Talking about Poverty

How Experts and the Public Understand Poverty in the United Kingdom

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I. Introduction

Those working to raise awareness of the impact of poverty in the United Kingdom and to generate action to tackle it face an uphill climb. A corrosive narrative about people in poverty has dominated the mainstream media in the United Kingdom over the past five years. Tabloid newspapers and 'reality' television programmes portray people in poverty as 'benefit scroungers', reinforcing negative stereotypes about them. These media portrayals take place against a backdrop of austerity and fallout from the global recession, which has led to restrictions and cuts to benefits and increased sanctions for people on benefits. These changes threaten the welfare of people across the United Kingdom at a time when economic life and the labour market are increasingly insecure. And all of this is evolving in the wake of Brexit and a public conversation that too often 'others', stigmatises and excludes the least privileged members of society.

Countering this increasingly negative discourse and creating a context in which the public supports and politicians have a mandate for positive policy change requires an effective strategy for reframing poverty in the United Kingdom. This report presents research from the first phase of a broader project, commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to shift the public conversation around poverty. The goals of the project are to develop communications strategies that foster an understanding of how systems and structures produce poverty, shift the ways that people think about people in poverty and increase public support for policy and practice to solve poverty.

Effectively reframing poverty first requires understanding how the public thinks about poverty. This report analyses public understandings of poverty and compares these patterns of thinking to the views of experts on this issue. Understanding how the public thinks about poverty and knowing where the gaps are between lay and expert perspectives allows us to understand how communications are likely to be received and where they are likely to run aground. We can also begin to see how to redesign and reposition messages to move the public conversation forward and create a policy context that can more effectively address poverty.

It is important to emphasise that this research examines *how* people in the United Kingdom think about poverty, not *what* they think about it. By looking below the level of opinion to deeper patterns of thinking, we can identify assumptions and understandings that are shared by the public across demographic, regional and ideological lines. These are understandings that shape how *all* members of the public – including politicians, business leaders, employers and service providers – think about poverty. This is not, of course, to deny that people also have *different* ways of understanding this issue, as a result of factors like the regions in which they live, their positions within society, their professional roles and their political ideologies. Yet by unearthing the deep ways of thinking that are shared *across* these different groups, we can develop ways of reframing poverty that are capable of fostering a fundamentally different public conversation across the United Kingdom and changing the perspectives of people across society.

The report begins by describing the expert story of poverty. This account constitutes experts' shared understanding of what poverty is, who is at greatest risk of being in poverty, why poverty happens, what its consequences are and how it can most effectively be addressed. This untranslated story represents the content to be communicated to the public through a reframing strategy.

The core of the report is a description of the cultural models[1] – implicit shared understandings, assumptions and patterns of reasoning – that the UK public draws upon to think about poverty. We find that while the public recognises that there is a societal responsibility to address poverty, people's dominant ways of thinking result in a narrow understanding of what poverty is – namely, destitution. This view is accompanied by ways of thinking that obscure the systems and structures that cause and perpetuate poverty. In turn, these dominant perceptions constrain thinking about the value and feasibility of the changes that society needs to make to address this issue.

The subsequent chapter of the report 'maps the gaps' between expert and public views of poverty and identifies places where these understandings overlap and where they diverge. This analysis identifies the primary challenges in moving the public conversation on poverty issues in more productive directions. We conclude with a set of provisional communications recommendations. These 'dos' and 'don'ts' represent the beginning of an effective reframing strategy. Yet building the comprehensive reframing strategy that this issue needs will require further research to develop specific communications tools to address the most imposing perceptual challenges around poverty. The report thus concludes by outlining a 'to do' list for future reframing research.

II. Research Methods

Expert Interviews

To explore and distil expert messages on poverty in the United Kingdom, FrameWorks conducted 16 one-on-one, one-hour phone interviews with researchers, policy stakeholders and practitioners with expertise on the subject. Interviews were conducted from November 2015 to February 2016 and, with participants' permission, were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. FrameWorks compiled the list of interviewees in collaboration with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The final list was designed to reflect a diversity of perspectives and areas of expertise.

Expert interviews consisted of a series of probing questions designed to capture expert understandings about what poverty is, why it happens, what its effects are and what should be done about it. In each exchange, the interviewer went through a series of prompts and hypothetical scenarios designed to challenge expert informants to explain their research, experience and perspectives, break down complicated relationships and simplify concepts and findings from the field. Interviews were semi-structured in the sense that, in addition to pre-set questions, interviewers repeatedly asked for elaboration and clarification and encouraged experts to expand upon concepts they identified as particularly important.

Analysis employed a basic grounded theory approach.[2] Common themes were pulled from each interview and categorised. Negative cases were incorporated into the overall findings within each category. This procedure resulted in a refined set of themes that synthesised the substance of the interview data. Analysis of interviews was supplemented by a review of materials from relevant academic literature. A penultimate draft of the expert story was revised in response to three feedback sessions conducted with experts, including people with direct experience of poverty, in February 2016. This process resulted in the distilled expert story on poverty presented in Chapter III.

Cultural Models Interviews

The cultural models findings presented below are based on 40 in-depth interviews with members of the public from April to June 2016 in six locations: London, Liverpool, Manchester, Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff. Cultural models interviews – one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately two hours – allow researchers to capture the broad sets of assumptions, or 'cultural models', which participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area. These interviews are designed to elicit ways of thinking and talking about issues – in this case, issues related to poverty. Interviews covered thinking about economic status and wellbeing generally before turning to an extended discussion of poverty, touching on its prevalence, causes and effects, responsibility for the problem and solutions to it. The goal

of these interviews was to examine the cultural models that participants use to make sense of these issues, so researchers gave them the freedom to follow topics in the directions they deemed relevant. Therefore, researchers approached each interview with a set of topics to cover but left the order in which these topics were addressed largely to participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' written consent.

Recruiting a wide range of people, as well as facilitating talk about concepts introduced by both the interviewer and the interviewee, allowed researchers to identify cultural models that represent shared patterns of thinking across the United Kingdom. Participants were recruited by a professional marketing firm and were selected to represent variation along the domains of ethnicity, gender, age, residential location (inner city, outer city and regional/rural areas up to three hours from city centre), educational background (as a proxy for socioeconomic status), political views (as self-reported during the screening process), religious involvement and family situation (married, single, with children, without children, age of children). The sample included 19 women and 21 men. Thirty-three of the 40 participants self-identified as 'white', two as 'Black British', one as 'Black African', one as 'British Asian', one as 'British of Sephardic descent' and two as 'Mixed Race/Ethnicity'. Sixteen participants described their political views as 'middle of the road', 13 as 'on the Left' and 11 as 'on the Right'. The mean age of the sample was 46 years old, with an age range of 24 to 69. Education was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status; five participants had finished secondary school, 14 had completed two or more A-levels or the equivalent, 17 had completed an undergraduate degree or the equivalent and four had a postgraduate degree. Seventeen of the 40 were married and 19 were the parent of at least one child.

To analyse the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understand issues related to poverty.[3] First, researchers identified common, standardised ways of talking across the sample to reveal organisational assumptions, relationships, logical steps and connections that were commonly made, but taken for granted, throughout an individual's talk and across the set of interviews. In short, the analysis concerns patterns discerned from both what was said (how things were related, explained and understood) and what was not said (assumptions and implied relationships). In many cases, analysis revealed conflicting models that people brought to bear on the same issue. In such cases, one of the conflicting ways of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other, in the sense that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants' thinking.

Analysis centred on ways of understanding that were shared across participants. Cultural models research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. It is not designed to identify differences in the understandings of different demographic, ideological or regional groups (this would be an inappropriate use of this method and its sampling frame). We hope, in subsequent research phases, to examine differences in both opinion and use of cultural models across different groups.

Sidewalk Interviews

We also conducted a series of 33 sidewalk interviews in London and Edinburgh to gather additional data for cultural models analysis. All participants in these interviews signed written consent and release forms and interviews were video recorded by a professional videographer. Efforts were made to recruit a broad range of informants. Interviews included a short series of open-ended questions designed to gather information about people's top-of-mind thinking about poverty, as well as dominant patterns of thinking and common assumptions about who experiences poverty, why poverty happens and what can and should be done about it. Data that resulted from the interviews were subjected to the aforementioned analytic procedures that were used to analyse cultural models interview data.

III. Research Findings

The Expert View of Poverty in the United Kingdom

This section presents a distillation of the themes that emerged from analysis of expert interview data. By distilling the perspectives of experts, we are able to arrive at an evidence-based understanding of poverty in the United Kingdom.

Taken together, these themes constitute the 'untranslated story' of poverty in the United Kingdom – the core set of understandings that experts want to be able to communicate to the public about this issue. The untranslated expert story is organised around several broad questions:

1. What is poverty and how should it be measured?
2. Who in the United Kingdom is at the highest risk of living in poverty?
3. What are the causes and consequences of poverty in the United Kingdom?
4. What are potential solutions to poverty in the United Kingdom?

1. What Is Poverty and How Should It Be Measured?

- **Lack of resources to meet material needs**. The first part of the definition of poverty is a lack of resources to meet one's material needs. Material needs include basic survival items, such as food, clothing and shelter, as well as resources to meet the current standard of living, such as having a washing machine. People in poverty lack both material and social resources to meet these needs. The most important economic resource is income, but wealth – assets such as savings and homeownership – is also important, as it can offset some of the effects of low income. Social resources include strong networks within both families and local communities that can provide emotional and economic support.

- **Lack of resources to take part in society**. In addition to material needs, experts highlight the importance of *participation* and *exclusion*. Lack of resources – both material and social – makes it difficult for people living in poverty to interact with others. For instance, experts discussed how living in poverty limits children's ability to join school or after-school activities, makes it more difficult for people to entertain or socialise with others and stifles their ability to engage in leisure and political activities. Both experts and those living in poverty reported that not being able to fully participate in society can lead to feelings of inadequacy; this, they added, is particularly true in a commercialised culture where advertising produces a consumerist understanding of what it means to be part of society. Exclusion from social activities that others take for granted is as important as unmet material needs.

- **Poverty exists in the United Kingdom and must be understood in relation to the specific social context in which it occurs**. Experts emphasise that people experience poverty in the context of the societies and historical era in which they live. So, while people's circumstances in the United Kingdom may not appear impoverished when compared to developing countries or previous historical eras, experts emphasise that people are in poverty if they lack the resources to purchase or repair the goods that are considered necessary in today's society or to participate in cultural and leisure activities and political life. This idea of 'relative deprivation' is important in understanding how people *experience* poverty and its negative effects for individuals.

- **Income and costs are essential for measuring poverty**. Experts concede that income is an imperfect measure of poverty. Yet they emphasise that income levels are a critical tool for understanding poverty in the United Kingdom. Lack of income is, of course, a core cause of poverty. And income levels are the most direct way to measure an individual's economic status. That said, income measures *must* be combined with other measures, such as wealth, assets, costs, expenditures and consumption patterns. Experts also advocated for the use of longitudinal data to distinguish short-term poverty from persistent poverty, as well as for measures that allow for a view of the 'depth' of poverty in order to see the degree of difference between an individual's resources and those required to meet his or her needs.

2. Who in the United Kingdom Is at the Highest Risk of Living in Poverty?

- **Children and families, especially lone parents and large families**. Poverty rates for children in the United Kingdom are higher than they are for adults. According to experts, between one-quarter and one-third of all UK children live in poverty. Experts expect that percentage to rise in the near future. Lone parents are at particularly high risk of experiencing poverty because of the high cost of bringing up children and the need for at least one full-time and one part-time worker in the household to keep a family out of poverty. Lone parents not only lack an additional earner but also may not be able to work full-time due to child care responsibilities and the cost of child care. Large families are also more likely to live in poverty because of their higher cost of living.

- **Disabled people are at higher risk of poverty**. This is because they are less likely to be in paid work and because government benefits have not kept pace with the rising cost of living, the cost of care needs or the cost of disability and health problems. The expectation that work is the solution to poverty is particularly problematic in this case, because many disabled people face significant barriers to a good education and employment and also experience social isolation.

- **Minority ethnic groups and immigrants face a high risk of poverty**. This is particularly true for people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani descent and Black people (including those of African and Caribbean descent), but poverty rates are high in other groups as well, such as people of Indian and Chinese descent. These are disparate groups – and their risk factors vary depending on

history and migration patterns – but explanations for greater risk of poverty include discrimination in the labour force, occupational segregation, lack of assets and accumulated wealth, regional settlement patterns, the prevalence of large families and lone parenting (for some groups) and the lack of bridging social capital.

- **Young adults are also at a particularly high risk of living in poverty**. The global economic crisis of 2008 and the austerity that followed significantly altered employment opportunities for young people. Young adults are entering a labour market with lower wages and less secure jobs than in the past. Meanwhile, the increase in the minimum wage does not apply to people aged 25 and under and young adults are less likely to be eligible for other social security benefits. Experts expect poverty rates for young (single) adults to rise in the near future.

- **While some groups are more likely to experience poverty, poverty can affect anyone**. Experts and people in poverty emphasised that poverty is dynamic; in other words, individuals move in and out of poverty and almost anyone can be affected, no matter what social group an individual falls into.

3. What Are the Causes and Consequences of Poverty in the United Kingdom?

- **The causes and consequences of poverty are interconnected**. The conditions that increase the risk of poverty can also be seen as the result of being in poverty. For instance, low educational attainment may increase the risk of poverty but may also be a consequence of it. Similarly, illness and family breakdown increase the risk of poverty, but at the same time the stress of living in poverty increases the risk of illness and family dissolution. A struggling economy may result from high levels of poverty but also has a feedback effect as wages fall and unemployment increases.

- **Low wages and insecure work**. Experts explained that the prevalence of low-paid, highly insecure jobs in the current labour market is a key component of poverty in the United Kingdom. There has been a significant rise in 'in-work poverty', meaning individuals (or at least one member of a household) are in the paid labour force but receive low wages, may work part-time and are in jobs that provide little security. This is the result of stagnant wages in low-skill jobs and a widening earnings gap between low-paid service-sector jobs at one end of the occupational spectrum and high-skill, stable, well-paid jobs at the other end. Experts noted that because of the current structure of the labour market, people with limited education and/or skills who start their careers at the bottom end are often stymied from advancing and end up stuck in dead-end, low-paid jobs.

- **High cost of living**. Experts frequently cited the high cost of housing as an important cause of poverty, particularly in London. This, they explained, is compounded by the shortage of affordable housing and cuts to government housing benefits. As a result, there are fewer low-cost rental options, while wage stagnation and rising prices have made homeownership increasingly

difficult for families and young adults. Experts also noted the exorbitant cost of childrearing and the difficulty that parents – particularly mothers – have obtaining and maintaining full-time employment when their children are young. One expert called having a child a 'pressure point' for families and several noted that government-led child care provisions and benefits do not adequately offset the costs of bringing up children.

- **Unemployment**. Unemployment is an important driver of poverty. Experts noted that as the duration of unemployment increases, the likelihood of finding adequate employment decreases, creating a difficult cycle to break. And although experts emphasised that there has been a shift towards more in-work poverty, chronic unemployment remains an ongoing problem – and the main driver of poverty – in several regions of the United Kingdom.

- **Low educational attainment and loss of opportunities**. According to several experts, the clearest evidence of the individual effects of poverty is its negative relationship with children's educational attainment. This is crucial because low educational attainment limits employment opportunities and future earnings and reinforces the cycle of poverty. The mechanisms by which poverty negatively affects educational attainment are not as clear, although a few experts described inequality between schools as a contributing factor; the fact that poverty limits children's ability to participate in some school activities or classes was also noted. A few experts said that parents experiencing poverty may lack the social and cultural capital to help their children succeed in school or limit their expectations for their children based on their own experiences.

- **Poorly functioning benefits system**. Many experts noted the government's benefits system does not adequately address poverty and may exacerbate its negative effects. Benefits are insufficient and it is often difficult and sometimes humiliating for people to claim them. In addition, sanctions for fraud and error may send people who are already impoverished into destitution when benefits are cut off. Most experts expect poverty to rise in the near future because the current level of benefits has not kept pace with inflation and increases in cost of living, which has coincided with weak growth in wages.

- **Discrimination and stigmatisation**. Discrimination both causes and reinforces poverty. For instance, discrimination and stereotyping of racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants limits their labour market opportunities and makes it hard to escape poverty. Similarly, employers may be unwilling to hire people with disabilities due to doubts about their abilities. In addition, both experts and people living in poverty emphasised that the 'othering' of people living in poverty leads to stigmatisation and stressful interpersonal interactions with those not experiencing poverty, which results in social exclusion. In addition, policies and services – including voluntary and community support, statutory services and even supermarket deals – are mostly geared to families, which means single people in poverty face further discrimination.

- **Social isolation and exclusion**. Experts emphasised the ways in which poverty prevents people from engaging socially with family or friends, makes it difficult for their children to join extracurricular activities, makes holidays and other leisure activities unattainable and excludes people living in poverty from participating in civic life. People experiencing poverty therefore become isolated from mainstream society. These experiences negatively affect wellbeing and limit social networks, which affects labour market opportunities. Several experts also noted that the lack of contact between people living in poverty and other socioeconomic groups weakens social cohesion.

- **Stress and illness**. The stress poverty puts on individuals is a dominant theme of the expert story. Poverty is a 'daily grind', involving constant anxiety and stress over the ability to pay bills or buy essentials, as well as the stress of being stigmatised. Experts discussed adaptive strategies and the ways in which minor inconveniences for people who aren't in poverty can turn into major crises for those who are. Poverty was described as being associated with poor health outcomes – both physical and mental – including prolonged stress.

- **Family breakdown**. Experts discussed the negative effects that poverty-related stress has on personal and family relationships. Lack of material resources can become a point of conflict between partners, leading to family breakdown. Family breakdown can tip families into poverty or plunge them further into poverty. Lone parenting may therefore be both a cause and a consequence of poverty. The stress created by poverty can also lead to dysfunctional familial relationships, increasing the risk of abuse and potentially leading to behavioural and mental health problems in children, which affect their life chances.

- **Economic stagnation and loss of productivity**. Experts noted that high rates of poverty can have negative effects on society at large. Foremost among these is the link between low educational attainment, underdeveloped skills and the loss of productivity. This 'waste of skills' can also negatively impact innovation. Economic stagnation and loss of productivity depress wages and increase unemployment, potentially leading to higher poverty rates. Several experts also noted the economic costs of dealing with the negative effects of poverty. For instance, the negative health effects of poverty might lead to higher health care costs overall.

- **The drivers of poverty are different in different places**. Most experts noted that the differences in poverty are more often regional than country-specific and that some drivers of poverty differ across regions. Regardless of differences in cause, experts said that the personal experience of poverty was similar throughout the United Kingdom.

4. What Are Potential Solutions to Poverty in the United Kingdom?

- **Poverty can be addressed through a system of social and economic support that is broad, sufficient and responsive to needs over the life course**. While experts' specific solutions to poverty varied, they agreed that measures must be *broad* – operating through multiple institutions including education, the labour market and government services. In addition, supports must be responsive to economic conditions and *sufficient* to meaningfully address poverty and improve a person or family's situation. Experts also emphasised that measures designed to address poverty need to be *responsive* to the needs of people across the life span; they must, for example, support transition periods where needs are high but currently unmet. This could mean offsetting child-associated costs for families and providing high-quality child care and early education, as well as employment assistance to help workers find better-paid work and advance in their careers and pensions for older adults.

- **Targeted poverty policies**. Some experts noted that people who experience the most severe poverty may not fully benefit from universal programmes and that targeted measures might be more cost efficient and effective. And some experts said they preferred targeted interventions if a truly universal, comprehensive welfare system is unreachable. Specific examples of targeted policies included job centres and workplace programmes designed to connect individuals to existing opportunities, services to assist disabled people in getting jobs and child care benefits targeted at families experiencing poverty.

- **Indirect and preventative solutions.** Several experts advocated solutions that are not explicitly designed to combat poverty but rather to prevent it by, for example, lowering costs, increasing employment and wages or providing services designed to support other needs. For instance, policies designed to spur housing development and increase supply could lower costs in London and other expensive markets. Some experts recommended improving education quality to increase opportunities. Others recommended employment-based reforms to increase the availability of flexible and part-time work at higher wages for workers with children and create better pathways for career advancement.

- **Non-discriminatory solutions driven by input from people living in poverty.** Addressing poverty requires multiple strategies: some solutions need to increase job availability, some to build skills and capacities and others to address housing costs and increase wages. Importantly, solutions must respect people's dignity and be responsive to the views, experiences and input of people who are living in poverty.

- **Attention to current and future needs.** Policies are needed to boost household resources now – primarily by increasing income or reducing costs – so people experiencing poverty are better able to meet all of their needs. Actions to improve the future life chances of those living in poverty are

also necessary, so people are able to move and stay out of poverty. Changes are also required to protect people from sliding into poverty.

- **Addressing poverty requires a focus on place.** The places where people live affect job prospects, access to essential goods and services and whether affordable housing is available or not. Policies are needed that improve the availability and accessibility of transportation, address the quality and affordability of housing, lower rates of crime and provide links between skills and local labour markets.

Untranslated Expert Story of Poverty in the United Kingdom

What is poverty and how should it be measured?

- Poverty is the lack of resources, both material and social, needed to (1) meet one's material needs and (2) participate at an acceptable level in society.
- Poverty must be understood in relation to the specific social context in which it occurs.
- Poverty exists in the United Kingdom.
- Income and costs are essential for measuring poverty.

What are the causes and consequences of poverty in the

Causes and consequences are interconnected and reinforcing, and include:

- Low wages and insecure work, which are prevalent in the current labour market
- High cost of living (e.g., housing, child care costs)
- Unemployment
- Low educational attainment and loss of opportunities
- Poorly functioning benefits system, including insufficient benefits
- Discrimination and stigmatisation
- Social isolation and exclusion
- Stress and illness, both mental and physical
- Family breakdown, often due to stress
- Economic stagnation and loss of productivity
- Drivers vary across regions

Who in the United Kingdom is at the highest risk of living in poverty?

While poverty can affect almost anyone, some groups are more likely to experience it. These groups include:

- Children and families, especially lone parents and large families
- Disabled people
- Minority ethnic groups and immigrants
- Young adults

What are potential solutions to poverty in the United Kingdom?

- Poverty is a complex problem but can be addressed through state, market and individual-level solutions.
- The system must be (1) *broad* and operate across multiple institutions and address the full spectrum of needs); (2) *sufficient* to lift people of of poverty; and (3) *responsive* to needs across the life course.
- Combine universal policies and services with targeted interventions.
- Include preventive solutions (e.g., lowering housing costs, improving education quality).
- Focus on current *and* future needs and outcomes and be driven by input from people living in poverty.

The Public View of Poverty in the United Kingdom

In this section, we present the dominant cultural models – shared assumptions and patterns of thinking – that orient, organise and guide public thinking about poverty in the United Kingdom.

The cultural models that people draw on to think about poverty include different – and sometimes conflicting – ways of thinking about the same issues. These cultural models represent ways of thinking that are *available* to the public, although different models are activated at different times. Some models are dominant, consistently shaping public thinking, while others are more recessive, playing a less prominent role in public thinking but nonetheless available as ways of engaging with the issue.

These cultural models, which are deeply embedded within UK culture, provide common ways of understanding poverty that are available and accessible to all members of the UK public. Cultural models of this sort are shared across demographic, regional and ideological lines. As noted, cultural models shape how *all* members of a society think, whether they are politicians, service providers or people in poverty themselves. There is, to be sure, variation between individuals and groups in the level of salience of these models – that is, some ways of thinking may be more top-of-mind for some people than for others – yet these ways of thinking are available and accessible across the population. And there are, of course, ways of thinking about poverty – for example, particular ideological perspectives – that are *not* shared across the UK public. The current analysis is not intended to deny the very real differences in opinion that exist on this topic, but rather to look to the level of culture at which there are common assumptions that shape thinking across differences. It is only by examining these common aspects of culture that we can begin to understand how we might create a different conversation about poverty at the national level.

Foundational Cultural Models: What Is Poverty About?

There are two foundational cultural models that provide fundamentally different ways of thinking about poverty. These two models structure people's thinking about poverty and shape their attitudes and opinions about a wide range of questions, from understanding what poverty is and why it matters, to thinking about how it affects people and who is responsible for addressing it. We devote significant space to describing and unpacking these models because they shape people's thinking in deep and pervasive ways and have serious implications for those communicating about poverty.

While both models begin with the understanding that poverty involves a lack of material resources, each organises thinking about these resources using different base concepts. One model is organised around the distinction between needs and wants, while the other is organised around the relationship between resources and choices.

The Non-Negotiable Needs Cultural Model

The UK public's dominant model of poverty centres on the idea of basic needs. Within this model, needs are understood in terms of subsistence: food, shelter, clothing, heat and sanitation. When thinking with this model, people understand needs in absolute terms, as things that all human beings need to survive. Needs for shelter, for example, are not relative to a particular society's standards but are grounded in the universal need to be safe from the elements. Anchored in this understanding of needs, resources that are not needs are understood as wants, which are treated as luxuries – nice to have, but not necessary for survival. Wants, in this model, are defined in opposition to needs; they are the things that we *don't* need. And, precisely because we don't need them, they are assumed to have lower priority. We can see these assumptions about needs and wants embedded in the following participant's reflections on the criteria that can be used identify poverty:

> **Participant**: [Criteria for identifying poverty would include] just having somewhere to stay, and having the basics of water, food, somewhere to wash your clothes and stuff like that – just healthy, hygienic stuff. This may sound silly, but I think TV's a luxury.

The distinction between real needs and mere wants undergirds the overwhelming tendency to equate poverty with destitution. Participants consistently understood poverty as the lack of what people need for subsistence:

> **Participant**: Poverty is not being able to eat, not having shelter. That's what poverty is, if you break it down. The basic needs, sanitation needs, shelter and food.
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> **Participant**: Poverty involves being in total deprivation.
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> **Participant:** I think poverty is about not having the basics of life. So, it could be housing. It could be clothing […], food.

The model's bifurcation between needs and wants not only shapes thinking about what poverty *is*, but also structures how people think about who is responsible for addressing poverty. Society is assumed to have a fundamental responsibility to provide for its members' basic needs. No one should go without food, shelter or clothing. As we discuss shortly, this leads people to assume that government has a responsibility to provide for people's basic needs. The model thus generates a solid baseline of support for at least a limited welfare state. However, using this basic cognitive model, all other material resources and goods are modelled as unnecessary 'wants'. Society is assumed to have, at most, a limited responsibility to provide for these wants. This understanding of poverty undercuts the importance of support that extends beyond subsistence needs and leads to a direct critique of the benefits system, as people suggest that

benefits are often used for wants rather than true needs. The following comments reflect this threshold understanding of responsibility and show how it shapes assessments of support:

> **Participant**: I have never been on benefits […]. But I don't think that people really should be poor in this country because, as I said, there is a backup. It's not great, you wouldn't live like a millionaire, and that's not what it's designed to do. It's designed just to keep you at a basic level, just pure basic level.
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> **Participant**: I think it's a good thing if they can set up structures [to prevent] people [from] just coming in to loaf off the government. I think more attention needs to be put on that bit. But in terms of giving out to the public, if they need it, yes, it's a good idea. […] So, if the government's supporting those who are in need, then yeah, I think it's a good idea.

The *Spectrum of Self-Determination* Cultural Model

While the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model is dominant, there is another common and highly accessible way of understanding poverty, which centres on freedom of choice and self-determination. In contrast to the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, which focuses on the *content* of needs and desires, the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model focuses on *choices*. According to this model, material resources are important not because they satisfy wants or needs but because they enable people to freely choose or determine their own path; they allow for autonomy or self-determination.

The *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model provides a way of understanding economic wellbeing that scales up and down the income ladder. People with more resources experience greater freedom of choice.

> **Participant**: I like to think of having freedom, you know? […] Being able to say 'I want to just do this today', or 'I want to do that'. I'm not saying neglecting your responsibilities, but I'm saying having that option to choose when you do things. To me, that's financial success.

Within this model, 'being poor' means having one's freedom of choice limited. Simply put, without money, people's choices are limited.

> **Participant**: I believe that money buys you options. So if you haven't got money, then your options are limited. You might have a feeling – I feel like I want to go to a friend's today. No you're not, you ain't got bus fare to get to the town centre, you ain't going nowhere. But if you had money you could make that choice.

This lack of freedom is sometimes described using spatial metaphors of constraint, as in the following quotes:

Researcher: What would life look like for someone who [isn't doing well economically]?

Participant: Limited and cramped and sort of claustrophobic. I get a sense of claustrophobia.

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Participant: [What are the] effects of poverty […] I guess limitations, constraints. Feeling trapped.

The limited options that people in poverty face and their dependency on others to provide options creates deep psychic strain, which contrasts with the wellbeing that accompanies free, autonomous action. The understood connection between financial resources and freedom of choice thus gave participants the capacity to think about the vastly different psychic worlds of the well off and people in poverty:

Participant: Being financially free is not having to worry about things like debt. Not having to worry about using a credit card, for example, having enough money where you don't have to use its options. Or being able to pay your bills, like have a mortgage, and not rely on the banks for such things.

Participant: It's all about power. If you've got a house, if you've got a mortgage, or if you've got a property, then fundamentally, you are so much further ahead than people who don't. […] If you own property […] you have a major advantage. But what that means, as far as I'm concerned, is just basically not needing – it's freedom essentially. It's freedom to not have to worry about things.

In contrast to the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model assumes a continuum of wellbeing rather than a threshold between what is and isn't poverty – and, in turn, what minimal welfare is owed to everyone and what lies beyond this social responsibility. When drawing upon the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model, participants more frequently spoke about 'being poor' than poverty. This is in part because the term 'poverty' is tightly linked with the notion of destitution, but also because 'being poor' is a concept that people understand as a matter of degree; it's a spectrum concept and thus fits the underlying model. Perhaps because the model assumes a continuum of wellbeing and freedom, participants tended not to use the language of responsibility or entitlement when drawing on the model, thinking instead in more aspirational terms about what society *should* do (but is not necessarily *responsible* for doing). The more society can do to ensure that people have the means to support some scope of choice, the better.

Implications of Foundational Cultural Models

1. **The *Non-Negotiable Needs* model yields support for basic social benefits but undermines support for a more robust welfare state.** On the positive side, this model supports thinking about addressing poverty as a basic societal responsibility. However, by differentiating between real needs and mere wants and conceptualising needs in terms of subsistence, the model undermines the idea that society has an obligation to ensure a decent quality of life *relative* to a society's standard of living. The model thus undercuts support for benefits that extend beyond the provision of basic subsistence needs. Communicators must be careful when talking about meeting people's needs, as this is likely to focus public thinking on subsistence and work against calls for more comprehensive anti-poverty measures.

2. **The *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model expands thinking about the support people need but may undercut thinking about this support as a societal *responsibility*.** This model enables people to recognise the importance of making sure that people have more robust resources available to them. Because the model does not rest on threshold concepts, it does not lead people to conclude there should be a cap or ceiling on benefits once a threshold of need is met. However, the lack of threshold thinking also means the model does not entail a built-in floor of welfare that all people should receive. Communicators can likely leverage this model to build support for more expansive benefits, but there is a danger that doing so will undercut the existing consensus on the minimum that all people are *owed*. Further research is needed to determine which strategy is most effective: trying to leverage the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model's productive conception of responsibility while expanding people's understanding of needs beyond subsistence, or trying to leverage the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model's productive assumptions to build support for a more expansive system of social supports without undercutting the idea of a social minimum.

Cultural Models of Poverty in the United Kingdom: What Does It Mean to Be Living in Poverty in the United Kingdom Today?

While the foundational models – *Non-Negotiable Needs* and *Spectrum of Self-Determination* – anchor thinking about poverty generally, the public's thinking about what it means to be living in poverty in the United Kingdom is shaped by two models that include deep assumptions about Britain's place in the world and about historical progress.

The *Post-Poverty* Cultural Model

While participants often acknowledged that poverty of some kind does exist in the United Kingdom, there was a strong tendency to identify it with other places and other times. This tendency resulted from the assumption that the United Kingdom is a prosperous, advanced society and, as such, has moved beyond

poverty. When drawing on this model, participants' talk often bore explicit or implicit marks of national pride, the residue of imperialist conceptions of the nation as the carrier of progress. In line with imperialist discourse, progress is modelled both temporally and spatially, as today's Britain is simultaneously modelled as more advanced than it was in the past and as more advanced than 'Third World' countries.

The *Post-Poverty* model is reflected in the widespread top-of-mind association of poverty with 'Third World' countries:

> **Participant**: If [you] say 'poverty', the first thing that comes to mind is people in starving villages in Africa.
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> **Researcher**: So when you think of the word 'poverty' initially, what springs to mind?
> **Participant**: The first word I thought of was 'Third World'.
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> **Participant**: Poverty is Third World, that's real poverty. Poverty is life or death situations. […] Poverty involves being in total deprivation, not having an opportunity to excel out of that environment that you are actually in. So when I think poverty, I think hopelessness, I think, effed. Messed up, nothing happening. So I don't see a lot of that in this country. I don't see lots of poverty.

The *Post-Poverty* model is strongly linked with the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model. When thinking with the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, Africa and 'developing countries' often come to mind because these are top-of-mind examples of destitution. The frequency of references to the 'Third World' attests to the dominance of the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model.

Participants also contrasted the more advanced present with the British past, indicating that poverty was more prevalent or more severe then:

> **Participant**: You may go to a kind of estate and obviously it's clean and tidy and you've got every last convenience. Everybody has now. [Compared to] 40 or 50 years ago, they really have every convenience. […] So it's not like it was in the 30s, where children in poorer parts went running in bare feet.

The identification of poverty with the 'developing' world and the past both indicate an understanding of poverty as a problem that has been largely superseded in the United Kingdom. When using this model, people sometimes recognise that poverty does exist in the United Kingdom today, but such cases are understood as outliers that are generally unrepresentative of modern society.

The Poverty Romanticism Cultural Model

Participants sometimes spoke wistfully about the poorer past as a simpler time, romanticising life without what they considered unnecessary consumer goods – a life not built around material wants. Like the *Post-Poverty* model, the *Poverty Romanticism* model relies on an identification of poverty with the past and with other places. But in the *Poverty Romanticism* model, perception of these other times and places is filtered through a dissatisfaction with modern consumer society. When this anti-consumerism is active, people assume that consumer goods are not routes to happiness and poverty is understood positively as a way of avoiding a life dedicated to the pursuit of material things. The model is circumscribed by the pervasive recognition, grounded in the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, that lacking basic needs is undesirable. But, when drawing on the *Poverty Romanticism* model, people understand the absence of *wants* as actively desirable. People in poverty are, in fact, assumed to be lucky because they can avoid the paradigmatic vice of modern society: consumerism.

> **Participant**: I've travelled a lot, and I've been to a lot of Third World countries. And a lot of the people there, they might not be in complete poverty, but they're not starving. But they don't have much, but they're really happy.
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> **Participant**: I've got a cutting out of the paper; I should have brought it to show you. It was 1933, and they showed you an area of Liverpool that now would be dreadful, but everybody in the picture, women holding babies, there are men but mostly women and children running around, and their clothes were ragged, their houses were probably built in the middle of the last century, but they didn't know any different. […] And there was not one without a smile. So that shows, I'm not saying it's the ideal way of life, but it's the way people think really with regards to poverty. […] I had a boss once, and he judged people by the car that they drove.

Implications of Cultural Models of Poverty in the United Kingdom

1. **The *Post-Poverty* model pushes poverty off the agenda**. By placing poverty in the past or abroad, the model undermines concern with poverty *in the United Kingdom today*. If poverty is about starvation and utter destitution, then poverty is a thing 'over there' or 'back then', not something for us to be concerned about *here*, *today*. Communicators should avoid cuing this model by, for example, comparing poverty in the United Kingdom today to poverty in the past or in other places. Doing so is highly likely to activate the model and decrease the salience of poverty as an important social issue.

2. **The *Poverty Romanticism* model directly impedes thinking about poverty as a serious social problem that must be addressed**. This model is wholly unproductive. It not only undermines concern about poverty, but also actively trivialises the serious challenges that people in poverty

face, adding a rose-tinted lens that blurs the harsh realities of poverty. Communicators must be extremely careful about talking about the ills of modern consumption and materialism or using language that activates nostalgia for 'simpler' times or places.

Cultural Models of the Economy: Why Do Some People Do Well and Others Don't?

Thinking about poverty is shaped and contextualised by general ways of thinking about the UK economy. Analysis identified two distinct cultural models of the economy that consistently structured participants' thinking about why poverty exists.

The *Game Is Rigged* Cultural Model

When thinking about why some people do well and others do not, participants assumed that economic outcomes are controlled by elites. This dominant model assumes that elites directly manipulate the economy to serve their own interests. Participants frequently viewed government policies and officials as the primary instruments that elites use to enhance their own wealth and keep people in poverty down:

> **Participant**: At the moment the government aren't doing anything to reduce poverty. What the governments are doing at the moment is helping the rich to become richer [LAUGHTER] […] and the poor to become poorer, unfortunately. I'll bet you've had a lot of that today.
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> **Researcher**: And do you think poverty will ever be ended totally in the UK?
> **Participant**: No. I'd like to think so, but you know, it's not going to end, is it? I don't see it. I think it's […] in government and big business interest to keep an underclass. That's just the way it is, isn't it? You need work rats, don't you? Worker bees.

Employing this model, people see inequalities in the economy as the direct outgrowth of elites' *intentions*, as elites are thought to deliberately rig the game for their own benefit. In this sense, the model does not understand the economy as a *system*. It does not attribute problems to institutions or systems that incentivise or constrain behaviour, but rather assumes that people in power are bad actors who behave like puppeteers, pulling the strings for their own benefit. A strong part of this model is the assumption that the economy can be easily and directly manipulated to the advantage of those in power – that it is highly responsive to deliberate manipulation.

The model yields a deep sense of fatalism about the possibility of reducing poverty, as the second of the two aforementioned quotes explicitly reflects. Change would, it is assumed, require a change of heart and morals among elites – and that is taken to be highly unlikely. The laughter of the participant in the first quote signals the resignation that accompanies this kind of thinking.

The Economic Naturalism Cultural Model

In contrast to the *Game is Rigged* model, which assumes that the economy is controlled by elites, participants sometimes drew on a second, fundamentally different model of the economy. According to this model, the market is understood to be driven by forces that are largely outside of and beyond intentional control. When thinking with this *Economic Naturalism* model, participants assumed that economic outcomes are a natural result of the interplay of forces within the global economy. How these forces work is 'black-boxed' – the mechanisms, in other words, are invisible and unclear. But because outcomes are assumed to be driven by impersonal forces within the global market, they are seen as beyond personal or societal control. Government can potentially temper some of the ill effects of the global economy, but it cannot affect them in any fundamental way. Our research found that this model led participants to assume that there are inherent limits to society's or government's ability to reduce, much less eliminate, poverty:

> **Participant**: Even southwest Cornwall again, used to be industries there, they used to produce clay for the potters. Nobody wants the clay anymore. […] And this is the consequence of the old industries, the key to living is all this globalisation.
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> **Participant**: I don't think [poverty] can ever be totally eradicated or ever prevented, because our economy is liable to flux and change. And the global economy is liable to flux and change. I'll give the mining communities and Port Talbot Steelworks as two examples. When the mines closed, lots of industries came in when there was regeneration, but they weren't appropriate for the people who lost their jobs. And the same thing could happen in Port Talbot. If the steelworks goes, then there might be money invested in there and training and stuff like that, but that won't help the people who lose their jobs on a Friday and become unemployed on Monday. That would be five years, ten years down the line.

Implications of Cultural Models of the Economy

1. **The *Game is Rigged* model productively spotlights inequality but makes solutions hard to think**. The model does, productively, lead people to be critical of existing economic inequalities. Yet this way of thinking attributes the problem to a handful of nefarious actors – the economic and political elites who pull the proverbial strings and have direct and immediate impacts on the economy – rather than to a complex economic and political *system*. In this way, the model makes it hard for people to recognise the value or importance of systems-level reforms designed to restructure incentives and opportunities. When the motivation of discrete bad actors is the problem, the solution can only be a change of heart. People see this as unrealistic – the powerful have no desire or intention to give up power and are unlikely to become suddenly altruistic or moral. While there is some truth to this model's critique of power, this way of thinking misses the

multiple points of leverage and pressure that exist in complex systems, which can impede or facilitate change. Communicators need strategies to fill out and expand people's understanding of economic and political systems to help people see both how policy change can happen and how such changes would affect economic outcomes by restructuring opportunities and constraining the actions of elites. Although limited in its 'system-ness', this might be a productive model on which to build, as communicators can potentially activate people's critique of power and then build better understandings of the systemic and policy dimensions of inequality.

2. **The *Economic Naturalism* model directly impedes thinking about how the economic relations behind poverty could be deliberately restructured**. In contrast to the *Game is Rigged* model, the *Economic Naturalism* model enables people to think about how economic systems constrain people's actions – including elites' actions. Yet naturalizing these constraints and the incentives of the market and leaving any and all mechanisms in a 'black box' makes poverty seem like an inevitable outgrowth of an economic system beyond meaningful control. Communicators need strategies that help people recognise that markets and economic systems are human products – the results of collective choices – and institutions that can be deliberately restructured through policy and institutional change.

Cultural Models of People Living in Poverty and Their Circumstances: Why Are They in Poverty?

While people draw upon the *Game is Rigged* and *Economic Naturalism* models to explain poverty, there are several additional, more specific patterns of reasoning that shape thinking about people living in poverty and their circumstances. While these models in many cases conflict with one another and with the aforementioned models of the economy, our research shows that they are all accessible and used, at different points, to think about poverty. Over the course of their interviews, research participants often toggled between these assumptions, employing one model to reason at one point and then switching to a different model at another point in the discussion. In short, each of these models is highly accessible and can become active to shape thinking.

The *Self-Makingness* Cultural Model

Participants frequently assumed that individuals' outcomes are a function of personal choices and levels of motivation. With enough drive and hard work, anyone can, it is assumed, make themselves into a successful person. Entrepreneurs are the prototype of the self-made person, as they have the ambition and will to succeed. Poverty and failure to succeed, meanwhile, are attributed to inadequate effort and poor choices. This understanding leads people to blame people in poverty for their situations, because being poor is seen as a sign of lack of effort. This way of thinking also makes poverty seem difficult to fix and pushes it outside of the realm of social responsibility, because the problem lies not in society or systems but rather in individual character deficits:

Researcher: What sort of things do you think determine how well people do economically?

Participant: I suppose their *aspirations*, their *drive*. If they're *ambitious* or not.

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Participant: I think it's really the individual's determination, motivation and self-power that can keep them going. I know some people that just think, 'Okay, there's an obstacle. Fine, I'll jump over it.' And they just keep going. And there are some people who just think, 'Okay, I've had two obstacles. That's it. I'm done. I'm just going to stay home and just stay where I'm supposed to stay.' […] And that's up to the individual.

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Participant: I think as long as we have people that don't want to work and can't be bothered, I don't think we ever eradicate [poverty] completely.

While the *Self-Makingness* model appears in people's talk through a focus on individual behaviour and choices, it is critical to note that it rests on the deep assumption that the economy provides sufficient opportunities that, with enough effort, anyone can succeed. In contrast to the *Game is Rigged* and *Economic Naturalism* models, which depict ordinary people as subject to elites or impersonal forces that shape their outcomes, the *Self-Makingness* model attributes responsibility for outcomes directly and completely to individuals. The model assumes that the economy is generally meritocratic and that all people, with enough effort or talent, can succeed. This assumption is occasionally made explicit, as in the following quote:

Participant: There's a lot of opportunities. Some people seize the opportunities, have careers, college careers […] However, if you don't grasp and you don't seize the opportunity, then you are going to fall to the wayside.

This model was very common in the research, appearing frequently in participants' talk. It was often interspersed with the more ecological models described next, as people toggled between explaining poverty as the result of bad choices and lack of drive and being able to see the effect of various environmental and contextual factors.

The *Culture of Poverty* Cultural Model

Participants frequently drew on the *Culture of Poverty* model to explain how poverty is perpetuated in low-income communities. There was a widespread sense that, in certain communities, there is a culture – a set of shared norms and values – that perpetuates poverty. This culture is described in highly moralised, 'othering' terms: 'those' poor people lack basic values, most critically the value of working to earn a living.

The model includes prototypes of the 'shirker' – a person on benefits who has no desire or intention to get work – and of communities of shirkers. The shirker is happy to live off benefits and has no scruples about manipulating the benefits system to his or her advantage. Participants cited popular reality TV shows in describing these shirkers, mentioning specific examples of misuse of benefits, such as to buy big-screen TVs.

This model assumes that shirkers' moral bankruptcy comes from irresponsible parenting and the immoral values of certain communities. These bad values and norms are assumed to be transmitted interpersonally through culture, as the family or community sets expectations and instils values. As the culture of poverty is perpetuated, it creates an intergenerational 'cycle' of poverty:

> **Participant**: I've come across loads of people that are quite happy – especially girls – quite happy to leave school, get pregnant and live off the state. […] That's my experience. Sit and watch the TV, there are loads of shows you can watch, it's pretty poor television watching and it infuriates me. You feel like picking it up and throwing it out the window, but it's people that just live for getting their welfare cheque through. These guys know all the dodges. They've got big 50-inch TV screens. I've seen some of them having cars. Depending how many kids they have bumps the money up. And it's not the odd isolated situation, it is absolutely rife. And that's not just Scotland, that's right down the whole country.
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> **Participant**: There's some people who live and just think they're entitled to social housing, they're entitled to their benefits, they're entitled and they've never worked a day in their life. And they grow up with that. That's how their mind-set is.
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> **Participant**: If your role model is your mother who is sitting on her backside on the couch in front of the TV all day and that's all you have to look for, for a role model, apart from your teacher in school, and your teacher could be saying they need this, they need that, and they need other, and it's all been falling on deaf ears.

The *Opportunity Structures* Cultural Model

Where the *Culture of Poverty* model looks to the environment but focuses exclusively on cultural and moral factors, there is a competing model that understands poverty as a function of opportunity structures. When this model was active, participants assumed that poverty is caused by lack of adequate opportunities. They most frequently mentioned the importance of a good education and the chance to acquire the skills necessary for a good job. Participants also noted that social class leads to differential opportunities because lower-class people lack the social networks that frequently open up job opportunities for people of higher socioeconomic status. In addition, participants sometimes highlighted

the geographic dimension of opportunity, suggesting that some areas have better job opportunities or schools than others, which leads to unequal outcomes:

> **Participant**: Lots of people can't afford to go to university. It's just not an option. […] And a lot of people might not think that it's for them or that they're capable of doing it. And even if they were capable of doing it, how would they able to afford it? Because you need to have the 'Bank of Mum and Dad'. And for a lot of people, that's just not an option.
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> **Participant**: Likelihood is that if you've got an education, you are less likely to experience real poverty. That's not to say you possibly won't, but I think having an education opens doors that mean you could probably have more options. Education buys options.

The model does not exclude a role for norms and culture. Participants occasionally suggested that there is a feedback loop between people's opportunities and their expectations. When people lack opportunities to get a good education or a good job, this lowers their expectations for success. In turn, when people's expectations are lowered, they stop trying to succeed and can end up missing opportunities that do appear. As people continue to struggle, this further decreases expectations and dampens effort. Thus, within the *Opportunity Structures* model, the 'cycle of poverty' is understood as the result of an interplay between structural and cultural factors.

Implications of Cultural Models of People Living in Poverty and their Circumstances

1. **The *Self-Makingness* model obscures systemic causes of poverty**. By focusing people's attention solely on individual character and effort, this model obscures the environmental and systemic contexts that enable and constrain individual action. The inability to see larger contexts causes people to blame people in poverty for their own situations and stigmatise them. People assume that people in poverty must be lazy and should try harder to succeed. Communicators need strategies to help people see the role of environments and systems to counter the tendency to blame people in poverty and to enable people to recognise the need for systemic changes to address poverty. Communicators must be aware of the *Self-Makingness* model and must avoid frame cues that activate this way of thinking. Otherwise, the role of systems and context becomes difficult to appreciate and support for policy solutions will be sapped.

2. **The *Culture of Poverty* model stigmatises people living in poverty, undermines collective responsibility for poverty and instils a powerful sense of fatalism**. In contrast to the *Self-Makingness* model, the *Culture of Poverty* model brings environments into view; yet because environments are understood in moralised, cultural terms, this merely shifts the blame from individuals to families, communities and class cultures. Furthermore, once the cause of poverty is

located in deficient 'cultures', any solution short of fundamentally changing cultural norms in specific groups seems to be out of line with the problem and thus destined to fail. Communicators must be careful not to trigger this model. As we discuss in the conclusion, acknowledging the importance of good values or attempting to directly counter this model is itself potentially dangerous because it can activate the model and to lead to an unproductive moralisation of the conversation. Instead, communicators must find ways to bring systems and structures into view to combat stigmatisation and build support for systemic solutions.

3. **The *Opportunity Structures* model enables productive systemic thinking about location within social structures**. This model provides a critical opening for communicators, as it enables the public to understand how opportunities are structured by systems and context. Communicators must try to pull forward this productive model while backgrounding the *Self-Makingness* and *Culture of Poverty* models. In order to cue the *Opportunity Structures* model, communicators should not only stress the concept of opportunity but also explain how social systems and structures constrain or create opportunities. This model is highly consonant with the expert perspective. Future research should focus on developing frames and cues that most predictably and effectively bring this model to the forefront of people's thinking. If poverty messages can more consistently be processed through this cultural model, understanding of this issue will be elevated and support for solutions will increase.

Thinking about Effects: What Are the Consequences of Poverty?

People's thinking about the effects of poverty flows directly from the aforementioned cultural models. In other words, people see different effects as salient depending on the model that they are using to think about poverty and people living in poverty.

- When thinking with the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, people focus on the physical health effects of poverty (for example, starvation, hypothermia).

- The *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model orients people to a broader range of mental health effects, opening up thinking about the psychic strains created by uncertainty, insecurity and constant constraints on choices. The model makes it possible for people to understand how poverty can lead to depression and other mental health problems.

- The *Poverty Romanticism* model places the harmful effects of poverty largely out of mind, focusing instead on the supposedly *positive* effects of being freed from material culture.

- The *Culture of Poverty* model views moral bankruptcy both as the *effect* of living within a particular type of 'poor' family or community and as the *cause* of continuing poverty.

- While the *Opportunity Structures* model is primarily a way of thinking about causes of poverty, it also helps people recognise that living in poverty contributes to ongoing limitations of opportunity; in other words, people living in poverty have limited opportunities, making it difficult for them to move out of poverty.

Participants discussed the effects of poverty on individuals, but not on society. Participants rarely, if ever, suggested that poverty has societal-level effects. The societal-level effects of poverty that experts highlighted, such as economic stagnation and loss of productivity, are simply not on the public's radar.

Implications of Thinking about Effects

1. **The *Spectrum of Self-Determination* and *Opportunity Structures* models open up productive thinking about effects**. By cuing these models, communicators can broaden people's focus beyond immediate physical health effects and subsistence concerns and bring into sight the broader range of effects that living in poverty has on individuals' wellbeing, opportunities and mobility. Cuing these models is also a way of inoculating against unproductive thinking about cultures of poverty, moral bankruptcy and the purported positive sides of poverty.

2. **Lack of attention to societal-level *effects* of poverty points to lack of societal-level *models* of poverty**. While some of the more productive models of poverty (such as the *Opportunity Structures* model) situate individual experiences of poverty in social contexts, these models are not models of poverty as a societal phenomenon and do not enable people to think about poverty at the population level. One of the fundamental tasks facing communicators is creating clear, salient and motivating understandings of the ways in which poverty affects society, not just those who directly experience its effects. Creating such understandings will require stories that move people beyond individual conceptions of the issue to views that make the social costs of poverty clear.

Solutions Thinking: What Can Be Done to Address Poverty?

The public draws upon the above models of poverty and economic status when thinking about solutions and reason in highly patterned ways about who is responsible for addressing poverty and what should be done about it. As we explain in this section, different models lead people to different solutions. It is important to note upfront, however, that participants shared the belief that government has a responsibility to provide for people's basic subsistence.[4] At the same time, though, participants disagreed about what precisely this requires and whether the government should provide more support than it currently does.

Solution No. 1: Education and Job Training

Thinking with the *Opportunity Structures* model, participants reasoned that good education (that is, attending a good school) opens up opportunities for children living in poverty that otherwise do not exist. Later in life, job training and employment services serve a similar function, generating opportunities that enable people to move out of poverty.

> **Participant**: I think that more emphasis needs to be put on education. Education needs to be brought to these people, and there's facilities in this country within those areas that are laying empty at night and are not being used. And I think more money needs to be spent on providing education. If a working-class person on benefits wants to do one GCSE here, that's a lot of money. Education should be free.

Solution No. 2: Restrict and Reduce Benefits

Reasoning from the *Culture of Poverty* model and, to some extent, the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, participants suggested that social benefits are more generous than they should be. As noted earlier, the idea that society has a responsibility to meet basic needs but *not* unnecessary wants is sometimes used to justify benefits cuts. People assume that current benefits levels provide for more than basic subsistence and reason that benefits should thus be cut. But more commonly, the argument to tighten benefits – in terms of both the amount of benefits and eligibility for them – was focused on the need to prevent abuse by supposed shirkers. People assume that tightening benefits is both morally justified – because some benefits are not deserved – and instrumental – because it might disrupt the culture of poverty by requiring people to find work and instilling better values in low-income communities.

> **Participant**: I think there's too many loopholes to the system. I think you have to go back to basics where you're strict. And we'd be really strict to get out of this situation. And I think the people claiming benefits, the amount is so high. It doesn't help for people who are working, who are doing those things to get by. […] I think be more strict, get your jobs where you can just spend it on only food, and things like that.

Solution No. 3: Provide Core Economic Supports

Participants sometimes suggested that the government should take direct steps to address the high cost of living and to help people cope with the challenges of the modern UK economy. These reflections likely stem from the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, as members of the public look for ways to make sure that everyone is able to meet their basic needs. When applying the model in this way, participants assumed a slightly more expansive understanding of basic needs, but they remained focused on providing what is needed for subsistence. Participants suggested different ways to raise income or lower costs in order for people to be capable of meeting their basic needs.

Participants frequently brought up the housing market, noting that (especially in London) housing has become incredibly expensive and suggesting that the government should help provide more affordable housing, such as by building more social or council housing:

> **Participant**: The only way you're going to really cure or address the housing problem is a lot of those homes are going to have to be council homes, whether you do that through housing association or you do that through something else. Because you could build loads of houses in the private sector, but that's not going to materially address the problem. Because a lot of people literally can't afford a quarter of the worth of what an actual house in the private sector actually costs.

Thinking along the same lines, participants suggested other ways of helping people in poverty meet their needs, such as raising the minimum wage, reducing taxes on people in poverty and protecting core benefits provided by the state:

> **Participant**: One thing this government has done that I'll give them credit for – I think it started with the Labour Party though – is the amount of money you can earn before you pay tax. I think it's up to £11,000 now. So there are people who won't pay tax at all, because they're on that sort of salary. And that's probably a good thing.

Solution No. 4: Nothing Can Be Done

As we have noted at several points, some cultural models – the *Self-Makingness* model, the *Game Is Rigged* model and the *Economic Naturalism* model – lead people to conclude that there is little that can realistically be done to reduce poverty because its causes simply cannot be solved. Lazy individuals are assumed to be unlikely to suddenly develop drive, elites are not going to suddenly become altruistic and global market forces will remain out of control no matter what we do. Expressions of despair about solving the problem of poverty are thus quite common, as reflected by the following quotes (as well as quotes interspersed in previous sections):

> **Participant**: I fundamentally believe that the poor will always be with us.
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> **Participant:** Even if the government did absolutely everything in their power to help the people in poverty, there would still be a percentage of people that would live like that. They may have a little bit more money, but they would still be slightly apart because what they'd choose to do with their money would be alcohol, drugs. You could give all the people in poverty £1,000,000. That doesn't mean they're going to come out of poverty, because what do they do with the money?

Implications of Solutions Thinking

1. **Existing support for education and job training provides an opening to talk about other ways of expanding opportunities**. Talking about education and job training seems to be one way to cue the productive *Opportunity Structures* cultural model. Once this model is activated, communicators should introduce other, less familiar ways of expanding opportunities in order to broaden the public's understanding of the ways in which opportunities can be restructured and poverty can be prevented and addressed. This is a highly promising strategy.

2. **Stigmatising discourse about benefits short-circuits the conversation**. Negative discourse around benefits is not only bad in itself, but also threatens to hijack conversations about poverty and the economy more generally. In interviews, once participants began engaging in negative, stigmatising talk about benefits, they became emotionally charged, which made it difficult to switch perspectives. Communicators need strategies to inoculate against this kind of thinking in order to avoid short-circuiting the conversation. When the conversation turns to the deservingness of people on benefits, the opportunity for productive discussion shuts down. Communicators should avoid discussions that centre on the will, drive and deservingness of people receiving benefits. It is a no-win position for anti-poverty advocates.

3. **Existing thinking about economic supports must be reinforced and expanded**. Communicators must reinforce the idea that all people are owed a decent quality of life, not merely bare subsistence. Discussions of affordable housing and the minimum wage suggest that people are capable of adopting a more expansive view of basic needs that fits with a fuller understanding of a social minimum. It may be possible to cultivate broad support for a more expansive social minimum by broadening people's understanding of basic needs. Whether or not this is possible – and, if so, how it can best be accomplished – will require further research.

4. **Fatalism is a major hurdle**. Many of the cultural models that people draw upon to think about poverty reinforce fatalism, making it one of the biggest challenges that communicators face. If dominant understandings lead people to believe that trying to address poverty is futile, support for anti-poverty measures will not increase. In order to build support for policies and programmes, people must be convinced that these measures can, in fact, make a difference.

IV. Mapping the Gaps and Overlaps in Understanding

The goals of this analysis have been to: (1) document the way experts talk about and explain poverty, (2) establish the ways that the UK public understands this issue and (3) compare and 'map' these explanations and understandings to reveal the gaps and overlaps between the perspectives of experts and the public. We now turn to this third task.

Overlaps between Expert and Public Understandings

There are important points of overlap between expert and public understandings of poverty. These overlaps represent areas that communicators can build upon and expand to shift public thinking in productive directions. However, it is important to note that some of these are relatively superficial overlaps that reveal, upon closer inspection, deeper gaps between expert and public views. As such, communicators need strategies to leverage these overlaps while avoiding accidentally triggering unproductive thinking.

Both experts and the public:

- See providing for people's basic needs as a **fundamental societal responsibility** (although how the public and experts understand these needs diverges substantially). This overlap can potentially be leveraged and strengthened by using language around social and moral responsibility to stress the importance of supporting the wellbeing of all members of society.

- Understand that there is a **relationship between people's available resources and the activities they can engage in**. Both experts and members of the public recognise that people's material resources can either enable or limit their ability to do what they want and to participate fully in ordinary activities in society.

- Recognise that **limitations on people's opportunities** can play a role in causing poverty, although this is the shared perspective for experts and a contested view for the public.

- View **quality of education** as important for success in life and see lack of access to good education as one of the drivers of poverty.

- Understand that **poverty can be cyclical** across generations.

- Understand that the **high cost of living** creates financial pressures that can push people into poverty.

- Recognise that poverty has a range of effects on people's wellbeing and that it can create **not only physical health problems but also mental health problems**. While the public sees some of these effects as the result of bad lifestyle choices, there is also an understanding, shared by experts, that the condition of poverty itself puts strain on people's physical and mental wellbeing.

- Identify improvement of **education, job training and affordable housing** as among the set of solutions that would help to address poverty.

- Recognise that **government** does and should have a **central role** to play in addressing poverty.

Gaps between Expert and Public Understandings[5]

Analysis also revealed a number of major gaps between expert and public understandings of poverty. These gaps represent areas that need to be targeted in communications to enable the public to access the perspectives and ways of thinking that are available to experts. In the conclusion, we offer some initial recommendations for addressing these gaps. In later phases of this project, we will develop and test communications strategies designed to bridge these gaps.

1. **Definition of Poverty: Relative vs. Absolute Deprivation**. While experts define poverty in relative terms (understanding needs in relation to social context), the public defines poverty in absolute terms (as a lack of what is needed for basic subsistence). This severely constrains public thinking about what is and is not poverty, as well as what should and should not be done to address it. When thinking through the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model, the public actively rejects the idea that lack of common technology or leisure activities amounts to poverty, thinking of these as wants and *not* needs. And (as noted shortly), social exclusion, which plays a central role in experts' definition, is not part of the public's understanding of poverty. This narrow understanding of what poverty is directly leads to a limited understanding of what should be done about it.

2. **Location of Poverty: The UK Today vs. The 'Third World' and the Past**. Tied to the public's definition of poverty is a corresponding understanding of *where and when* poverty happens. While experts think of poverty as a pressing problem in the United Kingdom today, the UK public associates poverty with the 'Third World' and the past and thinks of poverty as something that modern UK society has moved past. The public does, to be sure, recognise that there are 'poor people' in the United Kingdom today, but this is not thought of as 'real' poverty and, in turn, is treated as a lower concern than the more extreme poverty of other places and times.

3. **Causes of Poverty: Systemic and Structural Factors vs. Individual Choices and 'Culture'**. Experts attribute poverty to the failure of social systems and aspects of economic structures that limit opportunities, constrain choices and depress outcomes. While the public does recognise, at a high level, that the economy disadvantages lower-income people in some important ways, when members of the public think about why poverty happens they tend to focus on individual and group character traits, such as personal laziness and poor values. These flaws are, the public thinks, perpetuated through family norms and community culture. This focus on purported character flaws lies at the centre of widespread stigmatisation of people living in poverty.

4. **Vulnerable Groups: Central Concern vs. Off the Radar**. Adopting a systemic perspective, experts focus on the ways in which UK society places certain groups – such as children, lone-parent families, racial and ethnic minorities, people who are disabled and young adults – in disadvantaged positions that make them distinctly vulnerable to poverty. The public, which typically fails to adopt a systemic perspective, pays considerably less attention to these sorts of vulnerabilities. While the public does not *deny* that such vulnerabilities exist, people simply do not adopt a perspective that brings these vulnerabilities clearly into view.

5. **Social Isolation and Exclusion: Constitutive vs. Ignored Effect**. For experts, the social isolation and exclusion that accompanies a lack of material resources is a constitutive part of poverty, serving as both a definitional component and one of its key effects. While the public does, at times, recognise how a lack of resources can limit people's choices, the public is largely unaware of or unconcerned about how lack of resources cuts people off from full membership in and participation within society. This gap explains why experts are highly concerned about the stigma that accompanies poverty while the public is not.

6. **Effects on Society: Stagnation and Loss of Productivity vs. ???** Experts emphasise that poverty has major effects on society, while the public is unaware of these effects. Experts explain how poverty can lead to economic stagnation and loss of productivity, as people's skills and efforts are not utilised and possible contributions are lost. Public thinking about effects is centred on individuals and the public is simply unaware of how poverty harms society as a whole.

7. **The Economy: Complex System vs. Black Box**. Experts understand the economy as a complex system that produces outcomes through a dynamic interplay of factors. The public, by contrast, has a thin understanding of economic relations, attributing economic outcomes to either elite manipulation or vague 'market forces'. This lack of understanding of system mechanisms limits public thinking about both the causes of and solutions to poverty.

8. **Restructuring of Economic Relations: Possible vs. Impossible**. Working with a dynamic understanding of the economy as a complex system, experts suggest a range of ways in which government could intervene to adjust the labour market, cost of living and economic relations more broadly as a means of preventing and addressing poverty. The public, by contrast, struggles

to understand how economic relations could be restructured, as it seems this would require either a change of heart from all-powerful elites or combatting economic forces that – like forces of nature – seem beyond human control. Neither of these options seems possible, leaving people with a powerful sense of the impossibility of meaningful change on this issue.

9. **Benefits System: Insufficient vs. Rife with Abuse**. Experts and the public agree that the government should provide benefits to help people stay out of poverty, yet they have very different assessments of the current benefits system. This is due to different understandings of both poverty and how the benefits system actually works. Experts stress that the current system is not sufficient to keep people out of poverty, as benefits are simultaneously too low and too difficult to access. While the public's assessments of benefits inevitably differ to some extent depending on personal ideology, there is widespread concern among the public about *abuse* of benefits, as the public believes many people who could work choose to live off the system instead. The organizing question in the current public discourse is whether benefits should be reduced and restricted and who is deserving, not whether they should be expanded and who needs support.

V. Conclusion: Initial Recommendations and Future Research

Communicators face serious challenges in cultivating broad public support for the policies and programmes needed to solve the problem of poverty in the United Kingdom. Many of the public's cultural models of poverty, economic wellbeing and the economy do not support meaningful change. The narrow understanding of poverty as a lack of basic subsistence-level needs – that is, the public's dominant understanding of poverty – limits people's sense of what steps are sufficient to address poverty and constrains thinking about its social effects. The public's main cultural models of the causes of poverty blame 'the poor' for their circumstances, attributing poverty to bad values or lack of drive, which undermines support for a strong and effective benefits system. The lack of a systemic perspective, in turn, obscures the vulnerability of certain groups within society and the societal effects of poverty. Moreover, cultural models of the economy limit people's sense of what can be done to restructure economic relations, which severely constrains public thinking about solutions.

Yet these unproductive cultural models sit alongside more productive ones, which can be leveraged and expanded to shift thinking about poverty. While the public defaults to a subsistence model of poverty, communicators can leverage the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model of economic wellbeing to broaden understanding of what poverty is and what eliminating it would involve. Similarly, the public has access to a model that understands causes systematically, in terms of the structure of opportunities; communicators must find ways to cue and expand this model. The public already recognises that the economy does not work the same way for everyone. By helping the public better understand *how* the economy disadvantages lower-income people and how these economic relations can be restructured, communicators can widen and deepen the public's sense of what can and should be done to address poverty in a sustainable way.

The analysis of cultural models presented in this report yields a set of recommendations about how to communicate with the public about poverty. As we note in this chapter, more research must be done to understand which specific reframing strategies can best address the gaps we have outlined. Nevertheless, the following recommendations offer a provisional strategy that anti-poverty advocates can use now to improve their communications practice:

- **Be careful when talking about 'needs'**. Because the public equates needs with subsistence needs, communicators must be careful in using the term and other associated language. Brief references to needs are highly likely to be understood by the public in terms of basic subsistence. Communicators should either avoid talking about needs or explicitly specify a broad understanding of the concept and explain why resources beyond basic subsistence (such as access to technology) are important for everyone's wellbeing. Communicators cannot assume that the public understands needs in the robust way that experts do.

- **Link material resources to self-determination**. One way that communicators can explain why it is important to ensure that all people can achieve the current standard of living in the UK is to frame adequate resources as a necessary condition of self-determination. Linking material resources to self-determination should productively leverage the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model and inoculate against the idea that resources beyond subsistence needs are nothing more than luxurious wants.

- **Don't stress consumption**. Although communicators will, of course, want and need to discuss use of material resources, they must be careful not to frame material resources in a strong *consumer* frame, as the focus on consumption may trigger anti-consumerist thinking that can be connected to romanticised views of poverty, which undermine concern about it.

- **Use examples to explain what poverty in the United Kingdom looks like today and how it works**. Given the public's tendency to locate poverty in other times or places, it is important for communicators to provide examples of what poverty in the United Kingdom today looks like. Such examples may also usefully challenge the underlying equation of poverty with a lack of subsistence needs. Examples must be carefully created to avoid assessments of the worthiness or deservingness of individuals; instead, they must illuminate the role of systems and policies in creating and perpetuating poverty. Communicators should be careful *not* to compare poverty in the United Kingdom today to poverty in other times and places, as this is highly likely to trigger the public's assumption that 'being poor' in the United Kingdom today does not constitute 'real' poverty and does not need to be taken as seriously as the 'true' poverty that exists elsewhere.

- **Tell a systems story**.[6] Given the public's strong tendency to use individual character flaws or 'culture' to explain poverty, it is vital that communicators tell a story that explains poverty as a systemic and structural issue – with systemic causes and systemic solutions.[7] Advocates frequently use personal stories to emotionally engage audiences. When properly framed, these individual stories can sometimes be used effectively, but communicators should avoid telling such stories without first setting up a broader story about systems. Social science literature generally – and Frameworks research in particular – has found that stories about individuals that lack a systemic frame tend to reinforce individualistic thinking, leading people to explain outcomes in terms of characteristics of individual people and their situations rather than in terms of systems and structures. To tell a systems story, communicators must:

  o **Make systems a character in the story**. Communicators must include systems as characters who both act and are acted upon. Portraying systems as a protagonist can help inoculate against the public's tendency to focus on individuals, such as people living in poverty or politicians, to the exclusion of systems.

o **Cue and expand upon the *Opportunity Structures* model**. Communicators can cue this model by explicitly discussing how poverty constrains people's opportunities. By placing people's choices in the context of their opportunities and – critically – linking limited opportunities to the broader aspects of systems and structures, communicators can cue and expand on this productive model. Doing this will not only enable systemic thinking but also protect against the stigmatisation of people living in poverty that often accompanies public thinking about poverty. This type of explanation can fill a key slot in the story: how systems work to produce poverty.

o **Explain the sources of economic inequality**. Communicators must *explain* the sources of economic inequality to inoculate against the public's default tendency to see disparities as the direct outgrowth of elite manipulation, the product of uncontrollable forces or the result of lack of personal willpower. When communicators discuss markets, they must explain how these forces are shaped and channelled by policy and institutions to prevent triggering *Economic Naturalism* and the fatalism that accompanies it. By explaining the sources of inequality, communicators can help the public recognise that the status quo is not set in stone and that economic relations can be deliberately adjusted to lessen inequality. While this task is daunting – and one worthy of further research, as we outline below – communicators must attempt to address it in order to make poverty prevention thinkable and to increase support for anti-poverty policies. Explaining the sources of inequality will give the public a different way of answering the question: what currently prevents poverty from being fixed?

o **Explain *how* opportunities within UK society can be restructured and how doing so can prevent poverty**. Explaining how policy changes can alter opportunity structures and help to prevent poverty is critical to puncture the UK public's fatalism about inequality and poverty. By explaining – in a simple, step-by-step fashion[8] – how policies could change outcomes, communicators can facilitate productive thinking about the prevention of poverty. Communicators should make a point of discussing solutions beyond education and job training (which the public recognises as important) and explain how other ways of altering opportunity structures could help to prevent and address poverty. Rounding out the story by explaining the range of ways in which policies and programmes can restructure opportunities is needed to avoid fatalism and generate support for solutions.

• **Don't make nefarious politicians the villains of the story**. While it is easy to criticise the government, it is important not to frame such criticism in terms of politicians' *motives*, as this is highly likely to trigger the *Game is Rigged* model and, in turn, reinforce the sense that reform through government is impossible. To avoid such fatalism, communicators must focus on actions taken (or not taken) rather than motives.
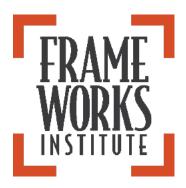
- **Contextualise and explain numbers**. When people are confronted with numbers or facts, they will generally interpret them through their default cultural models – unless the numbers or facts are contextualised within a message that helps them make sense of them in a different way. FrameWorks has found again and again, across social issues, that when numbers and facts are left unframed – when this type of contextualising message is absent – people interpret them in ways that diverge significantly from communicators' intent.[9] Facts do not speak for themselves. Numbers and facts should be used within a well-framed message to support clearly articulated points to ensure they are interpreted in intended ways. Use numbers to *tell* the story, but do not assume that numbers *are* the story.

- **Avoid gesturing toward the importance of drive or good values**. It is often tempting to begin a communication with an acknowledgment of opponents' concerns. While it may seem strategic to start with a sentence like: '*Individuals in poverty certainly need to do their part, try hard to find work and cultivate a strong sense of personal responsibility, but …*' – and then pivot to a systemic message – this will likely backfire. Although this kind of message is intended to defuse the power of opponents' points, it is just as likely to *remind* people of and reinforce them. It is possible that strategic acknowledgement or countering of opponents' messages may work;[10] however, without evidence to this effect, this is a dangerous strategy and should be avoided.

These recommendations provide initial strategies that communicators can use to create more effective messages about poverty. Yet further research is needed to identify communications tools and strategies capable of overcoming the deepest and most challenging gaps we have identified here. The following set of tasks comprises a prospective 'to do' list for future framing research:

- **Effectively counter the negative discourse around benefits**. Strategies for talking about benefits need to be developed and tested to challenge the stigmatisation of welfare programmes and people who rely on them. While the public widely recognises that benefits are necessary and that the government has a responsibility to ensure a basic level of welfare, pervasive stigmatisation of benefits reinforces unproductive models of social welfare and erodes a sense of collective responsibility, as well as public support for the robust system of benefits that experts recommend. Given the pervasiveness of stigmatising discourse around benefits, this is a top-priority task.

- **Broaden understanding of what poverty *is***. While communicators can potentially leverage the *Spectrum of Self-Determination* model to broaden thinking about poverty, research is needed to determine how this model can be most productively cued and reinforced, as well as how the strong sense of responsibility that accompanies the *Non-Negotiable Needs* model can be preserved while broadening people's understanding of what counts as poverty and what supports are required.

- **Deepen understanding of how economic, social and political systems and structures produce inequality and poverty**. Cultivating a better understanding of the *causes* of inequality and poverty, including low pay and insecure work, is necessary to support thinking about how these issues can be effectively addressed. Research is needed to ascertain how the sources of poverty can be most effectively explained.

- **Foster understanding of and concern for vulnerable groups**. Strategies must be developed to help the public recognise the particular susceptibility of people in certain social positions to poverty.

- **Expand public understanding of effects**. While the public understands that poverty has negative effects on physical and mental health, communicators need strategies to expand this understanding so that people recognise social exclusion and, at a societal level, loss of productivity and economic stagnation as key effects.

- **Generate understanding of the economy as a system amenable to intervention**. Research is needed to understand how to explain how public policy intervention can restructure economic relations in ways that can reduce and prevent poverty. This is a fundamental task that is necessary to both increase the salience of poverty issues and build support for solutions.

- **Cultivate a sense of collective efficacy**. Communicators need effective ways to combat fatalism. Increasing the public's sense of efficacy – the belief that collective actions can drive change – is vital to increase support for the policies and programmes that experts recommend. This is one of the most important challenges to address in future work.

Addressing these challenges will require communications tools of varying types. *Values* are likely needed to shift attributions of responsibility and promote a sense of efficacy. Explanatory tools such as metaphors, explanatory chains and examples are needed to expand understanding of what poverty and inequality involve, what their causes and effects are and how policy solutions can restructure economic relations. *Exemplars* may be useful in shifting people's perceptions of *what* poverty involves. Further research is needed to identify and test the effectiveness of these types of communications tools.

About the FrameWorks Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is an independent non-profit organization founded in 1999 to advance science-based communications research and practice. FrameWorks conducts original, multi-method research to identify the communications strategies that will advance public understanding of social problems and improve public support for remedial policies. FrameWorks' work also includes teaching the nonprofit sector how to apply science-based communications strategies in their work for social change. FrameWorks publishes its research and recommendations, as well as toolkits and other products for the nonprofit sector, at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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Endnotes

[1] On cultural models, see Quinn, N., & Holland, D. (1987). Culture and cognition. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.). *Cultural models in language and thought* (pp. 3–40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[2] See Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing; Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory*
[2] See Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing; Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

[3] See Quinn, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Finding culture in talk: A collection of methods*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

[4] While seemingly banal, the fact that this assumption of government responsibility exists is important. Such a shared assumption does not exist, for example, in the United States; see, e.g., Baran, M., Lindland, E., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Kohut, M. (2013). '*Handed to them on a plate': Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of human services*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

[5] The gaps identified in this section capture major differences in *how* experts and the public think about poverty; they do not directly address all of the specific factors that experts and the public raised. For example, both members of the public and experts discussed the role of unemployment and low wages in contributing to poverty, but the public made sense of these factors through multiple models (e.g. the *Opportunity Structures* or *Economic Naturalism* models). We centre discussion of the gaps on these *ways* of thinking about poverty, because it is these ways of thinking – rather than knowledge of discrete facts – that shapes public thinking at the deepest level and determines the public's most basic attitudes toward poverty.

[6] On thematic vs. episodic frames, see Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[7] The recommendation here is *not* to explicitly talk about 'systems and structures' – this may signal ideological positioning that activates partisan reasoning and, in turn, cues unproductive thinking. However, communicators must find ways to talk about systems and structures, albeit not necessarily in these terms, or else people will have difficulty understanding why the kinds of policies that anti-poverty advocates propose are needed. Future research will, in significant part, centre on how systems and structures can best be brought into the conversation in a way that is effective across the UK public.

[8] For advice about how to construct effective step-by-step explanations, see Benjamin, D. (2009). *A FrameWorks Institute FrameByte: Creating causal chains*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

[9] See, e.g., Volmert, A., Fond, M., Haydon, A., O'Neil, M., & Gerstein Pineau, M. (2016). '*It's a rite of passage': Mapping the gaps between expert, practitioner, and public understandings of adolescent substance use.* Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

[10] In our work on criminal justice reform in the United Kingdom, we found that acknowledging the value of punishment is unhelpful, but that raising opponents' points and actively countering them can be helpful. See O'Neil,

M., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Volmert, A. (2016) *New narratives: Changing the frame on crime and justice.* Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.