to change. The wide dispersal and consistency of the representations of asylum seekers as *bad people*, *threatening* and *illegitimate* strongly suggests that these are core representations and attempts to provide alternative discourses are therefore likely to be aimed at an unreceptive audience. This poses further challenges for effective communication about asylum seekers and supports the call from The Independent Asylum Commission for the labelling of those who seek refuge in the UK to be changed.

It can be concluded that future moral panic research should be based on empirical indicators of the kind identified in this thesis, it should utilise multiple data sources



and focus on a sufficient length of time to establish adequate evidence. Analyses should focus on both the content and process of moral panic and should also consider the impact of moral panic on 'folk devils'. In this way future research may not only be able to identify the role of moral panic in bringing about social and political change but may also be able to engage directly in this process.

#### **8.4.4 Final conclusions**

This thesis opened with the statement of two aims (1) to examine whether 'moral panic' provides an accurate characterisation of the UK response to asylum seekers and the extent to which this is empirically testable, and (2) to determine whether social psychological theory can be used to provide a model which can (a) theorise the content as well as the process of moral panic, and (b) understand both the cause and the impact of this response. The overall conclusion is that it is reasonable to characterise the UK response to asylum seekers as a moral panic, but this is just the starting point for producing an analysis that is able to adequately explain both the cause and impact of this response. This thesis points to the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach which draws on the strengths of both sociological and social psychological theorising to provide an integrated model of 'moral panic' with the capability of enhancing the explanatory power of the moral panic concept.

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**Appendix 1: Newspaper articles published in 2006 that refer to asylum seekers in the UK or UK asylum policy**  
**(all articles that refer to ‘asylum’ including foreign news stories) in the top four selling UK daily tabloids and broadsheets)**

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Daily Tabloids (Highest circulation first*)													
The Sun	15 (16)	7 (7)	10 (13)	15 (17)	39 (41)	16 (17)	28 (28)	21 (22)	22 (24)	11 (12)	20 (21)	17 (17)	221 (235)
Daily Mirror	6 (9)	4 (4)	5 (7)	8 (10)	21 (25)	8 (10)	8 (9)	8 (8)	8 (10)	5 (7)	7 (10)	5 (10)	93 (119)
Daily Express	20 (20)	6 (8)	16 (19)	30 (31)	51 (51)	25 (26)	28 (30)	21 (21)	13 (20)	15 (17)	22 (22)	19 (25)	266 (290)
Daily Mail	17 (24)	10 (17)	16 (19)	32 (33)	70 (72)	26 (28)	18 (24)	26 (28)	9 (19)	18 (21)	16 (21)	21 (22)	279 (328)
Daily Broadsheets (Highest circulation first*)													
The Times	13 (27)	3 (12)	15 (28)	20 (33)	36 (50)	19 (35)	20 (29)	17 (29)	14 (18)	19 (33)	16 (30)	16 (36)	208 (360)
Daily Telegraph	7 (11)	3 (5)	2 (11)	19 (26)	29 (34)	13 (18)	13 (15)	16 (23)	5 (8)	6 (10)	5 (16)	5 (9)	123 (186)
The Guardian	23 (32)	6 (21)	17 (29)	17 (34)	28 (50)	19 (30)	16 (27)	30 (37)	15 (29)	19 (32)	29 (50)	28 (37)	247 (408)
The Independent	4 (10)	9 (18)	10 (16)	16 (24)	34 (44)	15 (27)	21 (26)	21 (29)	13 (26)	13 (19)	12 (27)	9 (21)	176 (286)
Total:	105	48	91	157	308	141	152	160	99	106	127	120	

\*Figures taken from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) figures for the newspaper industry which were published on Friday July 14, 2006.

Total number of articles that refer to asylum seekers in the UK or the UK asylum system:	1,613
Total number of articles that refer to asylum in the sense of political asylum (including foreign policy stories, theatre reviews etc.):	2,212



**Appendix 2: Articles analysed from each publication during 2006**

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
The Sun	4	2	2	4	10	4	7	5	6	2	5	5	56
Daily Mirror	2	1	2	2	5	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	26
Daily Express	5	2	4	7	13	7	7	5	4	3	6	5	68
Daily Mail	4	3	4	8	17	6	5	6	3	4	4	6	70
The Times	3	1	4	5	9	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	52
Daily Telegraph	2	1	1	5	7	4	4	4	1	2	1	2	34
The Guardian	6	2	4	5	7	5	4	8	3	5	7	7	63
The Independent	1	3	3	4	8	4	5	5	4	3	3	3	46
Totals:	27	15	24	40	76	37	39	39	27	26	31	34	415

**Total articles to be analysed for the year: 415**  
(220 tabloid articles, 195 broadsheet articles)

## Appendix 3: Group Interview call for participants



### Information for participants

I am looking for participants to take part in a piece of research on UK responses to asylum seekers that I am conducting as part of my PhD research in the Psychology Department at London Metropolitan University. As part of this project I am carrying out small group interviews with a view to exploring the ways that British people think about asylum seekers.

I would like to interview groups of 3-6 people who already know each other, as I am hoping as far as possible to stimulate the kind of discussion you might have if the subject came up in everyday conversation. I am interested in hearing your views on the subject and there are no 'wrong' or 'right' answers to any of the questions. You do not need to have any particular knowledge about the topic to participate.

The discussion should last approximately one hour, depending on how much you have to say on the subject and can be conducted at a location and time that is convenient for the group. I would like to record what is said to ensure that I have an accurate record of your views, but will not record your name or any personal details that would allow anyone reading the report to identify you. I would also like to ask you to complete a short questionnaire at the end of the discussion to provide me with some information that will allow me to process and interpret the interview. Your answers will be completely confidential and will not be used for any other purpose. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, even after completion of the interview. I am happy to provide full access to the transcript of your interview and to discuss the research findings once the project is completed.

If you have any questions about this research or would like any further information, I can be contacted at [j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk) or by telephone on 020 7320 3548.

With many thanks for your time

Julia Pearce



Appendix 4: Group Interview demographics

Group	Location	Sex	Participant*	Age	Education	Occupation	Ethnicity	Family history of immigration	Contact	Newspaper / main source of news
Group 1	Birmingham	M	Dennis	51-60	NVQ 2	None	White	None	Occasional	The Sun, BBC1 news, other newspapers
		F	Joan	51-60	None	Housewife	White	None	Occasional	The Sun
		F	Karen	31-40	O Level or GCSE	Housewife	White	None	Regular	ITV news, school mums
		F	Ann	60+	Not completed	Retired florist	White	None	Occasional (less)	GMTV
Group 2	London	F	Salma	18-20	Doing a degree	Student	Asian	Family from Pakistan	Regular (more)	Daily Mail (Guardian, Independent and Evening Standard occasionally)
		F	Suzanne	31-40	Doing a degree	Student	Black	Parents from Barbados	Regular	The Sun, Barbados Nation, News Shopper, London Paper
		F	Paula	31-40	Doing a degree	Student	Black	Grandparents from West Indies	Occasional (more)	The Voice, The Daily Mail, The Daily Express, local newspapers
		F	Maria	18-20	Doing a degree	Student	Asian	Family from Sri Lanka	Regular (more)	ITV news, London Lite
		F	Ama	18-20	Doing a degree	Student	Black	Parents from Ghana	Regular (less)	London Lite, London Paper, The Guardian
Group 3	London	F	Sharon	31-40	Doing a degree	Student	White	None	Occasional	Internet
		F	Jeanne	21-30	Doing a degree	Student	White	Mother from Finland	Occasional (more)	The Times, Daily Telegraph, Independent, Guardian, local newspapers + BBC website
		F	Padma	21-30	Doing a degree	Student	Asian	Grandparents from Africa	Regular (more)	The Sun, Metro, Ilford Recorder
Group 4	West Bridgford	F	Carol	51-60	Degree or higher	Architectural Technologist	White	None	Regular (more)	The Times
		F	Beryl	60+	O Level or GCSE	Retired	White	None	Occasional	Daily Mail
		F	Maureen	51-60	Degree or higher	Senior Lecturer	White	None	Regular (more)	Daily Mail, The Times, BBC news
		F	Pat	41-50	RGN	Nurse	White	None	Regular	The Times, The Daily Mail
		M	Ian	60+	Degree or higher	Retired	White	None	Occasional (more)	Television news

\*All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity

Group	Location	Sex	Participant*	Age	Education	Occupation	Ethnicity	Family history of immigration	Contact	Newspaper / main source of news
Group 5	Nottingham	F	Michaela	31-40	None	PA	White	None	Regular	No regular newspapers, main source of news not completed
		F	Lisa	31-40	Degree or higher	Business Dev. Officer	White	None	Regular	BBC news
		M	David	41-50	Degree or higher	Lecturer	White	None	Occasional (less)	The Independent and The Guardian
		F	Charlotte	41-50	A Level	Administrator	White	None	Occasional	The Daily Telegraph + local paper
Group 6	Doncaster	M	Graham	31-40	Post grad diploma	Env. Health Practitioner	White	None	Regular (more)	BBC news
		M	Simon	21-30	Degree or higher	Env.I Health Officer	White	None	Regular (more)	BBC website / television
		M	Mike	41-50	Degree or higher	Env. Health Practitioner	White	None	Regular (more)	The Times
		M	Kevin	21-30	A Level	Food Enforcement Officer	White	None	Occasional (more)	The Daily Express
		F	Sarah	41-50	Diploma	Health Education Officer	White	None	Occasional	Radio, friends and family
		F	Judy	41-50	HND	Health Education Officer	White	None	Regular (more)	BBC and husband
Group 7	Rickmansworth	M	Steve	31-40	HNC	Electrical Manager	White	Parents Irish	Regular (same)	Express, Mail, Sun, Telegraph
		M	Gino	31-40	Degree or higher	Engineer	White	Grandparents, Sicilian/Irish	Regular (more)	BB1, Radio
		M	John	31-40	Diploma in Surveying practice	Quantity surveyor	White	None	Regular (more)	Mail, Sun
		M	Darren	51-60	A Level	Engineer	White	Parents Irish	Regular (less)	The Sun
		M	Paul	41-50	None	Gardener	White	None	None (same)	BBC 1
		M	Ken	51-60	HNC	Bid Manager	White	None	Occasional (more)	Mail
Group 8	Basildon	M	Nick	31-40	O Level /GCSE	IT consultant	White	None	Regular (more)	Telegraph, Sun, News of the World
		M	Dan	21-30	O Level/ GCSE	IT technician	White	None	Occasional (more)	From friends - actively avoids watching or reading news
		M	Gary	31-40	Degree or higher	Data centre strategist	White	None	Regular (less)	BBC, ITV, BBC & local radio, occasionally Mail or Express at weekends

\*All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity



## **Appendix 5: Group Interview topic guide**

### **Introduction:**

- Explain purpose (exploring the ways British people think about asylum seekers)
- Aim to promote conversation
- No wrong or right answers
- Confidentiality / copy of transcript on request
- Emphasise group dimension – encourage all to speak

When recording starts ask all participants to introduce themselves by first name / say what their expectations of the session are.

### **Topic 1: What is their understanding of what an 'asylum seeker' is?**

When you hear the expression 'asylum seeker' what comes to mind? / Who do you think of as asylum seekers?

Does the term 'refugee' conjure up similar or different images?

Do you know any asylum seekers personally?

If you met someone who was an 'asylum seeker' do you think you would have much in common with them?

### **Topic 2: What do 'British' people think about asylum seekers?**

Do you think your views about asylum seekers are 'typical'?

What do you think British people tend to think about asylum seekers?

What factors are likely to affect the way they think about asylum seekers?

Do you think that asylum is an important issue in the UK at the moment?

### **Topic 3: How are asylum seekers represented in the UK media?**

Do you think the asylum issue features much in the UK media?

How do you think asylum seekers are portrayed in the UK media?

Do you think this is an accurate portrayal? / Do you agree with what the UK media says about this issue?

Do you think the media influences the ways that people think about asylum seekers?

Do you think that British people would tend to agree with the way the media talks about asylum seekers?

### **Topic 4: Can asylum seekers become 'British'?**

Do you think someone who comes to the UK as an asylum seeker could become British?

Does it matter if asylum seekers eventually come to think of themselves as British?

How much choice do you think they have about this?

What does it mean to be British? (if not already covered)

### **Conclusion:**

Review purpose of study – "Have we missed anything?"

## Appendix 6 : Group Interview questionnaire

Thank you for contributing to my PhD research. I would be very grateful if you could provide me with the following information to help me to process and interpret the interview. Your answers will be completely confidential and will not be used for any other purpose. Please complete the following:

**Sex:**

Male ☐ Female ☐

**Age:**

18-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 60+ ☐

**Highest Educational Qualification:**

None ☐ O level/GCSE ☐ A Level ☐ Degree or Higher ☐

Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**Occupation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you know of any history of immigration in your family?**

No ☐ Yes ☐

If yes, please specify (e.g. my grandmother was from Germany and moved to the UK in 1935)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**How much contact do you have with people from other ethnic groups?**

Occasional ☐ Regular ☐ None ☐

**Has this contact changed over the last 5 years?**

Less ☐ More ☐ Same ☐

**Do you regularly read newspapers?**

No ☐ Yes ☐

If no, please specify where you tend to find about the news (e.g. BBC1 / from friends)

If yes, please specify which papers you read (e.g. The Sun)

\_\_\_\_\_





Information Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the PhD research on asylum in the UK that I am conducting in the Psychology Department at London Metropolitan University. As part of this research I am carrying out small group interviews with a view to exploring the ways that British people think about asylum seekers. I am interested in hearing your views on this subject and there are no 'wrong' or 'right' answers to any of the questions.

The discussion should last approximately one hour, depending on how much you have to say on the subject. I would like to record what is said to ensure that I have an accurate record of your views, but will not record your name or any personal details that would allow anyone reading the report to identify you. I would also like to ask you to complete a short questionnaire at the end of the discussion to provide me with some information that will allow me to process and interpret the interview. Your answers will be completely confidential and will not be used for any other purpose. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, even after completion of the interview. I am happy to provide full access to the transcript of your interview and to discuss the research findings once the project is completed.

If you have any questions about this research or would like any further information, I can be contacted at [j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk) or by telephone on 020 7320 3548.

With many thanks for your time

Julia Pearce

## Appendix 8: Individual Interview recruitment letter



### Information Sheet

I am looking for participants to take part in a piece of research on UK responses to asylum seekers that I am conducting as part of my PhD research in the Psychology Department at London Metropolitan University. I would like to interview people who have experience of seeking asylum in the UK with a view to examining the impact of media representations of asylum seekers.

Interviews should last approximately thirty minutes, although this can vary depending on the length of individual responses to questions. The interview can be conducted at a location and time that is convenient for you and will focus solely on your experiences in the UK; no questions will be asked about the experiences that led you to seek asylum. The interviews will cover issues such as the ways that asylum is represented in the media and your experience of being an asylum seeker in the UK. I am interested in hearing your views on this subject and there are no 'wrong' or 'right' answers to any of the questions.

The research will follow ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society, and although I would like to record the interview to ensure that I have an accurate record of what has been said, I will not record your name or any personal details that would allow anyone reading the report to identify you. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, even after completion of the interview. I am happy to provide full access to the transcripts of the interviews and to discuss the research findings once the project is completed.

If you are interested in participating or would like further information, please contact Julia Pearce at [j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk) or on 020 7320 3548.



**Appendix 9 : Individual Interview demographics**

Participant*	Sex	Age	Country of Birth	Former Occupation	Time in UK	Current Immigration Status
Sarah	Female	24	DRC	Student	4 years	Asylum seeker
Hope	Female	38	DRC	Fashion	4 years	Asylum seeker
Sadik	Male	50	Kosovo	Accountant	4 years	Asylum seeker
Mary	Female	37	Liberia	Shop keeper	5 years	Asylum seeker
Rose	Female	52	Sri Lanka	Journalist	6 years	Refugee
Amadou	Male	38	Guinea-Conakry	Printer	4 years	Asylum seeker
Akam	Male	25	Iraq	Student	7 years	Refugee
Nozer	Male	37	Iraq	Businessman	5 years	Refugee
Bako	Male	32	Niger	Agricultural worker	4 years	Asylum seeker
Abebe	Male	38	Ethiopia	Civil Servant	2 years	Asylum seeker
Bikila	Male	53	Ethiopia	Journalist	4 years	Asylum seeker
Ndulu	Male	19	Nigeria	Student	2 years	Asylum seeker
Hawraz	Male	31	Iraq	Student	5 years	Asylum seeker
Raman	Male	34	Iraq	Politician	4 years	Refugee
Babir	Male	33	Iraq	Student	6 years	Refugee
Adil	Male	40	Turkey	Journalist	14 years	British citizen
Mila	Female	33	Serbia	Journalist	8 years	British citizen
Lilith	Female	54	Iran	Administrator	33 years	British citizen
Ali	Male	34	Iraq	Doctor	5 years	Asylum seeker
Rashida	Female	46	Lebanon	Journalist	22 years	British citizen
Temen	Male	29	Iraq	Dentist	5 years	Asylum seeker
Nasih	Male	45	Eritrea	Student	23 years	British citizen
Aamina	Female	31	Somalia	Nanny	11 years	Asylum seeker
Latasha	Female	28	DRC	Student	6 years	Refugee
Amin	Male	37	Iran	Footballer	13 years	Asylum seeker

\*All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity

## Appendix 10: Individual Interview schedule

### Section 1:

**1. Do you regularly read British newspapers?**

If yes: Which papers?

If no: Move straight to question 2.

**2. Do you regularly watch television or listen to the radio?**

If yes: Which channels? Mainly satellite or terrestrial channels?

If no to both: Do you think you're exposed to UK media coverage of asylum?

If yes: how?

If no: move straight to question 9.

**3. How do you think asylum seekers are portrayed in the UK media?**

If prompt required: How are asylum seekers talked about in the media?

**4. Do you think this is a fair portrayal?**

If yes: In what way?

If no: Why not?

**5. Is this different to the way refugees are portrayed?**

If yes: In what way? / Are there any similarities?

If no: How are the representations similar? / Are there any differences?

**6. Do you think media representations of asylum seekers apply to you?**

If prompt required: Do you have anything in common with the image of asylum seekers that is portrayed in the UK press?

If yes: In what way?

If no: Why not?

**7. Do you think these descriptions apply to other asylum seekers?**

If prompt required: Are most asylum seekers like media descriptions of them?

If yes: In what way? / Are there any exceptions?

If no: How are they different? / Do they apply to any asylum seekers?

**8. Do media representations of asylum seekers have an impact on you?**

If prompt required: Do you just dismiss representations that don't apply to you or do you think they affect the way you think about yourself?

If yes: In what way?

If no: Why not?

**9. Do you think the media influences the ways that people think about asylum seekers?**

If yes: In what way?

If no: Why not?



**10. Do you think British people would tend to agree with the way that the media represent asylum seekers?**

- If yes:

Do you think there are any differences between public views and media representations?

If yes: In what way are they different?

If no: Why not?
- If no:

In what ways is public opinion different?

What are the reasons for this?

**This is the end of the section of the interview that focuses on media representations of asylum seekers. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the media before we move on?**

**The next set of questions will focus on you and your experiences of being an asylum seeker in the UK.**

**Section 2:**

**11. Is 'asylum seeker' a label that you would apply to yourself?**

- If yes:

What does this mean to you?
- If no:

Why do you think that is?

**12. Do you think you have much in common with other asylum seekers?**

- If yes:

What things do you have in common?
- If no:

Why not?

**13. Do you think it's possible to talk about 'asylum seekers' as a group?**

- If yes:

What do asylum seekers have in common with each other?
- If no:

Why not?

**14. Do you think other people think of you as an asylum seeker?**

- If prompt required:

People you meet in everyday life
- If yes:

Does this matter?

Do you think this shapes their view of you?

If yes: In what way?

If no: Why not?

How do you feel about this?
- If no:

Why not?

**15. Do you think it makes any difference if someone thinks of you as an asylum seeker or if they think of you as a refugee?**

- If yes:

Why?
- If no:

Why not?

**16. Are you planning on staying in the UK permanently?**

- If yes:

Do you think of yourself or could you imagine thinking of yourself in the future as British?

If yes: What is it that makes (would make) you feel British?

If no: Why not? Does this matter?

**17. Do you think it matters whether people living in this country think of themselves as ‘British’?**

If yes:                      Why?  
If no:                        Why not?

**18. Do you think it matters whether other people think of you as British?**

If yes:                      Why?  
If no:                        Why not?

**19. If you were asked to describe yourself in half a dozen words, which words would you use?**

If prompt required, what sorts of things are important to you / make you who you are?

**20. Do you think this has changed since you came to the UK?**

If yes:                      In what way?  
If no:                        Why not?

**This is the end of the main part of the interview. Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to add or are there any other issues you would like to raise that have not been covered by my questions?**

**As I mentioned at the beginning I just need to take a few details about you for the tape**  
[NB - if information already mentioned in the interview, repeat it and check I have understood it correctly / that they are aware that I’m noting it for the purposes of the report]

- Country of origin (where do you come from?)
- Former occupation
- Length of time in the UK
- Current immigration status
- Age
- Sex

[Thank the participant for taking part and ask whether it would be ok if I contact them again if I need any further information. Also check whether they would like to see a copy of the transcript.]





Information Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the PhD research on asylum in the UK that I am conducting in the Psychology Department at London Metropolitan University. As part of this research I am interviewing people who have experience of seeking asylum in the UK with a view to examining the impact of media representations and host responses to asylum seekers. I am interested in hearing your views on this subject and there are no 'wrong' or 'right' answers to any of the questions.

The interview should last approximately thirty minutes, depending on how much you have to say on the subject. It will consist of two main blocks of questions; the first focuses on your views of media representations of asylum seekers, the second on your experience of being an asylum seeker in the UK. Please let me know if any of the questions are unclear or if you would prefer not to answer any questions. At the end of the interview I will ask for a few details about you (for example, where you come from and how long you have lived in the UK) so that I have a description of participants for my report.

I would like to record the interviews to ensure that I have an accurate record of your views, but will not record your name or any personal details that would allow anyone reading the report to identify you. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, even after completion of the interview. I am happy to provide full access to the transcript of your interview and to discuss the research findings once the project is completed.

If you have any questions about this research or would like any further information, I can be contacted at [j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.pearce@londonmet.ac.uk) or by telephone on 020 7320 3548.

With many thanks for your time

Julia Pearce

**Appendix 12: Coding frame for moral panic content analysis of newspaper articles**

Cat. set	Category label	Definition of category	Code	Code label	Description of code	Example
A	Concern	A heightened level of concern over the behaviour of a particular group / the impact that behaviour has on the rest of society.	A01	Explicit statement of concern	Editorial comment that expresses concern about the asylum system / the effect of asylum seekers on the UK and expresses concern on behalf of the general public	"MORE than 400 criminal asylum seekers freed from jail have vanished into thin air, a shocking report revealed yesterday. The shambolic Government body in charge of Britain's asylum system has NO IDEA where they are." (The Sun, 14 Mar 06)
			A02	Attempts to elicit concern	Attempts to elicit concern include speculation about negative outcomes that 'may' happen and articles that present the issue of asylum or asylum seekers in a way that frames the issue as a problem.	"MORE than 2,000 passports sent to the Home Office have vanished in the last five years, chiefs have admitted. It is feared criminals may use them to enter the UK. Experts say the true total could be higher." (The Sun, 1 Jan 06)
			A03	Evidence of public / government concern	Articles that provide evidence of public and / or government concern about the asylum issue / asylum seekers. This includes reports of public opinion polls that demonstrate concern, quotations from individual members of the public and politicians or other public officials that express concern as well as evidence of policy / legislation created in response to public concern.	"Removals is a big, big problem in this field... There is absolutely no other area of law that I saw where, when you lose, people go forward to whatever the next stage is in the numbers there are in this system." (Mr Justice Henry Hodge, President of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal quoted in The Daily Express, 25 Jan, 02)
B	Hostility	Members of the group that is the focus of concern are collectively designated as the enemy of respectable society; their behaviour is seen as harmful / threatening to societal values and interests. This leads to an 'us / them' divide and the creation of a category of 'folk devils'.	B01	Threat to shared values	This embodies the 'moral' element of a 'moral panic' – the idea that the 'other' does not share 'our' values. This includes descriptions of asylum seekers as criminal and/or deviant.	"Most others are young men from countries with little tradition of civic order. No wonder that almost every day produces new allegations of sexual assaults, burglaries and other serious crimes carried out by failed asylum seekers and illegal immigrants." (The Daily Express, 14 Mar 06)
			B02	Threat to shared interests	This includes references to the negative impact of asylum seekers / the asylum system on UK residents (e.g. costs to the tax payer, strain on the NHS and benefit systems etc) and statements that suggest that asylum seekers are being privileged in relation to UK residents.	"They have presided over an immigration and asylum policy which has allowed tens of thousands in to leech off our benefit system, NHS and education services." (The Sun, 18 Apr 06)



Cat.	Category label	Definition of category	Code	Code label	Description of code	Example
B	Hostility contd.	As above	B03	Classification as "folk devils"	This includes the interchangeable use of terms like "asylum seeker" and "illegal immigrant" that are not synonymous, inappropriate usage of the term "asylum seeker" in negative contexts (e.g. when applied to someone who has been granted leave to remain and as such is a refugee or someone whose asylum application has been refused and has remained in the country illegally), use of inaccurate negative terminology like "illegal asylum seeker", the use of negative terminology (e.g. "bogus asylum seekers") and the use of negative associations (i.e. references to "illegal immigrants and asylum seekers" as categories that 'go together')	"AN illegal immigrant who is accused of rape has vanished after a judge freed him on bail. Asylum seeker Souny Mustafa, 31, is alleged to have carried out the attack almost a year after his bid to remain in Britain was rejected." (The Daily Express, 23 Feb 06)
			B04	Evidence of public / government hostility	This includes evidence of hostile public responses to asylum seekers / the issue of asylum (e.g. opinion poll findings or direct quotations from the public that demonstrate a response that is in line with the criteria for B01 and /or B02 and / or B03)) and evidence of legislation that criminalises asylum seekers (e.g. detention and electronic tagging) and quotations from MPs or other public officials that meet the criteria for hostility detailed above)	"As our aim is to send out a clear message to unfounded claimants, we are working towards tagging all adult claimants at the asylum screening units who are not detained, including those who seek asylum support," (Tony McNulty, Immigration minister quoted in The Guardian, 14 Mar, 2006)
C	Disproportionality	The level of concern about the particular group is in excess of that which would be proportional to 'objective' measures of harm	C01	Exaggeration of degree of threat	Descriptions that create an exaggerated impression of the size of the negative impact in relation to 'objective' measures of harm. This includes articles that make statements based on extrapolations from limited or peak statistics and those that present asylum seekers / the asylum system as having an "enormous" negative impact on the UK.	"On average only one fifth of claims are ever granted, meaning 4,930 cases were unfounded or 1,644 a month." (The Daily Express, 1 Mar 06)  "THOUSANDS of asylum seekers are to be offered millions of pounds in cash" (The Daily Telegraph, 14 Jan 06)
	Disconfirmation codes:					
D	Concern (counter)	Counter-evidence for the theoretical code 'Concern'.	D01  D02	Explicit statement that it is not a large problem  Articles that report concern on behalf of asylum seekers	Editorial comment that suggests that the asylum issue / asylum seekers are not a large problem  Articles that report concern for the plight of asylum seekers as well as concern that the government is acting too punitively towards them / the system is unfairly weighted against them.	"...fewer than 290,000 of the world's 9.2 million refugees had found sanctuary in the UK." (The Independent, 19 Apr 06)  "All the years of journalists demonising asylum seekers, all the years of politicians caving in to them - it ends here, with children locked behind bars for the "crime" of seeking asylum." (The Independent, 20 Apr 06)

Cat.	Category label	Definition of category	Code	Code label	Description of code	Example
D	Concern (counter) contd.	As above.	D03	Attempts to elicit more moderate responses from readers	Explicit attempts to counter the impression that asylum is an issue that "we" should be concerned about.	"There's a lot of rabid rhetoric in the tabloids about asylum seekers, but what about the facts? Far from coming over here to scrounge benefits, asylum seekers aren't even eligible for mainstream welfare." (The Guardian, 20 May 06)
			D04	Evidence for lack of public / government concern	Articles that provide evidence that the public and / or government do not consider asylum to be an issue for concern. This includes reports of public opinion polls, quotations from individual members of the public, politicians or other public officials that counter the impression that asylum is an issue that "we" should be concerned about.	"... The same moral panic that increasingly equates Muslim with terrorist and quietly accepts locking up for extended periods children of asylum seekers who have already suffered more than enough already." (Letter to The Independent from a member of the public, 18 May 06)
E	Hostility (counter)	Counter-evidence for the theoretical code 'Hostility'.	E01	Positive representations of asylum seekers	This includes the use of positive stereotypes of asylum seekers as a group (e.g. that they are "courageous" or "resilient") and stories that present asylum seekers in a positive light (e.g. as making a positive contribution to the community / as successful individuals)	"The couple had both held good office jobs in Iran and were very well educated and articulate... During the process of applying for refugee status you cannot get paid work, but Peri chose to work voluntarily in a nursery." (The Daily Express, 16 Mar 06)
			E02	Indications that asylum seekers share values	This includes descriptions of asylum seekers that describe asylum seekers in terms that indicate a shared moral perspective with the host population.	"Tham is a decent, honest and highly moral person ...Who the hell do you think would want to be in exile... if they could be at home, in the arms of those who love them?" (The Guardian, 24 Mar 06)
			E03	Indications that asylum seekers share interests	This includes descriptions of asylum seekers that suggests that they share interests with host population (e.g. want to work and support their families)	"These are incredibly resilient young people. They want to pursue their interests. They are like every other young person, but they need a place to be safe." (The Times, 24 Apr 06)
			E04	Evidence of positive public / government response	This includes evidence of positive public responses to asylum seekers / the issue of asylum, quotations from MPs or other public officials that describe asylum seekers in positive terms and evidence of policy / legislation in support of asylum seekers	"What asylum seekers want is a fair hearing and the right to support themselves while awaiting the outcome of their cases. They are not asking for benefits..." (Letter to The Guardian from a member of the public, 20 Dec 06)



F	Disproportionality (counter)	Counter-evidence for the theoretical code 'Disproportionality'.	F01	Expression of concern about disproportionate media / government response.	Concern expressed about disproportionate response by government / disproportionate coverage by tabloid newspapers.  This includes a 'neutral' editorial stance, where the facts of a particular case are stated without any obvious editorial slant, in a non-sensationalist way, and articles where both positive and negative arguments are given equal weight.	<p>"It is a wholly disproportionate approach to the undoubted abuses in the immigration system." (The Guardian, 22 Apr 06)</p> <p>"Figures published yesterday confirmed a continuing fall in applications for political asylum, which are now at their lowest level for 10 years." (The Daily Telegraph, 1 Mar 06)</p>
			F02	Proportionate (moderate) coverage of the issue		

Appendix 13: Coding frame for Moral Panic qualitative content analysis of group interviews

Category label	Definition of category	Code label	Description of code	Example
Concern	A heightened level of concern over the behaviour of a particular group / the impact that behaviour has on the rest of society.	Own concern	Instances in which participants expressed concern about the asylum issue / the impact of asylum seekers on the UK.	"the doctor's surgery will be swamped, the dentist'll be swamped. There won't be enough spaces in the schools... We say to anybody else wanting to come in there's no room, sorry the bus is full you can't come in." (Joan, Birmingham)
		Public concern	Instances in which participants indicated that they thought the public were concerned about the asylum issue / the impact of asylum seekers on the UK.	"I think that's what gripes most people is that they're coming over here and the NHS is on it's knees anyway" (Luke, Basildon)
		Media concern	Instances in which participants indicated that they thought the media was concerned about the asylum issue / the impact of asylum seekers on the UK	"Because it's always in the media isn't it? Always talk about, they always talk about...they're coming over here and yeah and they're getting...and they're getting all benefits" (Paula, London 1)
Hostility	Members of the group that is the focus of concern are collectively designated as the enemy of respectable society; their behaviour is seen as harmful / threatening to societal values and interests. This leads to an 'us / them' divide and the creation of a category of "folk devils".	Own hostility	Instances in which participants expressed hostility towards asylum seekers / indicated that they considered asylum seekers to be a threat to shared values or interests / reproduced negative stereotypes of asylum seekers.	"what worries me... is what their cultures are they bring with them and what they've actually been through and how they're lowering our standard of life and the violence that they've been through and they're bringing it onto our streets" (Paul, Rickmansworth)
		Public hostility	Instances in which participants described the general public response to asylum seekers as hostile.	"The first thing I think about when we're going to have a discussion about asylum seekers is peoples' prejudice" (Graham, Doncaster)
		Media hostility	Instances in which participants described the media response to asylum seekers as hostile.	"I think it's just, if the media does what it's good at, portraying things out of proportion and like basically I know, they talk about the bad but they don't talk about the good" (Maria, London 1)
Disproportionality	The level of concern about the particular group is in excess of that which would be proportional to 'objective' measures of harm	Own disproportionality	Instances in which participants expressed concern that was disproportionate in relation to 'objective' measures of harm	"Our country is too soft and it's not got it's procedures in place... we're just diluting all our economy. We don't produce enough as a country and we take on all the other country's worries and woes you know down to asylum seekers" (Michaela, Nottingham)
		Public disproportionality	Instances in which participants suggested that the public are responding in a disproportionate way to this issue	"I think the problem is that what people get muddled up with is immigration... so if you talk to people and they're not quite clear in their mind about what an asylum seeker is then they would think ah too many immigrants so then they go off on the wrong tangent" (Pat, W. Bridgford)
		Media disproportionality	Instances in which participants described the media response as disproportionate.	"I think they do this with immigration. They latch onto a subject and they boost it up... I don't read newspapers anymore because I don't believe in all what I read...they're trying to spice it up it can sound more scary than it is" (Ann, Birmingham)



DISCONFIRMATION CODES	Definition of category		Code label	Description of code	Example
	Category label				
Concern (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Concern'.		Own counter concern  Public counter concern  Media counter concern	Instances in which participants indicated that they were not concerned about the asylum issue / the impact of asylum seekers on the UK.  Instances in which participants indicated that they thought the public were not concerned about the asylum issue / the impact of asylum seekers on the UK.  Instances in which participants indicated that they thought the media was not concerned about the asylum issue / the impact of asylum seekers on the UK	<p>"There's no particular concerns I just feel if people want to come to our country and better themselves then why not" (Judy, Doncaster)</p> <p>"That's the most common view everyone has I think that's it if it doesn't concern me at this moment, I mean until I need to. Like people literally that's the news if it doesn't concern them then it's just one ear and out the other" (Maria, London 1)</p> <p>There were no instances of comments which indicated that participants felt that the media saw the asylum issue as something to be unconcerned about.</p>
Hostility (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Hostility'.		Own counter hostility  Public counter hostility  Media counter hostility	Instances in which participants expressed positive views towards asylum seekers / indicated that they did not consider asylum seekers to be a threat to shared values or interests.  Instances in which participants described the general public response to asylum seekers as a positive one.  Instances in which participants described the media response to asylum seekers as a positive one.	<p>"But this country's built on asylum seekers, sort of the Asians running away from Uganda..." (Mike, Doncaster)</p> <p>"I think it's not negative enough for them to do anything about it... I think it's something that we have accepted" (Gary, Basildon)</p> <p>"That's only the conservative part of the media, you've got the Left part of the media, The Guardian and The Independent, they're all totally opposite, they're saying 'oh it's good for the economy and you know they're doing jobs we don't want to do'" (Luke, Basildon)</p>
Disproportionality (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Disproportionality'.		Own counter disproportionality  Public counter disproportionality  Media counter disproportionality	Instances in which participants were proportionate in their response to the issue  Instances in which participants suggested that the public are proportionate in their response to this issue  Instances in which participants described the media response as proportionate.	<p>"But the fact of the matter is it's affecting the country one way or another... houses, prices now have gone out of control" (Paul) "I don't think that's down to immigration though" (Steve, Rickmansworth)</p> <p>There were no instances of comments which indicated that participants felt that the public were responding proportionately to the issue.</p> <p>"Do you think generally speaking the press is reasonably accurate or fair in the portrayal of the issue?" (Julia) "I think they have to be...I think they're forced to because if they don't they'll be done on some sort of grounds of something or other" (Sharon, London 2)</p>

**Appendix 14: Coding frame for Moral Panic qualitative content analysis of individual interviews**

Category label	Definition of category	Code label	Description of code	Example
Hostility/Concern	The perception that the UK media / host response is consistent with hostility/concern (i.e. media/host response is experienced as negative)	Media hostility/concern	Instances in which participants described the media response to asylum seekers as a negative one.	"When I read anything entitled asylum seeker under the media I know that it's going to be an attack" (Abebe)
		Public hostility/concern	Instances in which participants described the general public response to asylum seekers as a negative one.	"As soon as the word 'asylum seeker' come out of your mouth most ordinary English people they just want to escape" (Amin)
Disproportionality	The perception that the UK media/ host response is a disproportionate one.	Media disproportionality	Instances in which participants described media coverage as disproportionate or unfair	"I don't think it's fair because when they talk about asylum seekers as a group, there's more good people than bad people in this group, so when they are talking about this group the good people are getting affected by it" (Hawraz)
		Public disproportionality	Instances in which participants described public responses as disproportionate or unfair	"There are so many people they haven't had any interactions with any asylum seeker at all but they have this negative attitude" (Babir)
Consensus	The perception that there is widespread agreement in society that asylum seekers are 'a problem'.	Media consensus	Instances in which participants described the media response as uniformly negative	"They [the media] just say the negative aspect of asylum. They never talk about positive things of asylum" (Ali)
		Public consensus	Instances in which participants described the public response as uniformly negative.	"Eighty percent of the public who don't know nothing, just hear it from the papers, they will just in quotes put 'all asylum seekers are bad'" (Latasha)



DISCONFIRMATION CODES	Definition of category	Code label	Description of code	Example
Category label				
Hostility/Concern (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Hostility/Concern'.	Media counter hostility/concern  Public counter hostility/ concern	Instances in which participants described the media response to asylum seekers as a positive one.  Instances in which participants described the general public response to asylum seekers as a positive one.	There were no instances where participants described media coverage of asylum seekers as generally positive.  "Well it's very individual, but in my case people are very nice to me... it depends how you present yourself to them. If you are nice, people will be nice to you" (Mary)
Disproportionality (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Disproportionality'.	Media counter disproportionality  Public counter disproportionality	Instances in which participants described the media response as proportionate.  Instances in which participants suggested that the public are proportionate in their response to this issue	There were no instances where participants characterized media coverage as generally proportionate.  "Sometimes it's fair and sometimes I tend to agree with them... there is reason for concern if I am a pensioner who can't get care or help whereas if I'm an asylum seeker I'm getting them. I'll be bitter too" (Rose)
Consensus (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Consensus'.	Media counter consensus  Public counter consensus	Instances in which participants described media coverage as varied  Instances in which participants described public opinion as varied.	"In particular <i>The Sun</i> write very bad about asylum seekers... but if you read <i>The Times</i> , <i>The Independent</i> , they give some good information" (Sadik)  "From my impression I think it varies. It's not either black or white, but it varies" (Babir)

Appendix 15: Coding frame for Social Identity analysis of group interviews

Category label	Definition of category	Code label	Description of code	Example
Social Categorisation	Intergroup differentiation process of 'in-group' / 'out-group' classification (where the 'in-group' is the group(s) to which the person making the classification belongs and the 'out-group' is the group(s) to which they do not belong)	Social categorisation (in-group)	Instances in which participants made comments which indicated that they identified with the in-group and considered there to be an "us" in distinct contrast to asylum seekers as "them".	"They should accept, if they're accepted to come into the country with the benefits that we're giving them they should accept our culture... I think you know we should, we should appreciate other cultures but we have our own." (Michaela, Nottingham)
		Social categorisation (out-group)	Instances in which asylum seekers were clearly distinguished as an out-group	"Britishness should be, when in Rome, if you're going to come to our country you go by our standards and that's it, abide by our laws, none of this Sharia law rubbish, you abide by our laws as we would abide by their laws in their country." (Darren, Rickmansworth)
Social Comparison	Positive in-group distinctiveness is established by the selective accentuation of intergroup differences that favour the in-group. This includes the tendency to treat out-group members as undifferentiated and to make negative judgements about the behaviour of members of the out-group / negatively stereotype out-group members.	Social comparison (in-group)	Instances in which participants made statements about "our" positive traits as a nationality (e.g. our generosity towards asylum seekers).	"I mean it's very laudable isn't it I mean we are a good country because, is that what we're saying, we're a good country? (Ian) "Well I think we are" (Beryl) "Yeah I think we are, we allow a lot of people" (Pat) (West Bridgford)
		Social comparison (out-group)	Instances in which participants negatively stereotyped asylum seekers or displayed prejudiced views about asylum seekers.	"They come over here and start imposing their religions, beliefs, laws, I mean Sharia law, for example, on this country and try and turn this country into the country they came from. I mean I could give you a typical answer of 'if you don't like it go back to where you come from, if it's that good, why are you over here?'" (Luke, Basildon)
Social Belief Structures	The extent to which group boundaries are perceived to be permeable or impermeable and that status differences are considered to be legitimate or illegitimate.	Permeable boundaries	Responses which indicated that participants considered the boundaries between asylum seekers and the host community to be permeable.	"I think most people would welcome an asylum seeker who came over and says 'I now feel like I'm British and I'm going to embrace things that are British'. I think people would welcome, people wouldn't say 'oh no you're not'" (Graham, Doncaster)
		Impermeable boundaries	Responses which indicated that participants considered the boundaries between asylum seekers and the host community to be impermeable.	"Well they can't ever be British because it's a bit like saying if we go and live in Japan or China we can become, it's not possible, it's not possible, I don't believe that's possible." (Pat, West Brigford)



Social Belief Structures (contd.)		Legitimate status differences	Responses which indicate that participants consider the status differences between the host community and asylum seekers to be legitimate	"Something should be found for them but they must have the lowest money to live on until they get a job and they shouldn't be given the best of housing when our own have to wait in the system" (Dennis, Birmingham)
		Illegitimate status differences	Responses which indicate that participants consider the status differences between the host community and asylum seekers to be illegitimate	No comments were made which indicated that participants felt that group boundaries were illegitimate.
DISCOMFORMATION CODES				
Social Categorisation (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Social Categorisation'.	In-group counter social categorisation  Out-group counter social categorisation	Instances in which participants indicated that they do not identify with the host community as an in-group  Instances in which participants indicated that they do not treat asylum seekers as an out-group	"Although I'm British, I'd say more say I'm West Indian" (Paula, London)  "a persons a person, we all need to eat, sleep and you know we all die in the end don't we so everyone's sort of the same" (Dan, Basildon)
Social Comparison (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Social Comparison'.	In-group counter social comparison  Out-group counter social comparison	Instances in which participants were critical of the host community  Instances in which participants made positive comments about asylum seekers as a group or emphasised individual differences between asylum seekers.	"you've even got people that have been born here and they're quite rightly to be here and yet they're doing the same thing as the asylum seekers... They're taking money out of the country and never intending on putting it back" (Gary, Basildon)  "I was going to say that obviously you know there are more cultures coming in to this country and maybe we should be learning from some of their positive aspects as well. You know they're not all bad things are they that they're bringing into this country" (Judy, Doncaster)

Appendix 16: Coding frame for Social Identity analysis of individual interviews

Category label	Definition of category	Code label	Description of code	Example
Social Categorisation	Intergroup differentiation process of 'in-group' / 'out-group' classification (where the 'in-group' is the group(s) to which the person making the classification belongs and the 'out-group' is the group(s) to which they do not belong)	Social categorisation (in-group)	Instances in which participants made statements which indicated that they identified with the social identity of 'asylum seeker'	"It doesn't matter how many years you live here. I think it's important to not say that I don't belong to this group of people. I mean there is a line between an indigenous you know citizen and the other people so that will always be there, there is a divide and no, I do identify with them, yeah" (Liith)
		Social categorisation (as out-group)	Responses which indicated that participants were aware that they belonged to an out-group.	"When I'm walking or inside a bus, I'm travelling I can't look in your eyes because I always think that you are talking about me or you're thinking about me as an asylum seeker" (Amadou)
			Responses which indicated that participants felt that they were treated as undifferentiated by the host population and in the UK press.	"Those who are let's say coming from North Africa are different from the East Africa or from the Sub-continent or anywhere else, they are totally different people you are talking about even though the media and politicians would paint them with the same brush." (Nasih)
Social Comparison	Intergroup process in which positive in-group distinctiveness is established by the selective accentuation of intergroup differences that favour the in-group. This includes the tendency to treat out-group members as undifferentiated and to make negative judgements about the behaviour of members of the out-group / negatively stereotype out-group members. In the case of minority groups social comparisons may become an extremely important element of self-image and minority groups' acceptance of negative images imposed by society can have extremely detrimental effects on individual self-image.	Social comparison (by out-group)	Responses which indicated that participants felt that the host community considered 'asylum seeker' to be a negative social identity (regardless of their own views)	"Asylum seeker now is a figure of hate, everybody wants all asylum seeker being deported" (Ali)
		Social comparison (minority group acceptance of negative social identity)	Responses which indicated that participants felt that the media considered 'asylum seeker' to be a negative social identity (regardless of their own views)	"The image they are making in the media is the image inside the minds for people so what kind of image? That's different to explain I think, I think it would be I don't know I could be wrong but it would be a bad image I think." (Akam)
			Instances in which participants negatively represented asylum seekers as a group	"Some of the refugees you know, some countries they don't allow their women to work so they're not too serious in looking for a job to do so they like being refugees." (Mary)



Disconfirmation codes				
Category label	Definition of category	Code label	Description of code	Example
Social Categorisation (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Social Categorisation'	In-group counter social categorisation	Instances in which participants made statements which indicated that they did not identify with the social identity of 'asylum seeker'	"I'm not feel like asylum, I'm normal because I go sometime like playgroup, because you have playgroup, different people, English people ... I'm the same you know." (Aamina)
		Out-group counter social categorisation	Responses which indicated that participants felt as if they were treated as part of the host community	"So my experience during work, people are very friendly and very welcoming. There are times when they speak to you and you feel well they're treating you like one of them, they're not treating me as a foreigner" (Rashida)
Social comparison (counter)	Counter evidence for the theoretical code 'Social Comparison'	Counter social comparison (by out-group)	Responses which indicated that participants felt that 'asylum seeker' was perceived as a positive social identity by the host community	There was no evidence to suggest that participants felt that the host community consider 'asylum seeker' to be a positive social identity.
		Counter social comparison (minority group acceptance of negative social identity)	Instances in which participants rejected the negative stereotypes of asylum seekers and provided counter representations	"You have to feel good and the name of asylum seeker when we look, why I use this word also, the name of asylum seeker, everyone can be asylum seeker. If you're Head of State you can be asylum seeker so it's not shameful, it's not anything and it's not abusing word" (Bako)

Coping with stigmatized social identity				
Social Belief structures	The extent to which group boundaries are perceived to be permeable or impermeable.	Permeable Boundaries	Responses which indicated that participants considered the boundaries between asylum seekers and the host community to be permeable.	"I'm telling you I just feel I am British here" (Abebe)
		Impermeable boundaries	Responses which indicated that participants considered the boundaries between asylum seekers and the host community to be impermeable.	"No. No way. Maybe the guy who was born here is ok but who came here after fifteen years old nobody make them a British or feel Britishness" (Adil)
Social Mobility strategies	Coping strategies based on the belief that group boundaries are permeable. This produces individual 'exit' strategies.	Social mobility (disidentification with in-group)	Responses which indicated that participants did not wish to be associated with the social identity of 'asylum seeker'	"I don't think myself as an asylum seeker I think myself like any British human being that lives in this United Kingdom and I'm human being like them when they have the right to live. I have the right to live like anyone else" (Amadou)
		Social mobility (preference for out-group)	Responses which indicated that participants were more positive about the host community than about 'asylum seekers'.	"Is glad to become like a British when you come, like another country, like in France when they ask you 'Ah, are you a British?' 'Yes I am'. You see people they glad 'oh she's African, no she's a British aha'. When you explain no I can have a British because, they will say 'oh England is a nice country'" (Hope)
Social Change strategies	Coping strategies based on the belief that group boundaries are impermeable. This results in collective action	Social Competition (equal but different)	Responses which indicated that participants did not consider assimilation into the host community to be necessary or desirable	"I think we shouldn't insist on being integrated you know, because I have my kind of food, you have your kind of food, you might happen to like mine and I might happen to like yours which is great... but apart from that we are just different, by definition or by background or by whatever so it is just mutual respect and peaceful co-existence" (Liith)
		Social Competition (forming groups for change)	Responses which included references to the setting up of groups to challenge misconceptions about asylum seekers	"People feel that they need to organise, that they need to know more about how to deal with the media because they are aware of the fact that their communities are being represented on television or members of the community as such and such and we do know better" (Mila)
		Social Creativity (alternative group for comparison)	Responses in which asylum seekers were compared favourably to other immigrant groups	"An asylum seeker or refugee they have no way back and they know they have to make it here. Therefore they're going to be a source that British government they could always rely on, but the migrants they always come and they go. They could, most of Polish people now they leaving and now the country is going to be in a shortage of labours so that's the difference" (Amin)
		Social Creativity (new dimension for comparison)	Responses which indicated that participants felt that asylum seekers should be judged on different features to the usual dimensions of comparison	There was no evidence that this strategy was adopted by participants.
		Social Creativity (re-evaluation of existing group)	Responses in which asylum seekers were described in a positive way and re-evaluated as making a positive rather than a negative contribution to the UK.	"I wonder why you hardly ever find a positive side of asylums or refugees life, how they contribute to the society for instance... even just last year six billion pound was the contributions of immigrants and refugees to the economy of the country but facts like this get never reflected in the papers." (Babir)



Appendix 17: Media content analysis code book

Code	Inter-rater reliability index	Month	Tabloid publications		Broadsheet publications		All articles sampled	
	Cohen's kappa		Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Present
Concern	0.78	Jan	3 (5.4%)	12 (7.3%)	10 (8.3%)	2 (2.7%)	13 (7.3%)	14 (5.9%)
		Feb	2 (3.6%)	6 (3.7%)	7 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	09 (5.1%)	6 (2.5%)
		Mar	3 (5.4%)	9 (5.5%)	7 (5.8%)	5 (6.8%)	10 (5.6%)	14 (5.9%)
		April	8 (14.3%)	13 (7.9%)	12 (9.9%)	7 (9.5%)	20 (11.3%)	20 (8.4%)
		May	9 (16.1%)	36 (22.0%)	15 (12.4%)	16 (21.6%)	24 (13.6%)	52 (21.8%)
		June	4 (7.1%)	15 (9.1%)	8 (6.6%)	10 (13.5%)	12 (6.8%)	25 (10.5%)
		July	7 (12.5%)	14 (8.5%)	9 (7.4%)	9 (12.2%)	16 (9.0%)	23 (9.7%)
		Aug	4 (7.1%)	14 (8.5%)	13 (10.7%)	8 (10.8%)	17 (9.6%)	22 (9.2%)
		Sept	3 (5.4%)	12 (7.3%)	5 (4.1%)	7 (9.5%)	8 (4.5%)	19 (8.0%)
		Oct	3 (5.4%)	9 (5.5%)	10 (8.3%)	4 (5.4%)	13 (7.3%)	13 (5.5%)
		Nov	4 (7.1%)	12 (7.3%)	12 (9.9%)	3 (4.1%)	16 (9.0%)	15 (6.3%)
		Dec	6 (10.7%)	12 (7.3%)	13 (10.7%)	3 (4.1%)	19 (10.7%)	15 (6.3%)
		Total:	56 (100%)	164 (100%)	121 (100%)	74 (100%)	177 (100%)	238 (100%)
Hostility	0.86	Jan	0 (0%)	15 (7.8%)	4 (5.6%)	8 (6.5%)	4 (4.0%)	23 (7.3%)
		Feb	1 (3.6%)	7 (3.6%)	3 (4.2%)	4 (3.2%)	4 (4.0%)	11(3.5%)
		Mar	3 (10.7%)	9 (4.7%)	6 (8.5%)	6 (4.8%)	9 (9.1%)	15 (4.7%)
		April	0 (0%)	21 (10.9%)	2 (2.8%)	17 (13.7%)	2 (2.0%)	38 (12.0%)
		May	7 (25.0%)	38 (19.8%)	10 (14.1%)	21(16.9%)	17(17.2%)	59 (18.7%)
		June	4 (14.3%)	15 (7.8%)	9 (12.7%)	9 (7.3%)	13 (13.1%)	24 (7.6%)
		July	3 (10.7%)	18 (9.4%)	10 (14.1%)	8 (6.5%)	13 (13.1%)	26 (8.2%)
		Aug	3 (10.7%)	15 (7.8%)	7 (9.9%)	14 (11.3%)	10 (10.1%)	29 (9.2%)
		Sept	2 (7.1%)	13 (6.8%)	2 (2.8%)	10 (8.1%)	4 (4.0%)	23 (7.3%)
		Oct	0 (0%)	12 (6.3%)	7 (9.9%)	7(5.6%)	7(7.1%)	19 (6.0%)
		Nov	2 (7.1%)	14 (7.3%)	6 (8.5%)	9 (7.3%)	8 (8.1%)	23 (7.3%)
		Dec	3 (10.7%)	15 (7.8%)	5 (7.0%)	11 (8.9%)	8 (8.1%)	26 (8.2%)
		Total:	28 (100%)	192 (100%)	71 (100%)	124 (100%)	99 (100%)	316 (100%)
Disproportionality	0.69	Jan	9 (5.9%)	6 (8.8%)	11 (6.0%)	1 (7.7%)	20 (6.0%)	7 (8.6%)
		Feb	7 (4.6%)	1 (1.5%)	7 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	14 (4.2%)	1 (1.2%)
		Mar	6 (3.9%)	6 (8.8%)	11(6.0%)	1 (7.7%)	17 (5.1%)	7 (8.6%)
		April	13 (8.6%)	8 (11.8%)	15 (8.2%)	4 (30.8%)	28 (8.4%)	12 (14.8%)
		May	25 (16.4%)	20 (29.4%)	28 (15.4%)	3 (23.1%)	53 (15.9%)	23 (28.4%)
		June	14 (9.2%)	5 (7.4%)	17 (9.3%)	1 (7.7%)	31 (9.3%)	6 (7.4%)
		July	15 (9.9%)	6 (8.8%)	17 (9.3%)	1 (7.7%)	32 (9.6%)	7 (8.6%)
		Aug	15 (9.9%)	3 (4.4%)	20 (11.0%)	1 (7.7%)	35 (10.5%)	4 (4.9%)
		Sept	12 (7.9%)	3 (4.4%)	11 (6.0%)	1 (7.7%)	23 (6.9%)	4 (4.9%)
		Oct	9 (5.9%)	3 (4.4%)	14 (7.7%)	0 (0%)	23 (6.9%)	3 (3.7%)
		Nov	12 (7.9%)	4 (5.9%)	15 (8.2%)	0 (0%)	27 (8.1%)	4 (4.9%)
		Dec	15 (9.9%)	3 (4.4%)	16 (8.8%)	0 (0%)	31 (9.3%)	3 (3.7%)
		Total:	152 (100%)	68 (100%)	182 (100%)	13 (100%)	334 (100%)	81 (100%)

Code	Inter-rater reliability index  Cohen's kappa	Month	Tabloid publications		Broadsheet publications		All articles sampled	
			Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Present
Counter-Concern	0.83	Jan	15 (7.2%)	0 (0%)	9 (6.4%)	3 (5.6%)	24 (6.9%)	3 (4.5%)
		Feb	8 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.1%)	4 (7.4%)	11 (3.2%)	4 (6.1%)
		Mar	9 (4.3%)	3 (25.0%)	7 (5.0%)	5 (9.3%)	16 (4.6%)	8 (12.1%)
		April	19 (9.1%)	2 (16.7%)	14 (9.9%)	5 (9.3%)	33 (9.5%)	7 (10.6%)
		May	42 (20.2%)	3 (25.0%)	26 (18.4%)	5 (9.3%)	68 (19.5%)	8 (12.1%)
		June	17 (8.2%)	2 (16.7%)	14 (9.9%)	4 (7.4%)	31 (8.9%)	6 (9.1%)
		July	21 (10.1%)	0 (0%)	12 (8.5%)	6 (11.1%)	33 (9.5%)	6 (9.1%)
		Aug	18 (8.7%)	0 (0%)	15 (10.6%)	6 (11.1%)	33 (9.5%)	6 (9.1%)
		Sept	15 (7.2%)	0 (0%)	9 (6.4%)	3 (5.6%)	24 (6.9%)	3 (4.5%)
		Oct	12 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	11 (7.8%)	3 (5.6%)	23 (6.6%)	3 (4.5%)
		Nov	16 (7.7%)	0 (0%)	12 (8.5%)	3 (5.6%)	28 (8.0%)	3 (4.5%)
		Dec	16 (7.7%)	2 (16.7%)	9 (6.4%)	7 (13.0%)	25 (7.2%)	9 (13.6%)
		Total:	208 (100%)	12 (100%)	141 (100%)	54 (100%)	349 (100%)	66 (100%)
Counter-Hostility	1	Jan	15 (7.0%)	0 (0%)	10 (5.9%)	2 (8.0%)	25 (6.5%)	2 (6.5%)
		Feb	8 (3.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.8%)	4 (16.0%)	11 (2.9%)	4 (12.9%)
		Mar	11 (5.1%)	1 (16.7%)	8 (4.7%)	4 (16.0%)	19 (4.9%)	5 (16.1%)
		April	20 (9.3%)	1 (16.7%)	18 (10.6%)	1 (4.0%)	38 (9.9%)	2 (6.5%)
		May	44 (20.6%)	1 (16.7%)	27 (15.9%)	4 (16.0%)	71 (18.5%)	5 (16.1%)
		June	18 (8.4%)	1 (16.7%)	18 (10.6%)	0 (0%)	36 (9.4%)	1 (3.2%)
		July	21 (9.8%)	0 (0%)	16 (9.4%)	2 (8.0%)	37 (9.6%)	2 (6.5%)
		Aug	18 (8.4%)	0 (0%)	20 (11.8%)	1 (4.0%)	38 (9.9%)	1 (3.2%)
		Sept	14 (6.5%)	1 (16.7%)	10 (5.9%)	2 (8.0%)	24 (6.2%)	3 (9.7%)
		Oct	12 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	13 (7.6%)	1 (4.0%)	25 (6.5%)	1 (3.2%)
		Nov	16 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	14 (8.2%)	1 (4.0%)	30 (7.8%)	1 (3.2%)
		Dec	17 (7.9%)	1 (16.7%)	13 (7.6%)	3 (12.0%)	30 (7.8%)	4 (12.9%)
		Total:	214 (100%)	6 (100.0%)	170 (100%)	25 (100%)	384 (100%)	31 (100%)
Counter-Dispr.	1	Jan	15 (7.4%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.9%)	8 (8.7%)	19 (6.2%)	8 (7.4%)
		Feb	6 (2.9%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (1.9%)	5 (5.4%)	8 (2.6%)	7 (6.5%)
		Mar	10 (4.9%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (2.9%)	9 (9.8%)	13 (4.2%)	11 (10.2%)
		April	20 (9.8%)	1 (6.2%)	10 (9.7%)	9 (9.8%)	30 (9.8%)	10 (9.3%)
		May	41 (20.1%)	4 (25.0%)	20 (19.4%)	11 (12.0%)	61 (19.9%)	15 (13.9%)
		June	18 (8.8%)	1 (6.2%)	16 (15.5%)	2 (2.2%)	34 (11.1%)	3 (2.8%)
		July	19 (9.3%)	2 (12.5%)	11 (10.7%)	7 (7.6%)	30 (9.8%)	9 (8.3%)
		Aug	17 (8.3%)	1 (6.2%)	12 (11.7%)	9 (9.8%)	29 (9.4%)	10 (9.3%)
		Sept	14 (6.9%)	1 (6.2%)	8 (7.8%)	4 (4.3%)	22 (7.2%)	5 (4.6%)
		Oct	11 (5.4%)	1 (6.2%)	7 (6.8%)	7 (7.6%)	18 (5.9%)	8 (7.4%)
		Nov	16 (7.8%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.9%)	11 (12.0%)	20 (6.5%)	11 (10.2%)
		Dec	17 (8.3%)	1 (6.2%)	6 (5.8%)	10 (10.9%)	23 (7.5%)	11 (10.2%)
		Total:	204 (100%)	16 (100%)	103 (100%)	92 (100%)	307 (100%)	108 (100%)



## Appendix 18:

### Key news stories concerning asylum seekers and the asylum issue throughout 2006.

#### January:

- Legal Aid lawyers to be based inside detention centres
- Former asylum seeker found to be running £100million cocaine ring
- Abu Hamza court case – evidence presented includes sermons encouraging asylum seekers to lie about their identity
- Cash incentives paid to asylum seekers to leave the country
- National Lottery money spent on advice service for asylum seekers
- Figures released for legal aid for asylum seekers in Scotland
- Justice Hodge criticises government for failure to enforce deportation of unsuccessful asylum applicants.
- Government figures released for ethnic breakdown of British population, including numbers of asylum seekers

#### February:

- New asylum seekers to be tagged so that they can be tracked if their application fails
- Four 'asylum seekers' arrested for the murder of policewoman Sharon Beshenivsky
- Nigerian asylum seeker Kunle Elukanlo appeared in court on road traffic charges
- BNP leader Nick Griffin and party activist Mark Collett cleared of race-hate charges. Collett was twice filmed describing asylum seekers as "cockroaches"

#### March:

- Home Office released estimated figures for illegal immigrants
- Italy gives asylum to Afghan Christian
- Charity coalition warns nearly 2,000 children of asylum seekers locked up every year.
- Charles Clarke unveils new immigration points system
- Commons Public Accounts Committee criticises Home Office for failing to deport unsuccessful asylum applicants / failing to provide accurate estimate of how many failed asylum seekers remain in Britain.
- Voice recognition equipment to be used to track asylum seekers

#### April:

- Failure to deport foreign national prisoners
- Margaret Hodge warns that most people she canvassed in Barking said they would consider voting for the BNP in local elections
- Asylum seekers in hunger strike in detention centres in London.
- UNHCR report warns that asylum seekers are becoming the victims of the West's 'war on terror'
- Reports of African asylum seekers travelling to the UK via The Canary Islands.

#### May:

- 'Foreign prisoner scandal' – the failure to deport foreign criminals at the end of their sentences is blamed on resources having been concentrated on asylum.
- Cabinet reshuffle – Charles Clarke replaced as Home Secretary by John Reid
- John Reid describes Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) as "not fit for purpose"
- The head of UK immigration removals at the IND told select committee that he did not have "the faintest idea" how many illegal immigrants remained in the country.
- 'Sex-for-asylum scandal' at Lunar House – an immigration officer is alleged to have offered sex to a Zimbabwean asylum seeker in exchange for furthering her application.
- Hirsi Ali, Dutch MP resigns after accusations of lying on her asylum application
- Afghan plane hijackers in court – the men hijacked the plane in order to seek asylum in the UK
- Afghan asylum seekers on hunger strike in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin



#### June:

- Extension of pilot scheme that offers cash incentives to asylum seekers to leave the country.
- High Court Judge quashes control orders on six suspected Iraqi terrorists (all six entered the UK as asylum seekers)
- Sir John Gieve, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office from 2001 until the end of 2005 apologised to MPs on the Commons home affairs select committee for failings in the handling of foreign national prisoners. He said that the issue had been overlooked because staff and money were diverted to solving asylum issues and that the government "lost control" of asylum in the late 1990s.
- Asylum seekers wrongly given tax credits
- 'Your Pound, Your Choice' scheme introduced to allow National Lottery players to select local charities to receive funds following negative media coverage of the existing selection of charities (including criticism that money was given to charities providing advice to asylum seekers).
- Home Office officials prepare a report on the issues surrounding an amnesty for illegal immigrants.

#### July:

- An immigration officer at Lunar House suspended following undercover filming of him offering a journalist fake documents and help processing asylum claims in exchange for cash.
- Uniformed border control force to be introduced at airports and ports.
- John Reid announces Home Office reform programme, including the setting up of an immigration and nationality agency.

#### August:

- Court ruling that failed asylum seekers can be sent back to Zimbabwe.
- Nine Afghan asylum seekers who hijacked a plane given indefinite leave to remain in the UK
- High Court rules that the control order against six Iraqi asylum seekers suspected of travelling to Britain to carry out a terrorist act breaches their human rights
- Iraqi asylum seeker cleared of making video of London landmarks as a guide for foreign terrorists.
- Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities, makes speech voicing concern about multiculturalism
- Immigration figures are released which indicate a sharp increase in immigration since 1997 (i.e. since the Labour Party came to power).
- The Australian Upper House blocks legislation to hold asylum seekers in detention centres on a South Pacific island while their applications being considered.
- Airport security tightened after suspected terrorist plot uncovered. One of the suspects housed asylum seekers in their property.

#### September:

- An asylum seeker awaiting deportation killed himself as he believed this would mean his son could stay in the UK.
- An armed Palestinian broke into the British embassy in Israel threatening to kill himself unless he was granted asylum in the UK.
- A Zimbabwean man was accused of infecting at least six women with the HIV virus. He had previously claimed asylum, but subsequently admitted that his claim was groundless.
- Nicolas Sarkozy, French Interior Minister, called for the creation of a single European asylum agency to decide whether to award individuals refugee status on a European, rather than national, level.
- Switzerland passed legislation to introduce some of the toughest restrictions of any European country on asylum seekers.
- 32 failed asylum seekers deported to Iraq



## October:

- A Turkish plane was hijacked by a man seeking asylum in Italy
- Zaynab Bibi applied for asylum in Britain, claiming she would be persecuted in Pakistan due to her height.
- The trial for the murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky commenced. Widely reported evidence included the fact that the defendants were renovating a house for asylum seekers whilst planning the robbery
- A Turkish asylum seeker who led a people-trafficking operation was jailed for eight and a half years.
- An Iraqi asylum seeker who is an Al-Qaeda terror suspect broke a control order by removing his electronic tag and disappearing hours before the order was renewed.
- House of Lords recognise female genital mutilation as a ground for claiming asylum
- A Serb convicted of war crimes was found to be living in Britain having been granted asylum. The discovery was made when he was arrested for shoplifting.

## November:

- A riot broke out at an immigration detention centre in Harmondsworth, West London
- Retrial of BNP leader Nick Griffin and party activist Mark Collett accused of race-hate charges. Collett was twice filmed describing asylum seekers as “cockroaches”
- The murder of Alexander Litvinenko gives rise to debate regarding the UK policy of giving asylum to Russian dissidents
- The trial for the murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky continued. Evidence included the fact that one of the defendants was an employee of a company paid by the Home Office to provide accommodation for asylum-seekers. One of its properties in Leeds became a temporary base for the men who allegedly carried out the attempted armed robbery which led to the shooting of PC Beshenivsky.
- Channel 4 launches a new television programme – ‘Fame Asylum’ – which follows the development of an asylum-seekers only boyband.
- The Shadow Home Secretary, David Davis, proposes annual immigration limits but does not mention limiting asylum seekers, a Conservative policy that was criticised during the last general election.
- Border and Immigration Bill outlined in the Queen’s Speech. Under the new bill, anyone who has committed offences while awaiting a decision on their asylum application would be barred from access housing and benefits.
- Home Office figures indicate that the number of unsuccessful asylum applicants who were deported dropped by a quarter during July, August and September – indicating that for each month the target of removing more failed asylum seekers than new unsuccessful claims (the so-called ‘tipping point’) had been missed.
- Amnesty International and Refugee Action publish a report which indicates that rejected asylum seekers are forced to sleep rough in parks, public toilets and churches.

## December:

- Mustaf Jama, a member of the gang that killed WPC Sharon Beshenivsky allegedly escaped to Somalia disguised as a woman in a Muslim-style veil. He had come to Britain as an asylum seeker.
- Yusuf Jama, a Somali asylum seeker, was sentenced to a minimum of 35 years in prison for the murder of WPC Sharon Beshenivsky
- The High Court ruled that an asylum seeker convicted of rape should be awarded up to £50,000 in damages after being detained unlawfully pending deportation when there was no prospect of this occurring because of the unstable situation in Somalia.
- Home Office figures indicate that they failed to meet a target to remove three quarters of asylum-seekers whose applications were ruled to be “manifestly unfounded”. Only 47 per cent were deported.
- Allegations emerged that a representative of Uganda’s ruling party secured a job in the immigration service and blocked the asylum applications of political opponents.
- From August 2007, asylum seekers aged over 18 will no longer be eligible for free further education and English language courses in the UK.
- Four men who sought asylum in the UK are on trial for leading a genocide in Rwanda.
- Asylum seeker Farhat Khan met the Prime Minister in recognition of her community work 48 hours before making a last plea against deportation.



## Appendix 19: Summary of group interviews

### **Birmingham**

Participants: Ann, Karen (mother and daughter), Joan (Ann's sister) and Dennis (Joan's husband)

The tone of the interview was generally hostile towards asylum seekers, focusing on "illegals" and the negative impact this was having on the Birmingham area. Dennis conveyed the least hostility in that he expressed concern about 'genuine' asylum seekers and supported the principle of asylum, whereas the others argued that UK borders should be closed to all asylum seekers. Dennis' sympathy was tempered, however, by his perception that the system is unfair and he argued that asylum seekers should be given worse accommodation and lower levels of benefit than British citizens. All participants were concerned about abuse of the system and said that there should be tighter controls. Concerns centred on the negative impact of asylum seekers on UK resources, and the UK was represented as a small country with limited resources taking an unfair number of asylum seekers (Canada and Australia were cited as countries that should 'do more'). The main focus of discussion was competition for resources, perceived unfairness in the allocation of resources and concern that there were now areas in Birmingham they were scared to visit due to an increase in violent crime which was associated with asylum seekers. Asylum seekers were compared unfavourably with previous generations of immigrants, with asylum seekers characterised as more culturally 'other' than established ethnic communities in the UK and as being unwilling or unable to financially contribute to the UK in the same way. Cultural threat was linked to terrorism and radical Islam. All participants were keen to emphasise that they were not "skin colour prejudiced" and returned to this issue several times, citing friendships with members of other ethnic groups. Joan and Dennis also commented that they had not invited Joan's other sister to join the discussion as "she's a racist". Dennis and Joan live next door to an asylum seeker and describe this as a negative situation, generalising comments about their neighbour to asylum seekers as a group. However, towards the end of the interview they acknowledge that the previous British tenant was an equally difficult neighbour. All participants described public opinion as negative and it was suggested that existing immigrants would agree that asylum seekers were spoiling things for them and the UK in general. All participants said that they didn't trust the media and portrayed media coverage as negative and sensational, but all participants also reproduced media stereotypes throughout the interview (for example, describing England as "soft"). Dennis engaged with the media more than the others and was the most knowledgeable about the differences between asylum seekers and other migrant groups.

### **London (1)**

Participants: Paula, Salma, Ama, Maria and Suzanne (friends)

The views expressed in this interview were less consensual than in Birmingham. All except Ama expressed concern or hostility at times, but Maria and Salma were generally more supportive of asylum seekers and provided counter arguments in response to hostility expressed by Paula and Suzanne. All except Ama expressed concern regarding the difficulty in establishing whether asylum seekers had a genuine case. Hostility focused on competition for resources and perceived abuse of the system. Paula also suggested that asylum seekers were likely to commit crime in order to supplement their income. The main focus of the discussion was abuse of the benefit system, the economic impact of asylum seekers and competition for jobs and there was a consensual view, regardless of whether it was considered a problem or not, that the majority of asylum seekers come to the UK for economic reasons. EU expansion was also described as having negatively impacted on the NHS. Asylum seekers were compared unfavourably to the participants' parents who had migrated to the UK, with asylum seekers described as expecting to be supported whereas their parents worked hard to establish themselves in the UK. The only participant who described herself as having direct experience of asylum seekers was Salma, who had extended family who had entered the UK through the asylum system. She described their motivation as economic and considered this to be a typical rather than exceptional reason for seeking asylum in the UK. Suzanne had some knowledge of the asylum system through a part-time council job and was aware, for example of the use of detention centres, but nevertheless felt that there should be more control over the system and compared the UK unfavourably with the USA and Australia in this context. Perceptions of public responses to asylum seekers were mixed, with some participants suggesting that there was hostility and that the British public were getting "fed up" and leaving the UK, but it was also suggested that asylum is not particularly an issue of concern to the public, other than for those directly affected. Media coverage



was described as negative and as focusing on numbers and benefit fraud. The media was described as having some influence, for example Salma attributed her negative associations with the term 'asylum seeker' to the media, however public disinterest was raised again in this context and it was suggested that most people wouldn't particularly focus on media coverage of this issue.

## **London (2)**

Participants: Sharon, Jeanne and Padma (friends)

The tone of the discussion was consensual, predominantly hostile and focused on issues that were very similar to those discussed in Birmingham. The primary issues of concern were housing and benefits, competition for and unfair allocation of resources. There was also discussion of cultural differences, lack of integration and crime. As with participants in Birmingham, Sharon and Padma were concerned about the impact of asylum seekers on the area in which they lived and suggested that it had become more "scary" in recent years. All participants talked about "illegal asylum seekers" being "the worst" and Jeanne expressed concern about people "flying under the wire". They all felt that the UK immigration system was "too soft" and as in previous interviews it was compared unfavourably with Australia and Canada, as well as a number of European countries including France and Germany. Sharon expressed the strongest and most hostile opinions, Jeanne provided some counter arguments but was for the most part in agreement and Padma, whilst generally less vocal than the other two, also agreed with the opinions expressed. Padma described herself as having formerly felt very negative about asylum seekers (something she attributed to her father's influence) but had more recently made friends with some asylum seekers through her part time job and felt that this had tempered her views. However, she did go on to distinguish her friends as legitimate asylum seekers, doing things "the right way" by working and indicated that she hadn't generalised her views to the majority of asylum seekers. Like the participants in the previous interview in London who had family experience of migration, Jeanne and Padma compared asylum seekers unfavourably with their parents, describing the latter as having come to England with a desire to integrate and work. Furthermore, like participants in Birmingham, all three characterised asylum seekers as failing to integrate or contribute financially to the UK in comparison with established ethnic communities. Sharon and Padma both live in East London and have similar experiences in relation to competition for resources (although this is more marked for Sharon who is a mature student with children than Padma who still lives at home with her parents). Jeanne lives in wealthy part of Surrey and has no direct experience of asylum seekers. Sharon indicated that she had conducted some internet research the evening before the interview and that she had previously been unaware of much of the information that she had encountered. For example, she was unaware that asylum seekers are not allowed to work whilst their application is being processed. Interestingly she reported that this hadn't changed her negative opinions as evidenced by her description of asylum seekers "going down" her bins as unacceptable as British people can manage on benefits so they should be able to as well. All participants described public opinion as hostile and Sharon and Padma felt that their views were typical of residents in the Barking & Dagenham and Ilford areas. Jeanne suggested that public opinion in Surrey is also hostile but that it focused more on crime and the impact on NHS than housing. Media coverage was described as mostly negative, although Sharon felt that it must be a largely truthful account due to regulation. Jeanne disagreed, pointing out that the print media is not regulated and suggesting that the UK media is negatively biased against asylum seekers.

## **West Bridgford**

Participants: Maureen, Carol, Ian, Pat and Beryl (four neighbours plus Pat's mum Beryl)

The views that were expressed in this interview were generally less opinionated than in the other interviews, with the early part of the discussion centred on participants' lack of knowledge about the issue. The only unambiguously hostile opinions were voiced by Beryl, but she was not given much opportunity to elaborate on these views as Ian was very quick to interrupt and 'correct' her whenever she started to express an opinion. Maureen reported some concerns about the cultural impact of 'ghettos' of immigrant groups, but described her views as 'mixed' and said that she didn't have a clear opinion. Pat was the most knowledgeable participant as she has a friend who works in immigration services, Carol had some indirect experience via friends in Sunderland and Liverpool, but Maureen and Ian had no experience at all and described themselves as knowing very little about the issue. Ian was particularly concerned about discussing an issue that he felt that he had no knowledge about and was insistent that he was provided with a definition of asylum seekers and more information about the topic before he would be willing to contribute his views. This situation was resolved by initially asking



other participants to provide their responses to his questions, which allowed access to their representations prior to researcher influence. This was followed by the provision of a legal definition by the moderator. It was also emphasised that it was not the purpose of the research test knowledge, and that in everyday life individuals will form opinions when reading articles about 'asylum seekers', irrespective of legal definitions, and as such the aim of the research was to elicit their views without framing the issue for them. This seemed to resolve Ian's concerns and the interview continued unhindered, although he interrupted and corrected other interviewees when he felt that opinions were being expressed without basis in fact. The overall tone of the interview was mild concern rather than hostility, with all participants, including Ian, expressing concerns regarding the number of the people entering the UK at the current time. However, all participants felt that this was probably an issue to do with immigration more generally, and with the exception of Beryl, felt that asylum seekers contribute relatively small numbers to the problem. Pat and Ian expressed the most pro-asylum views; Ian was very positive about the benefits of multiculturalism and Pat was concerned about the need for asylum seekers to be treated with more respect in the UK. As in previous interviews, public opinion was described as being consistent with the views of participants, which in this case meant that asylum was described as not an issue of major concern for the local population. Participants speculated that like themselves, the general public would be more likely to be worried about wider immigration issues and Maureen suggested that people may be more sympathetic towards asylum seekers than immigrants more generally as they are perceived as people who need help. Public hostility was reported in relation to those who were directly affected or potentially affected by asylum seekers. For example, the public response to proposed asylum centres in their local area was described as "an uproar" and the public were described as having a "very, very angry" response to large numbers of asylum seekers being housed in Sunderland. This hostility was attributed to the perception that asylum seekers get preferential treatment and to competition for resources. Pat also suggested that hostility towards asylum seekers may be exacerbated by the public confusing asylum seekers with economic migrants. The media was described as a major source of influence and information and the majority of participants suggested that media coverage of asylum was probably unfair. Beryl reproduced stories that she had read in the newspaper as factual accounts, but both Ian and Pat countered these views and Ian argued strongly that the media should not be considered a reliable source of information.

## **Nottingham**

Participants: Michaela, Charlotte, David and Lisa (colleagues)

The discussion in Nottingham was based on a diverse range of opinions, with Michaela tending to dominate the conversation, expressing particularly hostile views that were politely, but continually contested by David. Charlotte and Lisa were supportive of the principle of asylum, but expressed concerns about the way that asylum applications are processed in relation to perceived abuse of the system. They also expressed concern regarding the number of people entering the UK this way. Hostility was expressed in relation to economic impact, cultural threat and the idea that asylum seekers are contributing to a perceived decline in the UK economy and standards of living. All participants expressed concerns about the management of the asylum system and the numbers of applicants. However, David raised this issue in relation to asylum seekers being unfairly sent home to dangerous countries rather than just focusing on concerns about the legitimacy of applicants. Concerns were also raised about the impact on schools and hospitals and asylum seekers were perceived as choosing to come to the UK rather than stopping in safe countries en route, resulting in an unfair burden on the UK. As in previous interviews, the UK system was compared unfavourably with Australia, France and Spain, although David contested this point in relation to Australia, suggesting that Australia accommodates a large number of South East Asian refugees. The only participant with any direct experience of the issue was David and he was also the most knowledgeable on the subject. Interestingly he was also the most willing to acknowledge the limits to his knowledge. For example, he highlighted the fact that whilst he instinctively felt that asylum seekers were not having a large impact on the UK that he did not know what the true scale of the 'problem' was. In terms of public perceptions there was a consensual view that this is not an issue that people are particularly concerned about unless they are directly affected by asylum seekers moving into their local area. UK press reporting of asylum was described as negative, although Michaela suggested that there is not much coverage of the issue and Lisa felt that it used to feature more than it does now. Media negativity was attributed to a general tendency in the UK press towards negative reporting of issues and was not seen to reflect a particular anti-asylum bias.



## **Doncaster**

Participants: Graham, Mike, Simon, Kevin, Sarah and Judy (colleagues).

The overall tone was much more pro-asylum than in previous interviews and whilst concerns were expressed about the impact of the asylum system on the UK, none of the participants indicated personal hostility towards asylum seekers and participants were generally very positive about the principle of asylum. Issues were discussed in a very measured way, with participants giving equal weight to the pros and cons of each argument. The concerns that were conveyed centred on control and numbers and participants' responses were positive about multiculturalism, with no indication that they felt culturally threatened (although there was some discussion about the importance of integration towards the end of the interview). None of the participants had any direct contact with asylum seekers, but potential contact was perceived as a positive opportunity to learn more about asylum seekers' experiences. Graham exhibited the most knowledge about the issue (for example, he was aware that asylum seekers are not allowed to work and could give an accurate account of the difference between asylum seekers and refugees) and his responses indicated that he did not consider the asylum issue to be a major issue of concern. Mike, Simon and Sarah all expressed concerns about abuse of the asylum system and lack of adequate regulation, although Mike also described the UK as being "built on asylum seekers" and all three argued that it was important to provide asylum for those genuinely in need. Judy and Kevin were the least opinionated in their comments and Judy described herself as having no concerns about the issue. Kevin was a junior colleague who was much younger than the others and voiced little opinion on the topic. His contribution mostly consisted of raising negative stories that he had heard in the media and asking his colleagues if they were true. When negative representations were contested by other members of the group he appeared to accept their account as a more factual version of events. There was a consensual view that public opinion is largely hostile and media led. Public hostility was attributed to concerns about control, terrorism, benefit abuse and the idea that the UK has an unfair burden in comparison with other countries. It was also attributed to widespread racism in the host community. Furthermore, like the argument made in West Bridgford, it was suggested that hostility might be exacerbated by confusion between asylum seekers and migrants more generally, with asylum seekers "tarred with same brush". The media was described as being generally negative about asylum seekers, although distinctions were made between different publications, with the tabloid coverage described as particularly sensational and hostile. Media coverage was described as focusing on asylum seekers "sneaking in" and was considered to have a large influence on public opinion due to a lack of direct contact between most British people and asylum seekers.

## **Rickmansworth**

Participants: John, Ken, Darren, Steve, Paul and Gino (friends).

The tone of this interview was predominantly hostile, with only one participant (Steve) providing any counter arguments, and all participants expressed concern about the issue. Concerns focused around perceptions of illegitimacy, the impact of asylum seekers on housing and other resources and concerns about the number of people entering the UK via the asylum system. As in previous interviews, the UK asylum system was compared unfavourably with that of Australia. It was also suggested that Germany has tighter controls, but Steve countered this argument based on direct experience and the others accepted his account. Hostility centred on the association between asylum seekers and violent crime, cultural threat and the perception that asylum seekers are "spoiling" the UK. An ongoing theme throughout the discussion was the idea that the UK is "going to pot" and asylum seekers are a major factor in this decline. Asylum seekers were positioned as undesirable immigrants, described as cowardly for leaving their problems behind and were compared unfavourably with other migrants. For example, economic migrants were described as entering the country through "normal" channels rather than "through the back door" and asylum seekers were described as not having the skills of other migrants. Despite making this distinction between asylum seekers and other migrants, the discussion frequently returned to Polish workers and although each time someone would eventually flag that they had gone "off topic" again, the repeated diversion indicates that the issue had to some extent become conflated for these participants. The issue of 'foreign labour' was clearly of importance to these participants as they all worked in industries that employ a large migrant workforce and knew of people who attributed their unemployment or business failure to the influx of Eastern



European workers. As in previous interviews with participants who had a recent history of immigration in their own family, both Ken and Gino compared asylum seekers unfavourably with their ancestors who were seen to have done things “the right way”. The most overtly hostile views were expressed by Paul and Gino. Ken and John indicated that it was an issue of concern, but were more balanced in their comments. None of the participants had any direct experience of asylum seekers, although interestingly unlike participants in Doncaster who described potential contact in positive terms, Ken expressed concern that positive contact might “taint” their views on the “other thousands”. In terms of their perceptions of public opinion, as in other interviews participants believed their own views to be typical, at least amongst “our kind”. Media coverage was described as negative and as a main source of information for the general public.

## **Basildon**

Participants: Luke, Dan and Gary (colleagues).

The overall tone of the discussion in Basildon was hostile and all participants expressed hostility as well as concern about the issue. Views were reasonably consensual, although Luke voiced particularly hostile opinions whilst Dan tended to make more complex arguments which indicated some hostility but also a greater inclination towards inclusivity. Responses that indicated concern primarily focused on the negative financial impact of asylum seekers and on resource threat. Hostility focused on cultural threat and the idea that asylum seekers come to the UK to “sponge” off the benefits system. The most overtly hostile responses were provided by Luke who expressed strong concerns about the cultural and religious threat posed by asylum seekers. Dan was more positive about the cultural benefits of immigration in general, although he was also concerned about the negative financial impact of asylum seekers. Similarly Gary’s comments tended to focus on concerns rather than hostility, but he was more likely to agree with Luke’s comments than Dan and provided very few counter arguments. All participants described asylum seekers as coming to the UK for the purpose of exploiting the benefits system, and as with the discussion in Rickmansworth, asylum seekers were positioned as undesirable migrants. The term ‘asylum seeker’ was described as having more negative connotations than ‘refugee’ and was associated with people “sneaking in” and “being here to take”. Also, as in Rickmansworth, asylum seekers were described as cowardly people who run away from their problems. Another similarity between these interviews was the tendency to move between talking about asylum seekers to discussing illegal immigrants and Polish workers. Again a lot of negativity was actually directed towards Polish workers, but voiced in response to questions about asylum seekers, suggesting that there is a close association between these issues for these participants. None of the participants had any direct experience with asylum seekers, but like participants in Rickmansworth, described potential contact in negative terms. For example, Luke suggested that his response to meeting an asylum seeker would be to “grass them up”. Furthermore, when Gary suggested that contact would be likely to shape views, Luke responded by agreeing and providing the example that the experience of “being beaten up” by an asylum seeker would be likely to lead to right wing political views. Both others agreed before going on to discuss the fact that they were only aware of an increase in Polish migrant workers as it had negatively impacted on friends in the building trade. Despite having never met an asylum seeker, Luke talks about “fighting them off” where he lives in Kent and as in previous interviews describes the UK as the main destination for asylum seekers, describing asylum seekers coming over from France and comparing UK policy unfavourably to Australia. Whilst Dan also praises Australia’s immigration system and considers the UK to be too “soft” he suggests that France has more asylum seekers than the UK and his comment indicate less hostility than Luke. As in previous interviews, participants indicated that they thought that public opinion would reflect their own views. Luke, for example, described public opinion as hostile, whilst Dan suggested that it wasn’t particularly negative. Gary argued that the public accept the need for asylum whilst not liking the situation. Luke described media coverage as a reflection of public opinion and argued that a full range of views were provided by different publications, whilst Dan was much more sceptical about the press, arguing that it deliberately manipulates public fears through sensational reporting. Gary suggested that readers of *The Sun* newspaper receive a particularly biased account. Whilst Dan and Luke indicated a more critical approach to the media, Luke also suggested that the media can influence views and reported that his views could be changed by persuasive journalism. All participants reproduced stereotypical language from the media, for example describing asylum seekers as “sponging”.



## Appendix 20: Individual interview participants' experience of UK media

Participant	Primary UK media source of news
Aamina*	Television (mostly BBC and Channel 5)
Abebe	Most UK national newspapers read in the library
Adil	Mostly internet and television (Channel 4, BBC & ITV news). Used to read The Guardian or The Independent, now mostly just reads Metro on the tube or bus. Sometimes reads The Daily Mirror if he finds a copy. Also checks headlines in newsagents
Akam	The Independent, Daily Mirror and BBC television
Ali	Metro, London Lite and The London Paper plus sometimes watches the news on the five terrestrial channels
Amadou	Metro and television news
Amin	Internet (mostly BBC news website) and The Guardian
Babir	BBC Radio Sheffield and Radio 4 and picks up The Metro when catching a bus
Bako*	Hounslow Informer (used to learn to read English), The London Paper on the tube and BBC television news
Bikila	The Sun, Metro and sometimes The Star and The Independent and television news
Hawraz	Mostly The Metro The Guardian, The Star and sometimes The Daily Mirror. ITV1 early evening news and BBC1 news.
Hope	Channel 5 and BBC news and The Evening Post (a London local paper)
Latasha	Answered the question by saying that tabloids tended to focus on the issue more than other papers or the television news and went on to give an articulate account of UK media but didn't specify her own reading preferences.
Lilith	Free London newspapers and The Guardian and will always look at The Sun if she sees it on the train to see what they are saying. Mostly picks up on news from newspapers rather than TV or radio.
Mary	The Metro and The London Lite and any other paper if someone has left it on the train. Mostly BBC1 and Channel 4 news but also sometimes watches ITV, Channel 5 and BBC News 24.
Mila	The Guardian and Radio 4, Channel 4 news at 7 O'Clock and breakfast television on BBC1
Nasih	The Guardian, The Independent and sometimes The Observer or The Sunday Times at the weekend. Television news on terrestrial channels and BBC News 24.
Ndulu	Sometimes picks up The Metro on the tube but doesn't tend to read newspapers. Watches BBC1 news and watches the parliamentary channel a lot.
Nozer	The Metro and The South Yorkshire Star and listens to BBC World. Also checks internet sites including the Home Office site for news.
Raman	The Sun and The Star and sometimes The Guardian. BBC News 24, Look North and ITV news on the television and human rights websites
Rashida	The Independent, The Times or The Guardian during the week and The Sunday Times at weekends. The Evening Standard and The London Paper and occasionally reads her son's copy of The Sun. BBC, Channel 4 and Sky News on the television and also accesses news via the internet.
Rose	The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Harrow Observer, and The Ealing Leader. Also accesses news via the internet including the BBC news website.
Sadik	The Times, The Independent, The Guardian, The Metro and sometimes The Financial Times. Most media access via newspapers but also the internet, including BBC news website
Sarah*	Free newspapers on the train or at the bus stop (she didn't know the names) and BBC 1 news
Temen	In terms of newspapers mostly the Metro, occasionally The Times or The Guardian. TV access mostly BBC or ITV and sometimes SKY.

\*Participants with poorest English language facilities