Communicating UK Poverty

Overcoming the barriers to create meaningful messages

Research and analysis for

JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

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Ipsos MORI

Executive Summary

The project

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Public Interest in Poverty Issues programme (PiPi) aims to secure and strengthen public support for alleviating poverty in the UK. This research project informed this process using two stages of qualitative research. The first involved an evaluation of existing public attitudes to UK poverty, and the second employed a more creative approach, to identify messages which might resonate with the public on the issue and thereby generate a more favourable climate of opinion for anti-poverty policies. The project involved a total of 12 discussion groups, across the UK.

Findings

Barriers and challenges

The public are currently a long way from supporting an anti-UK-poverty agenda. They are not aware of the problem, and do not trust that it is a legitimate issue. Key barriers are:-

- The word Poverty gives rise to the wrong associations; international issues, absolute rather than relative poverty, and historical associations.

- In the face of globalization and complex migration, there seems to be a growing body of belief that the UK welfare state should be a "small club" for hard pressed "members". The charity and NGO sector is imagined to speak from a "big tent" model of the welfare state, with a no-strings-attached model of help for the poor. The public feel very wary of offering more help to anyone, in case they are "taken for a ride" by freeloaders.

- Long term economic stability in the UK means the public tend to feel there is no excuse for poverty; it is the result of bad choices and wrong priorities, and therefore not a subject for public help.

- The audience believe that the social contract is growing weaker, and that social relations within society are breaking down due to anti-social behaviour; the real problem is seen as "emotional" poverty not lack of physical or concrete resources.

The 21st century 'poor person' does not currently exist in the minds of the audience. The communications challenge is to bring him/her to life, without using the "P-word",

in a way which goes with the grain of the above deep rooted public opinions. One example of how this could be done is the following:

Low Income, Low Opportunity or "LOLI". Someone who contributes to society and is not a freeloader, but who suffers social ills; without using the confusing term "poverty". He suffers specific modern problems; such as low/insecure wages, poor housing, and unfair taxation. Regularly, expenses and bills mean he goes into debt. All of which reduce his quality of life and his opportunities.

This is one of a number of ways of describing people affected by poverty. The key elements of deveoping such an image are:

- **Describe how specific elements of this person's life make up his overall experience.** Those problems listed above in relation to 'LOLIs' are ones that people can understand fairly easily. They can be explained more fully by different groups who are communicating about poverty.

- **Use an overarching metaphor for a broader systemic problem.** There is the chance to use imagery such as life as an unfair game, where the rules do not work in favour of LOLIs. There are risks associated with this approach, as the "life is a game" metaphor is complex; but it is worth further investigation.

- **Explain what we can do about it.** As soon as possible it is important to bring in suggestions for specific policy interventions, linking specific problems to specific solutions, to reassure the public that this problem can be analysed, split into component parts, and solved.

In describing poverty to the public, in a way which enlists tacit or active support for anti-poverty measures, it is important to explain how individuals can *start* with disadvantages in life. It is vital, however, that this should be coupled with communication on what *prevents* them from overcoming disadvantages – not just what puts people in poverty, but what keeps them there.

Targeting :

Some "low hanging fruit" may be the easiest to target, based on demographics and attitudes.

- Those who feel they have been close to poverty themselves.

- Teachers and other front-line workers who see poverty when they are at work

- "Big Tenters"; those who have an open and generous conception of the welfare state; especially the constituency of affluent liberals

Quantitative work from the British Social Attitudes Survey[1] suggests that a roughly equal proportion of the population fall into the "liberal" and "sceptical" clusters. The "Big Tenters" are closer to the liberal point of view on poverty. However, the qualitative research suggests that even for Liberals, the Big Tent model may be increasingly difficult to hold to in the current climate.

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[1] JRF report forthcoming; details to be added

We found that a newer worldview, the "Small Club" was dominant in the qualitative research. Even "Big Tenters" found it easy to see things from the "Small Club" perspective. Small Clubbers are those who see the welfare state as a club with limited resources, given out to its members, and resist the idea that the "undeserving" may take a cut of public resources.

This underlines the need for the communication as a whole to start with examples of people who are clearly "contributors" to society rather than "freeloaders" – which helps the audience to feel that resources are remaining within the "Club".

Channels and authority

No authorities are currently seen to be talking about these issues, credibly. There is scope for a shared cultural narrative to be created around an idea such as the 'LOLI', using channels such as grassroots and advocacy, guerilla marketing and the press.

Decisions that need to be taken

NGOs and the public sector tend to subscribe to the "Big Tent" model where the welfare state is seen as an open and inclusive model, where the right to resources is based upon need. Organisations with this inbuilt culture may have to consider how far they are prepared to use different arguments and assumptions in order to communicate with "Small Clubbers". There is therefore a decision still to be taken:: how far are organisations that wish to communicate with the public about poverty prepared to take on the worldview of the "Club" model in opening up the debate on the future of welfare?

Other questions include: which elements of 21st century poverty will be the focus of attention; how can different individual agendas fit in (without compromising values)? What language should be used, how can all share it?

1. Project background

"Would [poverty] sway my vote at the next election? Not really. But social issues generally, then yes. It's for the good of everybody" (Manchester)

1.1 Aims

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Public Interest in Poverty Issues programme (PiPi) aims to secure and strengthen public support for alleviating poverty in the UK. This research project informed the programme through two stages of qualitative research. The first involved an evaluation of existing public attitudes to UK poverty, and the second employed a more creative approach to identify messages which might resonate with the public on the issue and thereby generate a more favourable climate of opinion for anti-poverty policies.

Below is a summary of the objectives for this research process.

Communications objective
To foster a climate of public opinion in which tacit (or preferably active) support enables and encourages politicians to adopt policies which give more priority to alleviating poverty in the UK.

Overall research objectives:
- To develop our understanding of what the public think, feel and believe about poverty so that an effective and realistic communications strategy can be framed
- To explore the likely impact of different messages and develop different approaches to expressing them
- To make a significant contribution to the planning and execution of a communications strategy on the issue of UK poverty

Phase 1 objectives:
- Begin to map the population in terms of their attitudes to poverty, developing typologies if this helps us to classify and better understand how to connect with potential audience(s)
- Use stimulus of various kinds to see where there may be scope to influence people's outlook on UK poverty and conversely, identify the obstacles to this
- Use these insights to bring forward the strongest possible communications themes for further development in Phase 2 of the research

Phase 2 objectives:
- Further develop understanding of public attitudes to UK poverty
- Identify and explain barriers to greater public concern
- Explore various bases for effective communications about UK poverty

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1.2 Methodology: a sampling challenge

The core research team comprised Sarah Castell and Julian Thompson of the Ipsos MORI HotHouse, the company's specialist qualitative research unit. The team also included Alan Hedges, an independent research consultant, who worked closely with the MORI team throughout, providing a great deal of valuable advice and input to inform all stages of the planning, design and execution of the fieldwork.

> The **first phase** of groups were held in November 2005, in London, Newcastle and Leeds. The **second phase** took place in April 2006, in London, Birmingham and Manchester.

Our starting point for identifying possible target segments of the population for communications at stage one was the results of the quantitative analysis of existing BSA (British Social Attitudes) survey data[2], which was undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research.

This divided the UK population into two roughly even-sized segments: "Liberals" and "Sceptics", based on clusters of demographic and attitudinal factors. Our task was to investigate these segments further and understand their role in describing and mapping public opinion, and then to develop a more nuanced and layered description of them.

From early discussions we hypothesised that beneath descriptive top-level attitudes, and factors such as media consumption, we might uncover more stable, deep-seated **values** that would help explain what was driving attitudes towards poverty. These could be described as more stable factors relating to people's belief system or worldview which acts as a lens through which they interpret their experience of society, and attribute causality for social problems such as poverty.

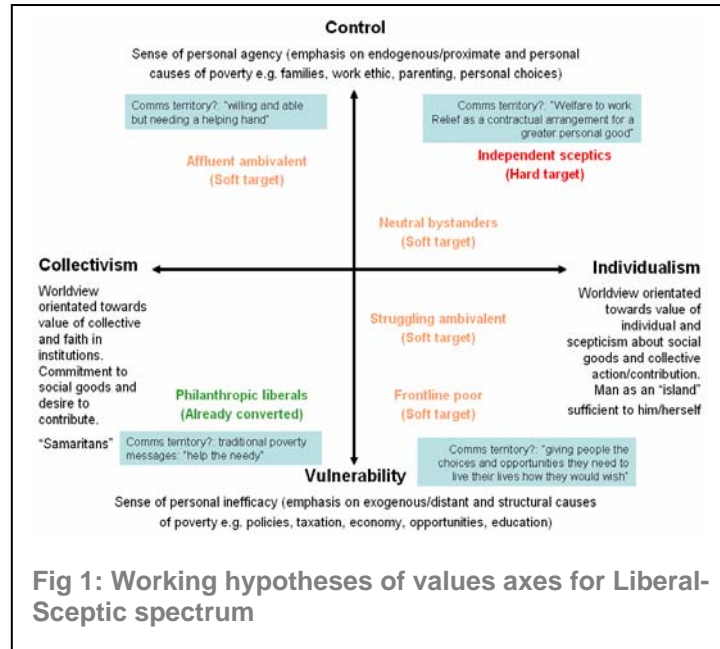Our initial hypothesis was that these deeper factors were

a) the degree of perceived personal efficacy or agency in determining their own life course

b) the degree of individual (inner-directed) vs. collective (outer-directed) focus that people have when they look for the solutions to society's problems

The foundations for these may derive from a combination of personality, upbringing and life experience but are likely to be influenced somewhat in the shorter term by such factors as daily life experience, media consumption and economic prosperity.

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[2] JRF report forthcoming

On this basis, we adopted the working belief that public attitudes to UK poverty – from the extreme ends of the liberal-sceptic spectrum to the more moderate or ambivalent - could be mapped on two key axes as seen on the grid below, onto which we placed our initial groupings:

Control
Sense of personal agency (emphasis on endogenous/proximate and personal causes of poverty e.g. families, work ethic, parenting, personal choices)

Comms territory?: "willing and able but needing a helping hand"

Comms territory?: "Welfare to work Relief as a contractual arrangement for a greater personal good"

Affluent ambivalent
(Soft target)

Independent sceptics
(Hard target)

Neutral bystanders
(Soft target)

Collectivism ← → **Individualism**

Worldview orientated towards value of collective and faith in institutions. Commitment to social goods and desire to contribute.

Worldview orientated towards value of individual and scepticism about social goods and collective action/contribution. Man as an "island" sufficient to him/herself

Struggling ambivalent
(Soft target)

Philanthropic liberals
(Already converted)

Frontline poor
(Soft target)

"Samaritans"

Comms territory?: traditional poverty messages: "help the needy"

Comms territory?: "giving people the choices and opportunities they need to live their lives how they would wish"

Vulnerability
Sense of personal inefficacy (emphasis on exogenous/distant and structural causes of poverty e.g. policies, taxation, economy, opportunities, education)

Fig 1: Working hypotheses of values axes for Liberal-Sceptic spectrum

We then recruited our Stage One groups with a number of attitude statements to reflect what we anticipated to be their position along these axes. As a way to simplify and ground the recruitment process we kept in mind the lessons from previous research (BSA) that the strongest indicators for people's attitudes along the Liberal-Sceptic spectrum of poverty attitudes tend to be their response to the issue on three dimensions:-

- o   Prevalence: how much poverty people thought there was in the UK

- o   Seriousness: how serious they thought the problem was

- o   Definition: how broadly or narrowly they defined UK poverty

Phase 1 comprised 6 discussion groups, each lasting 2 hours, held in London, Newcastle and Leeds; among a cross section of Liberals and Sceptics. An abbreviated recruitment grid is shown below:

No.	Location	Segment label	Age	Socio
1	London	"Moderate liberals"	25-45	BC1
2	London	"Moderate sceptics"	40-65	C1C2
3	Newcastle	"Unfocussed ambivalent"	25-45	C1C2
4	Newcastle	"Strict ambivalent"	30-50	BC1C2
5	Leeds	"Ardent Sceptics vs Ardent Liberals"	30-50	BC1C2D
6	Leeds	"Moderate sceptics & moderate Liberals"	30-50	C1C2

As the research progressed, (as is described below in **Chapter 3: Targeting)**, we evolved a more sophisticated understanding of drivers of belief; these related to personal experience of poverty, views on the welfare state, and reflected the fact that individuals often held contradictory ideas simultaneously about the whole situation.

For the second phase of our research, we therefore returned to a demographic basis of sampling. We used this to identify possible demographic target groups for future communications based on the argument that mobilising such groups would be key to the success of any campaign aimed at generating greater public acceptance of the need to tackle UK poverty. Thus we included two groups who we thought might prove to be at the liberal end of the spectrum and therefore "champions" of the anti-poverty message: teachers and university students. The sampling was also designed to include people with a range of proximity to, and experience of, poverty and deprivation.

Fig 2: Phase 2 sample

No.	Location	Description	Age	Socio
1	London	Affluent empty nesters	45-65	AB
2	London	Low income parents	25-45	C2D
3	Birmingham	Teachers & other young professionals (e.g. DINKY)	25-35	BC1
4	Birmingham	Retired/semi retd. low-middle income	65+	DE
5	Manchester	Middle income, mature families	35-50	BC1C2
6	Manchester	University students & student activists	18-22	E

As explained in Chapter 3, some of these targeting ideas worked well – while some didn't.

1.3 Stimulus materials and our interim creative meeting

For the first phase, we used both quantitative materials, (information and facts from charities, NGOs, Government and other studies about the extent and nature of the poverty issue in Britain) and qualitative materials (imagery, symbols) as well as a couple of video clips showing vignettes of people coping with poverty in Britain. We explored reactions when they were shown in the context of a more general conversation about life in Britain today. The aim was to identify from within the whole range of material anything which "switched on" our audience. The researchers explored whether there were any potential "emotional territories" within which we could position poverty to make it seem more important and striking to people. They also looked for ideas, words, or images, which might encourage people accept the existence of poverty in the UK and adopt a more supportive stance to those seeking to engage them on the subject.

During the analysis for Stage One, identifying potential themes, we held a meeting of **advertising and marketing communications experts** who were able to help us identify some more rounded "territories" for development at the second stage.

The meeting was held at Ipsos MORI and comprised two advertising planners from leading agencies, a creative team of an art director and a copywriter, students from St. Martin's College to "storyboard" what we were talking about, the MORI team and Alan Hedges.

This allowed us to develop some more focused "narratives" of why the public might care about poverty in the UK. At Stage Two we showed large mood boards (see Fig. 2 below) with imagery around these territories (descriptions of which are in the appendix to this document).
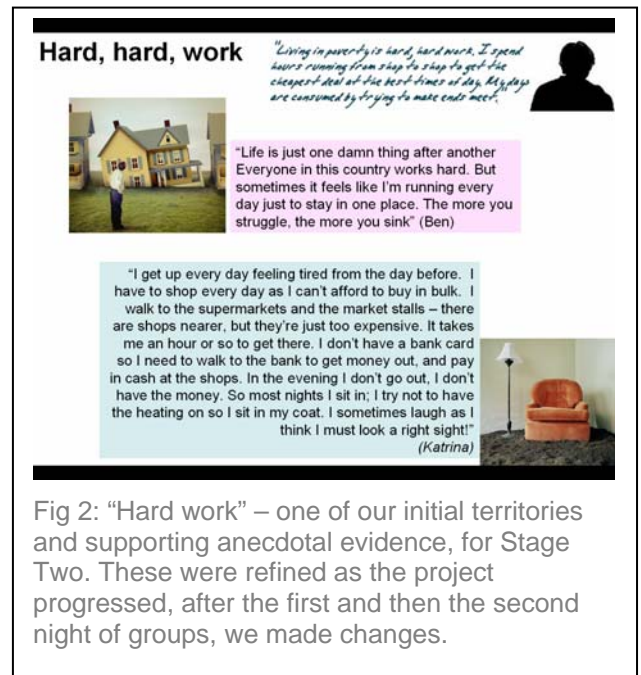

Fig 2: "Hard work" – one of our initial territories and supporting anecdotal evidence, for Stage Two. These were refined as the project progressed, after the first and then the second night of groups, we made changes.

We supported these with a more structured set of facts designed to fit with each territory.

2. The communications challenge

This chapter characterises the current public mindset about UK poverty, highlights the **barriers** to be overcome, and defines the **communications challenge**.

2.1 "Getting to base camp" on the climb towards public support

A process of fostering public support for anti-poverty measures is likely to involve a series of steps, each one bringing the public into a closer engagement with the issue itself, and opening up more avenues for them to signal their support. However the research identified just how much of a challenge this could be, and that, if there is a mountain to climb, the anti-poverty sector need to focus initially on just getting the public to "base camp."

The engagement model below illustrates the likely steps to be taken in creating the desired response to the issue of poverty amongst the general public. The challenge is to move people up this scale through targeted and progressive communication and engagement.


Figure 3: a model of how engagement is built
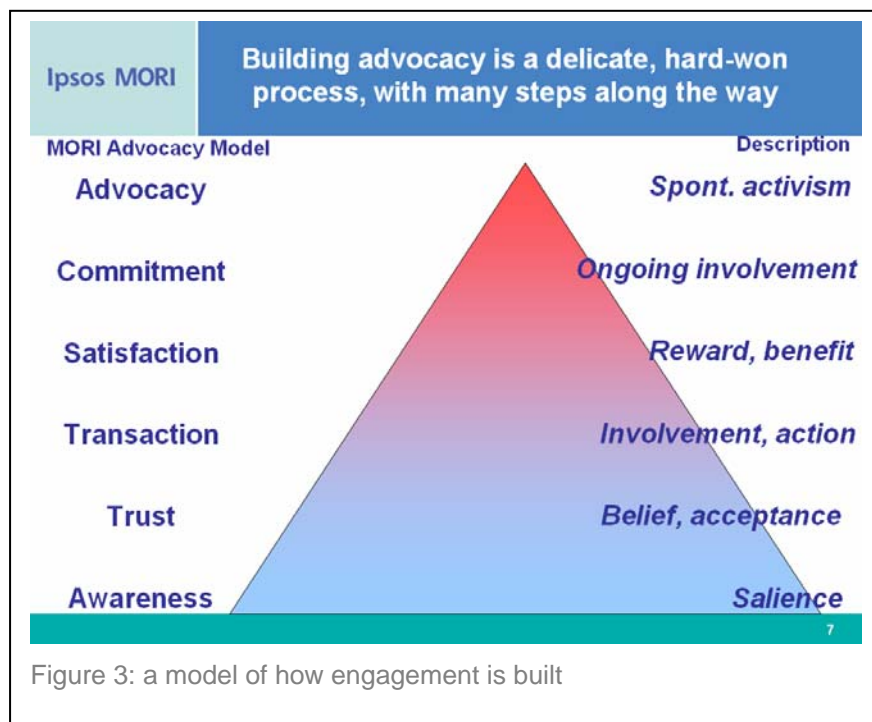
The first step is to get the public to a baseline of awareness on the topic, before then trying to gain acceptance that the issue does require attention and gaining trust in the authorities, concepts, facts and figures making this case.

Beyond this, it is a case of providing people with ways to actively signal their approval for "the cause" in whatever way (however small or personal) and making this feel satisfying in some way, so that a longer term engagement can be created, the profile of the issue is permanently raised, and ultimately people spontaneously talk about it as one of their pet concerns. This is advocacy – the highest level of support an idea, brand or policy can enjoy.

Our research indicates that for the public in general, and as compared to other (though not unrelated) social issues, UK poverty is currently at the bottom of this model, in terms of its salience as a cause for concern. The public are largely unaware or in denial of its existence, or if they are aware, dubious about its seriousness and prevalence and/or in doubt about the causes of the condition.

The debate is therefore essentially still stuck at the levels of awareness and trust. The graph below summarises some of the key barriers we identified that prevent the public moving into the same sphere as those in the poverty sector, or thinking about poverty in the same way they do other issues that they feel more passionately about:

Figure 4: Barriers to awareness and trust on the issue of UK poverty
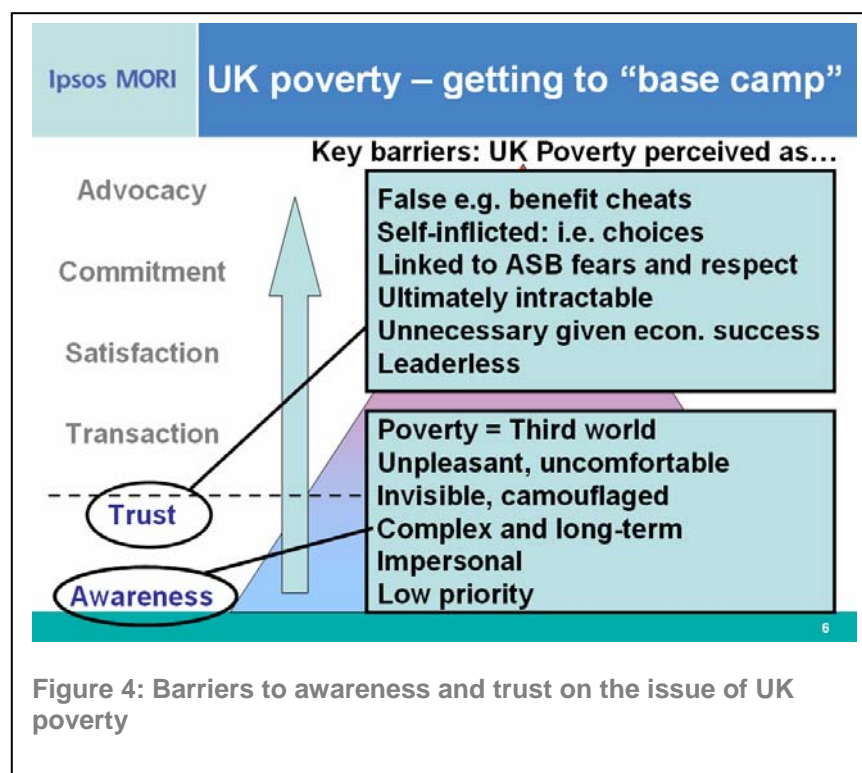
The nature of these barriers are discussed in detail throughout the remainder this chapter.

Given these barriers to moving people up the scale, it seemed sensible that the communications should start from first principles. It would be wrong to assume that the public share the same assumptions about the existence, nature, drivers and causes of poverty as those working in the sector. To move higher up this model

(which signals greater public support and involvement for the ideas), the sector must **redefine the problem** clearly. This is not to say that all those discussing poverty need to say the same thing, or that we need to invent new thresholds or definitions of poverty. However, the public at the moment lack an understanding of UK poverty which makes sense in terms of their understanding of *how society works.* The remainder of this chapter looks at this view of the world in more detail. A communications strategy which successfully engages the public will need to go, at least in part, with the grain of their feelings about the world, and acknowledge the problems of society *they* perceive, as well as educating them about UK poverty as it is perceived by those in the sector.

Perhaps the most overarching and significant barrier to involvement in any of the stimulus we used in this research was the lack of messages about **interventions**: how the problem can be solved and how the public can help. Where there is no discussion of what can be done, the public feel that the the problem seems incoherent, intractable and hopeless, and disengage from the discussion. The advocacy model illustrates that people need to understand the action that can be taken, in order to reach the higher stages of support for an idea. Without a sense of how the problem might be solved, the public worry that their well-meaning support might even be used for ends they disagree with; so adopt a wary and sceptical attitude.

This meant that, for instance, when we showed statistical information about poverty, in the research process, in general it did not cut through – the participants in the groups became sceptical and hostile, and argued about the validity and provenance of the facts they were shown.

As such, the research suggests that if messages, as early as possible in the process, can be linked to clear and simple ideas for **policy interventions**, they are seen as more worthy of attention.

2.2 Complicated and unclear – what is poverty?

> "Have we all got wealthier? Has poverty changed?
> Someone who was poor 40 years ago wouldn't say
> people are poor now." *(London)*

At the start of each discussion group, there was always an immediate sense that the audience were uncomfortable discussing the issue of poverty in the UK and unfamiliar with the terms of the debate. For most, the default associations with poverty related to the Third World, as part of the vocabulary of aid-oriented charities and international NGOs. It seems to suggest an abject end-state, which applies clearly to images of malnourished 3rd World children, or if pressed to consider the British context, a bygone age of Dickensian squalor.

However poverty in some ways is real to people in the UK – most can call up some personal associations, albeit on the extreme end of the spectrum in terms of the homeless or drug addicts. But in general the attempt to apply "poverty" to the UK context prompts a certain amount of resistance, and reluctance to extend the same kind of sympathy and support to the poor in the UK as to those in the Third World.

If people can admit of the possibility of UK poverty, they quickly make the comparison with third world poverty. They also assert that anyone in the UK finding themselves in an abject state do so through choice, bad decisions on their part, or exceptional external circumstances. These assumptions each carry their own set of problems and barriers to overcome, as we try to communicate the nature of poverty.

> "People seem to be relatively well off; we're not a poor country; there's no mass poverty; no children living on the streets. Our social structure lets the bottom level live well like, compared to say the West Indies. Even if people don't work, people are supplied with basic things – water and electric." *(Leeds)*

Participants did not support the idea of extending something like the **Make Poverty History** campaign to a UK context. The direct comparison of extreme absolute poverty with the more relative UK poverty (where most have at least some electricity, warmth and a home) seemed to be a case of reaching too far. Participants felt their sympathy for the more extreme problems would be "co-opted" to solve what they see as a less serious problem.

In general, when statistics about UK poverty were shown, groups expressed surprise and shock. Initially, this looked as though the "shock tactics" would be an effective way of communicating poverty. Certainly, it is a familiar tone of voice which participants were expecting to hear from campaigners and charities. However, as mentioned above, initial surprise soon gave way to scepticism and groups found it easy to "brush off" statistics unless they were linked to a more persuasive message (of which more later). Interestingly, at both stages of research, those who felt closest to experiencing poverty directly were less likely to express surprise or shock at poverty statistics. The statistics, perhaps, had *more* effect on these people than others, because they chimed with a world which they already recognised.

Importantly however, even for these people, this poverty was something that described 'other people'. Here again the word poverty is unhelpful. No one near to or below the poverty line described themselves as "poor" or "living in poverty"[1]. In fact, they seemed to want to avoid the tag - an important communications implication. We can speculate as to why this is the case (implied abject status, pride, the technical

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[1] Various different poverty definitions were used in the research; including "below 60% of median net income" plus, other definitions such as Oxfam's descriptions of adults without adequate clothing, heating, inability to save or insure, and so on.

points of the definition, lack of recognition and so on). However, the important thing here is that people instead describe their everyday experiences, whether they are good or bad, as illustrative of their quality of life. Therefore we were told about UK lives which are mundane, limited, constrained, full of drudgery or struggle. This seems to have more meaning than describing or defining than the absolute end-state.

One woman at Stage One only realised that she was technically well below the poverty line when she heard the formal income definition. She staunchly denied that this was a description of herself that she recognised or would ever use.

Possible "lay" terms for UK poverty include concepts such as "have-nots", "struggling", "scraping by", "drowning", "going without", "deprived", "having to beg and borrow", "being trapped", "bumping along the bottom".

It was uncomfortable for our groups to even consider poverty; there was a sense of suspicion overhanging all the general discussion of poverty, as though the public are wary of admitting support for allieviating poverty in case their goodwill should be co-opted for political ends, as a result of which they might themselves lose out.

2.3 A deep-rooted debate is underway about our collective rights and responsibilities

> "If someone stepped in now and looked at current headlines we would be living in a society where according to the headlines in some ways, everything's just right. And yet we're under a constant threat of being annihilated. It's a little bit scary." (*Birmingham*)

This research, and the debates it reveals within and between members of the public on the issue of poverty, take place within a wider context of tension and anxiety about the role and future of the welfare state.

Previous analysis cited recently by David Goodhart in an edition of Prospect magazine[2] suggests that as the effects of external pressures (e.g. complex migration, global economic competition) are starting to be felt in the UK, there is a divergence between two competing visions of the welfare state and the distribution of resources within it. These broadly correspond to groups at either the upper or lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, though are not restricted to them.

On the one hand, a relatively affluent liberal, progressive and predominantly middle class constituency – representing many of those in positions of authority - feels relatively optimistic about the emergence of Britain as a more diverse economy and open, cosmopolitan society.

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[2] Prospect, February 2004; though David Goodhart's analysis also owes much to work and thinking undertaken by Tom Sefton at LSE and Alan Hedges, over recent years.

For them, the downsides of these changes are generally outweighed by the benefits (e.g. low cost labour, services and choices). So they believe the barriers to entry into citizenship should remain relatively low, and the welfare system should remain all-encompassing, with the provision of state support granted simply on the basis of residence and need. This has been termed the "Big Tent" model of the state's relationship with citizens.

On the other hand, those at the lower end of the income spectrum are feeling the pressure of inward low-skill migration and the resultant increase in competition for finite state resources in the form of housing, benefits and public services. This includes established ethnic minority communities (e.g. West Indian, Pakistani) as well as white British working class participants.

Feeling this pressure, there is growing animosity towards, and anxiety about "free-riders" perceived to be cheating the system (e.g. Eastern European, East African). Race, ethnicity, and asylum-seeking become flashpoints.

> "There are so many, the Canary Islands get a lot of people coming over from Africa. They're sending them to Spain. Spain is now full, they're sending them to England. Now in the papers the weekend, the Express, they were showing you Malta. They have got so many there, they're sending them to England. We come across as a soft touch, we'll take anybody." (*Birmingham*)

 For this group, there is a growing desire for a system to recognise long-term contribution by awarding the benefits of the system on the basis of "earned membership" and conditionality being attached to the benefits of citizenship. We could call this the "Club" view of the welfare state. Coming into line with many other countries (e.g. Australia, USA), Goodhart argues, the UK is realising the need to make clearer the distinctive benefits of citizenship and seeking to increase its value by putting up barriers to entry. This is being signalled more clearly, in part by controlling access to public goods more carefully (e.g. Identity cards, citizenship points).

> "There's not a lot that's good about living in Britain – I'd like to say the NHS, but what we've got left of the NHS… well, if my kids were ill I'd like to feel they'd be treated but I'm not sure." (London)

The tension between the "official" and voluntary sector view of the issue of UK poverty (i.e. as a collective responsibility) and the "grassroots" view (i.e. an individual "free-rider" strategy/choice), seems to bear out this analysis. The public response to our statistics and the assumptions contained within them, in both phases of research,

seemed to indicate that the sector sometimes *assumes* shared "Big Tent" values, which may not always be the case.

> "There is a problem with how benefits are dished out
> … I think people calculate and they do take a
> conscious decision to go on benefits" *(Leeds)*

The public have certain expectations of charity communications, They assume that "charity" will always try to bring them back towards the "Big Tent" by appealing to morality, ethics, collective responsibility for the vulnerable and so on. The public survey their fellow citizens, in what appears to be a hardening and more competitive world, and feel afraid and threatened. They do not expect that NGOs and charities will acknowledge these feelings of fear and threat. This, in itself, suggests an opening for communications – voices from the sector who do acknowledge this prevailing point of view might have the chance to cut through.

Both models can exist in parallel in the minds of the public involved in the research. They are aired in response to different issues. Whilst the "Big Tent" model draws sustenance from charitable communications and the like, the power of mass media (such as lurid stories of benefit cheating in popular newspapers and reality TV) seem to have a greater influence and steer people towards their "Club" mentality.

Those attempting to engage the public's support for anti-poverty policies will need to recognise these competing and diverging worldviews and seek some kind of accommodation with them; or otherwise pursue a highly targeted strategy focusing only on those who clearly believe in the "Big Tent".

For many audiences, including some that surprised us such as the group of university students from Manchester, the "Club" mentality appears to be in the ascendancy. This creates assumptions about the shape of society in the UK today through which the messages from the poverty sector will be interpreted.

> "I think it's a problem [people living without resources]
> but if the Government were going to sort it out then I'd
> worry where they were going to take the money from.
> That could put us in a worse position and affect even
> more people. And it depends if they've already had the
> opportunity to get themselves out of it, if they've tried.
> If people don't try then why should we try, I know that's
> not very nice of me to say but it's true" (*Manchester*)

2.4 A key part of the communications challenge is to "define the demographic". Who needs helping?

The grid below resulted from analysis of the group discussions and seems to encapsulate the mental model which people are drawing on to inform their judgements about who in society deserves help and support:

Figure 5: the way the public map UK society
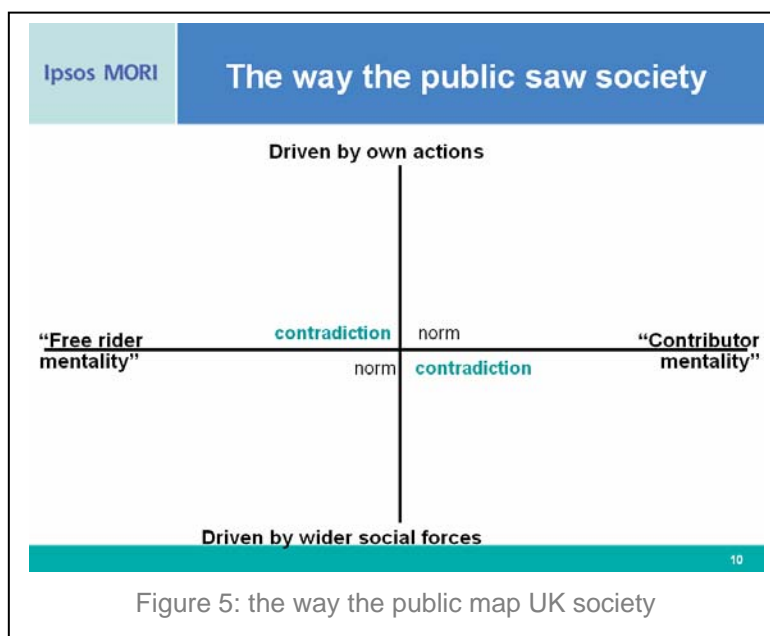
Our audiences carry with them this unconscious "model" or map of the types of people and attitudes which exist in today's society. This map gives us a way to understand what we heard in the groups - that the idea of a person who might be contributing to the "club" - or want to do so, but also needs support - is a hard concept for people to internalise, so is often rejected.

This map of society was populated by stereotypical "norm" characters, all activated in the audience's mind when we began to talk about alleviating poverty. One powerful "contradiction" already exists – the selfish, self determined free-riding anti-social individual, taking the system for what he can get. (Group 1 on the diagram below). He was described as a "scrounger" or "skiver" as opposed to a "striver". Lots of pejorative and emotive language was used to describe this category (e.g. "chavs").

Figure 6: the imaginary people who populate this map
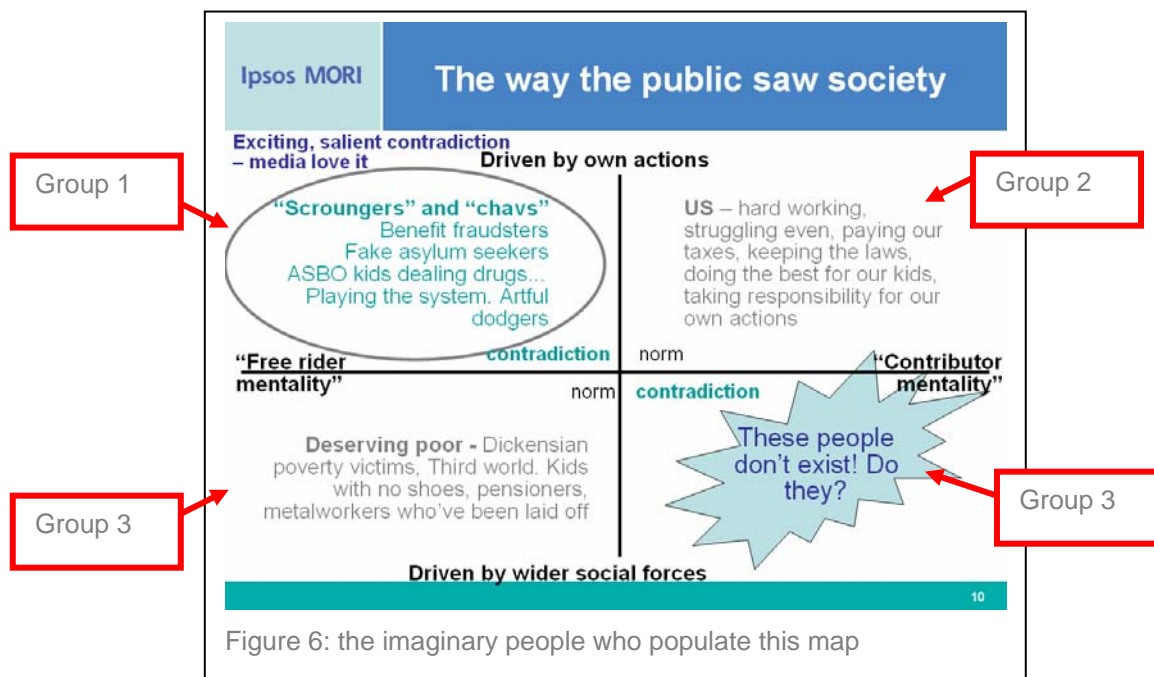
The well-trodden stereotypical territory, which the public *imagine* charities will address, is a model where the people in group 2 give help and resources to the people in group 3. It asks "us" (Group 2) to sympathise with the "deserving poor" (Group 3). This misses the contemporary target of many poverty analysts and compaigners in two ways: firstly, the public does not believe that great numbers of abject passive victims live today in Britain; and secondly, it does nothing to allay the underlying fear that if we give to the poor, "scroungers" (Group 1) will hijack the resources which should be destined for those of us in the "club" (Group 2).

But when asked to consider someone who, for example, works hard and wants to contribute (or actually does so) but finds themselves nonetheless in poverty (Group 4) our audiences' vocabulary dried up spectacularly. Every attempt to identify such a category prompted furrowed brows and silence, or else a hasty attempt to explain away their impoverished condition with reference to either a serious personal 'flaw' such as drug addiction or an exceptional event such as a debilitating illness.

This indicates the key **communications challenge** in this area – to present, in a motivating way, a person who is minded to be a "contributor" but who is nonetheless poor. Someone who is personally driven and motivated, but suffers adversely a result of wider social forces; to counter the image that the disadvantaged in society are freeloading.

A further challenge is to take the sting out of the controversial "free-rider" category (Group 1). This involves acknowledging people's suspicion of this group and communicate how people can be converted from this category into a more positive one, or at least have their actions explained in light of the perverse or unfair way in

which society makes it necessary to behave in this way. However communicating about this group will be extremely delicate and is therefore one to handle with care.

2.4 Poverty is seen as the net result of choices and priorities

Having encountered the contradiction in the idea of a contributor who is poor through no fault of their own meant we then met a great deal of resistance, particularly among the more affluent participants, to the notion of people "finding themselves in", or continuing to "live in" poverty.

There was strong resistance to the idea of the "victim" in UK poverty, tempered by acceptance of this in 3rd World contexts and a deep-seated belief that people make choices which lead them down the wrong path. These choices were seen as becoming apparent in retrospect, by which time it is too late.

> "They've just made some bad decisions in their lives and they've not got their parents to bail them out, and all of a sudden they've hit a sticky wicket" *(Leeds)*

Choosing to "live for the moment" or "have it easy" were often cited as the main reason for sinking into poverty. After years of economic stability, Britain is seen as a society of choices and opportunities, with *perceived* high employment. This 'choice defence' is incredibly strong (to the point of absurdity) at the upper end of the income distribution.

> "In Cuba people are sent to be trained – they have to go on a course whether they like it or not" (*Newcastle*)

When making the choice defence against evidence showing the extent of the problem, people reach for outlandish explanations to account for the dissonance from their view.

> "They probably don't wear coats because it's fashionable not to" (*Leeds*)

> "People in Cornwall don't need so much money – they can go out and cut trees down for fuel." *(London)*

This illustrates the mental model of "people like us", the strivers, vs "freeloaders" or the skivers.

On the one hand people explain that people (like themselves) avoid poverty by "having a vision" or "aspirations" or "drive" and therefore making sound strategic decisions that, whilst uncomfortable for them in the short term (getting a job, saving for a deposit), made for long term success.

On the other hand, those in poverty are deemed to have created their situation through a series of poor tactical choices at all stages in their lives (bunking school,

going to parties, drinking and smoking, getting pregnant), owing to a fundamental moral weakness and/or a lack of guiding vision for their lives.

> "Don't go by what the government says, but by what you see out there on the street, if people try to get a job they can get one. Everyone I know who wants to work, they can, I don't know many over 50s, though, but they can too" (*London*)

This makes people highly reluctant to, in their eyes, extend emotional or physical support to those who have already 'had it easy' and now want 'another bite at the cherry'. This again underlines the need for those aiming to raise the public profile of UK poverty to put forward creative rationale for this perceived behaviour, which both highlights the context for such behaviours, and perhaps initially focuses on specific elements of deprivation which do not immediately evoke these associations. In the medium and long term, it will be important to migrate perceptions of those perceived as "scroungers/skivers" into perceptions that they are "strugglers"/"strivers". Again, this will be difficult. However, as a communications strategy, it may be more effective to go with the grain of people's beliefs by acknowledging that there are free-riders in the system, then try to explain their "scrounging" behaviour, than to simple deny the existence of "scroungers".

2.5 Fear of anti-social behaviour feels more pressing than concern about poverty

> "Society is getting colder and harder… nobody cares about me, so why should I care about them?" *(Newcastle)*

When we began discussing life in Britain, the "respect agenda" came up immediately. Perceived loss of community, of social capital and infrastructure, of politeness, of respect, of family values inculcated in the family; increased coarseness ("spitting on buses"), agression and rudeness are top of mind for this audience – not poverty. In other qualitative MORI research over recent years we have charted a gloomier and more pessimistic mood slowly developing in the British public; over recent years, the authors of this report have noticed, when moderating group discussions on a variety of social issues, that public descriptions of life in Britain has become darker. Certainly, participants in this research often felt intimidated and outraged. The sense of isolation and work/life pressures, as well as fear of others, is tangible. This is perhaps at odds with the outward prosperity of the UK.

The threat is perceived as coming from a new underclass of "have-nots" in society, a sense of menace coming from a group who seemed to lack respect or consideration for others.

> " - People are self absorbed, there's random muggings, violence.
>
> - No discipline, no morals

- Children aren't mentored properly, they think they can get away with anything" (*Newcastle*)

This was by no means associated with all people on low incomes, but poverty as a result of bad choices, "scrounging" and lack of respect seems to be a fatally easy connection to make. Perhaps borrowing from policy messages, a strong demand for a society based on "respect", "decency" and ethical values were often woven into people's discussions of poverty issues.

"We have a system, or supposedly have a system, which tries to cover all sorts of people. Unfortunately it doesn't because, you talk about responsibilities, there are quite a few people who live in this country and have always lived here, they've abused that responsibility, for whatever reason. We need to stop that." (*Birmingham*)

A challenge for communications is to disentangle the drivers of poverty from the problems of the community, to take account of the fear and intimidation felt by the public, and to reassure them that interventions will not increase the numbers of 'antisocial freeloaders'.

2.6 Paradoxical beliefs about material things – we all have too much, so if you don't have anything, you're probably better off!

The response in these groups suggests that a core message identifying the problem as *income* poverty – that people simply do not have enough money - may not be the strongest territory for communications.

Most of our audiences seem to hold two seemingly connected impressions of modern life. On the one hand, we've never had it so good; everyone has access to consumer durables, goods and services. On the other hand, we are losing, as suggested above, our non-materialist values of family connection, emotional richness, honesty and so on.

"Parks are free, so is culture, museums, but people don't go" (London)

The group discussions suggested that a purely income-based message about UK poverty may fail to connect with the public beyond a superficial level. Most participants tended to see income as only part of the problem (if poorer themselves), or an even more peripheral issue (if richer). They find it hard to reach the level of trusting in the message.

Of course low income still makes obvious sense to people as a defining aspect of poverty, at least in theory. People certainly talk about the richer having more choices, and money enabling people to buy their way out of trouble. It remains the simplest and most direct way to describe poverty.

However, income discussions quickly become complicated by people's varying impressions of what a "comfortable" income is, and their inability to quantify how different levels of income translate into different qualities of life. A big problem for people was explaining the perceived "bling" factor of many of those who should by official measures be described as living in poverty. The gaudily dressed "chav" (or chavvers in the NE) driving a BMW was set against those living frugally but not claiming special status or demanding sympathy. Income here was not always helpful. It was felt to come down to how it was spent and the values that underpin these choices.

> "How come people claim poverty, but are dripping in gold?"(*Newcastle*)

There is, indeed, a deep seated sense that having money might stop you being happy, or actually reduce your quality of life. In many ways this is a rationalisation, so that participants in groups did not have to engage with the difficult question of UK poverty. Overall *quality of life*, though a more diffuse concept, seems to be the way people think about poverty-related issues in a *UK* context, even though they may not always describe it this way themselves.

> "I think of the lowering of the basic wage, you're struggling to pay for gas, potatoes and pies for the kids" (*Newcastle*)

The communications challenge here is to express the **poverty of experience** felt by disadvantaged people, and to link that to the new expression of "social contributor poor through no fault of his own". This may help us overcome the barriers associated with communicating income poverty.

In Stage One of the research, some tangible aspects of poverty felt like fertile territory for talking about quality of life, and we based some of our Stage Two stimulus upon them:

- Houses/homes

- Areas and regions – participants shown video clips about blighted areas sympathised with residents, and suggested action to rejuvenate and regenerate run-down communities would help eradicate poverty

- Stress/anxiety – emotional poverty

- Time - with family; friends and self time to recharge batteries;

- Work, wages, hours

- Repetition, boredom, poverty of outlook, negative state of mind. There is a need for a narrative to explain why people can't just "shake themselves out" of this last problem of poverty.

3. Messages which work

3.1 The journey to involvement

This chapter sets out the messages which have potential to work in communicating poverty, and the order in which they can best be absorbed by the public. It suggests some ideas for further creative expression of the key themes, and ends with a summary of how we developed and tested our stimulus material. These ideas indicate the directions which seemed to be successful with the participants in this research; and can perhaps be used as a starting resource of concepts and ideas for those wishing to communicate on poverty. They do not provide a prescriptive model of ways to talk about poverty.

During this project very few participants went through the whole process of engagement with the issues. It was only in our final groups, in Birmingham, with some "soft targets" (of which more in Chapter 4) that individuals left the sessions feeling that they had a handle on UK poverty and felt interested in supporting interventions to address it. However, in all the groups there were elements of the following set of ideas which cut through. Bringing learning from all the groups together means that we can identify a set of messages, which the public respond to best when they hear them *in this order*.

The journey to involvement

Define the terms and the demographic. Who are the people in this situation? (identify as contributors, not freeloaders, and avoid "the P-word")

Which specific aspects of their lives go to make up the experience we are describing (e.g. lack of opportunity, bad housing; these can be explained more fully by each of the different organisations working on aspects of poverty)

Overarching metaphor for a broader systemic problem How do these specific problems create the broader social problem we're talking about? (i.e. Poverty, but without using the term)

What we can do about it (Leads into policy, interventions, discussion of who should act, etc)

3.2 Defining the terms and demographic

The public see how some specific problems create hardship, even for those who are "contributors to the club". It may be obvious to the sector that these problems are all facets of the wider issue of poverty. However, though each of these problems is seen

as worthy of sympathy, and could be addressed, they are not yet joined up in the public mind. The problems below are currently seen as separate issues:-

- Someone who carries out low income, shift work, at the bottom of the work heap

- Someone with no job security, so can't plan for the future, save, meet their responsibilities effectively or get educated

- Someone who has little choice but to get into debt – not to buy luxury items, but for the things they need every day. This person probably suffers from a bad credit rating, high interest rates, loan sharks, etc.

- Someone who has no extra resources to take advantage of life's opportunities when they present themselves

If we can link these ideas - in the form of someone who does his or her best, yet can't get ahead because the rules of life do not work in his or her favour – we have the best chance of communicating what 21st century poverty can be in the UK.

Currently, some groups find it very hard to internalize the idea that the rules simply don't work in favour of other social groups.

Figure 5: What is a LOLI?

> "[example of a girl with low credit rating and a hard life] I think she's really just a bit dim really, isn't she? She doesn't have a bankcard but she's got a bank account so she blatantly lost the bankcard but hasn't thought to get another one yet…and why should we pay for her to go out at night? If she goes out at night, she should be working" (*Manchester*)

'Poverty', in a perceived world of plenty, suggests the solution will be charity, given to deserving poor. It suggests the solution will be doing something **TO people** such as giving them money. **Low income and low opportunities** suggests the solution will be systemic change; doing something **WITH people**, or FOR them, and doing something TO the system; suggesting that people in poverty have a certain degree of agency, and can actively make their own choices.

We suggest creating an overarching, shared definition of the kind of person who suffers from current social ills. A new collective noun might help, though we will need to avoid victimising those we describe (such as the pejorative "chav"). An example of a head-turning, lighter approach might be the character of a "**LOLI**" (low opportunity, low income) in the popular imagination, through blogs, the press and other channels. Where the rest of us get opportunities, this character would simply not get the breaks the rest of us get, or not be in a position to take advantage of them when they occur.

Specific aspects of the LOLI life

The public supported the idea of addressing some key issues which affected LOLIs. These might be a good start point as they feel like relevant, contemporary issues in the culture generally and they resonated most quickly with the groups themselves:

- Daily debt, a credit culture which penalises the poorest, and unregulated/aggressive loan sharks

- Low/insecure wages, especially for shift workers or part time workers

- Indirect taxation – poorer people pay more at the point of sale than the rest of us

- Low educational aspirations, failing schools and sink estates leading to lack of role models

- Poor housing, lack of reliable access to basic services like water and energy, deprivation and crime leading to fear, and the strong effect all this has on quality of life

- People who have no safety nets and cannot save; this links with an increasing fear that too many sectors of society are spending on credit and will come to a sticky end.

Figure 6: some imagery which caused controversy

Righting these wrongs encourages people to think and talk about **fairness**, and to agree together that we should solve these problems, because the current system is seen to be unfair. However, starting to talk about fairness in general, *before* specifying examples tends to be rejected. It highlights the underlying tension between who is in the "British club" and who isn't. One piece of stimulus material we showed, based

on the "social contract" and a shared sense of fair play in Britain, did not resonate with our audience; it seemed too abstract.

Reform of the benefits system was spontaneously cited as the simplest and best means of tackling the poverty issues people were concerned about, i.e. stopping cheats and benefiting the genuinely needy. Tackling the debt culture by limiting people's access to credit services, and cracking down on lenders was another popular measure. Irresponsible and immoral credit services companies were largely blamed for targeting people in vulnerable financial situations.

> "If you've got your insurance and you lose your job, you think well I've never claimed on it, it'll be the first thing to go…you think you're job's OK so you buy a washing machine and then you lose your job – you can't plan really" (*Birmingham*)

> "They don't look into your background enough, they just offer it. Credit cards that come through the door offering me credit cards, I'm not even working I'm a student. To a certain degree I know then some of the responsibility lies with you but it's irresponsible and the Government should do something about that". (*Manchester*)

Just as indebtedness was perceived to arise once people are in poverty, it was also, perhaps more strongly, identified as a key factor in precipitating people's descent into poverty.

Systemic not personal problems

There is a real need to focus *first* on descriptions of the LOLI life which do not activate the prevailing belief in freeloading. We heard angry opinions time and again about the perceived choices and priorities of the poor.

> "We do pay the benefit don't we to somebody who's disadvantaged, and it does grate if they have what we consider a luxury which is Sky, a football season ticket, whatever, because we know that that's not the benefit we've given them. But if they need it, then why aren't they spending it on the basics?" (*Manchester*)

In time, we may be able to shift these opinions, but currently there is a significant barrier. If we talk about people on benefits, rather than people "struggling to survive on low paid jobs and meet their responsibilities", it makes the overall task more difficult.

3.3 Use an overarching metaphor

> Participant: "Not all people take risks – some prefer to stay safe and not move on. Oh I see – moving on is about success – how about saying you can't *not* play?"
> Moderator: "Who's got the best chance of winning?"
> Participant: "Depends where you start – some are more privileged than others". *(London)*

The research suggests that there may be mileage in drawing on a big overarching metaphor to try to capture the complexity of the issues of UK poverty and provide a platform on which to communicate either at a specific or general level about different aspects of the subject. There are caveats associated with this approach, which we go on to detail below.

We explored a couple of metaphors with potential, one in which we explained society in ecological terms (i.e. as an ecosystem) and another in which we used the metaphor of "life is a game".

Response to the ecosystem idea suggested there was scope for future development, but of the two, the game concept was given the most exposure; the participants were more prepared to run with it.

This was the notion of "life as a game" as a theoretical and communications metaphor in which people in society were all players. A point to make upfront is that this must be carefully handled, to avoid appearing to trivialise issues around poverty. However, for the general public, this is a potentially rich way to make a highly complex system (social structure) comprehensible, accessible and communicable.

We are a gaming culture at present. Sales of games and games systems themselves are ever increasing, and in more subtle ways we see individuals as actors playing in a much wider environment, with a range of personalised skills and experiences[1]. Life could be seen as the following kind of game:

- A game we are all forced to play, even though some of us start without the resources to win.

- Not snakes and ladders, where you judge your game relative to the others playing – more of a computer game where you have to beat the environment.

Therefore LOLIs could be described in this game, with certain attributes:

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[1] Here are just two examples of this underlying trend: the modern "CV" with its lists of transferable skills, helping us to manage our own careers as we move through jobs. Another is our current fascination with TV "social game shows" where interpersonal skills, rather than knowledge, lead to winning (such as Big Brother, Fool Around With My Boyfriend, Wife Swap and so on). Board games in childhood, war games in politics, sport, and interactive computer games like the Sims help us feel close to the feeling that life and gaming are connected.

- No special magic skills to start with.

- Never get another throw at the dice if they make a mistake/get knocked back.

Though we were only able to evaluate this idea to a limited extent in the groups, given the need for more developed stimulus on the subject, we feel it has scope for application to different facets of the poverty and life chances theme:

- Allows us to talk about **interplay of collective and individual**. An explanation for society which accepts individual volition plays a part, as well as the influence of wider factors (e.g. other players, rules, chance, progression).

- Is theoretically robust. There is a great deal of **social science** literature on this.

- A rich and central part of **modern** culture. Brings poverty concept into the 21st century.

- Rich vein of **imagery and vocabulary** that cross-cuts both subjects; e.g. fair play, level playing field, playing the system, play by the rules, loaded dice, folding…

- Renders **stigmatised behaviours** understandable e.g. free-riders and cheats are making tactical choices that are understandable <u>given the incentives offered them by the structure of the game</u>

- Allows for explanation and engagement with **structural factors** (the underlying rules of the game)

- Allows for **random external factors** e.g. Chance card: lose job, go back 10 spaces. Go direct to jail, do not pass go, do not collect £200

- Can describe **longitudinal effects**. Different paths, outcomes and life chances.

- Finally, every game has both winners and losers.

Communications could highlight the structural problems inherent in the poverty phenomenon, and build support for reform and external intervention.

One communications strand could contrast the Official rules of UK society:

"Anyone can make it if they try"

with the Real rules of UK society:

"Anyone born into poverty will likely stay there." etc

The Game can be used in communications either as an underlying framework or explicitly and tactically. A "rigged" interactive game, which forces players to negotiate the "no win" choices of poverty as a player, might have mileage as a viral tactical piece of advertising, for instance.

There are, however, some **important caveats**. Unless handled well, this could all be interpreted as making light of the condition of hardship.

A further real concern is that the surface response from many people is "life is never fair". They may see a game as the wrong metaphor, as rules are designed to create a level playing field, and a fair basis to compete. Though this could be turned to advantage, (by showing how stacked the "unofficial" rules of society are against certain people, and acknowledging that while no game is ever entirely fair, rules can be changed to make them fair*er*) communications must be carefully designed to avoid giving the impression of a naïve message.

Moreover, of course, there would be little point to many games *without* winners and losers. We can accept (and people themselves point out) that there will always be some inequality in society and uneven outcomes, as in any game. This communication would focus on the idea that we can change the fairness of the place people start from and the obstacles they encounter. However a message that seems to pit players against each other in society, whilst ultimately reflecting people's worldview, would be inflammatory. It would therefore have to be positioned as playing "against life itself".

Different game concepts can be targeted at different audiences, but there is a risk of diluting and confusing the metaphor with multiple use on different issues. Also overfamiliarity and overuse could see it run dry as a useful tool.

3.4 Creative and tactical hooks

We have included in the appendix the full set of **images** we looked at at stage 2 and the **response models** we developed along with our advertising experts, and used to design them. (More on this at 3.5).

We have not set out the detailed response to each one, but pulled out the ideas, themes and creative ideas which worked *across* the territories. The information was very rich and varied, which meant we gained a great deal of tactical information on each image we showed. This information was less useful strategically, so has been summarised.. It is worth saying that even when audiences engaged with the most involving images and ideas, in the absence of an overall story about UK poverty, the real engagement, in our group discussions, with the overarching idea of UK poverty remained quite limited for most. Responses depended on underlying views of society, and on the order in which the messages were heard. Therefore it is more constructive to identify the parts which work, across territories. They are to be found below. Not all of them yet are neatly tied into strategic insights for communicating poverty overall, but they may provide valuable "ways in" for future communications.

The Campaign for More Breaks

There was potential in the idea of dramatising the moment when a LOLI is given a break, or is able to take it up. This idea would catch attention because the public expect to hear from successful Britons about their own willpower, strength of purpose and determination as the factors which helped them to succeed. This campaign could identify that everyone needs not only grit and pluck, but support systems (a role model teacher, or a social/activity club for instance) and opportunities to open up in front of them, in order to succeed.

> "If you're just being offered debt all the time and you've got no willpower to say no then I do think it's a bit of half and half really. Especially once you're in a lot of debt it's easy just to keep on going and get to that stage, you don't know anyone who's got out of it, so you say I might as well carry on." (*Manchester*).

It could introduce the concepts of mentors, cultural education, and the value of rich experiences as well as money in beating poverty. It would also fit with the prevailing cultural belief that everyone has the responsibility to seize a chance, and explain why some people don't seem to seize the chances we assume they have.

> "If you haven't done well leaving school and getting your first job, you wait and it turns into 2 years of no job, where do you go, you go to a bank with no ID and passport, you can get nothing – and you've started that cycle!" (*London*)

Groundhog Day – Poverty is neverending, hard, repetitive work

Imagery around feeling "imprisoned by your own life" felt very powerful. This worked best when prison imagery, such as bars in the supermarket, prevents access to ordinary foods rather than luxuries or treats. Or, when it cast simple foods (like Jaffa Cakes) in the role of luxuries. At best, this shows the extra work people in poverty have to do, which the rest of us don't.

> "Nothing seems to change, you go to work 9-5 and then do it all over again" (*Newcastle*)

This can perhaps mobilise support for a call to action on education – especially about **food, cooking, home skills.** This idea works best with those who are closest to the "Big Tent" way of thinking.

The prison imagery has some caveats – we should avoid pictures which look like depression, to avoid giving the impression that poverty is about inner fears/abilities when it's really about outside factors.

Some participants spoke about the "Learn Direct" gremlin – images like this, though powerful, might give the impression that overcoming poverty is only about the willpower of the LOLI himself.

Using statistics to express the experience of living with low opportunity, low income

The most surprising/striking and disruptive statistics seemed to be those which related to the experience of poverty.

For instance, the figures about the incidence of those living in substandard housing, cut through; but crucially, only when seen in conjunction with the definition of what substandard means. The statistics can form a way in to discussion of the progress of area poverty – councils in thrall to slum landlords, badly designed buildings and blocks and so on – which allowed people to realise that "giving everyone somewhere to live" was not as simple as it might appear.

However, whilst most participants supported the idea of area-based regeneration and community renewal, there was uncertainty about the extent to which such would succeed unless local authorities were prepared to turf out the few "undesirable" families who were felt to cause all the problems in an area.

Poverty of experience NOW, and money as the engine for opportunity

Poverty of experience hits home for the public more than messages about poverty of income. Money does not buy happiness, but does buy freedom to choose, quality of

life and so on. Of course, defining any "experience" in terms of fun or leisure activities works less well, as the public suspect LOLIs of freeloading at their expense.

However there is mileage in talking about "character forming" experiences such as the chance to travel, meet and talk to different kinds of people, get a more mature and rounded way of looking at life, take time to think and plan, and so on. When the public realise that LOLIs are denied these chances, they start to understand why some of them seem to make "bad choices".

When talking about life chances, and the possibility that LOLIs will miss life's opportunities, the most powerful way to do so is to focus on the experiences that the person will miss NOW.

Talking about narrowing of opportunities in the <u>future</u> works less well. The public try to find ways to claim a bad outcome is not inevitable, and talk about individual volition, work ethic, and the discipline of individuals to avoid the pitfalls of the future.

This creative territory, focusing on the awful possibility of a disastrous future outcome, tends to be used for drink-driving advertising. It works strongly here, because the advertising creates a response in the viewer where he inwardly vows to change his behaviour and take action. Unless there is a specific response, like this, demanded of the audience, it can be confusing to show a limited <u>future</u> for people in poverty. It tends to focus audience attention on the need for the individual in that situatuion to change his behaviour to avoid the disastrous outcome of the future, which creates a diffuse and abstract train of thought. When the audience realise that those in poverty are suffering NOW, the thought is much clearer, more concrete, and more engaging.

There may, however, be creative potential in reflecting on the opportunities which have <u>already</u> been missed – the "Think of all the Einsteins we could have had" approach, though this is still a difficult area to work in.

> "If you target an area where people haven't had much input in the outcomes of their lives, you're going to be more sympathetic to their needs. But when you're looking at older people you're still thinking, well, they could have done this, this and this" (*Birmingham*)

A life more ordinary – what we take for granted at work

The only view that united all our groups when they thought about life in Britain was the shared feeling that life in the UK, today, is about working hard, and the cost of living is high, for everyone - young people, families and the elderly. There may be scope to leverage this feeling by highlighting the *even greater* difficulties faced by some LOLIs to sustain the kind of normal working life that we all take for granted; emphasising the fact that even the poorest people have pride and want to look like they're keeping it all together.

> "I got my first payment after 5 weeks after being on the dole. I f
> I didn't have friends and family I would have starved, and after
> a point you can't keep asking." (*Newcastle*)

Examples suggested were anecdotal, such as:-

- The working man who goes for a job interview with only his bus fare in his pocket, and can't afford to buy a stick of chewing gum to freshen his breath before going into the interview.

- The working woman who can go to the local pub with a friend, has enough money for one modest drink, but comes home to an electricity meter that's run out of coins, and a house lacking warm blankets and curtains.

Again, the easiest messages to get across here tell a story about those who are already working, rather than those on benefits. People communicating with the public about poverty will need to take a strategic decision about whether focusing attention here can work in the context of broader messages; there are likely to be some interventions that can be communicated well with this imagery, and some which can't.

Taking the sting out of scrounging

Perhaps at a later stage of this communication process, there will be an interesting chance to explain to the public that the "scroungers and skivers" may not be so different from the 'rest of us' after all. Using the game of life metaphor to explain the role of the environment or ecology on our "tactics" and behaviour has potential to convey that everyone plays based on the strategy that makes most sense to them at the time, and in their environment. We can then introduce messages which suggest that if scrounging is adaptive, rather than evil, the solution lies in changing the environment around the "scroungers".

4. Targeting

4.1 What affects views?

Both demographic and attitudinal factors have a role to play in affecting views; age, geographical location and political leanings were all important drivers of perception. Overall, it is the underlying belief in the "club" versus the "big tent" which tended to be the strongest factor in predicting support or otherwise for the anti-poverty agenda.

However, it is important to mention that this is a **qualitative** piece of work, and the groups we identified are not linked to statistical proportions of the public as a whole. The BSA data, identifying liberals and sceptics, is useful in that it shows that broad proportions of the population align more or less equally with smallclub/sceptic and big tent ideas/liberal ideas. These data also identify sub-groups, such as the more educated as being more likely to be liberal. Our research suggests that some socio-demographic indicators might be useful, particularly whether the individual lives in an area where poverty and affluence live side by side.

However, creating sociodemographic and attitudinal targets for these messages is not as simple as aligning targets with the broad liberal/sceptic definition. Public ideas on poverty did not remain stable during the course of our discussions, We found that liberalism and scepticism were more complex than they seemed, and that demographic indicators of attitude cannot necessarily be relied upon.

Therefore, it is not possible to pin down a target and their opinions with absolute confidence. Despite the predictability of some views, which we go on to discuss, individuals showed quite startling shifts and changes of opinions during each discussion.

- The same groups <u>changed opinions</u> at different points in the discussion – often several times, and depending on the way the discussion as a whole was developing.

- Quite <u>different</u> groups made the same points and <u>shared the same perspective</u> at times even when they were at different points on the spectrum of big tent/small tent and closeness to / distance from poverty.


Figure 7: Veering
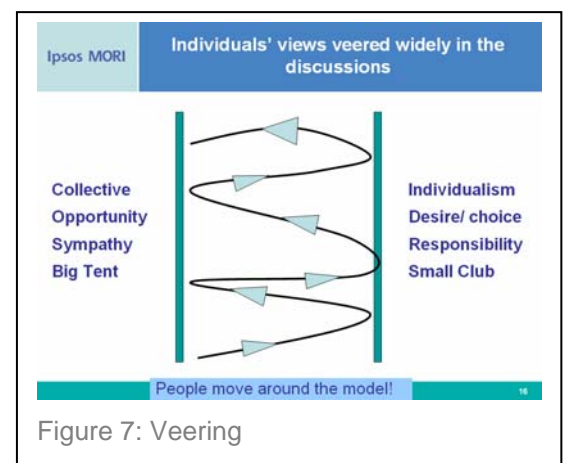
Not only did the individual's position on the big tent/club spectrum play a part, but his or her **perceived closeness to poverty** was also important.

Figure 8: What affects views
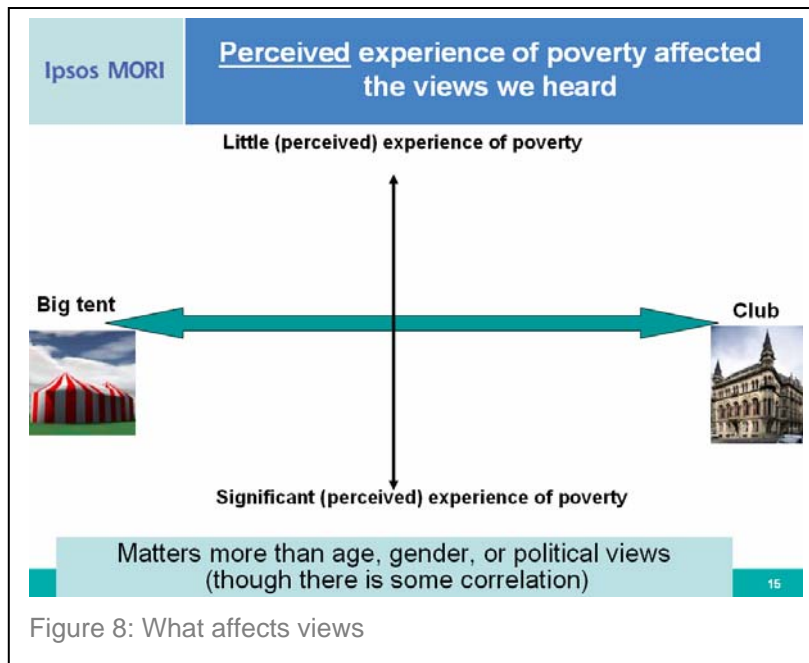
Those who felt they had experienced poverty themselves were sympathetic to the struggles of LOLIs, especially where they were portrayed as hard working (though they were still keen to distance themselves from the terminology of "poverty").

> "The Government throw money at these people [freeloaders] but what about hard working, working class people?"
> (*Newcastle*)

Those, however, who felt they had merely seen poverty from the outside tended to be less generous in their interpretations of the "bad choices" made by those in hardship, they felt more aggreived by the sight of, for instance, those on benefits with luxuries like Sky TV.
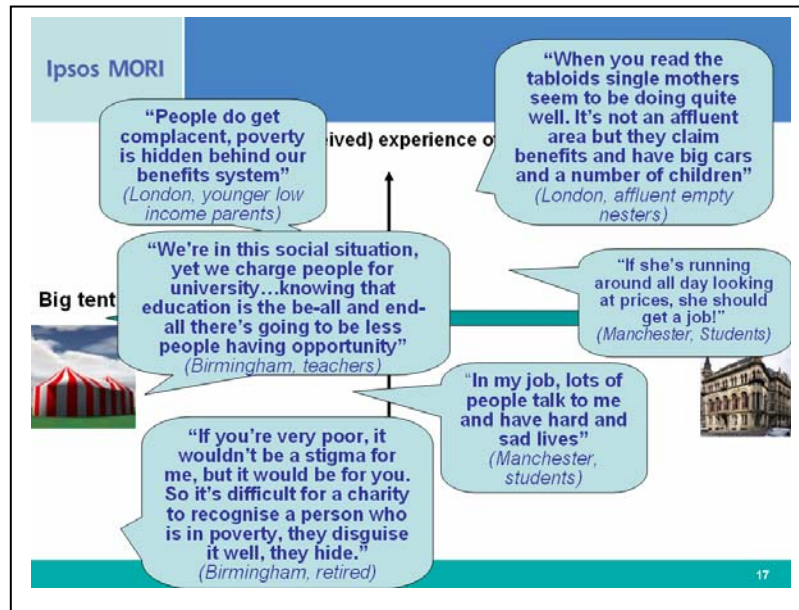
There were several other demographic predictors of views:

a) Regional differences between North and South

Overall, London groups are far more sceptical about the prevalence of poverty and the need to intervene. They have a sense that opportunities are plentiful and that a variety of life chances is open to all. They have reduced experiences of poverty, which is reflected in the BSA social attitudes data (report forthcoming from JRF)..

In the North, particularly in Leeds and Newcastle, participants initially saw debt as a positive 'choice' to buy into an instant gratification society. However, they were more susceptible to stimulus and prompting around people becoming trapped, seduced by things they could not afford as an antidote to the burden and drudgery of life. They could see that when 'struggling and juggling' the fall into debt may not be a lifestyle choice. The income disparities between the South East and the North West were obviously important drivers of these attitudes.

b) Lifestage

Life stages polarise opinions. For some, having families seemed to entrench people's views more strongly, making them less likely to empathise or feel "liberal" towards those deemed to have the wrong priorities or having made the wrong choices. For example, in the London groups there was a sentiment that if 'I struggle for my children, so should you!'

Focusing on children in communications is potentially risky, as it is so easy for children to be portrayed as the "innocent or deserving" poor. If a communications strategy is based on this, it will probably not cut through as it will not challenge

important assumptions and underlying attitudes, particularly about those children's parents and their level of responsibility for their children's situation.

However there may be more innovative ways to talk about children in communications. In Newcastle the idea of having children made people more sympathetic to the dangers of poverty: that when 'juggling and struggling' you have more to lose if something goes wrong; and that the environment may be even harder for your children, which illustrated the spiral of poverty very graphically. Thinking about children also spurred previously sceptical people on to consider how unpleasant it would be to live in relative poverty:

> "You should have a certain standard of living. If you
> want to take the kids to the pictures you shouldn't have
> to save for three weeks"
> (*Newcastle*)

c) Income

Higher income people tended to be less likely to believe that "people like me" could fall into poverty. They would attribute their own success to personal strength of character. Also, they tended to feel that everyone works hard and poor people don't have it any tougher than the rest of society.

4.2 So who to target?

Figure 9: The value of different targets
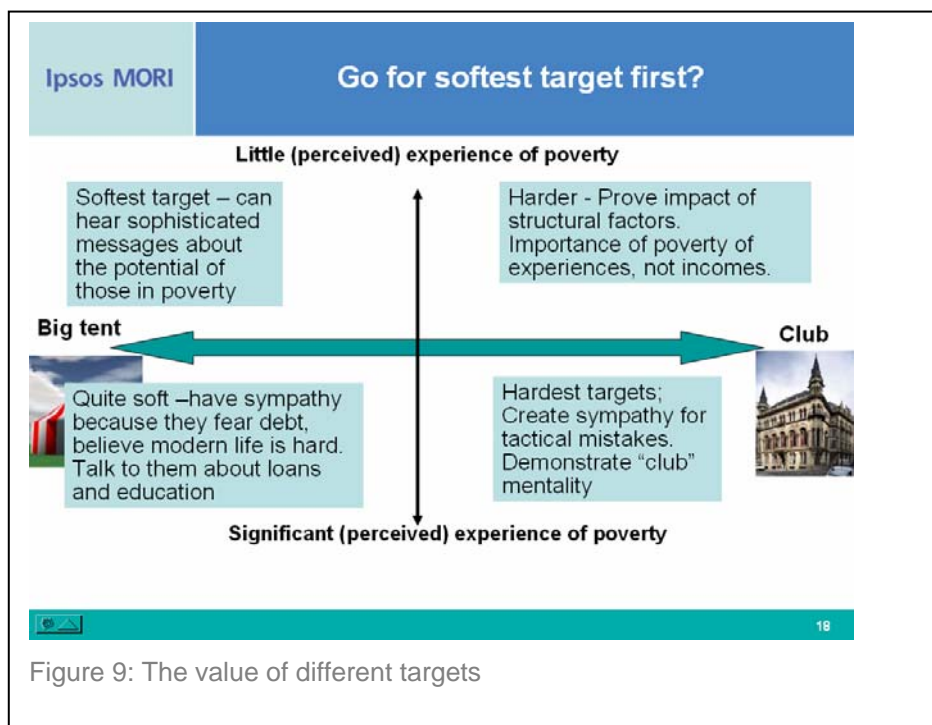
Big Tenters

This group are easier to move through awareness to trust, however at this point they stall. To move towards a transactional relationship, they will need to hear about policies. They find external authorities relatively convincing (i.e. statistics and evidence) as they are already more willing to accept structural reasons for poverty.

They have a limited appetite for redistribution. Those with little experience of poverty are the classic "middle class liberals" who are able to hear sophisticated messages about life chances; still they are reluctant to forego their positional advantages for minimal benefit, so really want to hear about specific solutions to specific problems.

Small Clubbers

This group resist vigorously any understanding or awareness of the issues, and certainly resist trust. They are sceptical about authorities such as NGOs but place faith in personal and anecdotal evidence from those they know, and the voice of the media especially on anti-social-behaviour issues. They place a heavy emphasis on individual factors. Those with no experience of poverty find it impossible to imagine that people don't have enough money in modern Britain, but easier to imagine poverty of experiences. Those with experience of poverty tend to be the most bitter about those around them in society who are felt to be taking more than their fair share. They advocate punitive action against the free-riders before action to help genuine cases. For these groups, there was a real need to produce genuine examples of "people like me" and to steer away from those who have made feckless

choices. At a later stage, it may be possible to create sympathy for those who have made bad tactical decisions – but this is a battle for the future.

In summary - there are "low hanging fruit" who may be the easiest to target based on demographics and attitudes.

- Those who feel they have been close to poverty themselves (e.g. older, poorer)

- Teachers and other front-line workers who see poverty when they are at work; these could be "opinion formers".

- "Big tenters"; especially the constituency of affluent liberals

However, this research suggests that **more people are moving towards the "club"** model. Though qualitative research cannot illustrate statistical proportions of the population, it can identify trends in thought and the strength of feeling on different issues. In this research, we heard from many participants that the "Small Club" mentality is all around them. It was hard for individuals to judge issues such as, for instance, social cohesion or life chances without coming into contact with the more defensive, Small Club set of beliefs, where social fragmentation is always around the corner. These beliefs could be expressed in the media, or by other individuals.

> "You hear about tough life, well then you always think it
> breeds the sort of society we've got now, where if you can
> get something by legitimate means you go out and get it
> the other way." (*London*)

therefore, though we are not able to judge accurately whether these "soft targets" are a large or small proportion of the population as a whole, this research does suggest that the strength of feeling of the "harder targets" may prove a significant barrier to communication.

This may mean we have to engage the Clubbers in a way they will find appealing. This underlines the importance of ensuring that any communication which looks for empathy focuses on the contributors, not anyone who could be seen as a freeloader; and links to speciific policy changes to avoid scepticism – because the Clubbers will be assessing it.

A debate about poverty will, to some extent, explore the question of "how big a tent we want". An internal debate for people communicating about poverty is to explore how far they wish to appear to share the worldview of the Clubbers. If they do not, they may risk missing the target, whereas if they do, this may involve using a style or tone of communication unfamiliar to the sector.

4.3 Channels for communication

The public felt that there was no authority credibly talking about these issues at present; which was one of the reasons for their difficulty in engaging with the information they were shown. They perceived problems in how these issues are usually addressed:

- **Papers** are imagined to take up partisan standpoints and play mind games

- **"Daily Mail"/ tabloid** approach makes problems hard to assess. Doom sells for a good reason

- Lots of **extremes** mean that people find it hard to tell how serious problems are

- Press fuel **antagonism** – "the poor who aren't scroungers get tarred with the same brush"

- **Politicians** are associated with short-termism, promising solutions to problems we know have always existed.

However, there is a strong news narrative within the whole concept of the LOLI which could be disseminated through conventional media channels. This "news" could be that we have missed a whole group of LOLI people, who are actually a large part of our society. In depth TV **documentaries** or fly-on-the-wall programmes are also imagined to be powerful methods to get this across.

To create a real buzz around the subject, however, will require a coherent approach across many channels including word of mouth, guerrilla marketing, grassroots and electronic communications, advocacy, and the use of opinion formers. However, it is important that communications should not feel 'official' – the government should not be seen as orchestrating them. Using an overarching metaphor, such as the game, may help different bodies to bring a coherent 'story' together.

Respondents also suggested the campaign should involve third parties – neither NGOs / charities nor government – who are known for their strength of belief, integrity, and clear ethical stance. Shaun Bailey (youth worker and journalist, famed for his background on the streets and his tough stance on discipline as a way to bring structure to the lives of disaffected youth) was mentioned, as someone who has lived 'on the front line' and experienced poverty.

> "I'd believe someone who's worked their way out of it – we've done it for ourselves and want to help you. Not someone behind a ten grand desk. People who know what they're talking about and have done it, not just having ideas and opinions …Someone who says I was born into poverty, and I did this that and the other, not someone in a 200k job." (*London*)

5. Next Steps

5.1 What would be necessary to develop greater support for anti poverty policies?

The following is needed.

Awareness – to be built on

- Defining the "missing demographic", bringing it to life in a believable way

- Overarching theme to tie it together (but used with care, so as not to over-simplify)

- Tactical hooks to grab attention and invoke empathy

- Passionate, charismatic, authoritative leadership

- Targeted messaging and channels

Trust – to be built on

- Accessible evidence and statistics to reinforce, not lead communications

- Narratives and stories that enter popular myth

- Real examples

- Mechanisms to build genuine empathy and a sense of identification with the missing demographic ("LOLI"s)

Transaction

To engage with the problem, beyond simply trusting it exists, the public will require messages about

…. **what can be done**, on each specific issue

….**who** will carry it forward

….and how **they** can contribute

Fostering public support could well involve linking these to a bigger idea or "meta-message". We indicate that "The Game" could be an overarching idea. When getting this message across, the channels will be just as important as the message.

Greater co-ordination and joint working between poverty organisations may help in this process. Unity is strength – if many voices sign up to a shared conception of UK poverty, and a shared objective for all policy interventions, this will send a strong message.   The shared objective could be as simple as -

"Making life better for Lolis"

This research suggests that this is the most likely way to achieve cut through for the general public. A shared narrative, such as the one below, may help. However, it is important to express complex ideas like the game sensitively, and to research different expressions of the idea, to ensure that communications hit the right note.

Life is like a game – we all get different chances and resources. We all try and play as well as we can, against the "game environment". The other players we meet can help or hinder us.

However - there are "LOLIs"(low income, low opportunity groups) playing in our society's game, and the rules are fixed against them. The dice are loaded and the house always wins. There are more of them than you'd think, and they play a lose-lose game.

This is how they live – hard work, barriers to the simplest things, only thinking one day, one hour ahead. No security. Can't lead 'normal' lives, pay more than rest of us all the time. Is it any wonder they seek distraction?

Nowadays more than ever (it may surprise you to learn) you need money and chances to succeed, as well as grit. If you've got no security, you can't grab those chances or if you do and it doesn't go well, it could be worse than ever.

How can we change things? Get more chances into the system for those who are struggling, and unable to contribute to the common good. Tactical solutions e.g. sort out debt/loans, increase insurance and security, housing, and income at key points in life.

Appendix

Response models and details of mood boards and other stimulus used in stage two of the research.

How did we develop the territories?

In this project we had considerable discussions around stimulus materials for messaging: the relative merits of balance of rational and emotional, of fact and narrative, personal and general. Qualitative stimulus, in the form of images, life histories and case studies seemed effective at breaking down generic stereotypes and generalised observations and making aspects of poverty tangible and immediate. It enabled people to quickly start to project into these situations and talk about poverty-related issues in a more animated, personalised and empathetic way. Statistics which we hoped might have a "shock factor" and created very little effect unless they existed within a narrative which itself overcame some of the larger barriers to believing in poverty.

A useful framework we used in developing stimulus was the Response Model. We identified the desired outcome of each communication theme, the mechanism by which we intend it to have an effect and, crucially, the insights into British society which, we believed, would make it chime with the audience.

Communication about: "Struggling and juggling"	
What is the desired outcome when it comes to the target's relationship with the issues?	Create an emotional, visceral understanding that part of living in poverty is an almost impossible, and sometimes completely impossible, process of juggling hundreds of different problems every day. And thereby identify with people in poverty And thereby support the agenda that something should be done
How is it trying to encourage that response? What do we want the audience to feel? What myths does it bust?	We want the audience to sense the precariousness of life (in general? Of people in poverty?) It shows a struggle - but not a struggle like a fight or climbing a mountain – imagery is there to evoke staying focused, balance, never drop anything, working really hard, like balancing on a spinning top. You're always at full stretch, always reactive, this takes up all your time. We want the audience to feel that this active work is an inevitable part of being in poverty – it's not about being lazy or about having your personal agency taken away.

What is it about the target "consumer" that means that it is relevant to be saying this?	They can identify with the underlying emotions. People in all 3 locations felt that life in Britain is Hard – we are all working really hard and thinking about life as "work". We are all juggling commitments on work level / personal level and often feel we are at full stretch. Busy – every minute of the day is full of some organisational thing that has to be done –often we have to react to circumstances > plan.
What is it about the issue that means this is a relevant way to talk about it	Anecdotes about tough decisions and hard work are true e.g. "if your fridge breaks, you'll have to get into debt". "I go round all the time seeking out the cheapest things and it takes all my time to walk to supermarket, carry heavy stuff back etc"; "deciding whether to buy food or shoes for the kid"
What's the story about?	We don't know yet – but qualitative, anecdotal, building one thing up as well as another. Needs to be supported with good reasons why the person can't just "stop". And then – and then- and then-. Chaos. Unpredictability. "Coming unstuck." A quicksand? The more you struggle the more you sink. Needs external help.
How is that story brought alive?	TBD

This became a mood board entitled "Hard Hard work; live at full stretch to make ends meet, can't ever stop to take a breath or make a plan" and supporting anecdotal evidence about strugglers, including images of quicksand.

Communication about: "Intolerable, relentless burden/groundhog day"	
What is the desired outcome when it comes to the target's relationship with the issues?	Create an emotional, visceral understanding that part of living in poverty is a grinding, soul-sapping tedious worry and boredom. And thereby feel that the reasons people don't work their way out of poverty is that it's an exhausting insurmountable task. And thereby feel that they could get stuck in the same position. And thereby support an agenda which would offer people in poverty relief from the grind / burden so that they can get their personal sense of agency back again.
How is it trying to encourage that response? What do we want the audience to feel? What myths does it bust?	By bringing home to people the fact that while they may think about those "bumping along the bottom" of society about once a year – those people are grinding on day in and day out. We want the audience to feel that its not laziness that stops people getting on their bikes – it's total exhaustion! We want them to feel that though people may have enough in their budget for basic resources (unlike people in absolute poverty) the effect of living at this basic level for a lifetime can be incredibly wearing.
What is it about the target "consumer" that means that it is relevant to be saying this?	They can identify with the underlying emotions. Everyone knows what it's like to do something boring and unpleasant. Everyone knows the feeling of "needing a holiday" – but do we know what might happen to us if we never ever got one?
What is it about the issue that means this is a relevant way to talk about it	Limited resources are a fact of life for people living in poverty – we're not talking about absolute poverty, but this is a legitimate way to talk about the kind of relative poverty where people do still have heating, lighting and basic foods, but that life is still so grim for them we can say we don't want to put up with it in this society. Can use examples such as every day, you go back to poor housing. A clean, warm house is seen as a basic necessity, so the gradual degradation you would feel in a grotty house is easy to understand.
What's the story about?	We don't know yet – – a treadmill you can never get off, which is exhausting. Groundhog Day. Housing? Deadly certainty that each day will be the same?
How is that story brought alive?	TBD

This idea was demonstrated using a powerpoint presentation of repetitive images along with a "stuck record" soundtrack.

Communication about: "The ecology of poverty" & "many different Britains"	
What is the desired outcome when it comes to the target's relationship with the issues*?*	Create an understanding that income coming into the house is only part of what makes people desperate, poor, bumping along the bottom etc. Create appreciation that a complicated mix of factors put people into poverty and keep them there – it isn't just one thing. Create a license for politicians etc to talk about mulitiple aspects of poverty, but it still be clear how this is all part of the same picture/issue. To create a sense of coherence, a story, around what is a complex multi-factorial problem. Metaphor of the "ecology" of poverty
How is it trying to encourage that response? What do we want the audience to feel? What myths does it bust?	That although life in our own ecosystem may be about relatively straightforward choices and priorities, in a benign environment, for many that is a dense, impenetrable and threatening environment in which the stakes for those who poor choices are much, much higher. Full of traps, barriers etc and without a machete – no way to see ahead! We are all given natural equipment (homes, parental care, education etc) to deal with our environments, but some start off with precious little to draw on in much harsher conditions. Choices don't look like choices in these environments. Everything looks like a challenge. They may not be strategic choices, just survival choices, but they are adaptive/make sense to their environment. The myth that just because we live in the same country, we experience roughly similar conditions The myth that some people's choices seem to make no sense in their environment.
What is it about the target "consumer" that means that it is relevant to be saying this?	People recognise that they live & operate in particular environment (neighbourhood, friends, mentors) etc People admit that they tend to live in their own bubble of experience, and through discussion admit how different their reality may be to others People are fascinated by "how other people live" – e.g. popularity reality TV programmes (Wifeswap), wildlife programmes etc People are quick to make judgements about what these alternative environments and infer how they would respond in a similar environment.
What is it about the issue that means this is a relevant way to talk about it	The emotional aspect of poverty for people is in terms of the experience rather than the definition, or the prevalence. People in poor environments seem somehow alien, and other. Threatening and confusing. Seen in their own context and environment, their choices and outlook starts to make a lot more sense. It's the context that needs to change so that new options and choices open up. Also plenty of culturally relevant metaphors: concrete jungle; mean streets; struggle for survival; etc etc

What's the story about?	Ecological/environmental/survival metaphors
	Some people are born, and grow up in a jungle, wearing only flip flops and a t-shirt – what's the likely outcome?
	Others are born and live in rich, wide open savannahs, with a jeep, hunting gear, a compass, a stove, a tent and plenty of warm clothes. What's the likely outcome?
	Supported by quantitative facts and information
How is that story brought alive?	TBD

This evolved and emerged as the **Game of Life** concept;

Game of Life: you've only got one shot, can you win the game? Imagery of computer games, prizes and supporting information about the Feinstein research on life chance.

Imagery from this territory also informed our image of a supermarket filled with dangerous animals, which was designed to express "life through other lenses" see below.

	Communication about: **"Life through other lenses"**
What is the desired outcome when it comes to the target's relationship with the issues*?*	Create an awareness that the prosperous Britain many people live in, right from the big picture down to the most minute detail, appears very different to people in poverty. Give people an ability to see the world from a different point of view. Through the lens of someone who is thinking from one moment to the next, and with no hope for their own future.
How is it trying to encourage that response? What do we want the audience to feel? What myths does it bust?	We want the audience to realise that whilst for them a job offer/interview presents options, potential benefits etc, for others it is fraught with problems, dangers, obstacles. What you take for granted is for someone else an insurmountable obstacle. The guy with the plasma TV may be up to his eye-balls in debt. You just see the TV and wonder why he's got one and you haven't. He sees the debt bills and the constant threat of having everything repossessed. To you, these things are signs of ostentatious wealth, but look a little bit wider, apply some wider lenses and realise that the wider circumstances are desperately poor. The supermarket may look like a comfortable world of tasty treats, but to others an exhausting minefield of price comparisons, unpleasant trade-offs, parental guilt, shame and unhappy children Debt, insecurity, deprivation, obstacles, contingency, valuing and sacrificing some forms of consumption for others – these are the lenses of poverty Bust the myth that everyone is presented with the same choices, but some simply opt not to take them.
What is it about the target "consumer" that means that it is relevant to be saying this?	We all seek to prevent other people second-guessing how or what we think or see. People find it hard to understand how others can apply such different evaluative criteria to their lives. Providing a point of view. People are anxious about the level of inequality and difference between people in Britain – how we lack common frameworks for viewing problems. A way to start bridging those gaps to create common ways of seeing and doing things
What is it about the issue that means this is a relevant way to talk about it	In discussions people come to realise that some of their impressions of those in poverty may be false. That their world may look very different, that people are constantly making assumptions. When individual people's lives were explained to them they understood their predicament and empathised much more.
What's the story about?	A journey through the mundane experiences of life with a fundamentally different point of view. Different styles of choice-making starts to make sense. Gradually start to see how others start to see the world
How is that story brought alive?	TBD

This was conveyed via a simple image of a supermarket seen through two different eyes – one image showed the shelves looking ordinary, the next suggesting wild animals and a scary jungle.