Reframing Poverty

Six Ways to Open Minds

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A Brief Experiment
We have a problem
Persistent stress can derail development and have negative long term effects on health and wellbeing.
Because public opinion drives and preserves policy change
Framing for change

...is making choices about how we present information:

- What to emphasise
- How to explain it
- What to leave unsaid
Charity only for the deserving → Shared human experience
Understanding is frame dependent
Reframing Criminal Justice

![Graph showing percent change vs. control for Problem-Solving and Cost Efficiency. The graph indicates a significant difference (*) at P<.01.](image)
Reframing Poverty in the UK
#1
Understand what you’re up against - and get strategic.
We need to put measures in place to support people in poverty so that they have opportunities to improve their situations.

You Say...They Think

Poverty in the UK is a major problem and urgently needs to be addressed. It exists right here, right now and we desperately need to do something about it.
How do people think about poverty in the UK?
How do people think about poverty in the UK?

**RESPONSIBILITY**
- Self-Makingness
- Culture of Poverty
- Government Responsibility

**NOSTALGIA**
- Poverty Romanticism

**FATALISM**
- Economic Naturalism
- The Game is Rigged

**CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE**
- Opportunity Structures
- Spectrum of Self-Determination

**CRITERIA**
- Non-Negotiable Needs
- Post Poverty

**SOLUTIONS**
- Nothing
- Tighten Benefits
- Provide Core/Basic Support
- Education

**Self-Makingness**

**Culture of Poverty**

**Government Responsibility**
#2

Cue the right issue.
Dominant Issue Frames

**Poverty**: Poverty is increasing for the first time in two decades. More and more people are struggling to get by.

**Economy**: The economy is not working. Zero hours contracts, unstable work, and low wages are creating impossible situations for people.

**Benefits**: Our benefits system is failing our society’s most vulnerable people and many are experiencing extreme hardship as a result.
Frames that Work

Sample

+15,000 people
(nationally representative sample)

Random assignment to treatment group

Treatment groups

1. Poverty
2. Economy
3. Benefits
4. Control

Outcome measures

• Salience/Importance
• Collective Responsibility
• Support for benefits
• Willingness to Engage

Analysis

Differences between treatment and control groups (controlling for demographic variability)
Testing Issue Frames

Change in % vs. Control

Salience/Importance

Collective Responsibility

- Benefits
- Economy
- Poverty

* = P < .05
#3
Connect with values to shift thinking.
In our society, we believe in showing compassion towards others, and protecting each other from harm. Yet, right now, many live in poverty. We share a moral and social responsibility to ensure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living.

Strategic way to redirect:
- *Self Makingness*
- *Culture of Poverty*
- *Poverty Romanticism*

Moves thinking towards:
- *Salience/Importance*
- *Social Responsibility*

Use this by asserting:
- *Our shared values and morals*
In our society we believe in doing the right thing. We look out for each other. We have decent public services for everyone – especially those who are in greatest need.

whatever happens, as a society we are in this together

“simply not acceptable"
“we won’t stand by and let this happen in our society/country”
“we won't stand for that”
“not on my watch”
“out of order”
“we’re not ok with this”

“it’s just not right”
“we need to put this right”
“morally wrong”
“our sense of decency”
“our society’s principles”

Measured

Strident
#4

Messengers matter. Align to amplify.
Testing Messengers

- Effectiveness of Benefits
- Political/Civic Participation
- Perceived Support for Benefits

* = P < 0.05
#5

Use metaphor that sticks and shifts.
Our economy is locking people in poverty. Low paid, unstable jobs mean more and more families can’t put food on the table. With the economy driving up the cost of living, many are caught in a daily struggle to make ends meet, unable to think about a different future. It is hard to break free from the constraints our economy places on people.

Things like low wages and rising living costs create currents that can pull people into poverty. And sometimes things happen that threaten to pull us under, like losing a job, coping with a disability, or leaving our home to get out of an abusive relationship. We need a benefits system that anchors people so they don’t get pulled into the current and pushed into poverty.
Primed with Restricts and Restrains
#6
Position benefits as a solution.
Before:
The benefit system is **broken** and must be **fixed**.
Benefits are vital for people in poverty – including those who work. We need to stop cutting benefits so the system is fit for purpose.

After:
We can solve poverty by **loosening its grip on people**. Benefits **help release people from the restrictions** our economy places on them, such as low pay and high housing costs.
I’ll tell you what’s the greatest power under heaven, and that is public opinion - the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That’s the steam that is to work the engines.

George Eliot
Thanks for listening.