

**Public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution in austerity Britain.**

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**The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.**

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### ***For Ruby***

*The 6<sup>th</sup> March 2006 marked a turning point in my life, now ours.*

*From therein, I set out with the intention of creating a brighter future for us. With the completion of this research, a new chapter in our life begins.*

*This thesis is dedicated to you...*

***Love always,***

***Mum***

***X***

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**Abstract**

Britain has undergone profound economic, social, cultural and political changes. Following the recession of 2008/09 and the consequent implementation of austerity measures, both poverty and inequality became more pronounced. The consequences of austerity measures are profound and have had a lasting impact, and this has been widely evidenced. What was less understood was how attitudes toward the redistribution of income, and of people experiencing inequality and poverty changed, if at all, during this period. This research sought to understand how attitudes toward the income gap, people experiencing poverty and support toward redistribution changed during austerity Britain between 2009-2015. In doing so, this thesis has contributed to a growing body of research intent on understanding the consequences of austerity measures. This was achieved by undertaking secondary data analysis of three sets of micro data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2009, 2012 and 2015). The findings suggest that perceptions of the income gap amongst the public reflect widening income inequality between people with high and low incomes. However, support toward measures to combat this form of inequality through the redistribution of income increased but was less favourable amongst the public throughout this period. Negative attitudes toward benefit recipients were also prevalent, with support toward redistribution less likely amongst those that held individualistic attitudes toward people experiencing inequality and poverty. Based on these findings, this thesis highlights where efforts to bolster redistributive support may need to be targeted to reduce widening social inequalities. Recommendations for the need for further research that seeks to not only understand why attitudes reflect stereotypical discourse, but also seeks to challenge these perspectives, are also made.

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**Abbreviations**

AHC – After Housing Costs

BHC – Before Housing Costs

BLRA – Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic

CFM – Centre for Macroeconomics

CH – Chi-square

CI – Confidence Interval

CPAG – Child Poverty Action Group

CRESR - Centre for Regional Economic Social Research

DEFRA - Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DV – Dependent Variable

EHRC - Equality and Human Rights Commission

ESRC – Economic Social Research Council

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

IV - Independent Variable

JRF – Joseph Rowntree Foundation

MVA – Multivariable analysis

NS – Not Significant

PP – Percentage point (s)

UKDS – United Kingdom Data Service Archive

UNCESCR - United Nations' Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights

TET – The Equality Trust

TUC – Trades Union Congress

TT – Trussell Trust

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution in austerity Britain

Following the recession of 2008/09 and the introduction of austerity measures, inequality and poverty in Britain have increased, with the consequences of austerity now widely evidenced (Seymour, 2014; Mendoza, 2015; United Nations' Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights [UNCESCR], 2016; Wren-Lewis, 2016; Dorling, 2017; Ellis, 2017; London, 2017; O'Connell and Hamilton, 2017; O'Hara, 2017; Paton and Cooper; Stiglitz, 2017). Focusing on public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution in Britain between 2009-2015, this thesis explores attitudes, alongside increasing social inequalities. Exploration of this is pertinent, given that although the "UK has a long history of anti-poverty policies, with detailed legislation stretching back over 400 years, since the Poor Law Acts of 1597 and 1601" (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010:556), substantial levels of inequality and poverty remain (Coote, 2010; Penny and Slay, 2012; Dorling, 2014; Oxfam, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Seymour, 2014; Stiglitz, 2013; Toynbee and Walker, 2015).

These rising levels of wealth and income inequality can be described as the most substantial "social threat of our times" (Dorling, 2014:1), with the non-economic consequences arguably threatening to further polarise individuals and groups. The redistribution of income between groups, a method employed with the intention of reducing poverty and inequality, is however often contested with attitudes toward income redistribution amongst the British public, conditional, complex, subject to self-interest and change (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Curtis and Anderson, 2015; Wu and Chou, 2015; Bourguignon, 2018). Whilst redistributive support from the public does not guarantee the implementation of social policies to alleviate social issues (Hanley, 2009; Devine and Robinson, 2014), as others have suggested there is a strong connection between public perceptions and policy initiatives (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhakar, 2012; Devine and Robinson, 2014; Kulin and Seymer, 2014; Wu and Chou, 2015), with politicians and policymakers often "constrained by public opinion" (Kulin and Seymer, 2014:1).



In focusing on attitudinal data between 2009-2015, this research provides an analysis of public perceptions during this period of austerity. Intent on understanding not only who is more likely to support income redistribution but also how negative attitudes toward people experiencing inequality and poverty reduce the public's willingness to support redistribution, thereby impeding social change. The thesis begins by providing an introductory narrative of the economic, social, cultural and political environment, in what became austerity Britain. Austerity is introduced, alongside the consequences of this economic strategy, contextualising the importance of this research to gain an understanding of how attitudes changed (if at all) during this period. The focus of this introductory chapter is, thus, on setting out the plan of the thesis, highlighting the aims and objectives of this research, alongside some key findings and recommendations.

## **1.2 Context: the social, economic, political and cultural environment in austerity Britain**

Over the last decade, Britain has encountered both economic and political changes, with the consequent challenges bringing forth social consequences. In the wake of the financial recession of 2008/09, Britain not only experienced the consequences of an economy slowing in growth, but also saw governmental changes, with two successive governments from 2010 implementing policies of austerity. In 2010, a Coalition government comprised of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, sought to enact Cameron's vision of "social change" and to arguably make good on a previous Conservative pledge; to replace what they perceived as "Labour's spendaholic government" with one of "thrift" (Cameron, 2009: no pagination). The Coalition, faced with a deficit, claimed that austerity was the only feasible way of rectifying the economy, restoring financial stability and undoing the damage done by the previous Labour government (HM Treasury, 2010). Five years later, the Conservative majority government continued to endorse austerity, noting how "the Great Recession" had "given way to a great revival", but that austerity measures would continue, with more cuts to follow (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015:7).

Whilst austerity in practice means public spending is reduced and taxation is increased, in Britain, however, this was not the case. Whilst there have been attempts to lessen the burden of the welfare state, thus reducing public spending, increasing taxation appeared to be less of a priority (Konzelmann, 2012; Oxfam, 2013; Bailey and Bramley, 2018).

Focusing on the welfare state, public spending cuts and changes to the tax and benefits

system were issued, where new restrictions were imposed, sanctioning those who failed to comply (Levitas, 2012; Penny, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Lupton et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Tucker, 2017).

Whilst a programme of austerity initially received support from a number of economists (Attanasio, 2010; Besley, 2010; Bootle, 2010; Davies, 2010; Desai, 2010; Goodhart, 2010; Marcet, 2010; Meghir, 2010; Muellbauer, 2010; Newbery, 2010; Pesaran, 2010; Pissarides, 2010; Quah, 2010; Rogoff, 2010; Rosewell, 2010; Sargent, 2010; Sibert, 2010; Turnbull, 2010; Vickers, 2010; Wickens, 2010), as Eaton (2012) pointed out, many of these economists revoked their support, questioning both the timing and the pace of austerity measures (Besley, 2012; Bootle, 2012; Newbury, 2012; Pesaran, 2012; Quah, 2012). Despite this retreat, others maintained that austerity was an efficient way of reducing the deficit (Warmedinger et al., 2015) or as the Centre for Macroeconomics [CFM] found, many (Smith, 2015; Milas, 2015; Oulton, 2015; Minford, 2015; Chadha, 2015) were united in the belief that "the austerity policies of the coalition government...had a positive effect on aggregate economic activity" (e.g. employment and Gross Domestic Product [GDP]) in the United Kingdom [UK] (2015; no pagination).

Focusing on the economy, the social costs of austerity were, thus, not their concern. The withdrawal of support from a number of leading economists appears, however, to strengthen the concerns of others, who from the onset and throughout, had cautioned that the need for austerity was contestable with unfair consequences (Coote, 2010; Slay and Penny, 2012; Oxfam, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Seymour, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Krugman, 2015; Wren-Lewis, 2016; Stiglitz, 2017), alongside "violent" (Cooper and Whyte, 2017:2), "ineffective" and a "dangerous idea" (Blyth, 2013:5). By 2016, following six years of austerity measures, through the expression of "deep concerns" on a number of social issues in Britain, the United Nations' Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights [UNCESCR] had reinforced these fears (2016:4). Emphasis was placed on how the effects of austerity measures were disproportionately impacting upon the lives of many "disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and groups" (UNCESCR, 2016:4). It was argued that the austerity led changes to taxation, social security payments, eligibility and sanctions, alongside the rise of zero-hour contracts, had multiple consequences, where the only solution was the reversal of both the cuts and changes (UNCESCR, 2016).

In short, not only was the recession considered “the worst...since the 1930’s” (Lupton et al., 2015:7), the effects of austerity measures were thus increasingly questioned, where fears over the consequences of the changes imposed by the Coalition and the Conservative government grew (Fawcett, 2013; Ginn, 2013; Women’s Budget Group [WBG], 2013; Rubery, 2015; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; UNCESCR, 2016). Three years on from this recommendation, not only has this reversal not occurred, the enduring consequences of this economic plan have now persisted for nearly a decade.

Although the impact of austerity is profound, the consequences are not experienced in the same way, nor equally (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; UNCESCR, 2016). The unequal experiences of austerity amongst members of the British public, have become the focus of research concerned with understanding the impact of austerity measures. This thesis contributes to this growing body of research. Not only has it been purported that “those at the bottom” are “drowning in austerity Britain” (Dorling, 2014:16), others have argued that as a result of the Coalition’s policies, it became clear that austerity Britain was comprised of two opposing groups, the “gainers” and the “losers” (Lupton et al., 2015:8), with one particular group facing more than economic inequality alone. Aside from facing economic inequality, people who are impoverished or facing inequality, were also routinely represented as one of the “key problem groups” (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF] found that “harsh attitudes towards those experiencing poverty” thus persisted, including yet not limited to, “the notion of the undeserving poor”, despite the economic crash emphasising how many people “may suddenly experience hardship” (2016:8).

It has, thus, been argued that the economic crash drove “people further apart” (Toynbee, 2017: no pagination), with austerity led changes and coverage of the cuts, accused of heightening “class racism” (Atkinson et al., 2013:35). Whilst poverty and by extension inequality, “can be understood as having both a ‘material’ dimension (lack of income) and a ‘non-material’ dimension (e.g. poor health, experience of crime)” (Centre for Regional Economic Social Research [CRESR], 2014:27), it also has social consequences of which are of interest in this research. Given this, and echoing the concerns of others, it is argued that the welfare state and its recipients became “victims of austerity”, routinely and publicly depicted as ‘scroungers’ who are to “blame for their own predicament” (O’Hara, 2014:2) and to blame for the economic crash itself.

Although the existence of poverty and inequality in Britain is nothing new, what is new is how some of the British media, and by extension politicians, have “capitalised” on such societal issues during this period (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination). For Mooney and Hancock, the British tabloid press have profited from the rhetoric of the ‘scrounger’, juxtaposed with the ‘tax payers’ who fund their endeavours (Mooney and Hancock, 2010). Arguably, this juxtaposition, for Beatty and Fothergill, was also observable within political rhetoric, where not only was attention within the political sphere more focused on “appealing to emotion, speculation and imagery” (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016:1), as others have demonstrated, politicians were also accused of strengthening the rhetoric of the ‘undeserving’ and ‘deserving’ poor, rather than highlighting the consequences of life lived on inadequate incomes within their austere campaigns (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Pantazis, 2016; Shildrick, 2018).

Termed ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013), a number of broadcasted television programmes and documentaries, concerned with the portrayal of those experiencing poverty and inequality (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Jensen, 2013) and of those ‘losing out’ in austerity Britain also emerged. This new genre of programmes, for the purpose of entertainment (Jensen, 2013), includes the series *Benefits Britain: life on the dole* (Channel 5) and *Benefits Street* (Channel 4). Though not the focus of this research, nor analysis, given that how poverty and inequality is presented to the public, often relates to perceptions of individuals and how the public understand poverty and inequality (McKendrick et al., 2008), a brief critical narrative of the contents of these programmes is provided. Thus, allowing for a more thorough examination of the social and cultural climate in austerity Britain over this period. This is presented prior to highlighting public reactions to instances of ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) or indeed, ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018).

This thesis thus highlights how culpability, rather than located in social structures, became re-focused on those facing inequality (Walker, 1981), with the “welfare apparatus” surrounded again by “more enemies than friends” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:205). Whilst this may not be new, both poverty and inequality are, arguably, becoming increasingly more like a “spectator sport” (Hanley, 2009:7) and this is significant. The consequences of heightened polarisation are particularly important, given the need of the public and their support to implement policies to combat inequality through the redistribution of income (Whitely, 1981; Burstein, 2003; McKendrick et al., 2008; Horton and Gregory, 2009; Wu and Chou, 2015). This support is critically examined in this

research. Intent on contributing to current research, emphasis is placed on understanding how negative perceptions of people experiencing inequality and poverty, relate to the level of support toward income redistribution expressed by the British public, over the course of austerity examined here.

Whilst the effectiveness of austerity as an economic strategy remains debatable, this is a debate not entered into here. Instead this research echoes the concerns of Oxfam, positioning austerity as a programme that “threatens to solidify the UK’s position as a country of growing inequality and poverty” (Oxfam, 2013:4) and one that has resulted in both social and economic consequences. Accordingly, the following section positions this research, specifying the aims, objectives and research questions, noting the need for a sociological exploration of attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution, over the course of austerity.

### **1.3 Rationale and Research Questions**

This research both complements and contributes to the existing literature, by providing a critical narrative of how austerity impacted on the lives of a number of people and groups in Britain. Tracking the austere changes imposed and demonstrating how over the course of austerity, both inequality and poverty increased (Belfield et al., 2014; Dorling, 2014; Aldridge et al., 2015; Mckenzie, 2015), public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution are thus explored, with a focus on social, cultural, political and economic changes.

It is beyond the scope of this research to determine why members of the British public hold the attitudes they do or to pinpoint exactly how these are formulated. However, given that attitudes are social, formed through both interaction and often a lack of experience (Goffman, 1959; Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Underwood, 2009; Voas, 2014), it is crucial to explore what could have contributed to the formation of attitudes toward redistribution and people experiencing inequality and poverty, during the period of austerity examined here.

Over the course of austerity examined here, perceptions of people experiencing inequality and poverty increasingly reflected stigmatising discourse that have predominated for decades (Bamfield and Horton, 2009; Baker and McEnery, 2015; Brooker et al., 2015; Paterson et al., 2016; Shildrick, 2018; van der Bom et al., 2018). Arguably these were

intensified by a social, political, cultural and economic environment that was hostile, though as Chapter 2 demonstrates, not unchallenged. In providing an analytical approach towards social attitudes between 2009-2015, this research investigates the social impact of austerity, examining public perceptions towards poverty, inequality and people in receipt of benefits. Exploring, further, how these attitudes relate to the willingness of the public to support redistribution initiatives. This research, therefore, aims to offer insight into how (if at all) the austere period relates to attitudinal changes amongst the British public. Quantitative secondary analysis of data from the British Social Attitudes Survey [BSAS] is used to address these aims. Three different datasets are selected to conduct comparative analysis, with each year selected purposely. The first year (2009) depicts the opinions held following the recession and period prior to the introduction of austerity measures. The second year (2012) captures the years following the introduction of austerity measures in 2010 and the related reforms and cuts. The final year (2015), records how attitudes changed (if at all), following three years of austerity in Britain.

Four research questions have been crafted for the purpose of this research, alongside a number of sub-questions. The research questions for this research, are as follows:

- How are people in receipt of social security benefits perceived by others?
- To what extent have attitudes towards poverty and inequality changed following the introduction of austerity measures in 2010?
- To what extent do negative attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits relate to the level of support expressed toward income redistribution?
- To what extent do socio-economic and demographic characteristics relate to perceptions of inequality and poverty?

To address these questions, a number of sub-questions related to poverty and inequality are explored. Through the analysis of secondary data, this research explores whether the public believed that the income gap is 'too large', whether the redistribution of income is supported, whether people believe the 'generosity' of benefits lead to dependency, whether fraud is perceived to be a common feature amongst many benefit recipients and whether the public feel people in receipt of benefits are 'undeserving' of help.

The analysis explores whether these opinions have changed between the period of austerity examined here. Attitudes are investigated in relation to specific characteristics. This includes demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnic background and educational attainment), and socio-economic characteristics (employment status, self-

rated income band, benefit status and occupation). The British public's attitudes are interpreted, alongside the literature. Redistributive theories are also drawn on, including: Risk-exposure and Risk-aversion (Leon, 2012), the Spiral of Silence Model (Scheufele, 2008), Rational Choice Theory and the Government Protection Hypothesis (Wu and Chou, 2017). Alongside these theories, attitudes are understood in relation to Cannadine's binary "vernacular" model of "them and us" (1998:19-20), the impact of social values on attitudes (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007), need explanations (Whitely, 1981), and the role of altruism (Goerres and Jaeger, 2016). Chapter 6 considers these critically in relation to the findings outlined in Chapter 4 and 5.

With an emphasis on understanding how these attitudes relate to the level of redistributive support expressed amongst the British public between 2009-2015, British social attitudes toward people experiencing poverty and inequality are thus explored. Concurrently, this research tracks some of the changes and cuts imposed by the Coalition and the Conservative government, seeking to critically understand the consequences of public spending reductions, for a number of individuals and groups in austerity Britain. Aside from the economic consequences of austerity, emphasis is also placed on the social environment, where alongside economic polarisation and political rhetoric, the media also reinvigorated instances of "scroungerphobia" (Deacon, 1978:124) amongst the British public.

Given the scale of this research, the following section sets out the structure of this thesis, detailing the focus of each chapter. Beginning with a discussion of this thesis' approach to, and understanding of the formation of attitudes, a critical overview of some of the key findings is also provided. Following this, the final section provides a discussion of this thesis' contribution to existing knowledge. Based on the research findings, a discussion of the need for and possible direction of future research is also provided.

#### **1.4 Thesis structure and overview of the findings**

This section focuses on detailing the structure of this thesis, describing the focus of each chapter, and providing an overview of some of the key findings. Before this, this section begins by explaining how attitudes are understood in this research.

In this research, attitudes are understood as complex, antithetical and often tentative. Reflecting this, the formation and indeed adaption of attitudes is understood sociologically.

Thus, it is argued here, that attitudes are not formed in isolation. Instead the role of both indirect and direct interaction or indeed experience, should also be considered. Further, whilst it is not suggested the media, nor politicians directly influence social attitudes, as Evans and Kelley (2017) also consider, these encounters alongside direct experiences, may influence perceptions. In this way, to understand attitudes and to do so sociologically, is to consider the role of social identities, social networks, experiences, inexperience and often fear, and this stance is supported by the literature (Goffman, 1959; Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Underwood, 2009; Dorling, 2014; Voas, 2014; Evans and Kelley, 2017). Demonstrating the originality and indeed contribution of this research, it is for these reasons social attitudes are considered in relation to a changing social, cultural, political and economic environment, and this is evidenced further by the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 begins by providing an analytical backdrop of the economic, cultural, political and social climate in Britain between 2009-2015. Building on this exploration, this chapter provides insight into why austerity was implemented, but also how austerity was perceived by others. Alongside this, an overview of some of the key austere policy changes is provided. With emphasis placed on the rhetoric of broken Britain, an account of the consequences of austerity measures for a number of individuals and groups, is also provided. Given that negative representations yield further consequences for those considered 'losers', this chapter also explores how people in receipt of social security assistance were represented in the media and how this group was perceived by the public. The final section explores the formation of social attitudes, and how perceptions are often related to aspects of identity, like socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Outlining how attitudes can be understood by incorporating theories of understanding behaviour and preferences, Rational Choice Theory, Risk aversion, need explanations, the role of altruism, the Government Protection Hypothesis, the Spiral of Silence Model and the role of social values are explored, prior to their contextual application in Chapter 6.

Chapter 3 presents the methods, methodology and ethical considerations inherent to this research. The initial stages of the research and its design, alongside the strengths and limitations of the research design, are discussed critically. Emphasis is also placed on the rationale for choosing both secondary data analysis and the data source selected. The variable selection process, and how each variable featured in the analyse, is also presented. Providing an explanation of how the research has been conducted with both



integrity and with a strong ethical foundation, the final section focuses on the ethical guidelines adhered to, during each stage of this research.

Chapter 4, the first of two findings chapters, explores how the British public perceive the income gap and income redistribution, and how these attitudes changed (if at all) over the course of austerity examined here. To foster a broader sociological understanding of social attitudes amongst particular groups, following this, Chapter 6 also considers these findings in relation to the literature, and the findings identified in Chapter 5. The findings outlined in Chapter 4 suggest that large proportions of the British public agree that income inequality between groups, is a gap they consider 'too large', but that support toward redistribution is less favourable amongst the public. What was also notable, however, is that support toward income redistribution is more likely amongst people who recognise the income inequality gap as 'too large'.

Whilst the findings suggest that large proportions of the British public were united in the belief that "the gap between people on high and low incomes is too large", each year, and that support toward income redistribution is more likely amongst people who recognise the income inequality gap as 'too large', some attitudinal shifts are also notable. The findings suggest that the public became more concerned with the income inequality gap between 2009-2012, and this is evidenced by an increase in the number of people holding this view. That said, this increase is relatively small (just 3.8*pp*). By 2015 and following five years of austerity measures, it might have been expected that the public's opinions would reflect increasing inequality, and cuts to social security provision. Instead, concern amongst the public decreased by 6.4*pp*. Overall, between 2009-2015, concern toward the income gap remained substantial but fell to a level lower than in 2009, but again this change was relatively small (2.6*pp*).

Attitudes toward the redistribution of income also changed, but to a greater extent over time. Notably, redistributive support, in comparison to the perceived need of intervention, was much lower each year. Redistributive support amongst the public did increase between 2009-2012, but this increase was less than 5*pp*. Between 2012-2015 support increased amongst the public once again, but this change was even smaller (2.6*pp*). Nevertheless, between 2009-2015 overall, the findings suggest that support toward income redistribution increased to a greater extent (7.4*pp*). Whilst this suggests public support toward the redistribution of income increased over time, at 44.7% redistributive

support remained low. Given the perceived need, alongside rising inequality, this was surprising; these changes are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

In approaching attitudes sociologically, attitudes toward the income gap and redistribution were investigated further in relation to aspects of identity, including age, gender and ethnicity, alongside socio-economic position, including benefit status. Chapter 4 highlighted which groups were more likely to recognise income inequality and which groups were more likely to support income redistribution. In part, the findings supported the literature, strengthening the findings of others. For example, women are identified as a group susceptible to income inequality to a greater extent than men (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Nandi and Platt, 2012; Conley; UKCES, 2014). In this way, it was expected attitudes toward the income gap by gender would reflect this, and this is apparent within the findings. That said, Goerres and Jaeger's (2016) contention was not reflected in attitudes towards the redistribution of income by gender. Although it was expected that women would also be more likely to support the redistribution of income, a different picture emerged. Instead men were consistently more likely to support the redistribution of income.

Further demonstrating the contribution of this research, without the sociological exploration provided within this research, this may have been surprising. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, changing attitudes amongst men appeared to reflect wider changes. As emphasised in Chapter 6, over the course of austerity examined here, men were identified as a group facing economic difficulty as a result of austerity measures (McKay et al., 2013). Exploration of labour market statistics, alongside the literature in relation to these findings, meant that attitudinal disparities amongst men and women could be interpreted in relation to self-interest. Thus, the findings suggest as changes occurred within the labour market, worsening the economic position of men, these changes though slight, appear to be reflected in attitudes toward the redistribution of income.

Continuing to approach attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution sociologically, these findings are considered further in the second findings chapter. To understand how negative attitudes toward social security recipients relate to support toward income redistribution, Chapter 5 focuses on how the public perceive benefit claimants. Drawing on the Literature, perceptions of deservingness, fraud and welfare generosity and dependency amongst the public are explored. The findings suggest that

stigmatising discourse remained prevalent during this period, with a significant proportion of the British public in agreement that people in receipt of social security assistance are undeserving of help, that benefit recipients are fraudulently claiming, and that the generosity of benefit payments lead to dependency. To illustrate, in 2009 over 35% of the British public felt that people in receipt of social security assistance did not deserve help, by 2012, the proportion holding this view had increased, that said this increase was particularly small.

Greater changes are however notable between 2012-2015 where the proportion of people sharing this view fell by 7.5pp. Reflecting the same pattern over time, a similar proportion of the public also agreed with the statement “most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another”, each year. Notably, the findings outlined in this chapter also identified concern toward welfare generosity and benefit dependency as greater than support toward redistribution. Thus, whilst less than half the British public supported the redistribution of income each year, in 2009, 2012 and 2015, more than half agreed that “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet”. Whilst this perception became less likely over time, and following five years of austerity measures, as Table 5.3.1.2 shows, these changes are particularly small.

Focusing on the significant findings, as Section 5.1.1 and 5.2.1 demonstrate, an interesting pattern emerged within the data. In 2015, people in receipt of benefits or those with a spouse in receipt of benefits, were more likely to agree with the statement: “many people who get social security don’t really deserve help” and the statement “most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another”, than those who did not claim benefits. In this research, it is posited that these findings can be explained by considering the social and cultural aspects of attitude formation, alongside Cannadine’s binary “vernacular” model of “them” and “us” (1998:19-20). Accordingly, based on these findings, and as a result of the ongoing stereotypical and stigmatising discourse highlighted in Chapter 2 and 6, it is argued that people in receipt of benefits (or those with a spouse in receipt) are aware of the “symbolic demarcations between them and us” (Bottero, 2005:234) and thus of growing social and cultural divisions, and as a consequence, appear to have positioned themselves to avoid the label “them” in relation to the prevailing “images of inequality” (Bottero, 2005:24). With this in mind, this chapter also investigates how negative attitudes toward benefit recipients relate to support toward redistribution amongst the public. The findings suggest that redistributive support is significantly reduced amongst people who

perceive of benefit recipients as undeserving or that the generosity of benefit payments leads to dependency and this is a problem in need of addressing.

Chapter 6 brings together the findings outlined in Chapter 4 and 5. A range of the available literature is drawn on to discuss the findings analytically, whilst also considering the economic, cultural, social and political climate in austerity Britain. This chapter, thus, discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and wider social changes, drawing once again on redistributive theories, including: risk-exposure and risk-aversion (Leon, 2012), the spiral of silence model (Scheufele, 2008), Rational Choice Theory and the government protection hypothesis (Wu and Chou, 2017) to explore public perceptions. Alongside this, the findings are again considered sociologically, and thus in relation to Cannadine's binary "vernacular" model (1998:19-20), social values (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007), need explanation's (Whitely, 1981), and the role of altruism (Goerres and Jaeger, 2016).

The consequences of austerity are restated in Chapter 7, noting how widening social inequalities have been observable throughout the period of austerity examined here. Emphasis is placed on the research findings, noting how much needed public support toward income redistribution (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhakar, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2015) is lacking. This chapter thus emphasises the need to address negative attitudes toward those in receipt of social security. With this in mind this chapter also offers recommendations as to how support could be bolstered and moreover, where this may need to be targeted.

Whilst this section focused on detailing the structure of this thesis, describing the focus of each of the chapters, and on providing a critical overview of some of the key findings, the following chapter provides a succinct a discussion of this thesis' contribution to existing knowledge, alongside the need for, and possible direction of future research.

### **1.5 Research contribution and recommendations**

This section focuses on highlighting further, how this research contributes to and extends existing knowledge. Following this and based on the findings presented in Chapter 4 and 5, research recommendations are also provided.

As already emphasised, this research sought to examine public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution in austerity Britain between 2009-2015. However, rather than focusing on attitudinal differences amongst members of the British public alone, this research has been undertaken sociologically. Thus, to understand British social attitudes towards inequality, poverty and redistribution during this period, emphasis has also been placed on the social, cultural, political and economic environment and the impact of austerity measures on a number of groups in Britain. Accordingly, to enable a broader understanding of attitudes, and to contribute to and indeed extend existing knowledge, rather than focus on statistical consistencies or indeed changes in British social attitudes over time, emphasis has also been placed on social inequalities and disadvantage, alongside policy changes. By incorporating an extensive analysis of attitudinal data in relation to societal change and social inequalities, this approach thus extends existing knowledge.

Reflecting this stance and a wide body of evidence drawn on throughout this research, this research considers attitudinal findings in relation to social identities. This includes gender, age, ethnic group, alongside wider social inequalities, and relevant social policy changes during the period of austerity examined in this research. The importance of this approach is further evidenced in Chapter 6, where a critical analytical discussion of the research findings outlined in Chapter 4 and 5 is also provided. In completing this thesis, this research has demonstrated that the consequences of austerity for a number of groups, both socially and economically, are profound. Whilst this research sought to understand attitudes both sociologically and critically, further exploration is, however, required. It is therefore posited that policy makers and commentators should seek to understand why members of the British public continue to express negative attitudes towards those who are experiencing economic hardship. Having achieved greater understanding of the formation of these attitudes, steps toward challenging these views may be taken. Thus, to gain more widespread support toward monetary redistribution, and successful equality policies, further research is necessary. Without this, negative attitudes, reflective of stereotypical rhetoric, will continue to hinder steps toward a reduction in the prevailing levels of social inequality and poverty.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 Introduction

Presented thematically, this research explores public perceptions of poverty, inequality and redistribution in Britain, following the economic recession of 2008/09 and the introduction of austerity measures in 2010. This Chapter begins by providing an introduction, exploring the backdrop to what became austerity Britain, before providing a critical narrative of the literature, followed by conclusion.

#### 2.1.1 Austerity Britain, overview

As this Chapter demonstrates, incomes fell following the financial crisis (Clarke et al., 2016), with the consequences of such economic difficulties still being witnessed across Britain and in the UK (Padley et al., 2017). The crisis had a “transformative effect on the UK economy”, with the repercussions of financial instability distributed unevenly (Catney and Sabater, 2015:15) and moving beyond economic disparities in income. As a result of the introduction of austerity measures, both the vulnerability towards and levels of social inequality and poverty, are expected to continue to have lasting impacts on the quality of life experienced by a considerable proportion of the British public (McKendrick et al., 2008; Oxfam, 2013; Lansley and Mack, 2015; Tucker, 2017; Alston, 2018).

Although Britain should be a place where, irrespective of location nor characteristic, everyone is afforded the opportunity to lead a “secure” and “decent life” (JRF, 2016:4), as the evidence presented here suggests, for many this is not always the case. To illustrate, between 2009-2010, measured before housing costs [BHC], 10.4 million people were living the consequences of relative poverty in the UK, calculated after housing costs [AHC] this increased to 13.5 million individuals experiencing life in absolute poverty (Belfield et al., 2015:37). Comparatively, in 2013-14, the absolute poverty rate in the UK, calculated AHC was 21.6% of the population or 13.6 million individuals, whilst the UK relative poverty rate stood at 21.0% or 13.2 million individuals (Belfield et al., 2015:5). Not only did poverty increase between 2009-10 and 2013-4, by 2015 a little over one in five of the UK population were living in poverty (Barnard, 2017).

By 2016, disquiet with reference to a number of societal issues, including yet not limited to: homelessness, social security benefits, poverty, housing, food poverty and moreover the impact of austerity as a whole, were reinvigorated by the UNCESCR (2016). The consequences of such poverty and inequality are said to “lie at the heart of the struggle for social justice and a fairer society” (Bunyan, 2016:491), yet with the decision to exit the European Union, although the full impact remains “uncertain” (Emmerson et al., 2016:3) both inequality and poverty are expected to increase further (Springford, 2015). Brexit and the implications of such uncertainty, are moreover, occurring in a society in which over the last fifty years, “the gap between rich and poor has risen” (Belfield et al., 2015:3). Following the recession of 2008, the gap between the top 1 per cent and the remaining 99 per cent of society became increasingly more pronounced (Dorling, 2014:2). Subsequently, it has been argued that whilst “the rich have grown richer”, Britain has become a more unequal society (Irvin, 2011:176).

Tonkin illustrates this point further, noting that in the financial year ending 2015 (2014-15), the “average income of the richest fifth of UK households before taxes and benefits was £83,800”, fourteen times higher than that of the poorest fifth, who per year, had an average income of £6,100 (2016:2). Such statements are further compounded by findings from The Equality Trust [TET], whom purported that by 2016 alone, in Britain “the richest 1,000 people own [owned] more wealth than 40% of households or 10.3 million families” (2016:2). Comparing the findings from a year earlier (between 2015-2016) also demonstrates that “the combined wealth of Britain’s 1,000 richest people increased by £28.508 billion, to...£576 billion” (TET, 2016:3). Thus, according to their calculations, the overall wealth of the 100 richest people in Britain, up by an increase of £14.98 billion from 2015, amounted to £322.89 billion by 2016 (TET, 2016:3). Or presented differently, amidst rising vulnerability toward inequality and poverty, and increasing financial uncertainty for many, a comparison of the figures between 2015-2016, show an overall income increase for the few of 4.9 per cent or £473.78 per second or £40.934 million per day (TET, 2016:3).

The findings from TET are demonstrative of the assertion made by Christie and Warburton (2001). Supporting their suggestion that what is particularly significant, is how rather than seeing wealth “trickle down”, it can be argued that it is instead, “coagulated around them [the wealthy]” and as a result, “the poor have been left to languish” (Christie and Warburton, 2001:28). These figures thus not only demonstrate the unequal distribution of

income in Britain, they also support the contention of theorists' describing income polarisation more than a decade prior to their publication.

Yet, for Christie and Warburton it is not the knowhow, capital, nor the ability or resources that is lacking "to lift the absolute poor out of poverty", or to "reduce...divisions within and between societies", it is instead a lack of "will to implement the changes made urgent by mounting evidence of widening gaps between rich and poor", by governments worldwide (2001:2). More recently and in the context of austerity in the UK, Alston (2018:22-23) appears to support this contention, exclaiming:

*the experience of the United Kingdom, especially since 2010, underscores the conclusion that poverty is a political choice. Austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so. Resources were available to the Treasury at the last budget that could have transformed the situation of millions of people living in poverty, but the political choice was made to fund tax cuts for the wealthy instead.*

Christie and Warburton and Alston, writing nearly two decades apart, ergo highlight how 'problems' such as income inequality and poverty, could be "solved by those in power for those without" (McKendrick et al., 2008:29) but that this is not considered a priority.

Thus, whilst "improvements could be experienced by all", the fact that this has not occurred, signifies failure for Christie and Warburton (2001:2). This failure is, moreover, further compounded by the fact that societies are becoming further segregated by income inequality and of "quality of life", despite having the means to ensure that all have access to food and "decent" working and living conditions (Christie and Warburton, 2001:83). An illustration of this failure, and of how people in austerity Britain are losing out, can be drawn from the increasing use of food and clothing banks in Britain, both prior to and following the economic crisis of 2008/09 (Dorling, 2014; Todd, 2016; O'Hara, 2014, Butler, 2015; Cooper et al., 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015, Alston, 2018). As highlighted within this research, following the introduction of austerity measures, food bank use increased considerably (Trussell Trust [TT], 2015; Loopstra et al., 2018). With the effects of the austerity measures identified in Section 2.3, suggesting further failure.

Discussing poverty in the UK has, however, been described as "unfashionable" (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:293) and a subject considered "uncomfortable" for a number of people (Castell and Thompson, 2007:10). Yet, the increasing proportion of individuals donating to charity shops and food banks (Todd, 2016), appears to suggest recognition of rising inequalities and willingness to act to reduce adversity. For Butler, the charities and



volunteers behind these operations (food banks) are taking up their “role as a sticking plaster for gaps in the welfare state”, with such food insecurity and consequent rationing, being likened to the post World War II era in Britain (2014, no pagination). Moreover, the findings of a publication from the JRF, provide more “damning evidence” (Todd, 2016: no pagination), highlighting that there are more than one million people in the UK who are or have been destitute (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016).

Thus, despite the UK being listed as the “world's fifth largest economy” (Alston, 2018:1), both inequality and poverty persist (Dorling, 2014; Oxfam, 2016a; Oxfam, 2016b). Discussing levels of poverty and destitution more recently, Alston asserted that “for one in every two children to be poor in twenty-first century Britain is not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster, all rolled into one” (2018:1). Notably, people are once again finding themselves living in, “in the midst of plenty...appalling conditions of poverty” (Christie and Warburton, 2001:83).

Given the rise in volunteers seeking to feed, clothe and care for their fellow citizens, this suggests that although individualism may have increased following the “economic reforms of the 1980’s and beyond” (Stanley, 2016:18) it is yet to fully take hold. That said, as this chapter demonstrates, hostility toward people facing inequality and poverty has not dissipated amongst some members of the British Public (McKendrick et al., 2008; Dorey, 2010; Levitas, 2012; Penny, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Brooker et al., 2015; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; van der Bom et al., 2018), thus suggesting that individualistic attitudes toward poverty and inequality remain both prevalent, and as this research amongst others suggest, problematic (Fong et al., 2003; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Lansley and Mack, 2015; Toynbee and Walker, 2015).

Whilst a full historical account of inequality and poverty is not provided here, the research seeks to introduce and focus upon the five years prior to the election of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in May 2010 (2005-10), before moving toward an explorative account of the years following their election (2010-15) and the election of the current, Conservative majority government in 2015, first headed by David Cameron, and now Teresa May. As Pemberton highlights, following the recession and the “bail out” of the banks, “political attention turned to the growing public deficit”, noting further how “public-sector austerity came to dominate the policy agenda” (2014:6). What was to follow were two successive governments, which in an effort to reduce public spending, issued

emergency budgets and set forth implementing austerity measures (O'Hara, 2014; Toynebee and Walker, 2015). This time frame is thus pertinent to this research, in that during those ten years, not only were there changes in governance but also a recession, with the consequences of the subsequent austerity measures, for a proportion of the UK at least, still being felt (Dorling, 2014; O'Hara, 2014; Tucker, 2017; Alston, 2018; TT, 2018).

Although an austere programme of government was considered the best way forward by the Coalition and the Conservatives, for Toynebee and Walker, it marked instead the beginning of "a chain saw massacre of the welfare state" (2015:63), where despite the "primary purpose of the...welfare state" being the "alleviation of poverty" (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010:571) and a provider of opportunity (O'Hara, 2014), the focus was instead placed on the reduction of its reach through austere budgets. Although the spending reductions outlined in each budget thereafter, were celebrated as an effective way to restore the economy, for Thomas these budgets signalled instead, a form of "class war", being "waged with a calculator" (2014: xii), where "the need for austerity was one thing", yet "who bore its wounds was another" (Toynebee and Walker, 2015:7).

For Mooney and Hancock, the assault on people experiencing poverty, aside from economic hardship, occurs both socially and culturally in numerous ways (2010). This, they argue, is evident in the news media, print and television broadcasts, where "examples of dysfunctionality" are "seized" on, resulting in both the construction and the reinforcement of "dominant attitudes to poverty and welfare" (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination). For Mooney and Hancock, this framing has both consequences and a purpose, to "serve to harden attitudes to poverty" and importantly, "justify harsher welfare policies" as a result (2010: no pagination). Similarly, given the current climate of austerity, what is particularly concerning for Monnickendam and Gordon, is how "the relatively low levels of public support for...government actions to combat poverty may lead to an eventual reduction in the emphasis...placed on poverty eradication", all together (2010:556-571). Thus, without public support for redistributive policies and an awareness of such changing perceptions, this may prove problematic for the future of Britain and the UK as a whole (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010).

Accordingly, with a focus on the economic, social, cultural and political environment, this research explores attitudinal changes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution in austerity Britain, sociologically. The following section provides a description of the

structure of this literature review, highlighting the necessity, alongside the focus of each of the sections included within the literature review.

### **2.1.2 Structure of the literature review**

To foster a broader understanding of contemporary sociological debates of inequality, poverty and the redistribution of income, alongside “punitive attitudes toward the poor” (Levitas, 2012:322), there are several important elements to this research, and these are presented thematically throughout this Chapter. Each section begins with an introduction, setting out the scope of the section and ends with a summary. The final section of this chapter offers a conclusion, situating this research in relation to existing knowledge.

The first section (2.2.1) provides an account of what austerity is and moreover, what measures have been introduced by the Coalition and Conservative governments. This section also begins to explore the rhetoric of both the Coalition and now Conservative government, providing an overview of the fiscal outlook from 2005 through to 2015. Focussing on public sector spending, the national deficit and tracking the changes of each government from 2010, throughout their terms in office. Further, emphasis is placed upon the ideological rhetoric of neo-liberalism. To provide a broader understanding of life in Britain during this period of austerity, Section 2.3.1 outlines the consequences of life lived in austere Britain, highlighting increasing social inequalities and thus exploring the impact of austerity led budget cuts, for a number of groups.

To highlight the social and cultural climate prevalent in austerity Britain over this period, this section is followed by a brief overview of mediated rhetoric during austerity and the ways in which people living on low incomes have been framed, in both printed and broadcasted media. Focusing on the consequences of negative representations for the groups concerned, the third section thus (2.4) highlights how this coverage reduces the perceived importance of inequality in Britain and the UK, by instead shifting the focus of attention upon individuals and their apparent inadequacies.

This is followed by section’s (2.5) which explore how social identities, perceptions and experiences often mean that social and economic distances widen, impacting further upon experiences but also on the attitudes people hold towards others and income redistribution (2.6). The final section (2.7) of this literature review not only introduces the following

chapter, but provides a conclusion, contextualising the importance of this research, in relation to what is already known. Thus, the purpose of this research will be restated.

## **2.2 Creating austerity Britain, Introduction**

Providing a brief fiscal backdrop to the recession and implementation of austere policies, this section explores austerity in Britain. Defining and locating austerity as an economic plan that was to bring forth both economic and non-economic consequences, for already vulnerable groups. A number of the key changes implemented by the Coalition and Conservative governments, witnessed between 2010-2015 are also explored, alongside the provision of an explorative account of both support and resistance toward austerity.

### **2.2.1 Austerity in Britain**

Previously, when the New Labour party were elected in 1997, following the recession of the early 1990s, public finances were already improving, due to both increases in tax and public spending cuts, instigated by the Conservative government from 1993 (Chote et al., 2010). By 2007-08, public finances were reported to be in a “stronger position” than they had been when Labour arrived into office (Chote et al., 2010:10). Public spending increased from 39.9% in 1996-97, to 41.1% between 2007-08, with revenues also subject to a 2.3 percentage point growth, with total borrowing also decreasing by 1.0 percentage point over this period (Chote et al., 2010:10). The budget also strengthened, falling to a relatively small deficit of 0.3% of national income, down from 2.7% in 1996-1997 (Chote et al., 2010). For the same period, public sector net debt decreased from 42.5% of national income to 36.5%, with spending as a share of national income, increasing from 36.8% in 2000-01 to 41.1% (Chote et al., 2010).

Between 2007-2009 the then Labour Government, however, intervened to support a failing banking sector, providing £137 billion of public money in the form of capital, loans and guarantees, to not only instil confidence in the financial system, but to also restore stability (Mor, 2018). By Autumn 2008-09, the UK had entered recession (Vaitilingam, 2009; Allen, 2010) where it was argued that the financial crisis had adversely affected the UK economy, on a scale not seen in many other countries (Crawford et al., 2012). During this period and through to 2009-2010, government borrowing “increased rapidly...as real economic activity in the UK...fell sharply”, with spending in this period said to reach “a

post-Second World War high” (Crawford et al., 2012:48-50). Following their election, the Coalition maintained that this increase in spending was problematic and in need of reduction (HM Treasury Spending Review, 2010). The Coalition declared that they had “inherited one of the most challenging fiscal positions in the world”, highlighting further how Britain’s deficit a year earlier “was the largest in its peacetime history”, amounting to 11 per cent of GDP, and warning that “the state was borrowing one pound for every four it spent” (HM Treasury Spending Review, 2010:13).

Both at the beginning of the crisis of 2008 and in the twenty years prior to 2006-07, public spending averaged around 40 per cent of GDP (HM Treasury Spending Review, October 2010). Reaching “a historically high level” by 2009-10, spending increased further to 48 per cent (HM Treasury Spending Review, October 2010:13). As a consequence, the Coalition declared how over the decade “the UK’s economy became unbalanced and relied on unsustainable public spending and rising levels of public debt” (HM Treasury Spending Review, October 2010:6). Net public sector debt had reached £956.4bn (62 per cent of GDP) by the end of 2009/10, with a budget deficit amounting to 6.9 per cent of GDP or £103.9bn (Lupton et al., 2015:2).

Subsequently, the government argued that the “most urgent issue facing Britain”, was the need to reduce the deficit swiftly and thus to continue to “ensure economic recovery” (HM Government, 2010:15). To deliver a reduction in the amount of borrowing, the Coalition planned “much like the previous Labour government” to “rely heavily on deep spending cuts” (Crawford et al., 2011:131). The Coalition were set to go ahead with what they stated was an “unavoidable deficit reduction plan”, proclaiming that this would be achieved in such a way that the country was to be both “strengthened” and “united” (HM Treasury Budget, June 2010:1).

Their strategy was to lead the UK's economic recovery, through the implementation of austerity measures, where the “driving imperative of this policy” was to “force down public-sector spending” (Levitas, 2012:322). Emphasis was thus placed on a reduction of public spending on the welfare state, where as Levitas notes, public money spent on the “bail out of banks” was not featured within this review (2017:5). Instead, as scheduled in October of 2010, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, revealed further plans to save £7 billion each year (HM Treasury Spending review, October 2010). This was to be achieved by ensuring that both public services and the welfare state were placed on “a

sustainable footing for the long term” (George Osbourne Spending Review, October 2010: no pagination). This was going to be, as Osbourne declared, “a hard road” from the onset, yet he argued that it was one that would “lead to a better future” (George Osbourne Spending Review, October 2010: no pagination).

The Coalition maintained that their core values were “freedom, fairness and responsibility”, that they wished to create a “Big Society”, whereby more power and opportunity was to be placed into “people’s hands” (Building the Big Society, 2010:1). Yet, as highlighted within the October Budget “particular focus” was to be “given to reducing welfare costs and *wasteful* spending” (HM Treasury 2010:5, my italics). Not only was this to be a long running feature of the Coalition government, this focus has since led others to argue that the Coalition’s policies seemed “ideologically driven, rather than economically sensible” (Trades Union Congress [TUC], 2015:2). Indeed, their austere plan to cut “public spending over the five years from April 2011”, was considered to “be larger in real terms than the UK has seen in any other five-year period since the end of the Second World War” (Crawford et al., 2011:131) and as Section 2.3 demonstrates, has had a lasting impact on many already disadvantaged individuals and groups.

Although austerity “has a long and complicated history”, its “current significance derives directly from the multiple and multi-layered crisis of the financial system” (Clarke and Newman, 2012:300). For the purposes of this research, austerity and its implementation from 2010-2015, will remain the focus. Yet, rather than debate whether austerity ‘works’ or not, this research focuses on what austerity is and importantly, on the consequences of austerity for the British public. Indeed, whilst debate over whether austerity was and is a feasible option, or why it should not have been enacted (Coote, 2010; Penny and Slay, 2012; Oxfam, 2013; Blyth, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Seymour, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Krugman, 2015; Warmedinger et al., 2015; CFM, 2015; Wren-Lewis, 2016; Stiglitz, 2017) have predominated, there has largely been a lack of “general agreement about what austerity is” in this context (Konzelmann, 2012:2). Room, however, explains succinctly that “austerity makes reduction of the public-sector deficit the principal economic goal”, noting further that this is pursued through public spending cuts, and that this “shrinkage of the public sector”, alongside reducing the deficit, will also “stimulate the private sector” (2015:3).

Thus, the “aim of economic austerity is to reduce a country’s deficit-the difference between what the government spends and the revenues it earns” (Konzelmann, 2012:2).

Konzelmann highlights, further, how these measures ultimately involve a combination of increased taxation, alongside decreases in public spending (2012:2). Clarke and Newman note, however, that the financial crisis has been transmuted into a “fiscal crisis centered on government debt”, where the cause of the economic crash (bank bail outs) has been “ideologically reworked” as a political, rather than as an economic problem (2012:300). Thus allowing “blame and responsibility for the crisis” to be reallocated (Clarke and Newman, 2012:300). This ‘reworking’ has, in this view, shifted the focus from the banks and their “high risk strategies”, onto what is regarded as “unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector” (Clarke and Newman, 2012:300). By extension, this has had an impact on those struggling, and/or in receipt of social security provisions whom were “convicted” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:3) once more, and held to blame for the financial crisis and their own predicaments.

The UK has, as purported by Clarke and Newman, “taken something of a vanguard position in austerity...cutting deeper and harder than most EU countries” (2012:300). Notably, there has been a number of instances whereby fiscal consolidation has been sought through a reduction or reforms within the welfare state, rather than through a commitment to increase income tax (Konzelmann, 2012; Oxfam, 2013; Bailey and Bramley, 2018). For instance, over their five years in office, the Coalition sought to introduce complex welfare reforms, reducing the level of “total public spending by 2.6 per cent between 2009/10 and 2014/15” (Lupton et al., 2015:1). Both “rapid and far reaching reforms were enacted”, such as the introduction of Universal Credit, the re-structuring of the NHS, Academy expansion, “pension reforms, widening non-state provision, increasing local autonomy and reducing eligibility for services and benefits” (Lupton et al., 2015:1).

Whilst the Coalition in the aftermath of the recession, remarked “difficult decisions” would be made; stressing further how they would “ensure that fairness” was “at the heart of those decisions”, and ensuring “all those most in need” would be “protected” (HM Government, May 2010:7), as this research demonstrates, their promises appear to have been proven void, whereby instead of the “better off” carrying the “burden of austerity”, their changes to social security payments and tax credits, had a negative impact on the poorest (Lupton et al., 2015:1). Thus, whilst Lupton et al. highlighted that “there is no doubt that the Coalition...faced a very tough fiscal climate and ongoing social policy issues” (2015:8), as

Section 2.3 demonstrates, their choice to implement austerity measures resulted in further inequality and disadvantage. Notably, this has led to the argument that as a result of “fiscal consolidation”, the welfare state has been transformed (Hood and Oakley, 2014:3) as have the lives of those who depend on its shrinking, constricted services.

As Lansley and Mack assert, the election of the Coalition government in 2010 and their consequent austerity programme, rather than reflecting the Coalitions’ mantra of each and every one being “in it together” (Building the Big Society, 2010:1), marks the “return to a more fully fledged individualistic approach”; whereby attention was given more so to individual behaviour, as the “key driver of poverty”, rather than “wider social and economic forces” (2015:67). This position meant further segregation and hostility. Toynbee and Walker argue that such individualistic explanations were “fanned by the government”, and as a consequence were “seeping into the nation”, where there was a noticeably “growing public intolerance” toward income taxation, welfare and those in receipt of social security provision (2015:109). What is thus also apparent, is that public attitudes towards the welfare state have also changed, seemingly reflecting the rhetoric of the Coalition and subsequent Conservative party.

At the same time, however, the numbers of global protests also grew, with the focus of many of the demonstrations increasingly reflecting what Dorling refers to as “issues of economic justice” (2014:2). This is evidenced by an example from a demonstration held in London in 2011, organised by the TUC, where members of the British public declared their disapproval and contempt towards the rekindling of neo-liberalism, and notions of the ‘Big Society’. The signs wielded by demonstrators read “Cameron there is no such thing as your big society”, “Beware of the Big Society” and with an image of both Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron, “same shit, different decade” (Levitas, 2012:328).

Others have, moreover, frequently expressed their discontent toward a programme of austerity, where declarations have included further references to individualisation and individual problems. Toynbee and Walker, for instance, argued that the Coalition’s legacy was one of cruelty and success in “hardening” the hearts of the nation, maintaining that “nothing stamps the character of the government as clearly as its assault on the welfare state and its campaign to turn public opinion against the needy” (2015:127). Similarly, O’Hara argued that both “privilege and dogma...framed the Conservatives thinking”, as



they began to “mount the greatest ever assault upon the welfare state and the poor since World War II” (2014: xiii).

Indeed, although it was argued by the chancellor, that the cuts presented in the first emergency budget, and arguably thereafter, “laid the foundations for a more prosperous future” (Osborne, 2010: no pagination), others maintained that what really occurred was the welfare state being “cut with a rusty axe wielded with malice” (Toynbee and Walker, 2015:111). O’Hara strengthens this point further, arguing that what has become increasingly clear is that those who are poor no longer matter, they are instead conceived of as “casualties of ideology”, both neo-liberal and austere (2014: xii). This latter point is supported by Farnsworth and Irving, whereby they describe “fiscal consolidation” as “a handy tool to craft the harsher and more residualised welfare model long preferred by market liberals” (2018:477). Despite this scrutiny and resistance, the Coalition continued their austere approach, arguing for a change in the direction and scope of the state, reiterating that what was required was a “Big Society” rather than a “Big State” (HM Treasury, 2010).

Cameron maintained from the onset, however, that their vision of a ‘Big Society’ was “not about creating cover for cuts”, instead it was argued that this form of governance would unite the nation, who would stand together (2010: no pagination). On behalf of the Coalition, Cameron elucidated what was meant by their mantra “we are all in this together”, this he urged, was not to be considered “a cry for help”, but instead “a call to arms” (Cameron, 2010: no pagination). Grimshaw and Rubery, however, offer a different explanation of the Coalition’s ‘Big Society’, suggesting that:

*the key notion is that the amorphous and unaccountable ‘big society’ can be empowered to provide services instead of the state, to the extent that these are truly needed or required, without the state being blamed for any failings of service provision as it is the local community that will fill the gaps (2012:122).*

Grimshaw and Rubery (2012), not only point toward deepening individualistic ideals within this statement, they also appear to highlight how responsibility was removed from the state and placed instead on both individuals and their communities. For Grimshaw and Rubery not only was this a flawed approach (2012:122), which nevertheless was to continue, their reference to whether support is “truly needed” also appears to reiterate how notions of ‘deservingness’ predominate.

Questioning deservingness and the redirection of accountability, was to continue throughout the period of austerity examined here. That said, such “anti-welfare ideology” had been in operation, prior to the introduction of austerity measures (Mack and Lansley, 1985:227). Thus, much like protesters had observed (Levitas, 2012), Thatcher also sought to reduce the role of the state, by way of promoting “self-help and a greater emphasis on individuals, voluntary and charitable help” (Mack and Lansley, 1985:228). Indeed, each were key features in the Coalition’s notion of a ‘Big Society’ (HM Treasury, 2010).

Nearing the end of the Coalition’s term in government, Lupton et al. warned that whoever was to succeed the Coalition, would be met by a “welfare state in flux” (2015:8). In May 2015, the Conservative government was elected with a majority, and were keen to publicise the great gains they had won as part of the Coalition. David Cameron in his role as then Prime Minister, declared how over a five-year period they [the Coalition] had successfully “put our country back on the right track”, emphasising further that “five years ago, Britain was on the brink” but that Britain was “back on its feet, strong and growing stronger every day” (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015:8). The Conservatives stressed that the gains made were “the product of a supreme national effort, in which everyone has made sacrifices, and everyone has played their part” (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015:8).

Given this self-declared success, the Conservatives were set to continue their austere plan, “rolling out Universal Credit, capping benefits which would mean a household could receive no more than £23,000 per year”, in order to “make work pay”, alongside protecting the NHS (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26). During the first budget, Osborne declared that “the budget deficit” was at that point, “less than half the 10 per cent” that the Coalition had initially inherited, stressing further that “economic security” was returning (HM Treasury Summer Budget, 2015).

By 2016, however, the economic outlook had deteriorated once again (HM Treasury May Budget, 2016:9), suggesting further that a programme of austerity was inadequate. Nevertheless, the Conservatives continued their quest to secure economic security, through making “additional savings”, which it was noted, equated to “0.5 per cent of total government spending”, with a view to ensuring that “the nation” was living “within its means” (HM Treasury May Budget, 2016:9). The Conservatives stressed that they would seek to ensure that they “keep a check” on the amount spent on welfare, thus enabling

them to provide a system that is “fair to those who *need* it, and fair to those who pay for it too” (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:27, my italics). This dualism, between those who pay into the welfare state and those who do not, was a distinction readily drawn upon by both the Coalition and the Conservative’s throughout the period of austerity focused on here. Whilst the Conservatives were “especially proud” that “hard decisions on public spending” had been made (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015:8), Ryan (2015) offers a different perspective. For Ryan, the results of an austere approach in governance are clear, and for him, these results are held in stark contrast to the success conveyed by Cameron and the Conservatives (2015). Ryan thus argues, that in pursuit of austerity and economic recovery, those “already struggling” have been pushed “deeper into poverty”, noting further how this was set to worsen, given that the Conservatives plans were to continue to pursue cuts and make additional savings or as Ryan puts it, “to cut deeper next time” (2015: no pagination).

Alongside this self-recognition of success, the reforming welfare section of the Conservative manifesto, arguably, made clear the party’s position going forward. Reflecting the binary rhetoric of the ‘striver’ and ‘skiver’, the manifesto featured phrases such as “hard working families”, “work hard” and “do the right thing”, alongside a vow to make “help for those who really need it” available (Conservative Party Manifesto, 2015:26). Strengthening this rhetoric further, the Conservatives depicted how:

*under Labour those who worked hard found more and more of their earnings taken away in tax to support a welfare system that allowed and even encouraged people to choose benefits, when they could be earning a living (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26, my italics).*

This, according to the Conservatives, “sent out terrible signals”, for this meant that “if you did the right thing you were penalised-and if you did the wrong thing, you were rewarded” (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26). The Conservatives argued that such “right” and “wrong behaviour” and the “unfairness of it all”, was consequently “infuriating hardworking people” (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26). Distinctions between ‘hard workers’ and ‘shirkers’, and ‘undeserving’ and ‘deserving’ recipients, was arguably further embedded when the Conservatives stated that help would be available to support those “who really need it” (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26). The Conservatives stressed further, that the “days of something for nothing” were, however, over (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26).

Borrowing from Patrick, these are examples of the “good worker-bad benefit claimant dualisms” (2012:10) that were readily drawn upon by politicians and the media. Here,

members of the British public are separated into two groups, where “those engaging in paid work are characterised as independent, responsible citizens”, whereas comparatively, “those out of work are...dependent, irresponsible and...even conceptualised as second-class citizens, given their failure to fulfil the most central of citizenship obligations” (Patrick, 2012:9). Much like the Coalition’s stance previously, this rhetoric is also an indicator of the prioritisation of “individual explanations for poverty” (Pantazis, 2016:4).

Such distinctions and statements appear to have compounded further rising debates over and between, those who are considered ‘deserving’ and those perceived as ‘undeserving’ of support (Toynbee and Walker, 2015). Thus, what has become increasingly apparent, through both political and media rhetoric alike, is how those in receipt of social security payments, were separated into two opposing groups, the “deserving” or “moral” and the “undeserving” or “immoral”, it was at this point for Toynbee and Walker that “social cohesion was subverted” (2015:9), bringing forth further consequences. Making the relationship between economic and social polarisation clear, Dorling explains that “once a process of economic polarisation begins, it is very hard to turn it around” (2011:181). Once this process is in motion, Dorling emphasises how not only do hardened attitudes arise, but so does fear, fuelled by fear (2011). As this occurs, so does geographical polarisation which results in people knowing “less and less of each other” (Dorling, 2011:181). As Dorling explains, in place of this certainty “more and more” use their imaginations (2011:181) or perhaps the images routinely provided through mediated and political ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018).

Emphasising how this may be problematic, Bottero argues that in “linking inequality to the moral capacities of individuals”, the problem becomes “the personal characteristics of the poor”, rather than being focused on poverty (2005:23). In austerity Britain, such moral views of inequality, now appear to have been firmly re-established. Groups have been distinguished and set apart by their apparent disagreeable “social and moral habits” (Bottero, 2005:24). As Bottero continues, this form of identification creates distance, whereby poverty is not considered a societal issue, but as one emanating from those whom “stand apart from society” (2005:24). According to this view, the poor are the “outcasts of society, the ‘other’ in ‘us’ and ‘them’ images of inequality” (Bottero, 2005:24), thus leading to both economic and social polarisation. Whilst such contentions are not new, over the course of austerity examined here, the rhetoric of the ‘striver’ and ‘skiver’ amongst other juxtapositions, have arguably however, become more common place

amongst politicians, whose actions as a result, seemed driven by a neo-liberal ideology, alongside an economic plan for recovery.

Pantazis strengthens this point, suggesting that:

*the Coalition government drew upon well-trodden discourses, framed in terms of the 'Broken Society', focusing upon individual motivations, behaviour and pathology, and familiar critiques of the welfare state and dependency. On the one hand, government rhetoric sought to portray individuals, including those previously regarded as 'deserving' of social security support as 'shirkers' (in contrast to 'strivers'), 'lazy' (in contrast to 'hard-working'), and 'profligate' (in contrast to 'provident'), and responsible, in different ways, for bringing poverty on themselves and their families. On the other hand, the structural deficiencies of the benefits system were highlighted as encouraging dependency and, ultimately, leading to poverty (2016:4).*

For Pantazis, this can be understood both as “a perspective that is part and parcel of neo-liberal economics” and as an example of the discourse also identifiable amongst the Conservatives following their election in 2015, where “the policy trajectory of the previous Coalition government” continued (2016:10-16). This contention is further supported by Farnsworth and Irving, where they succinctly argue:

*for social policy, the emergence of 'austerity' as a more convincing tool to delegitimise economic dissent...pursue yet deeper cuts and reforms in the public sphere, suggests that the post-crisis reconfiguration of the welfare state to its current economically-elite-driven, capital-centric, shrunken form must surely be a dream come true for neoliberalism (2018: 465).*

Notably, as this thesis explores, the consequences of an austere programme of government is far from a “dream come true” (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018:465) for a substantial proportion of the British public. Sharing the view that “deepening social inequalities have induced both discomfort and discontent” upon members of the British public, worsening conditions and thereby reducing the declaration that ‘we are all in this together’, to one that is, as Clarke and Newman argue, “implausible” (2012:314). Within this research, austerity is thus positioned as an economic programme with severe consequences.

Following the result of the Brexit referendum, David Cameron resigned from his post as Prime Minister on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016. Theresa May took his place as the new Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party. May delivered a speech setting out her intentions (Asthana et al., 2016) and in doing so, further evidenced the prevalence of polarisation between groups in austerity Britain. Within this, and in what has been

described as “the hardest-hitting passage of the speech” in its entirety (Mason, 2016; Asthana et al., 2016), May declared that “we need a government that will deliver serious social reform-and make ours a country that truly works for everyone” (in Mason 2016; no pagination). Arguing this point further, May continued:

*if you're born poor, you will die on average nine years earlier than others. If you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white. If you're a white working-class boy, you're less likely than anybody else to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately. If you're a woman, you still earn less than a man (in Mason 2016; no pagination).*

As Asthana et al. note, Robert Halfon, deputy chairman of the Conservatives, intimated that what May had actually proposed was “a vision that placed his party’s tanks on Labour lawns” (2016: no pagination). Amidst Brexit negotiations, whether such a “centrist leadership pitch” (Mason, 2016: no pagination) will become reality, and thus entail a new approach to Conservative rule, remains questionable. Importantly, however, whilst some regarded the content of this speech to be “a one-nation pitch to work for everyone rather than the privileged few” (Asthana et al., 2016), others saw this as May’s recognition of how her predecessors had failed (Mason, 2016).

### **2.2.2 Summary**

This section provided a brief fiscal backdrop to the research, covering the recession, tracking some of the challenges faced and changes implemented by each successive government, before their contextual application in Chapter 6. Emphasis was placed on austerity, and the rhetoric of the Coalition and Conservatives, particularly in the relation to the ‘big society’ and the Conservative’s manifesto. Noting how the language chosen, has largely resulted in the further distinctions being drawn between those that pay taxes and those that do not. The latter is particularly important, in that as Bottero warns, “symbolic demarcations between them and us” bring forth important consequences for those whom are attributed such labels (2005:234).

Accordingly, the following section outlines some of the consequences of austerity for a number of groups. To provide an analytical account of the social and economic issues prevalent in Britain over this period, emphasis is placed on the rhetoric of ‘Broken Britain’. Alongside this, the rising vulnerability towards the experience of inequality, poverty and the prevalence of food poverty, homelessness and destitution is also explored.

## 2.3 The Consequences of austerity, Introduction

This Section begins to explore both the economic and social consequences of the introduction of austerity policies between 2010-2015. Beginning by providing a critical narrative of how people experiencing inequality and poverty were reimagined as individuals who deserved their plight, emphasis is thus placed on the rhetoric of 'Broken Britain', alongside the persistence of inequality and poverty in austerity Britain. Section 2.3.1.1 focuses on exploring the prevalence of food insecurity, food bank use and the emergence of social supermarkets. Comparatively, Section 2.3.1.2 sets the scene further, considering the prevalence of destitution, homelessness, and the violence against homeless people.

### 2.3.1 Broken?

In such a climate of austerity, the rhetoric of "Broken Britain" encourages the view that Britain is broken, largely as a result of individual failures and unsavoury behaviours (Mckenzie, 2015:11). For Levitas, however, the neo-liberal 'Big Society' rhetoric and austerity policies, led her to recall the following verse from the 1914-18 war era:

*it's the same the whole world over, it's the poor wot gets the blame. It's the rich wot gets the gravy, ain't it all a bleedin' shame (2012:339).*

Similarly, for Toynbee and Walker, what the neo-liberal ideology translates to is the poor being responsible for their depravity, they are "skivers and moral delinquents, redeemable only through a sharp dose of benefit reduction" (2015:66). It was and thus is, accordingly, a "kindness to relieve them of their dependency by cutting their benefits" (Toynbee and Walker, 2015:66). Pantazis (2016:4) puts forward an interesting anomaly, noting how this form of rhetoric "sat oddly" with the governments "commitment to tackling relative poverty". Arguing further, that "such narratives played a crucial role in the framing of debates about the need for welfare reform", and indeed who really needed help (Pantazis, 2016:4).

Though not often the focus of political debate, the lived consequences of austerity measures were severe, resulting in cuts; to both services and financial provision, directed at people already struggling financially (O'Hara, 2014). Arguably for many, such cuts "wounded", and continue to "wound" those who need assistance the most (Toynbee and Walker, 2015:3). The policies headed by the Coalition, led others to argue that the poor had "become too expensive" (Levitas, 2012; O'Hara, 2014; Hills, 2015:19). Although Hills

suggests that this perspective is one that may not be “expressed...directly”, he argues nevertheless, that this attitude “underlies much current policy towards benefits”, and further both notions of the welfare state and its role (2015:19).

Golding and Middleton (1982), offer an explanation as to why this may occur. Writing in the early 1980’s, Golding and Middleton note how in times of recession, “public anxiety” often resurfaces (1982:3), describing further both the consequences and consistencies over time, where they state:

*as the economic slump bit deeper into daily life, venomous hostility to the supposedly protected and coddled charges of the welfare and social security schemes returned the welfare state into the centre of the political stage.*

Arguably, what Golding and Middleton described during the 1980’s provides an accurate narrative of the occurrences following the recession of 2008/9 and the implementation of austerity in Britain. Not only has the welfare state been brought to the forefront of political attention, Mckenzie argues, we have also witnessed the introduction of “draconian measures” into all aspects of the welfare state and these appear to be staying with us for the foreseeable future (2015:10). The cuts, rather than ensuring economic security for all, have had an impact “directly on the poor, the young...sick and...disabled” (Levitas, 2012:322). This was also evidenced by the UNCESCR (2016).

Others have, more recently, considered the “violence of austerity” (Cooper and Whyte, 2017:2), highlighting the consequences of austerity measures through depicting a rise in food poverty (O’Connell and Hamilton, 2017), fuel poverty (London, 2017), personal debt (Ellis, 2017), alongside evictions and repossessions (Paton and Cooper, 2017). O’Hara (2017) also evidences increasing suicide rates, with Dorling describing an increase in mortality rates (2017). Whilst McCulloch (2017) analyses increasing homelessness and violence toward this group.

Though much of this evidence is drawn on in Chapter 6, due to spatial limitations, it is beyond the scope of this research to include a detailed account of the all the evidence concerned with poverty and widening social inequalities as a result of austerity measures. Instead, to illustrate the extent of inequality and poverty in Britain, for the purpose of this section the rise of food banks, destitution and the prevalence of homelessness is considered.



### 2.3.1.1 Food insecurity

For O'Hara, aside from the cuts to benefits, services and sanctions, increasing dependence on food banks are "one of the most visible totems on the austerity landscape" (2014:22). The prevalence of food inequality or "rising hunger" (Dorling, 2014:76) have been exemplified by the rise in the number of food bank providers in operation, including the TT and other charities, such as the Salvation Army (Livingstone, 2015). Demonstrating the severity and prevalence of food impoverishment further, Livingstone highlights that "in 2013 the Red Cross began redistributing food in the UK for the first time since the Second World War" (2015:189), thus further signalling rising need. Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty estimated that in 2013/14 alone, 20,247,042 meals were given to people experiencing "food poverty" (Cooper et al., 2014:4) and this figure was set to increase (Butler, 2015: no pagination).

Though Food bank usage has been on the increase from 2005, as Downing et al. (2014:1) note, between April-September 2013 alone, more than 350,000 individuals received food from TT food banks, this figure was "triple the number helped in the same period in 2012". Whilst Berger, exclaimed that it is "a national scandal that...thousands of people are forced to go hungry" (2013: no pagination), this is an experience that has remained consistent for many. Leading others to suggest that food banks should be understood as "a metonym for the impoverishment of Britain" (O'Connell and Hamilton, 2017:98).

MP Frank Field, in the report *Britain's not-so-hidden hunger*, from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, highlighted the lack of knowledge surrounding food insecurity and food banks (2016). Through an emphasis on providing details of the extent of hunger, more recently, research has shown how the fears above, appear to have become reality. According to The Independent Food Aid Network (2017), there are now approximately 2,000 independent food aid providers operating, alongside a further 2,036 food banks. In the financial year 2017-2018, the TT (2018: no pagination) alone, report that 1,333,952 "three-day emergency food supplies" were provided to "people in crisis", with 484,026 of these parcels being received by children. This, they report is 13 per cent higher than the previous year 2016-2017. The previous year, 2015-2016, there was a 6 per cent increase in the provision of food banks (TT, 2018:no pagination).

Notably, however, there are issues with the reliability and accuracy of the data collected by food bank organisations. As Lambie-Mumford and Dowler (2014) and Forsey (2016) highlight, the statistics do not often capture the entire picture nor are they able to cast light on to the proportion of people unable to access adequate food supplies, who do not attend foodbanks. More robust data is, thus, required. The TT's findings, nevertheless, do offer valuable insights into the proportion of people experiencing food inequality and how this has changed over the period of austerity examined here. Findings from the TT also further demonstrate some of the key reasons why people visit or are referred to foodbanks, suggesting that "the top four reasons for referral" to TT's foodbanks between 2017-18 alone, were "low income-benefits, not earning", 'benefit delay', 'benefit change' and 'debt'. They also report that the reason most often given (with this reason becoming increasingly more common) is low income-benefits and "not earning" (2018:no pagination).

Loopstra et al. sought to examine the possible impacts of benefit sanctions on food insecurity previously, and found some similarities, noting that a "strong, dynamic relationship exists between the number of sanctions applied in local authorities and the number of adults receiving emergency food parcels" (2018:7). Perry found similar evidence, noting benefit delays, sanctions and other life experiences, including yet not limited to low-incomes, job losses, bereavement, homelessness, poor mental health and debt, had resulted in a need to access support from food banks (2014). Killeya (2014) also found similar findings, highlighting benefit sanctions, delays and changes, as key factors resulting in need. Garthwaite also found this in her research, noting further that users did not "want" to attend foodbanks, it was "a last resort", driven by "harsh benefit sanctions, precarious, low-paid jobs administrative delays" (2016:149).

For Perry, "hunger and hard choices between heating, eating, paying bills and servicing debts" were both "real" experiences and an ongoing struggle amongst her research participants, what is more, the need to visit foodbanks was "often outside of an individual's control", (2014:13) rather than as a result of more individualistic explanations, like an inability to manage finances. Other alternative choices to food banks have also appeared, including café's like FareShare and FoodCycle, amongst others (Downing et al., 2014). As Downing et al. note "social supermarkets" have also appeared, here people in receipt of low incomes are able to purchase food at reduced prices, "in a normal shop environment if they are in receipt of certain benefits and live in the area" (2014:4).

The first of its kind opened in South Yorkshire in 2013 (Downing et al., 2014), by 2017 Saxena found that at least “seven ‘parent’ initiatives, each with several branches or franchises” had opened (2018, no pagination). Since both Perry (2014) and Killeya (2014) found that many of those accessing foodbanks felt stigmatised, ashamed and embarrassed as a result, these alternatives are said to reduce the discomfort faced by people who visit foodbanks. That said, this is only achievable if visitors are able to pay for the items, irrespective of whether they are reduced or not.

For Saxena, both the strengths of this initiative and the positive effect on those accessing the stores, are clear, social supermarkets “emerged to fill a gap in austerity Britain...providing a social safety net” (2018: no pagination). Saxena continues to explain the “short term” advantages of these initiatives, noting how “a degree of choice and dignity” is provided, and how these initiatives can assist people in saving money, thereby helping to mitigate “the effects of poverty and social vulnerability” (2018: no pagination). However, Saxena also warns that these cannot function on a long-term basis, are “vulnerable” and focus on a reduction of food waste, alongside eradicating hunger (2018: no pagination). Whether visiting food banks or social supermarkets, the choice is also limited, as are the nutrients afforded to each visitor or indeed customer.

In the wake of the recession and austerity measures, the use of both food banks and ‘social supermarkets’ thus increased, with volunteers collecting food and other supplies for foodbanks, becoming more visible both within and outside supermarkets over the period of austerity examined here (Toynbee and Walker, 2015). Whilst McCarthy, warns that it is pertinent food banks do not, as they are in the United States, become permanent fixtures in the “welfare landscape” of Britain and the UK (2013, no pagination), nearing six years on, they appear to be far from temporary solutions. For O’Connell and Hamilton “given that food is fundamental to health and social participation, food poverty has violent consequences for individuals, households and society itself” (2017:94).

Lambie-Mumford and Dowler (2014) appear to draw a connection between rising food insecurity, the notion of the ‘Big Society’, the state and ordinary citizens. This is apparent in their suggestion that the responsibility “for ensuring access to food are devolving from the state to charities, or churches and faith groups, or local communities” (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2014:1442). Whilst it could be argued that the support extended by community members, charitable organisations and leading supermarkets signal collective

action, rather than heightened individualism, as this chapter demonstrates altruism exists alongside highly individualistic attitudes amongst both the public and politicians. Indeed, this is supported by O'Connell and Hamilton (2017:95), who argue that despite an increasing body of evidence concerned with the extent of food poverty, this evidence has "largely been ignored or dismissed" by the government. Explanations for this issue are, instead, focused on behavioural traits, resulting in individualistic explanations of why members of the British public are unable to afford to provide food for themselves (O'Connell and Hamilton, 2017). These individualistic explanations have not only had an impact on attitudes toward foodbank users, but as this section has suggested upon food bank users themselves, who express "shame and embarrassment" having also been exposed to what can be understood as unhelpful discourse (Garthwaite, 2015:149).

Whilst the focus of this section has been placed on the existence of and increasing levels of food insecurity, as the following section highlights, experiencing food insecurity is not the only consequence of life lived in austerity Britain. Focusing on the prevalence of destitution and homelessness, the next section explores the impact of austerity measures, further.

### **2.3.1.2 Destitution and homelessness**

As Section 2.3.1.1 demonstrates, the rising costs of living and food prices, including benefit sanctions and delays, have resulted in more people struggling financially and the numbers of people experiencing food poverty have thus increased. The necessity of food banks and rising need for clothing and toiletry supplies, are not only indicative of the consequences of life lived in austere Britain, as Ryan argues, these are also becoming a "normalised" (2016: no pagination) aspect of society in this country. Alongside the rise of food insecurity, survey findings from JRF highlighted a further consequence of life lived in austere Britain. In 2016, JRF estimated the extent of destitution, finding that approximately "668,000 households, containing 1,252,000 people, of whom 312,000 were children, were destitute" (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016:2).

People were, as Fitzpatrick et al. (2016:2) explain, considered destitute if "they, or their children, have been unable to afford and therefore lacked two or more" of the "six essentials" over the course of a month, or whether due to their income being "extremely low" that they were unable to purchase "essentials" (food, shelter, heating, electricity,

clothing and footwear and access to “basic toiletries”). For Fitzpatrick et al. “destitution is intrinsically linked to broader poverty” and “long-term experiences of poverty” (2015:27), which they argue, is “driven by low income from work or benefits, high cost of essentials, and debts associated with paying for these essentials”. Fitzpatrick et al. also suggest further complexities, noting that “in some cases” both addiction and/or “poor mental health-factors” may have contributed toward the vulnerability and risk of experiencing destitution (2015:27). Fitzpatrick et al. appear to emphasise the existence of a relationship between destitution, homelessness, benefit sanctions and the use of foodbanks (2016). Suggesting that “a rising trend in a number of...factors...appear to be associated with destitution in the UK”, these can be understood “as a potential cause”, (the sanctioning of benefits), or “as a manifestation”, for example food bank usage, “homelessness and rough sleeping” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016:27).

Following 2010, it has moreover, been demonstrated that instances of rough sleeping, ‘sofa surfing’ and homelessness have increased (Clarke et al.,2015; Fitzpatrick et al.,2017; Wilson and Barton, 2019). Further evidence has also highlighted the expressions of hostility from members of the British public, faced by a number of homeless people on a regular basis (Sanders and Albanese, 2016; McCulloch, 2017). Where Crisis found that members of the homeless population are subject to both verbal and physical abuse, from being physically targeted to burned, urinated on, mocked and ignored (2016). A lack of compassion toward homelessness can also be further demonstrated. Reports of hotel users, upon looking out of their hotel rooms and seeing homeless people, complaining of “spoiled” view’s (Osley, 2017:no pagination), and of feelings of intimidation when passing through areas with tents erected by homeless people (Greenfield, 2018). This, as Sparkes (2016: no pagination) argues, has occurred alongside instances of “hostile architecture” or “defensive architecture”. Examples include the installation of metal studs and metal spikes in the doorways of buildings, “anti-homelessness benches” and extend further to pavements and doorways being “watered-down” to deter rough-sleeping (Sparkes, 2016: no pagination).

Whilst this section has focused on the prevalence of homelessness and destitution, evidencing how some members of the public perceive of people experiencing poverty over the course of austerity examined here, attitudes toward people experiencing inequality and poverty are discussed in more detail in Section 2.5.

### 2.3.1.3 Summary

This section has introduced the rhetoric of Broken Britain, evidencing the consequences of austerity measures and in doing so has begun to provide a backdrop of austerity Britain during this period. As this section has highlighted, austerity measures have negatively impacted a number of individuals and groups, including people suffering from ill health, people with impairments, women and children (Levitas, 2012; UNCESCR, 2016). Fuel poverty (London, 2017), eviction and repossession rates (Paton and Cooper, 2017), alongside personal debt (Ellis, 2017) have all increased. As have suicide (O'Hara, 2014) and mortality rates (Dorling, 2017). These examples not only highlight the consequences of austerity measures, this evidence also supports the suggestion that for many individuals and families in the UK, the 'reality' of life lived on a low income, is one rife with struggle (Lansley and Mack, 2015).

Focusing on a discussion of food insecurity and food bank use, alongside the prevalence of destitution and homelessness in austerity, this section has demonstrated how, as O'Hara argued, austerity has served to provide a "very bleak reality...for a considerable proportion of the British population" (2014:5), and this, moreover, is well documented (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Hutton, 2011; Lansley and Mack, 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Despite this evidence, those who are impoverished are not always considered to be facing adversity, but are instead, held responsible for their own fate (Clarke and Newman, 2012). As Ferdinand points out, a number of accusations have been attributed to those who are believed to occupy positions at the bottom of the British social hierarchy, and these include labels such as "immoral, godless, ignorant, feckless, infantile" (2010:175). Given these characteristics, such groups are also considered to be "unable to sustain family life, utterly heathen, incapable of absorbing education, unable to look after themselves economically..." (Ferdinand, 2010:175). In the context of food insecurity and homelessness, this stigmatising rhetoric has been evidenced in research amongst food bank users (Killeya, 2014; Perry, 2014; Garthwaite, 2015) and amongst those whom are homeless (Crisis, 2016; McCulloch, 2017).

For Humpage, it can thus be argued that "neo-liberal welfare reforms" have once again, "reframed poverty and inequality as emerging from individual inadequacies and welfare dependency" (2016:91). Thus, in the midst of the recession, the political rhetoric noted above and the consequences of a programme of austerity, it has also been argued that

this has been “accompanied by a pervasive media assault” on those experiencing poverty (Mooney and Hancock, 2010:no pagination) which is expected to have divided members of the British public, further. Given this, alongside understanding changing social attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution of income over the course of austerity, emphasis is also placed on popular culture. Accordingly, the following section introduces a number of controversial broadcasted programmes, exploring the content of these programmes, alongside the literature.

## **2.4 Poverty and inequality in the media, Introduction**

This Section outlines how people experiencing inequality and poverty were represented in the media. Emphasis is placed on how televised ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) and ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) appeared, alongside the introduction of a number of austere changes, leading some commentators to share the belief, that in order to validate austere welfare changes, the consequent rising hostility between groups was also part of this economic plan (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Penny, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Shildrick, 2018).

### **2.4.1 Benefits and the media**

Bottero emphasises the importance of understanding how inequality is represented, this is evident where she highlights that “images of inequality” can be understood as “claims”, and that these claims reflect “whose interests align...who should be grouped...as virtuous or decent...who deserve power” or who is “unjustly excluded” (2005:18). These can be considered “campaigning strategies...over power social recognition, power and resources which help form the structure of inequality” (Bottero, 2005:18). In the same way, these “images of inequality” may attempt to position who is considered immoral and justifiably excluded (Bottero, 2005:18). As Bottero notes, therefore there is a need to “look closely at how images of inequality have been used in attempts to justify or transform social arrangements” (Bottero, 2005:18). With this in mind, emphasis is placed on how inequality has been mediated throughout the period of austerity examined here, using Benefits Street an example to illustrate, whilst also drawing on literature to suggest why this may be problematic.

The “images of inequality” (Bottero, 2005:18) drawn on over the period of austerity examined in this research, are far from new (Pantazis, 2016). It can however be argued that these have, however, re-emerged within a changing economic and political environment. As emphasised throughout this research, aside from an economic impact, the changes implemented under the guise of austerity, have had social consequences. Toynbee and Walker (2015) illustrate this point. Referring to changes to “tax...benefits...housing, health and education”, Toynbee and Walker (2015:1) argue that these austere changes have “prised further apart region, class, generation, gender and race”, thus “driving deeper wedges between town and country, old and young, deserving and undeserving, lucky and unlucky, left and right”.

Penny, in a similar vein, acknowledges further ‘cruelty’ as a result of austere policies, where she argues:

*the cruellest thing about the benefits cap is not that it could make thousands of people homeless or force more families to depend on food banks...It's that it's not really about people on benefits at all...It's about placating public rage (2013: no pagination).*

Here, Penny, is seemingly arguing that austerity provided a different function, one intent on fracturing social relations and cultivating an austere and divided Britain. Toynbee and Walker argue, further, that alongside austerity measures “the facts of poverty” have been “fended off by Manichean rhetoric about benefits scroungers versus hardworking families” (2015:18). Arguably, this distinction was further embedded in the 2015 Conservative governments’ manifesto (Section 2.2.1).

In this austere Britain, the focus, thus, appeared less concerned with social inequalities and more concerned with presenting a particular “image of inequality” (Bottero, 2005:18). Indeed, alongside rising hostility toward taxation, benefit claimants, and the welfare state as a whole (Slater, 2012), there has also been a “proliferation of popular cultural output” which has arguably become “devoted to the expression of class relations” (Skeggs, 2013:5). Although there have been a number of long running soap operas (The Archers, 1950- present, Radio 4; Cathy Come Home BBC, 1966; EastEnders BBC1, 1985-present; Coronation Street ITV, 1960-present; and Emmerdale ITV, 1972-present), arguably depicting class lifestyles, more recently there has been a plethora of programmes and documentaries, portraying social class identities, with a markedly different tone.



Importantly, as Slater highlights, these have occurred alongside the consequences of the “institutional arrangements” outlined above, and subsequent “dramatic assault on the British Welfare state” during austerity (2012:950). It has, as a result, been argued that the following programmes provided an important function, beyond entertainment. Whilst the portrayal of social class disadvantage, have been observable in ‘comedy sketch’ shows (Little Britain’s’, ‘Vicky Pollard’), series’ like Shameless and chat shows such as The Jeremy Kyle Show (2005-to present) for some time, as Jensen highlights, a new form of classed reality televised entertainment has also emerged, ‘Poverty Porn’ (2013). This is descriptive of the rise in programmes concerned with the lives of real benefit claimants. To illustrate, Channel 5 (Ch5) has aired a number of programmes, including: On Benefits and Proud (2013) and the series, Benefits Britain: life on the Dole (2014), which included: Benefit Brits by the sea (2014), Benefits: 19 kids and counting the cost (2015), My Big Benefits Family (2015), Benefits: can’t Work, won’t work (2015) and Benefits: 37 Years on the Dole (2015), to name but a few.

Although not exhaustive, other programmes also include Nick and Margaret: We All Pay Your Benefits (BBC1, 2013), Saints and Scroungers (BBC1, 2009-2015), and Tricks of the dole cheats (Channel 4, 2012). Many of these programmes arguably appear to seek to reinforce what van der Bom et al. (2018:3) refer to as “neo-liberal discourses related to the notion that poverty is a result of individual failures”. Previously, Mooney and Hancock had also, in a similar vein, argued that the programme Saints and Scroungers was aired to “remind us that ‘we’ law abiding taxpayers are being robbed by the scroungers” (2010: no pagination). As Section 2.5 highlights, such individualistic attitudes are also observable amongst members of the British public.

Discussing the content of the programme Nick and Margaret: We Pay All Your Benefits (2013), Penny argues that what this programme sought to do was pit “the underpaid against the unemployed” (2013:no pagination). Penny highlights however, this programme also provided another function, that of “echoing the rhetoric of the Department for Work and Pensions” [DWP], as it sought to pit “taxpayers against shirkers” and placed further emphasis on the “make work pay” rhetoric (2013:no pagination). Penny (2013: no pagination) argues further that the broadcaster (The BBC), alongside the content of the show, was of concern, where she remarks:

*on any other channel...this could be written off as a crass cash-in on public mistrust of the welfare system, treating the unemployed as a telegenic cross between criminals and animals in a zoo. That it was given the green light by*

*the BBC, a publicly funded and supposedly impartial broadcaster, indicates something more. It suggests a culture shift: the wilful misdirection of public anger towards those who least deserve it.*

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to provide a thorough analysis of each of these programmes, one programme has been selected for the purpose of this discussion, Benefits Street. Continuing to thoroughly explore austerity Britain, the following section introduces Benefits Street, focusing on the portrayal of people in receipt of benefits and on research examining the content, impact, purpose and the timing of this programme.

#### **2.4.1.1 Benefits Street**

The first series of Benefits Street was filmed in Birmingham, incorporating (predominantly) the residents of James Turner Street. A second series also aired, filmed on the Tilery Estate (Stockton-on-Tees), just days after the election of the Conservative Government in 2015 (van der Bom et al., 2018). Produced by Love productions, Benefits Street, is perhaps the most controversial of this genre of programmes (Channel 4). For this reason, the focus of this section is on providing a critical overview of the content of this series.

According to Channel 4, “Benefits Street reveals the reality of life on benefits, as the residents of the streets in areas hit hard by recession invite cameras into their tight-knit communities” (2014, no pagination). The programmes present the critical viewer with a broad range of examples descriptive of the issues faced by a number of low-income individuals and families. This includes the prevalence of environmental degradation, poor quality housing, housing insecurity, a lack of education, language barriers, low paid work, underemployment, overcrowding and racist attitudes, alongside ill health. For others, it can be described as fulfilling a different function, the provision of ‘poverty porn’. As Jensen explains, such programmes are referred to as a pornographic, as their intention is to “arouse and stimulate the viewer” (2014:4). Thus, it is argued that the programmes aim to stimulate an “emotional sensation” amongst the public, “through a repetitive and affective encounter with the television screen” (Jensen, 2014:4). For Jensen, ‘poverty porn’ can thus be understood as “an all-surface, no-depth visual culture of immediacy and its semiotic cues” where “its red flags of moral outrage-require no interpretative work from the viewer” (2014:4). Public perceptions, reflective of such outrage and of wider social issues are discussed in Section 2.5.2.

Benefits Street can be understood as “harsher in its moral judgements” than other programmes portraying classed identities (Allen et al., 2014:2), with benefit recipients routinely portrayed negatively; “filming shoplifting, arrests”, and “attempts to buy drugs” (van der Bom et al., 2018:1). Reflective of political rhetoric during this period, as van der Bom et al. highlight “narratives in which people were dependent on welfare payments” and lacked “the motivation to seek employment” (2018:1) were focused upon. Brooker et al. (2015:3179) also noted similar findings, emphasising how “the dominant narrative from the show is that many of the street’s residents are dependent on welfare payments”. This, they point out, is:

*set against the backdrop of austerity imposed...following the global financial crisis, as well as...ongoing...controversial reforms designed to reduce...welfare and unemployment benefit spending (Brooker et al., 2015:3179).*

Mooney and Hancock previously argued that programmes concerned with inequality and poverty, are often purposely narrated and framed in a way that direct the audiences’ attention, cultivating “revulsion among the viewing public” and by extension directing attention away from structural issues, toward those considered at fault for Britain’s “broken society” (2010: no pagination). Mooney and Hancock explain this ongoing process, alongside the wider implications further, whereby they purport:

*the cameras pay attention to the possessions of those experiencing severe poverty and through the cameras gaze on the plasma TVs and other goods, use of alcohol and tobacco, we learn that many of those in poverty are ‘flawed consumers’, and that these are non-essentials, the benefits which claimants receive must be ‘too much’...in the absence of understanding any further context, the viewer responds with moral indignation and disgust (2010:no pagination).*

Similarly, and more recently, van der Bom et al. (2018) also draw on Bauman’s understanding of flawed consumerism (2007) in their research. van der Bom et al. (2018:15) note how the spending habits and possessions of those featured in Benefits Street was focused upon by cameras, with their research findings highlighting further how the public respond toward the “misjudged priorities” demonstrated by benefit recipients. Thus, much like Mooney and Hancock’s (2010) observation, items such as cigarettes remained “conceptualised as luxuries” amongst research participants, implying “that the poor should restrict their purchases only to the ‘essentials’, such as food and household bills” (van der Bom et al., 2018:9).

As Paterson et al. argue “framing of welfare recipients beside high-end electronic goods...casts them as undeserving and draws on prevalent ideologies of benefit scroungers/cheats” (2016:197). Alongside this familiar discourse, van der Bom et al. also emphasise how a “scrounger discourse and an underclass discourse” is observable, which subsequently portrays “people as morally repugnant and unaware of, or deliberately not conforming to, wider social norms” (2018:18). Here, people in receipt of benefits are not just labelled scroungers, but also “as non-human ‘creatures’ and objectionable beings” (van der Bom et al., 2018:18). The existence of these stereotypical labels are discussed in more detail in Section 2.5.2 and 2.4.1.2.

In short, it can be argued that Benefits Street represented benefit recipients negatively, where abuse of benefits and illegal activity were focused upon, further intensifying public mistrust toward the welfare state and benefit recipients. Whilst this section has introduced one example of the negative discourse and representation of benefit recipients, and of people experiencing inequality and poverty, the following section considers how poverty and inequality are represented in the media, further, and how this may inform public debate. Whilst it is not suggested that the media influence attitudes directly, the media is understood as an outlet with many platforms, enabling information to be shared and debates to be framed. Exploring mediated portrayal, therefore, allows for a greater understanding of the social and cultural climate throughout this period in austerity Britain.

#### **2.4.1.2 Framed? Stigmatising discourse and the media**

As illustrated in the discussion of Benefits Street, issues of disadvantage are conveyed to the public in “voyeuristic and...exploitative” ways (Kyprianou, 2015:12), these representations and the frequency in which they occur may, consequently, reinforce perceptions of “them and us” (Cannadine, 1998: 19-20). Polarised in this way, it is expected that further consequences will arise, both for those who are impoverished and in gathering support to combat these issues.

Perhaps it is for these reasons, Shildrick believes that these “misleading, damaging and divisive depictions of those experiencing poverty and related disadvantages might best be described as poverty propaganda” (2018:784). Shildrick explains that through the production of propaganda, people experiencing disadvantage are stigmatised and labelled, thereby hiding the “real causes and consequences of poverty” (2018:784). Shildrick, thus,

highlights how “poverty and economic disadvantage are rarely called out as being the result of policy and political decisions”, instead she maintains that these are depicted “to be the result of individual behaviours” (2018:787). This propaganda is generated by political rhetoric, reflected within policy and is “reinforced by the media, both print and television” (Shildrick, 2018:787).

McQuail emphasises the most important functions of the media, noting that the media is powerful, acting as a prospective source of “influence, control and innovation”, this power derives from its ability to supply “definitions and images of social reality” alongside providing a place whereby “the changing culture and values of societies and groups are constructed, stored and most visibly expressed” (1994:1). Similarly, Hill (2014:129-130) discusses how audiences of reality programmes, as noted above, are presented with a “mix of fact and fiction”, a form of “structured reality”, which “draws on narrative, drama and direct experience of life”. Hill argues further that, “these cultural contexts to the genre” are both “fascinating and troubling at the same time”, offering “a huge menu of people, characters, emotions and performances”, but importantly also encouraging “moral and social judgement-often condemnation of people and their direct experiences” (2014:129-130).

The media thus has the ability to inform others, connecting people who lack “first-hand experience” of poverty allowing them to see the “reality of poverty” for many, and by extension having a “significant impact on how people with experience of poverty view themselves” (Hanley, 2009:7). Often, by extension, meaning that consumers of these shows, “mark boundaries between themselves and different kinds of people on television” (Hill, 2014:129). What is, however, often missing from these representations is the portrayal of the vast majority of people who struggle financially and as McKendrick et al. emphasise of people “struggling to make ends meet who do not descend into petty (or larger-scale) criminality...resort to violence...defraud the state”, or of those who “are hopelessly lacking in resources of other kinds” (2008:38). Due to this lack in focus, the social consequences are profound, resulting in the continuation of “demonising of poverty and those living in it” (McKendrick et al., 2008:38).

Horton and Gregory refer to previous historical periods, where such a distinction between the “poor and non-poor” resulted in members of Victorian England perceiving those impoverished as “alien others” or a “submerged residuum that

was the object of fear” and equally, fascination (2009:22). Horton and Gregory (2009) thus highlight similarities over time. Drawing out further similarities between contemporary society and Victorian preoccupations, they also note how previously “well to-do Victorian ladies” would participate in “covert tours of East End slums”, whereas contemporarily they argue “we have Vicky Pollard and voyeuristic reality shows” like those identified above (Horton and Gregory, 2009:22). Similarly, for Clarke and Newman, such “contemporary obsessions” with people who are said to belong to the “urban underclass in its many guises (hoodies, chavs, single mothers, the feckless and the workshy)” bear “uncomfortable similarities” with Victorian fascinations of those they believed were “deprived and depraved” (2012: 310-311). Others have argued, in a similar vein, that within such programmes “dystopian depictions of Britain’s underclass have been reinforced” (Dorey, 2010:335).

Though theorised before the production of *Benefits Street*, McKendrick et al., (2008), Horton and Gregory (2009), Dorey (2010) and Clarke and Newman (2012) highlight a continued public interest toward those experiencing inequality, alongside the prevalence of a dualism between those considered ‘deserving’ and those considered ‘undeserving’. The renewal of interest toward those living on inadequate incomes, can be evidenced by the extreme popularity of *Benefits Street* in the UK, with approximately seven million viewers at its peak (Plunkett, 2015: no pagination) and a second series, further presenting poverty both as entertainment and in a negative light (van der Bom et al., 2018).

Alongside such programmes, some daily newspapers were also keen to continue to promote stories of benefit ‘scroungers’ and ‘fraudsters’ (Dorling, 2014), implying that the regular tax payer should be scornful of those who spend their hard-earned taxes, both frivolously and on the wrong things (Penny, 2013). Dorling refers to an important relationship between politics, political rhetoric and the media in framing societal issues, maintaining that “fears and belief systems are built up and altered through many media”, but that printed press is also “vital in this process” (2011:168). For Dorling, “the press does not promulgate prejudice simply because it sells more papers and gains more viewers in fearful times”, on the contrary “the press also takes its lead from the actions of politicians” (2011:168-169).

Indeed, for Kyprianou both politicians and the media have ensured that issues concerning welfare benefits have “never strayed far from the news headlines” (2015:46). Dorey further notes the importance of “persistently negative attitudes towards the poor” and how these have been “reinforced by deeply unflattering reports” which construct a narrative around “sink estates...rife with anti-social behaviour, chaotic and dysfunctional family relationships, alcohol and/or drug abuse” of which are further described as being inhibited by “feral children and adolescents...and widespread welfare dependency” (2010:335).

Although the prevalence of poverty and the existence of inequality are more likely to be acknowledged by the public, “when it is described as such when presented through the mass media” (McKendrick et al., 2008:6), for O’Hara the representations and framing of disadvantage as noted above, served a different purpose, for her they were used as a “tactic to validate benefit changes” (2014:117). McKendrick et al. highlight how mediated sources, like “newspapers, television, films, blogs and radio, all present poverty to their respective audiences” (2008:6). However, it is argued, that many of the newspaper articles and televised specials mentioned above, are also “expected to let us know, perhaps only by the tone of voice”, used by the narrator’s voice over, “or a raising of the eyebrows, a grimace-but sometimes in words of one syllable what we should be thinking too” (Mullin, 2009:49).

Thus, rather than portraying the negative aspects of lives lived on or supported by social security benefits, such as a lack of an education, poor living conditions, poor nutrition and a lack of access to secure employment, the focus is on the behaviours of those “living off the social”, where there is a curious interest in knowing exactly what our taxes are “paying” for (Penny, 2013: no pagination). For Ferdinand “the popular media once represented the lower classes as sturdy, indomitable, responding to misfortune with a chirpy stoicism”, this however, he believes has changed, instead “the worse off” are now depicted as “sour, whingeing and defeatists” (2010:108), whom could have made better choices.

Much like Golding and Middleton observed previously, it can be argued that the media held a significant role in both the identification of “targets and amplifying public indignation in a deep cutting and highly effective welfare backlash” (1982:4) following the implementation of austerity. Similarly, Mooney and Hancock argue that “the messages given are pervasive, reflecting and forging an anti-welfarism”, one that “fits neatly with state agendas for welfare reform and austerity policies and legitimates them” (2010: no

pagination). Such representations are particularly important, in that as Bottero maintains “images of the other don't just reflect social distance, they are also ammunition in strategies attempting to create or reinforce social distance” (2005:27).

For Mullin “tabloid journalism...requires a constant supply of victims”, whereby “in recent years the tabloid virus has spread well beyond traditional tabloids, even into the broadcast media”, as noted above (Mullin, 2009:48). Over the course of the last two decades, the UK has also seen the rise of what Mullin refers to as a “new British phenomenon, the feeding frenzy” (2009:49). More recently it is argued that the media have used these victims, in seeking to sway public opinion and to justify cuts (O'Hara, 2014). Yet rather than the poor being portrayed as those victims, it has instead seen them vilified, where the true victim is represented by the taxpayer (Penny, 2013).

For Larsen and Dejgaard, “the moral panic of the tabloid press” and now beyond, is often “constructed around the stereotype about the deviance of the poor” (2013:298) and this is not new phenomenon. Indeed, as Dorling points out, whilst a “large section of press feasted on benefit scroungers”, the same outlets were however, “strangely quiet about tax avoidance” (2014:112). Mooney and Hancock argue that there appears instead, to be a “fascination with poverty and the supposedly deviant lifestyle of those affected” (2010:no pagination), with this form of mediated vilification of recipients of welfare assistance evidently not new, instead programmes like Benefits Street are an example of the “notorious exploitation” of others (Toynbee and Walker, 2015:111). Thus, these programmes and indeed other mediated forms, serve as examples of those in need having once again been propelled into “media stocks for public stoning” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:89).

For Mooney and Hancock, not only are the public expected to feel “moral outrage” but they are also “encouraged to find the worst and weakest moments of people's lives” both entertaining and amusing (2010: no pagination). Arguably, such “negative newsworthy stories about the deviant poor”, serve to provide the “perfect environment for building negative stereotypes about the poor” (Larsen and Dejgaard, 2013:289). Drawing on Shildrick and MacDonald, this is descriptive of a historically long process of “the social and political propensity to mark out some people as unworthy of support or culpable for their own hardship” (2013:293). This is further observed by Mckenzie, who noted how the demeaning language used to describe the poor is “powerful and has been with us for



many generations” (2015:9). Not only is the language now used in every day parlance, in both the formal medium and social media, as demonstrated in Section 2.2.1, it has also been favourable amongst politicians in their quests of “political capital” (Mckenzie, 2015:9).

Although the impact of the way in which this is received by the public, is questionable (McQuail, 1994), for others the production of these articles, and programmes, alongside the political rhetoric and dwindling economy, have not emerged by accident but rather with specific intentions of influencing the publics’ perceptions (Kim et al., 2012; O’Hara, 2014; Shildrick, 2018). Indeed, Kim et al. highlight how in “framing a social problem in a specific way, the media can address the question of who is responsible for causing and solving the problem” (2012:101). Accordingly, questions arise in relation to whether the “government or society as a whole are responsible” for social problems presented (Kim et al., 2012:101). Kim et al. argue further, that “journalists seek to reduce the complexity of issues”, by way of presenting them to the public in “easy-to-understand interpretive packages, framing functions as a packaging process” (2012:102). This process involves the selection of particular aspects of reality and increasing their saliency, whilst also omitting other aspects (Kim et al., 2012:102).

As Kim et al. propose, it is within this “selection process” that the medium seek to “promote a particular definition of reality”, thus leading audiences to then “make attributions of responsibility” (2012:102). Shildrick makes a similar point, noting that ‘poverty propaganda’ manufacture “confusion about the root cause of inequality, blaming the supposedly feckless, the lazy and the workshy” and thereby draws people’s attentions away from the “real causes” (2018:791). Not only is responsibility shifted, the “life limiting effects and the role governments play in perpetuating or alleviating poverty and its effects remain largely hidden”, disguised by both “false” and “misleading caricatures about poverty and the people who experience it” (Shildrick, 2018:791). The consequent definitions of responsibility are thus “particularly important”, because this may also prove to “shape the overall policy approach taken to address issues, such as poverty” (Kim et al., 2012:102). Similarly, Alcock also purported that “ideologies structure the way in which all of us perceive and think about social events”, noting further that “they are as important in determining the form of policy as economic demands or political struggles” (1987:28).

Thus, the many media available, has the capacity to become an imperative source of information and also serve as environment that enables debate, where inequality and

poverty is concerned (McKendrick et al., 2008). This power is, however, not without consequence (Shildrick, 2018). Through the consumption of poverty porn (Jensen, 2013) and by extension, the spread of poverty propaganda, Shildrick emphasises how:

*Poverty Propaganda is given voice, and...power, though the mainstream media, in ways that hard evidence about poverty or the grind of day-to-day life in low paid, insecure work that fails to take people away from poverty, either far enough or for long enough, to make a real difference to their lives, very rarely is. It is most often the affluent and the powerful (and in many cases those who have the power to resolve poverty or extend the condition to more and more citizens) who hold the cards about how poverty is presented in public arenas. The voices of those with first-hand experience are very rarely heard or where they are, they are moulded, shaped and represented in particular ways (2018:791).*

As Paterson et al. (2016:196) argue “the perpetuation of negative evaluations of poor people” may thus “be used as supporting evidence for governmental policies relating to the benefits system”, and whilst empathy may be extended to those perceived as living in poverty through no fault of their own, for those whom are perceived to be poor due to their own failings, they are marked ‘scroungers’, living off our taxes, and are thus undeserving of any assistance.

This, as noted by Kim et al. is descriptive of the “two conflicting views on defining responsibility” in action (2012:102). Thus, one view regards social problems as being caused “by the deficiencies of individuals”, whereby due to the ‘problem’ being considered in relation to “flaws in individual behaviours”, suggestions to eradicate these issues “tend to focus on modifications of the problematic behaviours” (Kim et al., 2012:102). Conversely, the other view holds that attention should be given to “flaws in social and environmental conditions”, whereby solutions to the issues faced, are for instance, sought through recommendations in social policy changes (Kim et al., 2012:102). In 2011, a speech by Cameron, named *Troubled families*, arguable reinforced the former (Troubled Families Speech, 2011).

Consequently, societal issues such as poverty can be framed in ways, whereby it is suggested that “political, economical or other social forces” are defined as “largely responsible” or in “in a way that stresses the responsibilities of the poor” (Kim et al., 2012:102). It is for these reasons, Larsen and Dejgaard suggest that mediated output also serves to “form an important basis for creating opinions toward recipients of welfare schemes” (2013:288). Arguing further that such content “is likely to influence who we (politicians, journalists, social scientists and ordinary citizens) think the poor and welfare

recipients are” (Larsen and Dejgaard, 2013:288). Allport (1954) described this as the formation of labels and categorisation, where images and stereotypes are born.

Larsen and Dejgaard described these images and stereotypes as “crucial for the moral judgements about whether the recipients are deserving or not” (2013:288). Shildrick (2018) explains the important function of such processes further, drawing on the work of Link and Phelan (2014). Link and Phelan (2014:24) assert that “when people have an interest in keeping other people down, in or away”, stigma can be used as a valuable “resource” that enables people to “obtain the ends they desire”. This, they name, “resource stigma power” (2014:24). As Shildrick (2018:793) purports, “the power of stigma and shame” that are widely attributed to the experiences of poverty, and by extension inequality, have meant that people who experience poverty themselves seemingly “disassociate themselves from the condition”. As Dorey emphasises, negative representations like those described here, fail to “elicit much sympathy” amongst those “who already harbour unsympathetic or judgemental attitudes towards the poor” (2010:335). This perhaps explains why people wish to distance themselves away from such stereotypical assumptions of the way in which lives are lived in periods of inequality or poverty, whether these are prolonged or temporary.

Although it would be “naïve” to solely attribute the public’s attitudes towards poverty and inequality, to the media alone (McKendrick et al., 2008:7), for indeed “buried beneath the surface of attitudes about the welfare state lie centuries of experience and imagery” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:6), the media arguably “fulfils an important role in shaping, amplifying and responding to public attitudes toward poverty” and redistributive initiatives (McKendrick et al., 2008). As Shildrick (2018:787) emphasises, both “the pervasiveness and consistency of poverty propaganda’s core messages...that those experiencing poverty are somehow culpable for their own poverty”, veils the “realities of poverty”, its “causes and consequences”. As the following section demonstrates, such “cultural products such as television programmes”, also became a “popular topic of discussion on social media”, with attitudes toward those experiencing inequality and poverty reflective of longstanding negative perceptions (van der Bom et al.,2018:4).

Concerned with the consequences of such mediated scrutiny, Larsen and Dejgaard, suggest that what is needed is further “welfare attitude research”, of which should “focus on stereotypes...of fellow citizens...as they are indeed both crucial and difficult to change”

(2013: 298). Indeed, Scott Paul (2013: no pagination) exclaims, “how can campaigners attempt to shift public attitudes, when the media is dominated by such [poverty porn] programmes?”. Accordingly, it can be argued that “efforts to engage public support for measures to tackle poverty” must first “consider the media’s role in informing and reflecting public opinion” (McKendrick et al., 2008:2).

Though it is not the intention of this research to offer this examination, this section has outlined the broader social and cultural climate in operation in austerity Britain during this period. Emphasis has been placed on how people living life on low incomes are portrayed in negative ways, “as lacking skills, living life according to different value systems and being unproductive in the wider economy”, thus generating “an attainment value around dismissive distancing of the general public, from those living with poverty” (McKendrick et al. 2008:36) and thereby widening the social distance between groups.

#### **2.4.1.3 Summary**

With a focus on Benefits Street to illustrate, this section has shown how people experiencing inequality and poverty have been represented in the media. Emphasis has also been placed on the role of the media in framing societal issues, how the media are powerful and are also able to guide debates surrounding poverty and inequality. Allowing for a further examination of perceptions of inequality and poverty, responses to the programme Benefits Street are discussed in greater detail in the following section. Prior to this, however, it is also worth noting that despite an increase in programmes within the genre of poverty porn between 2010-2015 examined here, the focus appears to have changed over time. To illustrate this change, in 2014, Hungry Britain (Panorama) aired, followed by Battling with Benefits (BBC One, 2016) which sought to highlight how austerity driven cuts had impacted upon people’s lives. Similarly, Ken Loach’s I, Daniel Blake (2016) provided a similar narrative, reflecting the reality of the British Welfare State for a number of people.

The content of these programmes, are in stark contrast to the framing of programmes like Benefits Street (Channel 4), depicting how, for many individuals and families, austerity in Britain means being unable to feed and clothe themselves, nor pay their bills. Accordingly, although it could be argued that the research presented in this section is outdated, it is argued here that this research instead, places emphasis on the social and cultural climate,

demonstrating changing discourse, over the course of austerity examined here. The following section seeks to build on this further, exploring the literature relating to public perceptions of inequality and poverty, drawing on research where public perceptions of *Benefits Street*, benefit recipient's and the welfare state have been investigated.

## **2.5 Perceptions of inequality and poverty, Introduction**

In austerity Britain, it is argued “intensely punitive” attitudes toward the poor are becoming increasingly recognisable (Levitas, 2012:322), this research, alongside others has demonstrated how this has occurred (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; O'Hara, 2014; Sparke, 2016; Alston, 2018). Not only are negative representations of people experiencing the reality of economic disadvantage becoming more readily presented in the form of televised entertainment, these groups have been actively targeted, verbally and physically, by other members of the public (Baumberg et al., 2012; Who Benefits?, 2014).

This Section critically explores public perceptions of inequality and poverty, noting how instances of ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) or indeed ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) were both resisted as a form of vilification and accepted as an accurate depiction of life for many considered dependent on state support. The consequences of shared beliefs like the latter are also discussed, intent on gaining a broader understanding of how such attitudes relate to wider attitudes towards inequality, poverty and income redistribution in Britain. Section 2.5.2 provides a narrative of research concerning the public's responses to the programme *Benefits Street*, considering further the wider implications of this programme and others like it.

### **2.5.1 Divided?**

Much like Golding and Middleton cautioned in the early 1980's, it can be argued that “the diffuse waves of public anxiety that rippled out from the storm centre of economic recession were closing in over the poor and the welfare systems on which they depended” (1982:4). Although written some time before the economic crash of 2008/09, this also appears to be the case following the recent recession, heightened further by the implementation of austerity measures. Hills argues further, that the word welfare itself is now increasingly “used to conjure up a picture that the source of Britain's budget deficit” (2015:19) were benefit recipients and their plentiful welfare payments. For Park et al. the

consequences of such a rhetoric are clear; we are living in a society inhibited by scepticism, where the “public appear unconvinced by...current collective responses to key social issues like welfare, inequality, housing or the environment” (2012a: xx). Hill continues, describing an increasingly polarised society, one comprised of the “strivers” and “skivers” (2015:1). Explaining this mentality further, Hills (2015:1) argues:

*it's skivers against strivers; dishonest scroungers against honest taxpayers...benefits street against the rest of the country; undeserving and deserving. It's them against us. We are always in work, pay our taxes and get nothing from the state. They are a welfare-dependent underclass, pay nothing to the taxman [sic], and get everything from the state.*

The above is descriptive of what Bottero refers to as “symbolic demarcations between them and us” of which “have important consequences for the fate of people who become assigned to such categories” (Bottero, 2005:234). As noted above, this mentality not only perpetuate acts of “symbolic violence” (Mckenzie, 2015:16), such expressions also exist as a form of “class racism” (Atkinson et al., 2013:35). That said, however, these perceptions are not necessarily reflective of the British population in its entirety. What they do highlight, however, is how class abuse is both in existence and is problematic, arguably acting as both a symptom of and cause of class polarisation and thus operating as a barrier to successfully ending inequality.

Notably, trends in perceptions of inequality and poverty, demonstrate that the proportion of people who believed there was “very little” poverty in Britain, based on BSAS data, increased from 28% in 1994, to 35% in 2000, before increasing further to 45% in 2006 (Park et al., 2012a:166). This is whilst the proportion, who believed there was “quite a lot” of poverty, decreased over the same period, falling from 71% in 1994, to just 52% in 2006. Further, although in 2000 36% of people believed poverty had increased over a ten-year period, by 2006 just 32% believed it had, whereas 23% stated it had decreased (Park et al., 2012a:166). More recently, further changes have occurred. As Clery and Dangerfield (2019:11) highlight, by 2018, 62% of the British public agreed that poverty had increased over a ten-year period, and this is increase from just 48% in 2009. These attitudinal changes suggest that the British public have become more likely to recognise the extent of poverty in Britain over time. Further, by 2018, showing an increase from 2009, and 2006, 65% of the British public felt that “quite a lot” of real poverty existed in Britain (Clery and Dangerfield, 2019:11).

Although both inequality and poverty remain substantial, the proportion of people who are aware of this, appears to fluctuate over time. Whilst the proportion of people able to recognise the extent of income inequality in the UK has increased over time, Clery and Dangerfield argue that this may be a result of “the rise in political and media discourse around poverty”, and this they argue further may have “influenced perceptions of its prevalence” (2019:11). That said, for a considerable proportion of the British public, poverty remains under recognised or perhaps misunderstood. Relatedly, Hall et al. found in their research, that the word poverty itself is “problematic” when used in the context of the UK (2014:4). People thus find the word poverty a “loaded” concept, one that often “evokes issues faced by people in the developing worlds, rather than in their own communities” and thus as a UK phenomenon (Hall et al., 2014:5). The failure to recognise inequality and poverty as a UK phenomenon could perhaps begin to explain why poverty in Britain is often under recognised (Hall et al., 2014).

For the majority of people (82%) in 2000 however, the gap between those with high incomes, and those with low incomes was “too large” (Park et al., 2012a: 24). This figure fell, year on year, before increasing again to 74% in 2006, yet the proportion of people who believed that such differences were “about right” held at 15% in both 2000, and 2001, before increasing to 22% in 2002 and 2006 (Park et al., 2012a:24). More recent data shows some consistencies, in 2018, 78% of the public agreed that the gap between people on high and low incomes was “too large”, whilst far fewer (16%) felt that this gap was “about right” (Clery and Dangerfield, 2019:13). Comparatively, just 2% agreed that the gap was “too small” (Clery and Dangerfield, 2019:13). This data suggests that large numbers of the British public are consistent in the view that the income gap between groups is “too large”.

Despite this, other research also suggests that there is a strong sense of inevitability found, when addressing all aspects of economic inequality, including the pay gap, where people express a “sense of fatalism”, noting that such occurrences are “inevitable” or explained by the assertion that this is “just the way it is” (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:15). Interestingly, as Bamfield and Horton found, despite relatively high numbers stating that the gaps between incomes are too large, perceptions of people on lower incomes are markedly “more negative and punitive”, in comparison to the views held of those at the “top” (2009:6). Their research revealed that the majority of people believe that individuals are responsible for their economic and social positions, noting further that

conceptualisations of those impoverished and receiving benefits, were largely drawn from stereotypical assumptions (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6). So much so, that people “struggled to conceptualise them [the poor] in positive terms” (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6). Bamfield and Horton note that such opinions are not only widespread, but that these relate to the view that there are opportunities for all, yet these are effectively untaken by all.

Thus, individualistic explanations of disadvantage are particularly prevalent. Such views are further compounded where individuals are believed to be feeding into the “something for nothing” criteria, where there is concern that not all people will make “reciprocal contributions back to society”, often in the form of future employment (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6). Perhaps reflecting this view further, public support for the government redistributing income from the “better off, to the less well-off” also declined, from 38 per cent in 2000, to 32 per cent in 2007 (Park et al., 2012a:27). Park et al. also note that support for more taxation and a rise in public spending has also seen a reduction since 2001 from 61 per cent to 30 per cent in England in 2010 (2012a:28). Similarly, Bamfield and Horton highlight a strong sense of entitlement throughout their research, noting how people tend to resent “the idea of their *hard-earned* money going to support *layabouts who were bleeding the state dry*” (2009:22, my italics).

Throughout the literature scrutinised to date, the idea of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ remains consistent, as does the idea of ‘inevitability’ and ‘choice’. For instance, perceptions of why there were people living “in need”, highlighted that the numbers of people who believed “laziness and a lack of willpower” was the cause, rose from 23 per cent in 2000, to 28 per cent in 2003, before decreasing slightly to 27 per cent in 2006 (Park et al., 2012a:166). The majority of people each year, however, believed that this was “inevitable in modern life”, whereas the third largest proportions of people were found to respond asserting “injustice in society” was the reason (Park et al., 2012a:166). For Bamfield and Horton “much of the UK population subscribes to some type of belief in fair inequality on the basis of desert” or described differently, “that some inequality is fair because it is deserved on the basis of differential effort and contribution” (2009:7).

More recently however, Hall et al. found that people offered a number of potential causes for poverty (2014). They found that people believed that poverty had worsened following the 2008/09 recession, noting how both structural and economic reasons were drawn



upon, including the cost of living, a lack of job opportunities and the numbers experiencing in work poverty were cited (Hall et al., 2014). There was however a continuation of perceptions of people as ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ their experiences. Those within the former groups, were seen to have “chosen a life of poverty”, whereas those falling within the latter category were seen to have “no control of their situation” (Hall et al., 2014:5) and therefore, did not deserve their plight.

Curtice (2016:1) points to further attitudinal changes amongst the British public, where he believes “there are signs of a reaction against the fiscal discipline of recent years”. Strengthening this point, Curtice highlights how in 2016, 48% of the public agreed with the statement: “the government should increase taxes and spend more” (2016:1). Whilst less than half the British public subscribed to this view, the proportion of people holding this view increased each year from 2012, where just 34% of the public agreed that the government should spend more (Curtice, 2016). Thus, the level of agreement recorded in 2016 was “a higher proportion than at any point during the last 10 years” (Curtice, 2016:1). These changes are reflective of the “Thermostat effect”, whereby the public, “like a thermostat”, begin to push against government policies, intimating that they do not wish a particular “policy direction” to continue to be pursued (Curtice, 2010:2). Alternatively, again utilising Curtice’s approach, had the public’s attitudes fit more closely with the “Weathervane effect”, attitudes towards an increase in taxation and greater spending by the government, may have been less popular amongst the public (2010:2).

In the context of voters, Curtice explains the “Thermostat effect” succinctly where he states:

*if government starts spending more money on something, and as a result the quality and/or quantity of a service improves, voters gradually come to the view that no further action needs to be taken. If on the other hand, government cuts back on spending and as a result the service comes to be seen as less satisfactory, then there are calls for government to spend more (Curtice, 2016:3).*

Reflective of this latter point, as Curtice contends, the shift in attitudes toward an increase in taxation, and more spending over this period suggests that people were “beginning to react against the ‘austerity’ of recent years” (2016:11-12). Given this, it could be argued that the public are becoming increasingly aware of wider structural issues and how these impact on fellow citizens lives.

Reflecting much of the literature drawn on, the following section continues to draw out public perceptions of inequality and poverty, utilising research concerned with the content and impact of the series *Benefits Street*.

### **2.5.2 Perceptions of Benefits Street**

Notably, there are consistent negative opinions held towards people experiencing poverty and inequality. However, there have been instances where the public have revolted, demonstrating a distinct sense of public distaste for the representation of people experiencing poverty and inequality in programmes such as *Benefits Street*. For instance, Red Faction, supporters of Middlesbrough Football Club, wielded a banner which read “being poor is not for your entertainment”, alongside an additional banner, which read “Fuck Benefits Street” (Love, 2014: no pagination). Reportedly, residents from Stockton, also expressed their disdain, throwing eggs and chasing *Benefit Street*’s film crews away (Cain, 2014).

Research has also sought to understand how members of the public reacted to *Benefits Street* on social media platforms like Twitter (Baker and McEnery, 2015; Brooker et al., 2015; Paterson et al., 2016; van der Bom et al., 2018). van der Bom et al. (2018:4) emphasise how “cultural products, such as television programmes, are one popular topic of discussion on social media”, with their research highlighting conflicting perspectives. With a focus on the second series of *Benefits Street*, van der Bom et al. followed “instantaneous reactions” from 4,086 different Twitter account holders, whom were tweeting in direct response to scenes, as they aired (2018:3). van der Bom et al. note “evidence of scrounger discourses, negative evaluation of individuals, generalisations about benefits claimants”, alongside individuals keen to question both the “hygiene and morals” of the people they encountered (2018:9).

Issues of consumption also featured negatively within responses to the programme, to highlight this, van der Bom et al. cite one Twitter user’s response, whereby they wrote: “they are all struggling to pay bills and buy food. But where do they get their cigarettes from?! #benefitsstreet” (2018:9). Similarly, Bauman’s (2007) notion of ‘flawed consumerism’ was also identifiable during the festive period, with one user exclaiming: “this lot are deluded they don't work, squander what they get on fags and booze then complain they can't afford Christmas lol! [laughing out loud] #benefitstreet” (van der Bom

et al., 2018:9). Alongside this discourse, a “political commentary” also emerged, with users drawing on wider social implications (van der Bom et al.,2018:12). To illustrate, one user wrote: “new series of #BenefitsStreet on @Channel4 ... Bleak. Expect more poverty on your doorstep in #ToryBritain over the next 5 yrs.? Thanx4That”, with another referring to the Conservative election victory some days earlier, stating: “to celebrate the #Tories win, Iain Duncan Smith proudly brings you a brand-new series of #BenefitsStreet #IDS #DWP Pure Propaganda TV” (van der Bom et al.,2018:12).

Despite scrutiny, the people featured on Benefits Street were nevertheless, depicted “as ‘scroungers’, ‘scum cunts’ and ‘lazy twats’ who are given ‘lucrative’ amounts of money but are too lazy to find employment”, such depictions for van der Bom et al. are “typical of scrounger discourse”, implying that people in receipt of benefits “do not really need the money to survive” (2018:10) .Or, as van der Bom et al. succinctly suggest “that is to say, their flawed consumerism is further evidence of their general low worth as human beings”, pointing further to the prevalence of an ‘underclass discourse’, which is descriptive of “a cluster of human characteristics that are generally undesirable”, inclusive of characteristics such as “laziness, drug-taking, low intelligence and, sometimes, ‘scrounging”” (2018:10).

The research thus emphasised how:

*the tweeting audience of Benefits Street II drew heavily on cultural stereotypes in forging indexical links between individuals’ social characteristics and an underclass identity (van der Bom et al., 2018:17).*

Whilst Baker and McEnery also found that Twitter users expressed outrage, hostility and drew on stereotypical assumptions of people in receipt of benefits in their research, they maintain that other posts revealed a “picture of online activism” (Baker and McEnery, 2015:261). Expecting to see words like scrounger and poverty used in negative way, Baker and McEnery highlight how each of these words were actually often used sympathetically, noting that “two thirds of tweeters used the word scroungers in tweets that were critical of the word”, with one user stating that: “labelling all benefit recipients as scroungers...easy way out. Open your eyes instead of comparing them to those on Benefits Street” and another declaring that: “poverty porn sells better than community outreach” (2015:261). Other tweeters were keen to inform other Twitter users that they were being invited to “hate the wrong people” (Baker and McEnery, 2015:260).

Brooker et al. also highlighted within their study of Twitter responses to the first Benefits Street programme, that the public held both differing and contradictory opinions (2015). Whilst it was noted that a “large amount” of what they found “could be characterised as being abuse, or perhaps, joking pejorative”, it was noted that “this behaviour was mostly targeted towards people depicted in the programme, as well as towards the broader social class that those individuals supposedly represent” (Brooker et al., 2015:3185). This included their homes, clothes and again their consumer choices. Furthermore, public reaction to the programme Benefits Street, as they note, was actively encouraged amongst social media users of Twitter, via an “official hash tag #benefitsstreet” (Brooker et al., 2015:3177). Brooker et al. upon analysing 124,000 tweets from Twitter users, noted how Twitter acted as a “platform for both abuse of the people represented and to support discussion related to the wider political narratives surrounding welfare in the UK” (2015:3177-8).

Comments from Twitter users, according to Brooker et al. were “predominantly negative”, again, comprising negative “observations relating to the appearance of the residents and the ways in which their homes and James Turner Street itself were presented” (2015:3180). Alongside the vilification of the residents on the street, tweeters were also concerned with their representation in the documentary, noting how some users felt that the footage was edited “to meet popular stereotypes”, one user for instance stated: “regardless of what people think of those ‘scroungers’ the truth is their [they are] vulnerable and channel 4 have set them up” (Brooker et al., 2015:3181). Interestingly, this particular twitter user appears to point to the framing of benefit recipients and indeed vulnerability, yet draws on negative, yet popular discourse to do so.

Suggesting further instances of “online activism” (Baker and McEnery, 2015) Brooker et al. found a number of users who referred to fraudulent claiming of benefits, taxation and how other tweeters should consider: “REAL benefits cheats”, such as the “bankers and MPs” (2015:3182). The broadcasters “intentions” were considered, in relation to the number of viewers the show attracted and further questions as to who “had funded and commissioned the series”, such debates led one twitter user to state: “the govt [government] who owns the broadcaster that showed #benefitsstreet have a vested interest-cuts or abolition to welfare”, and another media user to argue that this programme had an agenda, where they wrote: “AGENDA: demonise those on welfare; introduce

reforms, desensitise injustice, fabricate consensus...ACTION: propaganda” (Brooker et al., 2015:3182).

Paterson et al. (2016) sought to understand differing public reactions to Benefit Street, further, analysing how participants responded to clips of Benefits Street in focus groups. Reportedly, “judgement” of those featured on the programme were passed by focus group participants, frequently reflecting a perceived “benefits culture in wider society” (Paterson et al., 2016:199-200). They also found that the respondents felt that a “very narrow view of people on benefits” was provided, prompting one individual to think of the television series, *Shameless* and another to assert that the programme was: “exploiting people ...because they just show...a stereotype or ideology in society about maybe a sort of class or certain groups of people” (Paterson et al., 2016:199-200).

Interestingly, Paterson et al. ponder whether these perceptions, and others where respondents have queried whether the programme could actually have “a positive effect”, with the participants believing that, given “the problems of people on benefits...somebody is actually taking an interest now rather than just sweeping it aside”, are indicative of:

*an awareness that the lives of those on Benefits Street are viewed through a particular lens can help to position some participants as resistant readers to the stereotypes that they claimed they saw portrayed (2016:199-200).*

Paterson et al. (2016: 212), however, also argue that a “case can be made for the position that poverty porn facilitates the evocation of negative evaluations”, given that particular clips played to respondents, led to a discussion of wider stereotypical assumptions, of which were not portrayed within the particular clips (including teenage pregnancies). Notably, the research also revealed a lack of “affinity with the people...on screen”, although benefit recipients were “slightly more sympathetic”, Paterson et al. note however “in all cases...our participants considered themselves to be separate from those represented on Benefits Street” (2016:212). Paterson et al. conclude that Benefit Street “is not just an entertainment programme”, instead it can be understood as a “site for ideological construction and the perpetuation of existing stereotypes about benefit claimants”, suggesting further that “the programme (and others like it) invites negative evaluations of those on benefits...” (2016:198). Indeed, by their own admission, the researchers “invited...participants to judge the people they saw on screen”, but they believe the analysis revealed much more, arguing that the participants “used the

individuals in Benefits Street to work collaboratively to construct an overwhelmingly negative stereotype of those on benefits” (Paterson et al., 2016:212).

Notably this research has shown mixed reactions from the public, with some people maintaining familiar discourses of the undeserving poor, and conversely others seeking to emphasise wider social and economic implications. The following section critically examines the consequences of stereotypical rhetoric, intent on understanding attitudes toward inequality and poverty further.

### **2.5.3 Stereotypical rhetoric**

Section 2.5.2 demonstrated how perceptions of “inequality, poverty and economic disadvantage are complex and multi-layered” (Shildrick, 2018:785). Public perceptions appeared to challenge stereotypical labels and question the impact of social structures. However, attitudes also continued to reflect and reinforce stereotypical distinctions between the undeserving and deserving poor and of a dualism between the “good worker” and “bad benefit claimant” (Patrick, 2012:10). Drawing on relevant literature, including the work of Shildrick (2018), alongside Tyler (2008), this section focuses on the consequences of stereotypical rhetoric and the labels attributed to people experiencing inequality and poverty further.

Borrowing from Golding and Middleton, it could be argued that the stereotypical public perceptions focused on in this research, are merely reflective of a fear held for some time; a fear that the “welfare umbrella has been extended over too wide a range...at great social and economic costs” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:85). However, whilst this is a view that may resonate amongst the British public, what has continued to occur, may best be described as “moralistic scapegoating”, where it can be argued that “there is a renewed political appetite for the condemnation of poor places and people” (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination). Not only has this “condemnation” existed for some time, this “appetite” is identifiable amongst the attitudes of the British public (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination), and this has also existed for decades (Horton and Gregory, 2009; Seabrook, 2015). It has, moreover, been suggested that the focus placed on people experiencing inequality and poverty over the course of austerity examined here, was both powerful and purposely driven, with a specific aim (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Penny, 2013; Jensen, 2014; O’Hara, 2014; Shildrick, 2018).

To reiterate, people experiencing inequality and poverty have been characterised as an underclass, whom are “immoral, godless, ignorant, feckless” and “infantile” (Ferdinand, 2010:175). Alongside this, they have been labelled ‘undeserving’, ‘shirkers’, ‘profligate’, and ‘work shy’ (Pantazis, 2016). As Shildrick and MacDonald (2013), Jensen (2014) and Mckenzie (2015) noted, such degrading language is not new but is formidable. Analysing public attitudes toward benefit recipients featured in Benefits Street, van der Bom et al. found a continuation of this language, where those featured were described as “deluded”, “scroungers”, “scum cunts” and “lazy twats” (2018:10).

For Jensen, these latter findings may not be surprising, for she believes the intention of the contents of these programmes was to both perpetuate and reinforce dominant stereotypical narratives:

*the national objects of poverty porn serve to transform precarity into a moral failure, worklessness into laziness...social immobility and disconnection into an individual failure to strive and aspire...poverty porn does not only play on existing shameless curiosity about poverty, it...positions the lives of the poor as a moral site for scrutiny, something to be peered at, dissected and assessed. It reinvents the underclass for the purposes of welfare reform 'debate'...It presents the 'others' on the screen as dysfunctional in their choices and behaviour...presenting a dysfunctional welfare state which rewards such 'lifestyles' (2014:4).*

The consequences of both hostility toward the welfare state and benefit recipients, and of stereotypical labels, impede “social relationships” (O’Brien and Kyprianou, 2017:8), where stereotypical assumptions serve to “guide” people in the formation of attitudes of others, but also influence behaviour towards other people (Glynn et al., 1999:148).

The consequences of the ways in which people experiencing inequality and poverty are represented, discussed and characterised, can be explained by drawing on Shildrick’s understanding of ‘poverty propaganda’ (2018). Notably, as evidenced throughout this research, propaganda is reflected amongst public attitudes, presented in the media and reinforced by political rhetoric. For Shildrick, propaganda provides an important function and should be understood as “a mighty political tool that orchestrates widespread consent”, consent toward “a political system that affords punishing life opportunities (2018:793). Here, Shildrick is making a connection between the role of propaganda and the preservation of neo-liberal capitalist ideologies (2018). For Shildrick, “poverty propaganda plays an important role in its [neo-liberal capitalism] legitimation”, thus

“normalising class inequality”, whilst “helping to ensure its continuation” and presenting “inequalities of life chances and life conditions...as right, necessary and just” (2018:793).

Shildrick (2018) not only stresses the importance of this tool but is also critical of the short and long-term consequences of such characterisations, and representations of people experiencing poverty and inequality. This concern is perhaps reflective of McKendrick et al’s caution that “how we encounter poverty shapes how we understand and respond to it” (2008:5). Furthermore, as Hanley emphasises, when perceptions are “based on misconceptions or limited information, these gaps...need to be filled” (Hanley, 2009:4) and it would appear both politicians and the media have attempted to fill these voids.

Whilst the effects of mediated discourse are questionable (McQuail, 1994), and it is not argued that the media tell their audiences what to think, it can be argued that the media are “stunningly successful in telling its readers [or audiences] what to think about” (Cohen, in Glynn, 1999:389). Indeed, as Holman observed, the extent of the impact of the media in shaping attitudes and behaviour “is a matter of date” (1978:210), but this is one that is not entered into here. The focus is instead placed on the cost of popular stigmatising discourse (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) on both British social relations and attitudes towards those in receipt of social security provision and on support towards eradicating income inequality through redistributive measures.

Bottero emphasised that “all accounts of hierarchy contain images of inequality, social pictures which classify, categorise and grade the members of society”, resulting in statements being made concerning “similarity or difference” (2005:15). This, it is argued, produces “distinctions of social worth”, where people set about establishing their “own social position relative to others...” (Bottero, 2005:15). What Bottero also suggests, however, is the importance of social position and previous interaction, and experience in relation to hierarchical depictions (2005). This is evident where Bottero states that these “social pictures” are “politically loaded descriptions”, noting further how “the images we draw partly depend on our own social location”, our own “attitudes and relations towards social unequals”, alongside “the agenda (and alliances) that we are pursuing” (2005:15).

Much of the literature scrutinised to date reflects these “distinctions of social worth” (Bottero, 2005:15), where what can be regarded as “negative and punitive” attitudes (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6) towards people experiencing hardship are reinforced and



have become more routinely expressed. In the context of reality-based television programmes and *Benefits Street*, audiences are afforded “multiple narratives, interactions and settings” or rather “a character menu” (Hills, 2014: 129). As Hills (2014:129) explains, audiences of reality programmes are thus provided with “an opportunity for relational and emotional work”, which often “fuses and reinforces social distinctions” further. It can be argued that these types of programmes set out with this intention and are thus, as Shildrick explains, “specifically orchestrated to present the participants very much as the irresponsible and feckless ‘other’” (2018:791), thereby reinforcing stereotypical attributions and positioning blame.

Problematically, however, such “character menus” (Hills, 2014:129) may not be reflective of reality. Indeed, as Shildrick highlights, *Benefit Street* professed to provide “a true-to-life representation of unemployment and poverty” (2018:791). Yet, for Shildrick, these representations should only be understood as “partial” realities, “prone to extremes” and reflective of highly stereotypical assumptions, rather than understood as both “the everyday and the mundane” (2018:791). Whilst research has shown that some members of the public did see such programmes as exploitative and edited with a specific aim (hatred), others however, expressed hostility, amusement and disdain toward the individuals represented (Baker and McEnery, 2015; Brooker et al., 2015, Paterson et al., 2016; van der Bom et al., 2018), distinguishing between and marking “boundaries” between those on the television and themselves (Hill, 2014:129).

This boundary making is both significant and problematic. Borrowing from and adapting the work of Tyler (2008), may further explain the important role of ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) plays in attitudes toward inequality and poverty, and of the consequences of stereotypical rhetoric. Focusing on the portrayal of social class identities through the “figure” of the ‘chav’, Tyler suggests that “class disgust is invoked and deployed in instrumental ways, marking difference and blocking social mobility” (2008:19). For, Tyler emotions, like disgust and laughter, “in the mediation of social class” need to be reflected upon (2008:19). As Tyler explains, “an everyday definition of disgust would be an emotion experienced and expressed as a sickening feeling of revulsion, loathing, or nausea” (2008:19). These negative feelings not only appear to fit closely with the stereotypical labels attributed to those experiencing inequality and poverty, but are also descriptive of a substantial proportion of the public’s attitudes toward those featured on *Benefits Street*

(Baker and McEnery, 2015; Brooker et al., 2015, Paterson et al., 2016; van der Bom et al., 2018).

The importance of these reactions, and the associated consequences, can be explained by borrowing once again from Tyler, and her understanding of the popular cultural representations of the 'chav', where she argued "like disgust, laughter is community-forming...often contagious, and it generates proximity" (2008:23). For Tyler:

*like disgust, laughter is community-forming...often contagious, and it generates proximity. Laughter is always shared with a real or imagined community. Laughter is often at the expense of another, and when we laugh, we effectively "fix" the other, as the object of comedy. Laughter moves us both literally and figuratively, we are averted, moved away from the thing, the object or figure, we laugh at. In the case of laughter at those of a lower class, laughter is boundary forming. It creates a distance between "them" and "us," asserting moral judgments and a superior class position" (2008:23).*

In this way, laughter like disgust, may bring people together and yet exclude others at the same time. The complexities of the issues faced by people to whom we are encouraged to laugh at or feel disgusted with are, as a consequence, reduced. Instead, stereotypical rhetoric and assumptions become further embedded.

Similarly, Baker and McEnery argued that members of the public, using the platform Twitter, were "engaging and uniting in 'fun anger' in their hostile and demeaning responses" to a programme debating Benefits Street (Charlie Brooker's Weekly Wipe, BBC4, 16th January 2014). Drawing on Le Bon (1896), they argue that this may bring forward an alternative way of understanding stereotypical discourse and its consequences, where people are merely "following the crowd and seeking confirmation from others" thereby "heralding a new form of 'herd mentality'"(Baker and McEnery, 2015:261), where stereotypical discourse, amusement and repulsion was a shared activity, driven by dominant stereotypical attitudes, yet not necessarily personal opinions.

It can be argued that as a result of the negative portrayal of people experiencing inequality and poverty, a distinct sense of 'othering', stemming from stereotypical assumptions of people who experience poverty and inequality (Bottero, 2005) was evident during the period of austerity examined here. This is significant, as these continue to have important consequences for those to whom labels, such as 'undeserving', 'deserving', 'worker', 'shirker' are attributed to (Bottero, 2005). As McKenzie highlights, the negative labels

attached to people who experience inequality and poverty, act as a form of “symbolic violence”, which go beyond economic stigma (2015:6). Meaning not only do people experience economic hardship, they are also subject to disapproval and stigma over their tastes and consumer choices, including both their clothing and speech patterns (Mckenzie, 2015). Not only is this evidenced in recent research (Baker and McEnery, 2015; Brooker et al., 2015; Paterson et al., 2016; van der Bom et al., 2018), this is suggestive of a deeper shift in attitudes in Britain; the rise of individualism, alongside a reinvigoration of blaming individuals and this poses a problem.

Indeed, as Fong et al. highlight, whilst the public are considered “willing to help the poor”, it is stressed that this support is withdrawn when they suspect that “the poor may cheat or fail to cooperate by not trying hard enough to be self-sufficient and morally upstanding” (2003:3). The mediating framing of hardship discussed here, also highlights how the social context of attitude formation operates, and as Hall et al. note, how the “public attitudes to poverty matter a great deal” (2014:10). Not least because “public attitudes have a direct impact on the day-to-day experiences of people living in poverty” (Hall et al., 2014:10), but because public attitudes, to some extent, “inform the levels of support for action by government and others to tackle poverty” (Hanley, 2009:3). Whilst such support does not always result in successful policy implementation, as Stanley argues, it does however ensure that there is “sustained and increased action by all levels of government to take measures that will tackle poverty” (2009:3).

Individualistic tendencies thus reduce peoples understanding and reduce their awareness of the inequality endured by others, acting as a barrier to the implementation of successful policy initiatives to eradicate inequality. Alston’s (2018:2) more recent findings appear to support this statement, whereby he remarked:

*British compassion for those who are suffering has been replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous approach apparently designed to instil discipline where it is least useful, to impose a rigid order on the lives of those least capable of coping with today’s world, and elevating the goal of enforcing blind compliance over a genuine concern to improve the well-being of those at the lowest levels of British society.*

Much like inequality and poverty, these punitive notions of people experiencing inequality or poverty, are however not new, nor are the associated discussions of dependency, self-help and self-sufficiency. Cootes emphasises this point. Writing in the 1960’s Cootes described how people “shut their eyes to the problems and simply said it was up to the

poor to help themselves” (1966:3). More recently, Dorling has drawn out contemporary similarities, noting that as inequality rises the number of people “turning a blind eye to the suffering of others” also increases, where the individuals looking on “become increasingly concerned about themselves and how they are seen” (2014:99). This research seeks to understand this process further, intent on exploring whether the public perceive the gap between high and low incomes as a gap ‘too large’.

Alongside instances of rising indifference among the British public, people are also seemingly keen to ensure they avoid the consequences of the ‘symbolic violence’ Mckenzie (2015) describes. As Bottero highlighted previously, people often make “strenuous attempts to mark their social difference” from those who are deemed to fall “below them” (2005:28). Not only does this strengthen Dorling’s point of concern on an individual basis, but this as Bottero highlights is also “unsurprising” (2005:28). Both practices of concern and avoidance in this way, are reflective of the consequence of “the stigma” attributed to people “at the bottom of social hierarchies” (Bottero, 2005:29). For Mooney and Hancock, however, these practices signify a reinvigoration of something else also in operation (2010). This is clear where they argue that “once more we find ourselves amidst a war on the poor, not on the economic, structural cause of poverty” (2010: no pagination).

As this research emphasises, the “gainers and losers” (Lupton et al., 2015:8) of austerity Britain have been routinely exemplified in the media and amongst politicians; presented as two groups of individuals who are in stark opposition to one another. Not only does this point to research suggesting that the UK is becoming increasingly more polarised (McKendrick et al., 2008; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Irvin, 2011; Hills, 2015; Toynbee and Walker, 2015), this statement is also in direct opposition to the ethos drawn on by the Coalition and the Conservatives, throughout the period of austerity examined here. Indeed, as Clarke and Newman emphasise, the idea that “we all are in it together” (Cameron, 2010: no pagination) was a “collective imagery” which suggested “a nation united in the face of adversity” (2012:303). As Dorling maintains, it can be argued that “in the UK the bottom 99 per cent now have more in common than has been the case for a generation”, arguing further that “some 99 per cent of us are increasingly all in it together”, however this does not signify unity given that “the top 1 per cent...are not part of this new austerity norm” (2014:4). Instead, what has become increasingly apparent is how social relationships have been eroded further. Within the 99 per cent Dorling (2014) describes,

hierarchies exist, where “social inferiors are often still marked out as physically and morally distinct” despite often “close contact between social groups” (Bottero, 2005:27) or indeed similarities.

Accordingly, this suggests that Britain, as a result of austerity, was not a nation united but one further divided both economically and socially. Given that “public consent” is required in order to enact “political change” (Horton and Gregory, 2009:19) and that a number of people perceive poverty as signalling a “lack of respectability” an “inability to manage” and a “moral failure worthy of blame” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:293), this is problematic. Indeed, as Shildrick and MacDonald reiterate, following the election of the Coalition in 2010 “political justification for austerity-driven cuts to welfare spending” have been legitimised by enabling a vision of welfare claimants as “undeserving” and as having chosen a life dependent on benefits, and this is a rhetoric that was also widely emphasised in the media (2013:295).

That said, the mood amongst the public also began to change, Harding notes how attitudes towards welfare recipients and the redistribution of income, and austerity as a whole have shifted (2017). Drawing on BSAS data from 2016, Harding shows how more people wish to see taxation and spending increased, and how negative attitudes towards people experiencing inequality also ‘softened’, with just 22% of the public asserting that claimants were fraudulently doing so; this fall in proportion is described as the lowest recorded since 1986, when the first question appeared in the BSAS (2017). Harding also highlights that a smaller proportion of people (21%) felt that the majority of social security recipients were undeserving of help (2016).

As Hatzisavvidou (2018) also notes, resistance toward austerity has seemingly increased over time, with a number of political actors standing together with a collective aim, the end of austerity. This includes UK Uncut, the People’s Assembly, Scotland United against Austerity, the Radical Assembly, as well as Plaid Cymru, Left Unity, SNP, the Green Party, alongside other community led campaigns (2018). For Hatzisavvidou, each served as “agents of anti-austerity rhetoric”, in that “all rejected the necessity of austerity and sought to infuse collective political imagination with a common goal: the end of the era of austerity” (2018: no pagination). From 2015, leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn has also been an influential voice in the anti-austerity campaign, seeking to restore unity and bring forth the demise of austerity (Grierson and Slawson, 2017).

Indeed, whilst Alston notes, “tremendous resilience, strength, and generosity, with neighbours supporting one another”, is observable amongst the public, he also believes that “the compassion and mutual concern that has long been part of the British tradition has been outsourced” (2018: no pagination).

#### **2.5.4 Summary**

This section emphasised public perceptions of inequality and poverty, focusing on the portrayal of people in receipt of social security and the use of stereotypical rhetoric. The role of ‘poverty porn’ and ‘poverty propaganda’ have also been considered, drawing on Tyler’s research on ‘chavs’ and the emotions, disgust and laughter, to further understand attitudes and the consequences of stereotypical representations and rhetoric. Whilst the discussion of Benefits Street emphasised stigmatising discourse, resistance was also notable, though to a lesser extent. To summarise, it has been argued that propaganda is powerful, and that attitudes reflective of disgust or amusement toward those experiencing inequality and poverty are problematic. Where, as a result, complex social issues become reduced, discussed and consumed for the purpose of entertainment, reducing people’s understanding of the experiences of inequality. Though it is not the intention of this research to suggest that the media nor politicians directly influence attitudes toward inequality and poverty, the following section explores how social attitudes can be interpreted and how these are not formed in isolation.

### **2.6 Exploring Attitudes, Introduction**

Poverty and inequality cannot be understood with the use of statistics alone, for each also “concerns personal experiences, feelings and attitudes” (Holman, 1978: 46). It is for these reasons, this research has not only highlighted how Britain fared economically post-recession, through austerity, but has also placed emphasis on the social and cultural environment. Before their contextual application in Chapter’s 4-6, this section explains how exploration of socio-economic and demographic characteristics may aid an understanding of perceptions and by extension how these may change over time.

#### **2.6.1 Understanding social attitudes**

Understanding the process of perception formation from a sociological viewpoint, involves understanding how attitudes arise, as a result of the influence of both “beliefs, preferences,

behaviour and values at the individual level”, but also understanding that these influences are “formed through the interaction of culture, human nature and the world around us” (Voas, 2014: no pagination). Emphasis is thus placed on how perceptions are often social, acquired through, maintained and altered by social interaction, of which occurs either directly or indirectly (Hogg and Terry, 1980; Underwood, 2009). For the purpose of this research, attitudes are understood as enabling the provision of an evaluation as to whether something is conceived of, as good or bad, right or wrong or something that ought to occur or the opposite (Voas, 2014: no pagination). Attitudes are taken as “propositional” entities that are both “expressed or unexpressed”, of which may serve to “motivate or be influenced by behaviour” (Voas, 2014: no pagination). Further, attitudes are not understood as “static nor immutable”, they are on the contrary, understood as both “spatially and temporally variable” and thus subject to change, and so too are the “cultural and social conditions in which they develop” (Underwood, 2009:104-113).

From a sociological standpoint, attitudes can be further understood as “entities on the same level as beliefs, feelings and behaviour”, in that attitudes may reflect both the “consequences and causes of beliefs, feelings and behaviour”, yet as Voas argues they are both observable and identifiable “independently of them” (2014: no pagination). In this view, understanding attitudes from a sociological stance, would mean that the “defining feature” of social attitudes is not missed (Voas, 2014: no pagination). The “defining feature”, Voas argues, is that “attitudes are evaluative judgements”, of which are applied “to others as well as ourselves” (2014: no pagination).

Thus, people’s attitudes should not be regarded as simply reflecting “personal likes and dislikes”, because “they concern how people in general ought to think, feel and behave” (Voas, 2014: no pagination). Consequently, understanding attitudes in relation to “evaluative judgements” applicable not only to self, but to others (Voas, 2014: no pagination) may also involve consideration as to what the societal consequences of these attitudes may be for both the subject and attitude holder.

What is increasingly evident throughout the literature, is how attitude formation is thus a complex endeavour, and is subject to a number of societal influences and experiences, alongside change. For the purpose of this research, and within the constraints of secondary analysis, attitudes are explored by specific characteristics. This includes demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnic background and educational attainment),

and socio-economic characteristics (employment status, self-rated income band, benefit status and occupation). Focusing the analysis by characteristic not only allows for comparative analysis of attitudes based on group categorisation, this also allows for attitudinal differences to be considered in relation to wider changes over the course of austerity. What is of central interest in this research, is the extent of change in attitudes toward the income gap and redistribution, alongside attitudes towards those in receipt of social security, in the context of austerity Britain between 2009-2015.

Understanding public attitudes and how these change over time is thus not only interesting from a research perspective, but it is also important, and this importance derives from the relationship between attitudes and public policy (Devine and Robinson, 2014; Kulin and Seymer, 2014). Devine and Robinson suggest that the relationship between attitudes and policy can be understood by further understanding that “policy is informed, but not governed by public opinion” (2014:1). In this way, they assert that “understanding the attitudes of the public is important, both to help shape and to evaluate policy priorities” (2014:1). Whilst Devine and Robinson express the importance of “factual” data use by the government in the process of “decision making and evaluation”, using the UK Family Resources Survey as an example, they also highlight the importance of attitudes (2014:2).

Devine and Robinson, note, however that It is important to acknowledge that the relationship between policy making and survey data can work in both directions”, in this way “data can have an impact on policy making, whilst policy making can have an impact on data creation (2014:8). They argue further, that inconsistencies in survey questions over time, is reflective of this latter point and this, as the following chapter highlights, is also reflected in the BSAS (Section 3.4.1).

More recent research by Hudson et al. (2016a; 2016b) note, however, that caution should be exercised when considering policy support or indeed their lack and public opinion. Hudson et al. highlight an element of ‘nostalgia’ whereby “analyses of contemporary welfare (state) discourse are often rooted in an implicit presumption that the tone and nature of popular and political debate today” actually differs from those observed in the past (2016a:10). Arguing further that:

*in the ‘golden days’ of the Welfare State, the broad willingness to endorse higher spending was qualified by a high degree of public scepticism towards some aspects of the Welfare State and a suspicion amongst many that some services were being abused and particular groups were marked out for public disapproval (Hudson et al., 2016a:7).*



In their research, Hudson et al. (2016a) extend their analysis of attitudes toward welfare policies and include an examination of attitudinal data collected in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, concluding that because “widespread pejorative attitudes to welfare” were apparent, during what is now regarded “the ‘golden era’ of welfare state expansion”, this thus suggests “that the existence of similar views” amongst the public more contemporarily, “need not be a barrier to expanding social policy provision today”.

Further, yet related research by Hudson et al. (2016b:693) point to what can be understood as “often contradictory and ambivalent attitudes to welfare”, that are “held...now” and were apparent “during the golden age”. Thus, based on their findings, Hudson et al. suggest that “the welfare state is rarely a matter at the top of the agenda for the public” and that much of the public possess “a rather hazy knowledge of the details of policy” (2016b:706). Thus suggesting that the role of public opinion and policy, and indeed social attitudes more generally, is questionable, where changes in welfare may be better focused upon the political and elite classes.

Kulin and Seymer (2014:1), however, suggest a stronger link between attitudes and policy, asserting that: “whether seeking to implement, maintain, or roll back social policy...policymakers and politicians are constrained by public opinion”. Wu and Chou, also highlight the significance of the public’s attitudes, particularly in relation to support toward redistributive initiatives to narrow or indeed seek to eradicate income inequality (2015). However, as McKendrick et al. also note, although the support of the public may be a “precondition for effective anti-poverty measures”, they highlight how the British public are often “only conditionally supportive” (2008:7). Indeed, as emphasised in Section 2.5.3 whilst the public are often said to be “willing to help the poor”, if people “fail to cooperate” in the sense that they are not considered to be “trying hard enough to be self-sufficient and morally upstanding” this support is retracted (Fong et al., 2003:3). Drawing on the characteristics of the public, attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution are considered in relation to both literature and theory, and these are outlined in the following section.

### **2.6.2 Interpreting attitudinal differences, Introduction**

As Orton and Rowlingson note, as income inequality rises, there is also an expectation that “public concern about inequality”, will also increase (2007:11). That said however, such relationships between inequality and social attitudes, and indeed “policy responses”

like that of redistribution, are both “complex and ambiguous”, as well as subject to contradiction (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007: ix). Indeed, as Evans and Kelley point out, “there are many important aspects of people’s perceptions, interpretations, and evaluation of societal inequality” (2017:350). What is more, despite the contention that “the less money you have, the more likely you are to support redistribution” (Glynn et al., 1999:227), as Alcock and May argue, there is also “strong ideological current of hostility to taxation” in operation in the UK (2014:267), which is expected to reduce support toward redistribution initiatives.

Alongside this and amid rising inequality, it is argued that individualism and individualistic explanations have been increasing steadily amongst the British public (Christie and Warburton, 2001; Dorey, 2010; Pantazis, 2016). Alongside providing an understanding of how particular ‘images of inequality’ (Bottero, 2005) have been made available to members of the British public over the course of austerity, this is reflected in this chapter. Much like before, the prevalence of inequality and poverty has been questioned, as have the need of those in receipt of help. With this in mind, one consequence of growing income disparities, is the widening of the “social distance” between those who are more affluent and those who are not (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:3). Thus, it has been argued that such distance may also impede feelings of “responsibility” towards those who may need help the most (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:3), meaning that support for the redistribution of income may be less widespread. This section explores how ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) and particular ‘images of inequality’ have resulted in stigma, which may influence attitudes toward people experiencing inequality and poverty.

### **2.6.2.1 Discussion**

Irwin noted both “unease with extensive inequality” and moreover, “concern about exclusion”, evidencing the contention “that inequality is seen as an issue for everybody, not just a problem for the poor” (Irwin, 2016:15). Others have similarly reported that people also acknowledged how a “climate of economic uncertainty” impacted upon the financial position of households (Fahmy et al., 2012:6). However, as Section 2.5 demonstrated, despite this, negative attitudes also prevail. As Dorey suggests, increasing inequality, as found in Britain, has been occurring alongside “increasingly conservative economic attitudes among much of the British public” (Dorey, 2010:338), these shared attitudes are also reflected in political rhetoric and in research concerned with the portrayal of people

experiencing poverty, inequality, alongside people in receipt of benefits (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Baumberg et al., 2012; Penny, 2013; Jensen, 2013; Who Benefits?, 2014; O'Hara, 2014; Mckenzie, 2015; Shildrick, 2018). Thus, whilst it can be argued that people do seemingly “care about inequality and the distribution of opportunity and about fairness and inclusion” (Irwin, 2016:15), this may only be applicable to those who are undeserving of their circumstances (Pantazis, 2016).

Within this research it is posited that attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution may be reflective of the ‘images of inequality’ (Bottero, 2005) drawn on over the course of austerity. As McKendrick et al. (2008) and Shildrick (2018) emphasise, these pictures are not reflective of the majority of individuals who experience inequality and disadvantage. Instead, as Section 2.5 illustrates, these images were selective and framed in a particular way. For Shildrick, this portrayal means that “inequalities of life chances and life conditions are presented as right, necessary and just” (2018:793). Accordingly meaning, that to experience inequality and poverty, is to “lack...respectability”, to express an “inability to manage”, and is thus considered a “moral failure worthy of blame” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:293).

This, thus implies, that those who are not experiencing inequality are the opposite, they are instead the ‘strivers’ (Hills, 2014). Bottero (2005), drawing on the work of Cannadine (1998) allows for a clearer understanding of how these processes can be understood. As Bottero emphasises, Cannadine (1998) proposes a “binary, dichotomous model”, where society is separated into “two opposed camps” (2005:2017). This is explained as a “dichotomous, adversarial picture, where society is sundered between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Cannadine, 1998:19-20, in Bottero, 2005:15). Not only is this divide evident within the literature drawn on in this thesis, it is arguably also reflected in attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution. Where individuals are further segregated by another, related dualism, between the “good worker” and the “bad benefit claimant” (Patrick, 2012:10). Wu and Chou explain this further, noting that social values are often “reflected in concrete attitudes towards income inequality or poverty” (2015:6) and by extension redistribution.

Accordingly, perceptions of redistribution are often influenced by what is considered to be the cause of poverty, or rather why there is a need for the redistribution of income. Given this, whilst the purpose of redistributive initiatives is to reallocate resources between groups, the “trigger” being some form of “social need” (Busemeyer et al., 2009:198), when

people hold the individual accountable, as opposed to wider societal constraints, redistributive support will be reduced. As Wu and Chou suggest, this may be particularly so amongst people who regard individual “problems”, such as “laziness” or “character failing”, “poor parenting”, poor choices or “financial mismanagement”, as the reasons behind their circumstances (2015:6), and this is a problem.

Comparatively, people who believe that structural issues and “social injustice” create poverty and inequality, and thus the need for redistribution, are more likely to both support redistributive initiatives, and also to believe that the government should intervene (Wu and Chou, 2015:6). For many, this latter point, “the government protection hypothesis”, rests on the assumption that people feel that it is the duty of the government to protect its citizens from “economic shocks” and other “crises” and to do so through the use of welfare provisions (Wu and Chou, 2015:6). In this view, the demand for this form of “social insurance” through redistribution, would be found to increase in times of economic insecurity, and “bad times, such as recessions” (Wu and Chou, 2015:6).

In this way, although people may not see the returns of, or receive the same as what they are prepared to give, people often consider others, and that it is in their own interest to ensure “basic needs dissatisfaction” does not result in “increased social conflict or violence” (Leon, 2012:201). Although this form of altruism, arguably feeds into the stigma surrounding people experiencing inequality and poverty, there is evidence to suggest that inequality results in detrimental effects on crime, alongside health, happiness, social mobility and indeed, social cohesion (Rowlingson and Orton, 2010:1). It is, thus, argued that as inequality rises in a society, people from “all economic conditions” are found to be more supportive, in order to “alleviate its consequences” (Anderson and Curtis, 2015:268).

For Anderson and Curtis, disparities amongst levels of support between social classes thus “converge at high levels of income inequality” (2015:268). Here, the “social ills associated with inequality become unbearable”, irrespective of economic positioning (Anderson and Curtis, 2015:284). As Anderson and Curtis argue, as the severity of income inequality increases, the effects of inequality “climb up the class ladder as inequality grows” (2015:270). In this way, the possession of altruistic values in times of heightened inequality, mean that despite the fact some individuals stand to lose out from, or gain very little from redistribution economically, people are also more able to “notice and understand its [inequality] consequences for society as a whole” (Anderson and Curtis, 2015:283).

Thus, these concerns reflect “non-economic consequences for themselves”, as well as others (Anderson and Curtis, 2015:283).

Policy preferences also often have a “rational economic basis” (Curtis and Anderson, 2015:5), where support toward redistribution is thus also expected to be subject to the role of self-interest, where individual’s will often consider their own financial position, and thus how support for redistribution could impact their own lives, despite their discomfort in relation to the growing income gap (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:29). Wu and Chou explain the logic of self-interest hypothesis, suggesting that people are “utility-maximising agents”, and will therefore seek to act in ways that will benefit them (2015:4). Therefore, both people who will and people who may become beneficiaries, should therefore support the redistribution of income and resources (Wu and Chou, 2015). Preferences, alongside attitudes toward inequality and poverty and redistribution, are thus also expected to differ by characteristic group.

This may include socio-demographic characteristic, such as the gender an individual identifies with, their ethnic background, their level of educational attainment, their age, and geographical characteristics, such as where they live (Castell and Thompson, 2007). This can also include socio-economic characteristics, such as whether someone is unemployed or employed (Wu and Chou, 2015), whether they claim social security benefits, their occupation and further, though interrelated, the level of their monetary income. Further, other aspects of identity and attitudes, although not dealt with in this research, can be understood in relation to behavioural characteristics, such as political party affiliation and the type of newspaper an individual consumes (Castell and Thompson, 2007). These theories are discussed in relation to the socio-economic and demographic variables included within the analyse, and the findings in Chapter 6.

As Busemeyer et al. stress income is an important factor in understanding preferences toward redistribution (2009). As Fong et al. also note, people who are not concerned with how they will make ends meet and pay their bills “are significantly less supportive of redistribution”, in comparison to those who do worry (2003:13). Similarly, it is also argued that people who have higher incomes, and often a higher status, are more inclined to be accepting of higher rates of inequality (Medgyesi, 2013). In part, this may be explained by the role of self-interest, where individuals “might lose” through the redistribution of income (Medgyesi, 2013:3). Williamson readdresses the role of self-interest, stating that it is in the best interests of people “at the upper end of the socio-economic distribution to find fault

with and oppose any major effort to improve the conditions of the poor” (1974:635), arguably in this way their position is not threatened by increased social mobility. Further, any motivation amongst those in receipt of higher incomes, is often “far weaker...because it typically results in...paying higher taxes” (Anderson and Curtis, 2015: 267). Conversely, people on lower incomes, such as unemployed people, people fulfilling lower paid jobs and benefit claimants, tend to be less accepting of inequality (Medgyesi, 2013; Wu and Chou, 2015). Evans and Kelley make a similar point, noting that “high status people tend to perceive a relatively egalitarian society, whereas those low in status perceive a relatively unequal, elitist society” (2017:322).

Yet, irrespective of the proportion of people facing inequality in society, it is argued that people with “low economic standing have the most to gain from supporting government intervention” (Anderson and Curtis, 2015:267). Thus, people on lower incomes are said to be both more motivated to, and more inclined to support redistributive policies; because they will often benefit from monetary redistribution (Williamson, 1974; Habibov, 2013). Accordingly, it is often expected that those from lower socio-economic positions would favour redistribution more so than others. But and perhaps further reflecting the complexities, people experiencing poverty and/or those in receipt of lower incomes, are however, not always found to support policies that advocate income redistribution, despite the fact they may be the beneficiaries (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:33). It is posited that this could be understood as reflecting the role of self-interest. It could however also be explained regarding both “empathy and socio-cultural distance”, as noted above (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:34). This is discussed in relation to Cannadine’s (1998:19-20) two-way “vernacular model” in more detail in chapter 6.

Not only are women considered more altruistic than men, they are often considered so, due to greater experiences of disadvantage (Goerres and Jaeger, 2016). Whilst the role of altruism in relation to gendered attitudinal differences is considered in Chapter 6, the experience of gender can be used to explain another theory considered in this research, “risk-aversion” and “risk-exposure” (Leon, 2012). In this way, because women are often perceived as more vulnerable to the experience of poverty and inequality (risk-exposure) this group will therefore seek to minimise their risk (risk-aversion), by supporting initiatives to combat inequality and poverty through monetary redistribution (Leon, 2012). Equally, in comparison to men, it is in the self-interest of women as a group to support initiatives they will perhaps benefit from. These assumptions also highlight how ‘need

explanations' are useful in determining preferences and attitudes, with those more likely to be in need, more likely to offer support (Whitely, 1981).

For Evans and Kelley (2017: 345) public perceptions can be understood as reflecting "a complex mix of objective experience with subjective projections from their own reference group". Drawing on the work of others (Stouffer et al., 1949; Merton and Kitt, 1950; Lockwood, 1966; Runciman, 1966), Evans and Kelley begin by explaining the reference group theory, noting that people's "social perceptions include as main ingredients their own experiences and the experiences of their families, friends, and co-workers" (2017:320). Given this, what is limited or may be missing entirely, is "information about society as a whole". This can be understood in relation to the "availability heuristic", where others (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981; Kahneman et al., 1982) drawing on the work of Kelley (1967), suggest that "a systematic perceptual bias" is in operation (Evans and Kelley, 2017: 320). In this way, individuals acquire their "impressions from their small social circle" and as a result they engage in their own "informal survey of themselves" and moreover their "social networks" (Evans and Kelley, 2017: 321). What people observe is then translated and applied to society as a whole, or as Evans and Kelley put it, following this survey, people summarise "their observations by a subjective regression analysis and then generalize to the broader society" (2017:321).

Evans and Kelley consider perceptions of "class imagery" further, noting how the impact of reference group processes though influential, are not the only influences observable (2017:322). Instead, "people's interactions and information exposure" extend beyond social networks and "include a myriad of small events and impressions" and this includes "interactions with strangers to encounters with institutions to media stimuli" and this, for Evans and Kelley, "make the actual social structure an insistent presence, sometimes subtle, sometimes brash" (2017:322). Citing previous work (Evans et al., 1992; Kelley and Evans, 1995; Evans and Kelley, 2004b) Evans and Kelley suggest a mix or rather "a reference group and reality blend theory" where both "reference group forces" and the "material structure of society" are both considered influential, combining "to generate images of society's social class composition" (2017:322). Thus, for Evans and Kelley "reference groups are shaped not only by the individual's position in the socioeconomic hierarchy but also by the social locations of potential network members in the society" (2017:323).

Accordingly, the reference group and reality blend theory, suggests further a need to understand attitudes sociologically, considering both direct experiences but wider social and cultural influences. This is also supported by Smith and Hogg who argue that since “attitudes are grounded in group memberships...attitude research must consider more completely the way in which attitudes are socially formed, configured, and enacted” (2006:3). Both the reference group theory and the reference group and reality blend theory are discussed in relation to the findings in Chapter 6.

What is also particularly interesting to consider further within this research, is how the spiral of silence model operates, alongside “fear of isolation” (Scheufele, 2008:175). Not unlike Goffman’s (1959) theory of impression management, the spiral of silence model holds that people are cognisant of the perceptions of others and will therefore seek to adapt their behaviours and opinions accordingly. Thus, this model predicts that people are often fearful that their opinions will not match those of the majority, and they will as a result be positioned “on the losing side of a public debate” (Scheufele, 2008:175). In this way, people may act alongside the majority. In doing so, they may not necessarily express their own personal views due to a “fear of isolation”, where the true perceptions held may illicit unfavourable responses from others (Scheufele, 2008:175). Thus, it is suggested that individuals from minority and marginalised groups, who hold views that are different from the majority of the public, are often “less vocal and less willing to express their opinions” (Scheufele, 2008:175).

### **2.6.3 Summary**

Attitudes have been positioned as both complex and subject to a number of possible influences. It has been argued that there is a need to consider the social, economic, cultural and political environments in which attitudes are formulated, maintained and altered. This thesis reflects this need. It has been demonstrated that negative attitudes and stereotypical rhetoric toward people experiencing inequality may have an impact on policies and policy making. Given that public opinion is fundamental in order to implement social policies successfully, this is an issue (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhakar, 2012) and one that needs to be addressed.



## 2.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter provides an overview of the social, cultural, political and economic environment in what became austerity Britain, between 2009-2015. Emphasis has been placed on the Coalition's term in office, before moving to include the election of the Conservative government in 2015. The rationale for pursuing austerity measures and the consequences of this economic plan according to others, has also been considered critically. Mediated coverage of benefit cuts, sanctions and benefit recipients have also been included, in order to understand how the recession and as a consequence, austerity, created further gaps between people and groups, of which move beyond economic disparities in income. The views of the public toward people who are poor and the perceived views of why poverty persists, highlight how the "legitimation of social and economic inequality" operates (Oorschot and Halman, 2000:3). Whilst it has been argued that negative perceptions of inequality and poverty have existed for a long time, what is largely unknown is how a programme of austerity relate to attitudinal changes toward inequality and poverty, and the redistribution of income. This research contributes toward existing knowledge by filling this gap. Enabling an exploration of where future support targeting may be needed and doing so whilst further stressing that understanding why people support or refute redistribution measures is paramount in order to enact change (Leon, 2012; Rowlingson and Orton, 2010). The following chapter brings together the research questions presented in Chapter 1 and explains in more detail how the research has been approached ethically and methodically.

## **Chapter 3**

### **3.1 Methodology, methods and ethical considerations, Introduction**

To explore perceptions of inequality, poverty and support toward redistribution, explorative quantitative secondary data analysis has been conducted using BSAS microdata from 2009, 2012 and 2015. This Chapter provides a rationale for the chosen research methodology, noting both the strengths and weaknesses in the research design, alongside previous research considerations (Section 3.2). This chapter also critically presents the foundations and scope of the BSAS (Section 3.3), alongside the research methods. Discussing the selection process of variables for analysis, describing data manipulation and limitations (Section 3.4.1) and providing an explanation of how ethical considerations were realised throughout the research process (Section 3.6).

### **3.2 Research methodology, the rationale**

This section presents the rationale for choosing quantitative secondary data analysis. Highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, this section also provides an evaluation of this research methodology.

Pursuing quantitative secondary data analysis of three sets of micro data, meant that changing attitudes over time could be measured and interpreted, in relation to the changing social and economic landscape in austerity Britain. Thus, allowing past data from 2009, 2012 and 2015 to be drawn upon, to measure changing social attitudes toward inequality, poverty, redistribution and recipients of welfare support, and this would not have been possible had this method not been adopted (Vezzoni, 2015). Comparative secondary analysis of three large datasets also meant that access to a broader demographic was also possible (May, 2011). If this research was primary or mixed in methods, this would not have been achievable. This is a feature widely acknowledged as an advantage of pursuing secondary data analysis (Blaikie, 2003; Gomm, 2008), whereby official statistics are renowned for the provision of both complex and expansive sources of data (Gorard, 2003; May, 2011).

Secondary data analysis, thus meant a substantial volume of reliable data could be accessed, downloaded and recoded, ready for new analysis. In the context of this

research, a further strength of opting for secondary analysis can be drawn in relation to the methods employed in the initial research stages of the chosen data source. As Section 3.2 highlights, each year it is undertaken, BSAS data collection is subject to the same methods and includes a number of consistent questions and statements. As a result of the repetition of these measures, valuable comparisons can be drawn out over a specific time frame (Balnaves and Caputi, 2001). Allowing for consistency and further, an understanding of how social attitudes change over time.

There are also criteria data instruments used in research should demonstrate, including issues relating to both face and content validity (Balnaves and Caputi, 2001; Gorard, 2003). As evidenced in the following sections, the BSAS meets such criteria in that it exhibits both forms of validity. Face validity is ensured because the BSAS measures what it initially set out to do, in this case, British social attitudes. Likewise, content validity is also achieved, in relation to how well each of the survey's measure the intended attitudinal data (Gomm, 2008).

Opting for the secondary analysis of data from a longstanding survey of this size, also strengthens the research as a whole. This is due to the intricate sampling methods and methodological rigor (Dale et al., 2008) exercised by secondary data providers, like the National Centre for Social Research [NatCen], in their preliminary research. Therefore, despite longstanding criticism (Blumer, 1956), opting for the use of secondary inferential analysis, based on this reliable data, means important comparisons can be drawn between the variables (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2006), seeking out possible relationships and identifying trends over time (Pole and Lampard, 2002) and this is a key objective of this research. By extension, this also means that where statistically significant, the findings will be both repeatable and generalisable (Blaikie, 2003). Due to variable consistency over time, BSAS data thus not only incorporated both the desired socio-economic and demographic characteristics of interest in this research, but also included a number of survey questions, central to the themes within this research.

As Section 3.3 explains, these questions also directed the selection process of the independent variables [IV's] and dependent variables [DV's]. Therefore, both informing and enabling an exploration of changing attitudes. Although this research is explorative, to guide the research and maintain both "clarity" and "specificity" (Frankfort-Nachmias and

Nachmias 2006:53) four research questions were crafted for the purpose of this research. These research questions are as follows:

- How are people in receipt of social security benefits perceived by others?
- To what extent have attitudes towards poverty and inequality changed following the introduction of austerity measures in 2010?
- To what extent do negative attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits relate to the level of support expressed toward income redistribution?
- To what extent do socio-economic and demographic characteristics relate to perceptions of inequality and poverty?

Despite these strengths, however, this method is not without its difficulties nor criticisms. One of the difficulties applicable to this research, is the considerable time lag in the availability of the data, following data collection. The survey data selected for analysis is comprised of data collected in 2009, 2012 and 2015, although these datasets allow for comparative analyse, more recent data now exists. This time lag means that although the social attitudes of the public in Britain are available via the NatGen website and are published in reports, the raw data is unavailable for access, nor download in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences [SPSS 24], from the UK Data Service Archive [UKDSA] for a considerable time after the initial data is collected. Although more recent datasets were unavailable at the time this research was initially undertaken, more recent BSAS data now exists and these data would have perhaps offered further insights into the changing nature of attitudes in austerity Britain over the course of nearly two decades.

Aside from this time lag, secondary data analysis often presents further issues, including a lack of control over what data is collected and in turn, how this is undertaken during the data collection process (Boslaugh, 2007). In the context of this research, there are a number of inconsistent variables, meaning that some variables are not included in each survey, each year. Furthermore, as Gorard notes, there is also a loss in access to “field notes” and “incidental observations” that may have been drawn out by researchers during primary data gathering (2003:25). Again, in the context of this research, the attitudinal data is accessible, but the non-verbal cues (if any) from respondents were not. That said, secondary quantitative analysis of data from a large, pre-established institute, ensured that the most reliable data was drawn upon for the purposes of this analysis. This was, moreover, achieved within both the time and cost constraints of postgraduate study (Gorard, 2003; May, 2011).

Prior to the decision to undertake secondary data analysis, the production of a primary piece of research was, however, considered. It was hoped that this would enable the collection of raw attitudinal data, aimed at understanding the experiences of austerity measures and the consequences, for a number of people. However, due to both resource, cost and time constraints, alongside sampling issues related to the creation of an online survey, this method and research design was discounted. Having reconsidered how best to approach the research questions, the research design changed shape and became mixed in methods. It was hoped that quantitative secondary data analysis of BSAS data, alongside the use of qualitative methods, through the facilitation of focus groups, would enable a clearer understanding of the British public's attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution. This research design was, however, problematic, for practical reasons. Although focus groups would have enabled the collection of primary attitudinal data, this would not have enabled an understanding of how attitudes had changed over time. Thus, secondary data analysis, has been chosen largely as a result of the research questions selected for analysis, the time frame and the overall theme of the research.

Throughout the research, however, other questions were raised, with answers beyond the scope of this thesis. For instance, were those surveyed in the BSAS aware of programmes like Benefits Street? If yes, how did they perceive this programme and others like it? Why did people believe welfare recipients were undeserving of help? Was this based on experience or a reflection of wider stereotypical discourse? Whilst the findings do suggest that support toward redistribution is lower amongst people who held negative attitudes toward benefit recipients, aside from this, why is support toward redistribution so low? Is this based on their own financial constraints, their objection to taxation or a fear that those receiving redistributed income will be undeserving? Though this research has identified patterns in attitudinal data, further research is needed to explore these questions and to do so with the intention of generating debate, providing knowledge and seeking to inform policy makers in the process. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

The use of attitudinal data from social surveys has also been considered critically and this includes the presentation of the questions featured in social surveys, alongside their interpretation amongst respondents. Jann and Linz (2016) highlight a fundamental assumption that is made in both the construction, and the analysis of attitudinal social survey data; the accuracy, and indeed relevance of the answers provided by survey respondents. More specifically, that the "respondents are assumed to provide meaningful

and correct answers” during the research process (Jann and Linz, 2016:105). Whilst it is not possible to determine whether respondents surveyed within each of the BSAS included within this analysis, provided researchers with “meaningful and correct answers” (Jann and Linz, 2016:105), closer inspection of the attitudinal questions provided to respondents, enables a critical exploration of the possible difficulties encountered, and how these may impede or indeed prove advantageous during later analysis.

Notably, the wording of questions and respondent comprehension may prove problematic (Miller and Willis, 2016). One of the ways researchers seek to mitigate this possible issue, is by ensuring that the questions included in surveys are constructed carefully and that the respondents are able to comprehend what is being asked of them (Miller and Willis, 2016). Avoiding vague or complex terminology is also paramount, as is ensuring that the words selected are “simple and familiar”, and that “as few words as possible” are used, and that these are presented in “sentences with simple structures” (Miller and Willis, 2016:221). In the context of this research, Section 3.4.2 demonstrates that each of the DV’s included within this analysis, are clearly articulated, avoiding unnecessary specialist terminology throughout.

As Section 3.4.2 demonstrates, the five DV’s selected for analysis seek to explore people’s attitudes toward income inequality, income redistribution and attitudes towards people experiencing inequality and poverty. Whilst the DV’s selected allow for an understanding of how the public perceive of these issues, as they are presented, as Mc Call (2013:53) asserts, to determine whether people care, or conversely, “do not care about income inequality, rests on a critical assumption”, that people “know enough about the issue to form an opinion about it”. Mc Call, however, draws further attention to a key related issue, “how much information is enough to develop sensible ideas about an issue?” and indeed, where was this information gathered from? (2013: 53). Relatedly, others suggest that individuals “do not hold structured attitudes toward inequality...they have idiosyncratic emotional responses”, instead (Walster, 1976, p. 4 in Kelley and Evans, 1993:78). As Kelley and Evans succinctly point out, for Converse (1964) “public opinion is flighty, disorganized, and random”, rather than reflective of coherence. These critical points bring back into question the accuracy of the attitudes and responses surveyed within such research (Jann and Linz, 2016).

Mc Call (2013), cites a related issue in the context of exploring attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution, questioning how much knowledge can thus be gained from attitudinal survey questions. Mc Call (2013) considers the inherent complexities of both inequality and poverty, noting how each are areas of life and indeed study, that have perplexed leading figures in each field, and this has been ongoing. Kelley and Evans support this, noting that “income inequality is a central issue in social stratification and has been a topic of normative debate and political dispute since the time of Aristotle” (1993:75). Thus, consideration of the wording of questions is emphasised as a necessity, but particular attention should also be given to the topic under study, and whether as Mc Call ponders, “it is possible to infer much of anything...” given the complexity of the topic, for both lay audiences and indeed specialists (2013:54).

Miller and Willis (2016) take this further, considering question interpretation by respondents. They argue that “one of the most salient factors related to data quality is the process by which respondents interpret survey questions” (Miller and Willis, 2016:210) and how this may differ. Thus, whilst the questions included within this analysis may be clear and comprehensible, what is less so, is whether each individual interpreted each of the questions in the same way. Income inequality impacts “different groups, in different ways, at different times” (Mc Call 2013:57), and question interpretation is not separate to this. In this way, Miller and Willis (2016:212) explain that a socio-cultural stance should be adopted, with particular focus placed on the possibility that “the same question may not be understood in the same way by everyone”. In the context of comparative attitudinal research, this may mean that the quality of research based on attitudinal data may be reduced.

Emphasis thus must be placed on the contention that:

*The interpretation of a question depends on the context of respondents' lives. Meanings and thought patterns do not spontaneously occur within the confines of a respondent's mind, but rather those meanings and patterns are inextricably linked to the social world (Miller, 2011; Miller et al, 2014; in Miller and Willis, 2016:212).*

Again, in the context of this research, and as demonstrated in Chapter 2, alongside Section 3.4.3, the IV's selected for analysis reflect this complex relationship and the adoption of a socio-cultural stance (Miller and Willis, 2016). Each of the IV's and DV's selected for analysis have thus been chosen with purpose, intent on enabling an exploration of social inequalities, alongside social attitudes between 2009-2015. Thus,

whilst it is not always possible to avoid “fluidity of meaning” and interpretational disparities, inclusion of these variables extended the analysis, allowing for a broader understanding to be drawn out from the findings over time, and this would not have been possible, had this method not been adopted (Miller and Willis, 2016:214).

Aside from these limitations, the creation of statistics and their consequent analysis by others, perhaps with a different research objective than originally intended, are also not free from methodological issues. Statistical analysis, nevertheless, affords researchers with the resources to produce well informed research, intent on understanding relationships (Aldridge and Levine, 2001; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2006; May, 2011) and this was the case in this research. Not only did comparative quantitative secondary attitudinal data analysis meet the requirements of this research, the research is strengthened by the consistent quality of the data accessed. Strengthened further by the quality and careful construction of the questions and statements, presented to members of the British Public, during data collection.

In the context of this research, secondary data analysis of survey data, made it possible to both “describe the characteristics of social phenomena” but also afforded the opportunity to “understand, explain and predict patterns in social life or in the relationships between aspects of social phenomena” (Blaikie, 2003:28). This is achieved with the assurance that these data were collected by established social researchers, who had undertaken training to successfully obtain and measure social attitudes amongst the British public and to do so without causing harm. As Section 3.4 explains, from the onset and throughout, this has been a priority within this research.

However, despite the clear advantages of utilising secondary sources, longstanding criticism and caution remain prevalent. Theorists like Blumer (1956) have criticised the study of attitudes and of exploring social life in accordance with an analysis of variables. Similarly, Mills described these processes, and the social survey itself, as a form of “abstract empiricism” (1959: 60), with the related analysis too focused on “statistical software”, rather than critical thinking for others (Amrhein et al., 2019:307). Gorard has also cautioned that secondary sources should be approached critically or as he puts it, treated with “tentative scepticism” (2003:26). Gorard thus believes that to bring any meaning to a study involving secondary data analysis, researchers should thoroughly investigate the “pedigree of its raw material” (2003:26). This includes scrutinising the initial intention of the research, alongside its design and implementation (Gorard, 2003). With



these precautions in mind, the following section critically introduces the BSAS, its establishment, sampling frame and scope.

### **3.3 A critical overview of the BSAS**

This section provides a critical overview of the BSAS, describing the purpose of the survey, how many people were included in each sample, the sampling frame and the data collection method.

The BSAS is an annually repeated, cross-sectional study, established with the intention of gathering “peoples changing social, political and moral attitudes” (NatCen, 2015:4). Publishing reports, disclosing these publicly and annually, following its establishment in 1983, NatCen encouraged secondary analysis from the onset (NatCen, 2015). The scope of the survey is large, inviting “households...from across England, Scotland and Wales” to participate (NatCen, 2018: no pagination). As a method, the BSAS is comprised of two parts, a face-to-face interview conducted by Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing [CAPI] and a self-completion questionnaire, where the latter element includes attitudinal questions which could be construed as “particularly sensitive” (NatCen, 2015:6).

To ensure a representative sample of adults, residing in private households and over the age of eighteen is obtained for the purposes of the research, the survey employs a multi-stage stratified random sample. This sample is based on the Postcode Address File [PAF]; of which is comprised of a list of addresses and/or postal delivery points that are available to researchers. The sampling method is described as a multi-stage design, with three distinct selection stages. Postcode sectors in Great Britain are systematically selected from a list during the first stage, and then stratified on a basis of the density of the population, with “probability proportional to the number of addresses, in each sector” (NatCen, 2015:7).

Addresses were then selected by beginning “from a random point on the list of addresses for each sector and choosing each address at a fixed interval” (NatCen, 2015:7). During the final stage, each address selected, was frequented by an interviewer. After noting all eligible residents at an address, the respondent was then selected through a computer-generated random selection procedure (NatCen, 2015) with a sample size of 3,421 in 2009, 3,248 in 2012 and 4,328 in 2015. Given this sampling method, researchers are

instructed to only conduct interviews with members of the public who had been selected randomly.

Though the scope of the survey is large, and there are notable positive aspects to the administration of surveys, lack of response poses, however, a real issue and is cited as a disadvantage of choosing this method (Seale 2004; May 2011). Responding to this criticism and acknowledging possible issues in data analysis, NatCen explain that because samples were obtained from the PAF, weighting can be used to offset this issue, thus using the weight 'WTfactor' prior to each analysis attempted (2015:11). Further issues are cited, which may also hinder the analysis following data collection. Although weighting the data prior to analysis will counteract this problem, despite employing a random sample, as a result of just one eligible individual being required to participate in the research interview and complete the questionnaire, "people in small households...have a higher probability of selection" than those who reside in larger households (NatCen, 2015:11). Given that the research involves people residing in households, this sampling frame also excludes people without addresses or indeed those residing in communal establishments. This highlights a further disadvantage in research design, and by extension, a disadvantage of opting for secondary data analysis of sources which use this method.

That said, NatCen Social Researchers are committed to collecting data and analysing social change and doing so whilst protecting their participants. As Section 3.4 outlines in more detail, the respondents are aware of the reason for their participation, how they will participate and their rights throughout.

This commitment is further evidenced by NatCen where they state:

*for many questions you will be asked to pick from a selection of common answers. Your interviewer will ask you about a range of topics including healthcare, education, welfare and transport. And don't worry-you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to (2018: no pagination).*

Nevertheless, the data collection method for the BSAS, CAPI and self-completion questionnaires, were also scrutinised. To understand the research process, the survey questions were accessed, paying particular attention to the questions and statements that would later become the variables chosen for analysis in this research. The survey consisted of a wide range of attitudinal, closed questions and statements, inviting participants to select their answers from a range of pre-determined multiple-choice

options, further incorporating the use of Likert scales. These are discussed in more detail in Section 3.4.

As Section 3.4 also highlights, although there were some initial issues in the formation and consistency of the questions featured in each round of data collection process, it is argued that the BSAS provide a number of researchers with a variety of useful data, intent on understanding the attitudes of the British Public, tracking how these vary (if at all) over time. This is despite the contention that “secondary data analysis verges on being nothing more than virtual sociology” and that “there is no connection to the social world” where “social life” merely becomes transformed in to “the world of secondary data” (Murphy and Schlaerth, 2010:388). Instead, it is argued that the secondary analysis of large datasets over time, enables a more detail focused understanding of a number of societal issues, enabling new research of which would not have been possible, as was the case in this research (Gorard, 2003). The following section provides a detailed explanation of how BSAS data was accessed and analysed, introducing the key variables chosen for this research.

### **3.4 The analysis of BSAS data, Introduction**

To conduct comparative explorative analysis, a selection of consistent IV's and DV's have been selected from each of the BSAS datasets, following downloading the data from the UKDSA, into SPSS. This section focuses on the selection process of the variables, alongside highlighting the issues encountered in the initial stages of the research. The variables of interest in this research, alongside the IV's and DV's selected for analysis, are introduced, discussing the recoding of variables (where required), before a final section explains how the variables were analysed.

#### **3.4.1 Variables of interest in the BSAS**

Prior to discussing the chosen IV's and DV's, it is worth highlighting the selection process of the DV's and the problems encountered in the initial stages of the research. With this in mind, this section focuses on exploring the variables of interest in this research that would have, had they been included in the analysis, enabled further important comparisons to be drawn from the data, noting why their inclusion was not possible.

Due to the scope and direction of the BSAS, many of the datasets include a number of attitudinal variables concerned with understanding social attitudes towards poverty and inequality in Britain. Although this too is an objective of this research, having downloaded each selected dataset, a reoccurring issue became apparent, the changing nature of some of the questions and statements over time. Highlighting a disadvantage of opting for secondary data analysis, rather than each of the questions and statements being reproduced each year, many of the available variables varied year to year or altered slightly.

Table 3.3.1.1 illustrates this issue, highlighting variables that were of interest, yet could not be included as DV's, due to inconsistency across the datasets.

**Table 3.3.1.1:** Inconsistent variables of interest in the BSAS, not included in the analysis

<b>Variables of interest</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2015</b>
How much poverty in Britain today?	✓	X	X
Over the past ten years, think proportion of children in Britain changed?	X	✓	X
In GB how much conflict between unemployed people/people with jobs?	✓	X	X
Over the next ten years, think proportion in child poverty will change?	X	✓	X
How much child poverty in Britain today?	X	✓	X
How important or unimportant do you think it is to reduce child poverty?	X	✓	X
Government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor	X	X	✓
Child poverty in Britain because...	X	✓	X
Closest to respondent's feeling about their household income these days?	✓	X	X
Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular class. Which social class you belong to?	✓	X	X
<i>✓ indicates the question was present, X indicates the question was not present</i>			

Many of these questions sought to track how views of poverty and inequality have evolved over time (if at all) yet were not available each year. Nor were the questions that asked participants to explain why child poverty existed in Britain, to specify how they felt about their household income and to allocate themselves to a class category. Though the responses to these questions reflected the literature in Chapter 2 and would have provided valuable knowledge, to ensure comparative analyse could be conducted, each variable needed to be present in each of the datasets selected.

There were however a number of consistent variables that were selected for analysis. For the purpose of the following two sections, these variables have been separated into DV's and IV's. The following section introduces the consistent DV's in each dataset, providing

the responses presented to the survey's participants and any changes made to these variables prior to analysis. Following this, the IV's are introduced, before a final section describes how these featured within the analysis.

### 3.4.2 The DV's in the analysis

This section introduces each of the DV's included in the analysis, explaining the selection process, alongside the responses available for each participant in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Alongside this, variable recoding is also outlined, demonstrating how each variable was recoded, prior to analysis.

Five DV's were selected for analysis in this research (Table 3.3.2.1). With exception to the first variable (1), four of the five variables offered each of the participants the same response (2-5) in each dataset. The first question asked participants to state whether they thought the 'gap between high and low incomes' is: 'too large', 'about right' or comparatively 'too small'. Participants' were also given the option to skip the question, refuse to answer or to respond, 'don't know'.

**Table 3.3.2.1:** The DV's selected for analysis (source derived from: BSAS 2009, 2012 and

Consistent variables selected as DV's		2009	2012	2015
1:	The gap between high and low incomes is...	✓	✓	✓
2:	The Government should redistribute income between the better-off and the less well-off	✓	✓	✓
3:	Many people who get social security don't really deserve any help	✓	✓	✓
4:	If welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet	✓	✓	✓
5:	Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another	✓	✓	✓
<i>✓ indicates that each question was present in each of the datasets: 2009, 2012 and 2015.</i>				

2015).

Comparatively, the remaining DV's (2-5), provided participants with a Likert scale, the choice of responses available to each respondent are shown in Table 3.3.2.2. Each of the DV's were selected with purpose, reflecting the literature in Chapter 2, but also allowed for the research questions to be explored thoroughly. The variables were also recoded to enable a more focused analysis. For those questions that gave respondents a Likert scale (2-5) to select their response, each Likert scale was reduced and recoded into a new variable with two categories, those who 'agreed' (people who said they 'agree' or stated 'strongly agree') and those who 'disagreed' (those who said they 'disagree', or stated

‘strongly disagree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’). The remaining categories, ‘don’t know’ and ‘refusal/skip’ were coded as missing. This was repeated in each dataset.

The justification for these recodes is based on the direction of the research questions, and the desire to understand who is in agreement, rather than the strength of this agreement or indeed its lack. Though recoded, the findings following analysis were not compromised by the recoding of this variable (Blaikie, 2003), recoding did however focus the analysis.

**Table 3.3.2.2:** Likert Scale responses available to all participant’s in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

Likert Scale responses for DV’s 2, 3, 4 and 5						
‘Agree’	‘Strongly Agree’	‘neither agree nor disagree’	‘Disagree’	‘Strongly Disagree’	‘Don’t know’	‘Skip/refusal’

The recoding process for the first question (1) was, however, slightly different. Rather than focusing on the proportion of people who felt the income gap was ‘too small’ or indeed ‘about right’, the research is focused upon the proportion of the British public who agreed that this gap was ‘too large’. Not only does this question, and its new focus, reflect literature which suggests that income inequality in the UK is rising (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Clarke and Newman, 2012; Tyler, 2013; Seymour, 2014; Mckenzie, 2015; Savage, 2015), recoding allowed greater focus. Understanding whether the British public felt that the income gap is ‘too large’ is also of central interest to this research, with Section 4.1 exploring how attitudes toward the income gap changed (if at all) over the course of austerity examined here. To achieve this, this DV was recoded. Whilst ‘too large’ remained the same, the categories ‘about right’ and ‘too small’ were merged. Respondents who stated ‘don’t know’ or ‘refused’ were coded as missing. This was repeated in each dataset.

The second DV (2), the ‘government should redistribute income between the better-off and the less well-off’ (BSAS 2009, 2012, 2015) was included in order to understand whether people supported the redistribution of income, which is evidenced as a measure to combat income inequality between groups, often inciting debate (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhakar, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2015). This DV is included in the first findings chapter, in Section 4.2 and is also of central interest to this research. Including the first two variables also enabled further analysis, as outlined in Section 3.3.4. The third DV (3) selected for analysis ‘many people who get social security don’t really deserve any help’ (BSAS 2009, 2012, 2015) was included in the analysis, as it represents a longstanding process of the public and others, distinguishing between the deserving poor and the

undeserving poor (Bottero, 2005; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Hall et al., 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015).

Reflecting a further theme within the literature, the fourth DV invited participants to indicate their attitudes toward the generosity of benefit payments and the perceived consequent dependency amongst claimants. The statement: 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet' thus enabled an understanding of how people perceived benefit claimants and how this changed (if at all) over the course of austerity examined here. The final DV (5) sought to understand how people perceived fraud amongst benefit claimants, inviting respondents to specify whether they thought that 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another'. Again, this question also reflects literature which suggests that the public often perceive benefit claimants as fraudulently receiving social security assistance (McKendrick et al., 2008; Dorling, 2014; Brooker et al., 2015).

Due to the limitations of postgraduate study, alongside inconsistencies in the available BSAS data, focussing on five consistent DV's, alongside a number of IV's, allowed for a more thorough understanding of changing social attitudes in austerity Britain. Whilst this section has focused on the DV's included for analysis, the following section introduces the socio-economic and demographic variables included within the analysis and explains how these variables were recoded prior to analysis.

### **3.4.3 IV's in the analysis**

Eight socio-economic and demographic variables were selected for analysis. This section introduces these variables, explaining why each were selected and recoded prior to analysis (Table 3.3.3.1).

Given that previous research has shown that attitudes to poverty, inequality and redistribution vary by gender, age, ethnicity, social class (economic position), economic activity, levels of educational attainment and geographical location (Habibov, 2013; Park et al., 2012a; Wu and Chou, 2015; Goerres and Jaeger, 2016), the IV's incorporated in this research reflect this literature. The eight IV's selected, include the age of respondents, their gender, employment status, benefit status, occupation, educational attainment and self-rated income group. During the initial stages of data analysis, region of residence was

also included, however, this analysis did not provide any clear trends, thus region of residence was removed prior to the final stages of the analysis.

In adopting this approach to the analysis of attitudes, this research may be accused of “additive thinking”, in that categories are included within the analyse separately (Sigle-Rushton and Lindström, 2013:131). This is explained in relation to the theory of intersectionality, where “different dimensions of social life (hierarchies, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structures, normativities) are intersecting, mutually modifying and inseparable” (Sigle-Rushton and Lindström, 2013:131). As Dubrow explains, succinctly, people “belong to multiple demographic categories, the same individual has a specific gender, an ethnicity, and a social class position, among others”, and some of these “categories provide advantages and some disadvantages, with each having roots in social stratification structure” (2008:86). In this way, by considering gender, age, ethnicity and other characteristics separately, is to be accused of ignoring the intersecting layers of disadvantage (or indeed privilege) often faced by individuals. These layers of disadvantage are, however, not ignored within this research. Instead, this research practices “intersectional sensitivity” (McBride et al., 2015:334), where the literature drawn upon, reflects these layers of disadvantage.

For the purposes of this section, the variables are separated into demographic and socio-economic variables and are presented in two separate tables. Due to the sparse nature of the data, recoding was necessary (Table 3.3.3.1) in order to avoid small groups and to facilitate statistical tests. Care was however taken to ensure that the accuracy of measurement was not diminished (Blaikie, 2003). Table 3.3.3.1 shows the demographic variables included in the analysis. The first column shows the variable categories prior to recoding, the second column shows the variable categories following recoding, with the merged categories presented in brackets. As Table 3.3.3.1 shows, the demographic characteristics include: gender, age, ethnic background and educational attainment.

Age was selected as a characteristic and aspect of social identity that often influences attitudes towards redistribution (Busemeyer et al., 2009). Across the BSAS datasets, the age categories originally consisted of seven categories, for the purpose of this research these were recoded into three new groups. The new age groups were selected to avoid small group sizes, but also to provide more manageable groups consisting of a young age group (18-34), a middle age group (35-64) and an older group (65+). The gender variable



remained male or female, with any refusals recoded as missing, along with responses recorded as 'don't know'.

**Table 3.3.3.1:** Demographic BSAS variables in the final analysis, original categories and new recoded variable categories.

Original Variable categories		New variable categories in the analyse	
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Gender</b>
1	Male	1	Male
2	Female	2	Female
8	DK	M	(8,9)
9	Refusal		
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Age</b>
1	18-24	1	18-34 (1-2)
2	25-34	2	35-64 (3-6)
3	35-44	3	65+ (7)
4	45-54	M	(8)
5	55-59		
6	60-64		
7	65+		
8	DK/Refused/NA		
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Ethnic group</b>
1	BLACK: of African origin	1	BAME groups (1-8, 10, 11)
2	BLACK: of Caribbean origin	2	White ethnic groups (9)
3	BLACK: of other origin	M	(98,99)
4	ASIAN: of Indian origin		
5	ASIAN: of Pakistani origin		
6	ASIAN: of Bangladeshi origin		
7	ASIAN: of Chinese origin		
8	ASIAN: of other origin		
9	WHITE: of any origin		
10	MIXED origin		
11	Other		
98	DK		
99	Refusal		
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Education</b>
1	Postgraduate degree	1	Degree and above (1-2)
2	Degree	2	Below degree (3,4,5,6)
3	Higher education below degree	3	None & Other (7,8)
4	degree	M	(9)
5	A level or equivalent		
6	O Level or equivalent		
7	CSE or equivalent		
8	Foreign or other		
9	No qualifications		
	DK/Refusal/NA		
DK – Don't Know, NA – not answered, M – missing (Brackets show merged categories)			

Due to sparse data, and to avoid small group sizes, the original ethnicity variable categories were also recoded, transforming these into two categories, a BAME group and a White ethnic group. The educational attainment variable was also recoded and transformed from a variable with eight categories, into a new variable comprised of three categories. The new category 'degree and above' included people with a postgraduate

degree and/or a first degree, whereas 'below degree' comprised of people with higher levels of education below degree level. This included people with A level's, O level's, CSE's or Equivalent qualifications. To avoid sparse groups, the category 'none and other', incorporated respondents with no qualifications, foreign qualifications or 'other' qualifications.

The socio-economic characteristics selected as IV's include employment status, self-rated income band, benefit status and occupation (Table 3.3.3.2). The inclusion of these characteristics reflect the contention that people on low-incomes are more likely to support social security spending and redistributive efforts, than those in the higher-income bracket (Glynn et al., 1999; Fong et al. 2003; Anderson and Curtis, 2015), and the relationship between income and educational attainment, occupation and employment status (Fong et al., 1999; Busemeyer, 2009; Hills et al., 2010; UK Commission for Employment and Skills [UKCES], 2014).

Further, given the relationship between low incomes and the receipt of benefits, the benefit status of respondents (or their spouses), were also of interest. For the purposes of this analysis, due to the sparse nature of the data in some categories, many of these IV's were recoded into different variables. For example, benefit status was recoded into two groups, labelled 'yes' for those in receipt (or whose spouse was) and 'no' for those who were not in receipt of any benefits. Responses where participants had declined to answer or had specified 'don't know' were recoded as missing. Although it would have been of interest to understand what kind of benefits respondents or their spouses were in receipt of at the time of data collection, and how these influenced (if at all) their opinions, given the relatively small sample sizes and due to the time and spatial limitations of postgraduate study, this was not feasible.

Respondents were also asked to specify whether they were in the receipt of a high, middle or low income, these categories remained the same during this analysis. However, responses detailing those who refused to answer the question or stated they did not know were recoded as missing. Notably, the process of inviting individuals to self-rate their income may result in inaccuracy. In this way, the three groups, may not necessarily accurately reflect high, middle and low incomes.

The respondents' employment status was also recoded in each dataset, merging the categories into two groups labelled 'in employment' (those in work or waiting to take up

work) and 'not in employment' (those not in work and not waiting to enter paid employment). This latter group not only featured respondents who stated they were unemployed, it also encompasses people looking after their home/family, in education or training, and those who have retired. The new two categories became the focus of the analysis, enabling an understanding of the differences (if any) in attitudes amongst people in work and those not in employment.

**Table 3.3.3.2:** Socio-economic BSAS variables in the final analysis, original categories and new recoded variable categories.

Original Variable categories		New variable categories in the analyse	
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Self-rated income group</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Income</b>
1	<i>High income</i>		
2	<i>Middle Income</i>	1	<i>High</i>
3	<i>Low income</i>	2	<i>Middle</i>
8	<i>DN</i>	3	<i>Low</i>
9	<i>Refusal</i>	M	<i>(8,9)</i>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Benefit Status</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Benefit status</b>
1	<i>Yes</i>		
2	<i>No</i>	1	<i>Yes</i>
8	<i>DK</i>	2	<i>No</i>
9	<i>Refusal</i>	M	<i>(8,9)</i>
<b>Coding</b>	<b>Economic Activity Summary</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>
1	<i>Full Time education/training</i>		
2	<i>In work/ waiting to take up work</i>	1	<i>In employment (2)</i>
3	<i>Unemployed</i>	2	<i>Not in employment (3,5)</i>
4	<i>Retired</i>	M	<i>(9)</i>
5	<i>Other</i>		
9	<i>DK/ Refusal</i>		
<b>Coding</b>	<b>NSSEC (5 category)</b>	<b>Recoding</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1	<i>Managerial and Professional occupations</i>		
2	<i>Intermediate occupations</i>	1	<i>Managerial &amp; Professional Occupations (1)</i>
3	<i>Employers small organisations own account workers</i>	2	<i>Intermediate occupations (2, 3)</i>
4	<i>Lower supervisory &amp; technical occupations</i>	3	<i>Routine &amp; Manual occupations (4, 5,8)</i>
5	<i>Semi-routine Occupations and Routine occupations</i>		
8	<i>Not classified</i>		
DK-Don't Know, NA-not answered, M-missing (Brackets show merged categories)			

Similarly, the participants' occupational position (NSSEC) was also recoded into three categories within a new variable (Occupation). The new occupation variable, retained the original first category, leaving this unchanged ('managerial and professional'). Comparatively, as Table 3.3.3.2 shows, the second category 'intermediate' was recoded to include people working in intermediate occupations, employers in small organisations with own account workers. The final category, 'routine and manual' included people who held lower supervisory roles, technicians, people who were employed in semi-routine

occupations and finally those who could not be placed in one of these categories ('not classified'). Recoding in this way in each of the datasets was necessary to avoid sparse data and allow for statistical analysis.

Much of the focus of this chapter so far has been on the methodology and providing a critical introduction to the BSAS, alongside the variables in this analysis. The following section critically discusses the methods, explaining the focus of the variables included in the analysis alongside the statistical test incorporated.

### **3.5 Analysis and focus, introduction**

This section critically presents the research methods, explaining which statistical tests were undertaken within the analysis and why these were incorporated. In doing so, this section will also discuss how the eight socio-economic and demographic variables, alongside the five DV's, featured in the analysis.

To understand changing attitudes over time, this research has been completed in stages. Having selected the time frame of the research, BSAS data from 2009, 2012 and 2015, was accessed through the UKDSA and downloaded into SPSS 24. All consequent tables and graphs were created in Excel. Each of the datasets were explored, seeking variables that would enable an understanding of how people perceived income inequality, redistribution and benefit recipients. Having selected the variables, each variable was inspected, noting the sizes in each category and recoding where necessary. Following this process, inferential analysis was possible. Following data download, cleaning and recoding where necessary, univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis was conducted.

#### **3.5.1 Testing for Statistical Significance**

Keen to avoid what Gorard (2004:219) refers to as "superfluity", this Chapter has thus far, been presented in such a way that the methods and methodology are accessible, ensuring that explanations are clear, and terminology is explained. This section continues to adopt this approach, discussing how and why confidence intervals featured in the analysis [CI] and how the statistical test, Chi-squared was also used to explore the data, each to determine possible relationships between groups and over time.

Presented at the beginning of each findings section, to understand the significance of changing attitudes over time, confidence intervals were included in the analysis of the DV's. This included the DV's: 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large' (Section 4.1), 'the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off' (Section 4.2), 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help' (Section 5.1), 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another' (Section 5.2) and 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet' (Section 5.3). Having established the proportions in agreement each year, individually, CI's were constructed around the point estimates in each year, reporting the 95% confidence intervals and comparing these findings to determine whether the changes between 2009-2012, 2012-2015 and 2009-2015, were significantly different (at the 5.0% level).

The next stage of the analysis involved using crosstabs and employing the statistical test, Pearson's Chi-square test to determine whether statistically significant relationships between variables were evident and whether trends were notable (Gorard, 2004; Adeyemi, 2009; Field, 2012). As Adeyemi (2009:48) explains, "the chi-square test is a nominal level non-parametric test of significance...used to test the differences or relationship between two variables", using the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Here,  $\chi^2$  = Chi-square,  $O$  = Observed frequency;  $E$  = Expected Frequency. As Adeyemi (2009) and Field (2012) acknowledge, as a convention, the significance value or alpha [ $\alpha$ ], is often set at less than 0.05, using hypotheses ( $H_0$  and  $H_1$ ) to guide the research findings.

$H_0$  = there is no association between the IV (s) and the DV

$H_1$  = there is an association between the IV (s) and the DV

If the  $p$  value (observed significance level) is equal to or less than the alpha [ $\alpha$ ], the null hypothesis (that there is no relationship) can be rejected (Adeyemi, 2009; Field, 2012), thus suggesting that there is a relationship between the IV(s) and the DV.

In this research, this was also the case. However, rather than focusing on whether the significance value was less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ), the values were also identified if these were less than 0.01 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and less than 0.001 ( $p < 0.001$ ). The level of statistical significance (where applicable) is emphasised within each of the tables ( $p < 0.05^*$ ,  $p < 0.01^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.001^{***}$ ). For significant findings, these are further indicated within the narrative, expressing significant differences in attitudes between groups as 'more likely' or 'less likely'. For results, where  $p > 0.05$ , these were discussed clearly as not significant findings

(ns), meaning that the null hypothesis (of no relationship) cannot be rejected (Gorard, 2004).

Recent literature, however, not only suggests the need to exercise caution when employing tests of statistical significance, including the use of confidence intervals (Amrhein et al., 2019:306) but also calls for an abandonment of the “concept of statistical significance” entirely. This desire for abandonment rests on the assumption that the use of statistical significance in a dichotomous way results in the production of “misleading” findings (Amrhein et al., 2019:306). This occurs when researchers are presented with a  $P$  value over 0.05 ( $P > 0.05$ ), leading the researcher to declare there is no difference or no association or perhaps that there is no significant difference. For Amrhein et al. (2019:307) researchers should instead “embrace uncertainty”, avoiding making “overconfident claims” based on statistical analysis. Amrhein et al., (2019:307) thus advocate that  $P$  values should be reported with “precision”, rather than indicated with “adornments such as stars or letters to denote statistical significance and not as binary inequalities ( $P > 0.05$  or  $P < 0.05$ )”.

In this research, the language of statistical significance is retained, with the realisation that whilst a test may show no associations between variables, this is not necessarily reflective of social relationships. Thus, caution is exercised when interpreting the findings of statistical tests, striving to avoid “misleading” findings (Amrhein et al., 2019:306). To promote precision in the presentation and interpretation of these research findings, the results of statistical tests are also presented within the findings chapters and although stars are utilised, with exception to the BLRA findings, so too are specific  $P$  values.

The analysis and findings are grouped by chapter, incorporating available literature, alongside theory to understand changing attitudes. Chapter 4, Section 4.1 involves the analysis of BSAS data from 2009, 2012 and 2015, highlighting the proportion of people who agreed that ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’. Section 4.2 explored the proportion of people who agreed that ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off’. Crosstabulation meant that the levels of agreement toward each statement could be understood in relation to socio-economic and demographic characteristics, thus highlighting which groups were more likely to hold each view and by extension which groups were less likely. To maintain consistency and enable comparison, this was repeated in each dataset.

The findings presented in Section 4.1 and 4.2 extended the analysis further, leading to the introduction of a new question of interest, intent on understanding why support toward income redistribution remained so low, despite so many members of the British public agreeing that income inequality between groups was 'too large'. Section 4.3, thus, highlights which groups are more likely to support redistribution, amongst those who also agreed that income inequality was too great. This was achieved by filtering the data, using the variable 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', and then using crosstabs to place the variable 'the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off' as the DV, and the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of interest as IV's. This was repeated in each dataset. Following a discussion of the findings in each table initially, Chapter 6 provides an analytical discussion of the data alongside the literature, enabling interpretation.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the analysis of three of the DV's, concerned with understanding what attitudes were held toward social security recipients and how these changed (if at all). The statements included for this chapter include: 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help' (Section 5.1), 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another' (Section 5.2) and 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet' (Section 5.3). Having initially sought to understand how socio-economic and demographic characteristics relate to attitudes in the first three sections, Section 5.4 sought to understand these findings further.

Filtering the data by the variable 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help', the crosstabs function was used to determine what the proportion of people who said people were undeserving, also agreed that 'the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well off'. The redistribution variable was used as the DV, with each of the socio-economic and demographic variables acting as IV's. Similarly, Section 5.5, filtered the data by the DV 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet', using crosstabs to determine what proportion of people who felt that welfare generosity resulted in dependency also supported the redistribution of income. To allow for comparative analysis, this was repeated in each dataset.

### 3.5.2 Binary Logistic Regression Analysis [BLRA]

Following the independent analysis of data from the 2009, 2012 and 2015 datasets as discussed above, the datasets were merged to create one new dataset, ready for the final statistical analysis, BLRA. This section explains this process, noting why BLRA was employed in the research.

As Gayle and Lambert (2009:3) explain, regression can be used to “explore the effects” of multiple (and categorical) IV’s on a binary outcome variable (DV). Accordingly, this enabled further exploration of the DV’s in the analysis. Rather than modelling for best fit, however, within this research the results of the BLRA are interpreted in relation to odds ratios [OR], *p* values and 95.0% CI’s. As Szumilas note, OR’s are a measure of the association between an exposure variable (IV) and an outcome variable (DV), in this way the OR “represents the odds that an outcome will occur given a particular exposure, compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in the absence of that exposure” (2010:227).

In this analysis, the 95% CI is employed to estimate the accuracy of the calculated OR (Connelly et al., 2016). As Szumilas contends, where a “large CI indicates a low level of precision of the OR”, comparatively, a “small CI indicates a higher precision of the OR” (2010:227). Given that a positive OR does not “necessarily indicate that this association is statistically significant”, both CI’s and *p* value’s are used to establish whether or not significant findings are observable (Szumilas, 2010:229), though the latter is not presented in the tables. Due to variation and a lack of firm guidelines, findings from each BLRA are presented in tables, reporting the Exp Beta ( $\beta$ ) or OR and the 95% CI’s (Connelly et al., 2016). Though this form of data analysis is not without its difficulties (Gayle and Lambert, 2009; Szumilas, 2010; Connelly et al., 2016; Amrhein et al., 2019), to enable further exploration of the data, this was considered the most appropriate.

Prior to each BLRA, to ensure that the DV’s were binary (having just two categories), further data management was, however, necessary. Each DV was recoded, using ‘0’ and ‘1’, renaming each variable in each dataset, to ensure these were consistently labelled throughout. To simplify the analysis, the IV income, was also recoded into a two-category variable, comprised of people in receipt of middle-high incomes (merging the two categories) and people in receipt of low incomes (remaining the same). Having completed



this process, the individual datasets (2009, 2012 and 2015) were merged to create a new dataset, comprising all the data. Following this, the two DV's presented in Section 4.1 ('the gap between high and low incomes is too large' and 4.2 ('the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off') were selected for analysis. This analysis was also repeated in Chapter 5, with the three main DV's selected for BLRA (Section 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). Focusing on six IV's (year, age, gender, benefit status, employment status and income), BLRA was included to explore what relationships were evident, if any, having taken into account other variables in the analysis. The findings of the BLRA are presented and discussed in each chapter, before inclusion within the analytical discussion section.

This chapter has, thus far, provided a critical discussion of the methods and methodology, intent on highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of this research design and on clearly outlining the variables featured within the analysis. The following section focuses on emphasising the ethical considerations inherent to this research, outlining the ethical guidance and practices adhered to throughout this research

### **3.6 Ethical considerations, Introduction**

This Section outlines the ethical guidance and practices adhered to throughout this post-graduate research. Importantly, this research has been conducted in accordance with the guidance purveyed by three different research bodies. The guidance afforded by the ethical frameworks of both the Social Research Association's [SRA] and British Sociological Association's [BSA] ethical guidelines, as well as those of the organisation who made this research possible through funding, the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC] has thus been followed. Aside from these organisations, support and guidance was also received by the University's Ethical Committee, where ethical approval for the purposes of postgraduate study was granted, following review by the University of Leeds Ethical Committee.

#### **3.6.1 Research ethics**

Each aspect of this research abided to the ethical guidelines presented in each of the above frameworks. Thus, demonstrating a commitment to ensuring social research continues to be meaningful to society, through the care continually taken to ensure that research participants remain unharmed and that legislation of any given country is not

contravened as a result of research conducted (SRA, 2003). The purpose of this research was to make meaningful contributions. Not only through the production of recommendations of future research and policy, but to do so in a way that is accessible to all. Thus, this research has been conducted with the intention of enabling a firmer understanding of how people feel toward inequality, poverty and how attitudes towards social security recipients relate to support toward income redistribution. Not only is this a prerequisite of the funding body of this post-graduate research, as laid out in their 2015 Framework for Research Ethics [FRE], in an effort to provide insight into social inequalities and social issues, this is also something the funding body strives to achieve in their own research.

Alongside this and the guidelines provided by SRA and BSA, The FRE (2015:4) set out six core principles for all research to adhere to, this is also a mandatory expectation of research conducted by individuals and bodies in receipt of ESRC funding. Each of these principles will be discussed in relation to the research, demonstrating how each of these principles were incorporated into the “research lifecycle” to date (FRE, 2015:2). The first of six principles set out the expectation that all research should ensure the safety of research participants, where their contributions are based on voluntary participation, free from coercion with their rights and their dignity remaining the focus of the research. Secondly, the consequent research should proceed with caution, ensuring that the outcome of the research is worthwhile and that all those involved, do so free from risk and harm (FRE, 2015).

Given that the research and analysis is based on secondary data, the research method previously employed at the time of data collection in 2009, 2012 and 2015, was critically explored. Due to the nature of this analysis, this involved examining the ethical procedures in place at the time of BSAS data collection. NatCen evidenced stringent ethical research practices, gaining informed consent from the participants, and making the respondents aware that any questions they did not wish to answer, they could refrain from doing so. These statements can be further evidenced from NatCen’s ‘Taking part’ advice page. NatCen introduce the purpose of the survey to each possible participant, specifying that although the data will be anonymised, “the results of the survey will go on to feature in the newspapers, on TV and radio, and will be discussed in Parliament” (NatCen, 2018: no pagination).

Prior to the research taking place, the selected sample received a postcard, informing of their selection and that a researcher was intent on visiting each address, noting again the purpose of the study and the prospective respondent's rights to refuse to participate. This information was and remains readily accessible online, with a number of further important points of information included. NatCen emphasise that the "legal basis for processing the data" is on the basis of "legitimate interest", that NatCen controls the data for the BSAS, with a clear stance on the sharing of any personal information being on the basis of consent (NatCen, 2018: no pagination).

Prospective participants and participants are assured that their details will be treated "in the strictest confidence under current data protection legislation" (NatCen, 2018: no pagination). Participants or prospective participants are thus both informed and are further able to access information related to both the BSAS and data dissemination. Further, as a result of anonymisation during the data collection process, it is not possible to identify participants based on the information shared during this process. Not only is informed consent gained, each of the respondents are over the age of eighteen and were only deemed eligible if they fit these criteria, thereby avoiding the need to gain parental agreement (SRA, 2003; BSA, 2017).

In taking further steps to ensure no harm to the participants, each interviewer carried an identification tag and were also subject to checks from Disclosure and Barring Service (NatCen, 2018). As a reward, thanking all respondents, each household was sent a Post Office voucher, to be exchanged for money (NatCen, 2018). Not only does this demonstrate the first two principles afforded by the FRE (2015), this also highlights how the third and fourth ethical principles have also been adhered to. The third principle explains that all those involved in the research should be made aware of the methods, what the research will be used for, what their role in the research process is and whether there are any possibilities of risk or indeed benefits (FRE, 2015). This expectation has been met. The fourth principle clarifies that the research process maintains the anonymity of participants, with respect to the confidential information and/or personal data (FRE, 2015). This expectation has also been met.

A commitment to ensuring that the data used in this research adheres to the ethical principles set out by the ESRC in their FRE (2015) framework, highlights how this research demonstrates a "personal responsibility for undertaking research to the highest ethical

standards” (FRE, 2015:4). The final two expectations set out by the FRE (2015) have also been demonstrated throughout this research process, this is evidenced in the design of the research. The research design was thus constructed in relation to ethical frameworks, was reviewed in the early stages, maintaining integrity, quality and transparency throughout.

Although secondary data analysis was conducted with a view to fulfilling a research objective and fulfilling the requirements of post-graduate study, there remains no conflicts of interests (FRE, 2015). In the context of this research, this has been achieved by employing these guidelines, strictly and by maintaining “high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and analysis of data and the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings” (SRA, 2003:13). Throughout this research, all findings from secondary analysis are reported and interpreted both “accurately” and “truthfully” (BSA, 2017:4), with all participants and those involved in the research, remaining free from harm.

The ESRC note within their FRE, a research integrity Checklist featured within the UK Research Integrity Office [UKRIO] Code of Practice for Research [COPR]. The ESRC advise that all those undertaking research funded by them should abide by the recommendations presented in this COPR checklist. The first question addressed concerns the purpose and scope of the research. More specifically, whether “the proposed research address pertinent question(s)” and whether “is it designed either to add to existing knowledge about the subject in question or to develop methods for research into it?” (UKRIO, 2009: no pagination). The research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and

Section 3.1 demonstrate the purpose and importance of this research in the pursuit of knowledge and contributing to existing knowledge. The UKRIO (2009) also question whether the research design is appropriate for the research questions stipulated. As demonstrated in this Chapter the research design is appropriate, with further questions arising as a result of the findings, the “necessary skills and resources” required to “conduct the research” are furthermore, demonstrated throughout this thesis (UKRIO, 2009: no pagination).

The “best practice for the collection, storage and management of data” is also considered, alongside appropriate risk assessments, prior to data collection and the research (UKRIO, 2009: no pagination). Although the questions and statements presented to each respondent were attitudinal, seeking to understand perceptions those featured in the CAPI

and personal questionnaire were free from ethical issues, each were comprehensible and of an unobtrusive and inoffensive nature (Gomm, 2008). Not only did the data collected by NatCen adhere to ethical guidelines, the consequent secondary data analysis in this thesis also sought to uphold the same ethical rigour.

At the point the data for each year was downloaded from the UKDA, this has been stored securely, as a result of both the requirements of the End User Licence agreement [EUL] but also in ensuring the data remains anonymous. The data has been stored, with any physical copies of the data collected, stored in a locked cabinet, behind a locked office door. The data, once no longer necessary will be destroyed securely. As specified by the UKDS (where this micro data was stored prior to being downloaded into SPSS) in the EUL (2018:3), the research in this way will “preserve at all times the confidentiality of information pertaining to individuals and/or households in the data collections where the information is not in the public domain”.

Following the end of the access period, all copies of the data stored, irrespective of format, will be destroyed (EUL, 2018). This necessity is also highlighted within the Microdata Handling and Security Guide to Good Practice (2014). This agreement and guide also emphasise that all publications (in all formats), should provide acknowledgements and citations, making it clear where the data was derived from. This includes “the original data creators, depositors or copyright holders [NatCen]”, alongside “the service funders [ESRC] and the data service provider(s) [UK Data Service] in the form specified on the data distribution notes or in accompanying metadata received with the dataset” (EUL, 2018:4).

Further, the EUL also specifies that “bibliographic details of any published work based wholly or in part on the data collections” should also be provided (2018:4). Not only has this research been produced on a not-for-profit research basis, given PhD theses are also published online, with a copy also retained by the University library, the thesis incorporated the necessary citations throughout and references. In line with EUL regulations, prior to publication, the EUL will be updated, requesting a change to the originally specified use.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

To summarise, this Chapter outlined the research methods, methodology and ethical guidelines inherent to this post-graduate study. Whilst the final Section outlined the ethical

guidance adhered during the research process, Section 3.1 explored the research methodology, providing the rationale for the research and some of the initial issues encountered, alongside the strengths and weaknesses of opting for secondary data analysis of three sets of micro data. A critical overview of the BSAS, including the sample frames and sizes for each year of micro data has also been provided. Section 3.3 discussed the analysis of the BSAS, presenting the variables for analysis, changes to the data, and the statistical analysis employed throughout. Despite criticism, it has been argued that the methods employed in this research have enabled the creation of an original piece of research, of which contributes to a growing body of literature, concerned with public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution. The following Chapter presents the first of two findings chapters, exploring perceptions of the income gap and redistribution, alongside how perceptions of income inequality relate to redistributive support.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research findings 1**

#### **4.1 Perceptions of income inequality and redistribution, Introduction**

This chapter explores public perceptions of the income gap in Britain, alongside support towards initiatives to combat inequality, through the redistribution of income. The first section explores whether people agreed that ‘the gap between people with high and low incomes is too large’ (4.1.1). Comparatively, the second section explores the extent of agreement with the statement: ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off’ (4.2.1). The third section (4.3.1) builds on the analysis presented in Sections 4.1.1-4.2.1, exploring the proportion of people who said that the income gap is ‘too large’, alongside the proportion of people who also supported redistribution. These findings are also discussed in Chapter 6, drawing on a range of the available literature, to provide an analytical discussion of the findings illustrated in Section’s 4.1.1-4.3.1 and Section’s 5.1.1-5.5.1.

As Section 2.6 emphasises, although people’s perceptions are often inconsistent and subject to change (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Underwood, 2009; Voas, 2014), due to the possession of a number of social identities, their behaviour and by extension their attitudes, can be gauged (Luttig, 2013). Accordingly, changing attitudes were investigated in relation to specific characteristics. This includes demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnic background and educational attainment) and socio-economic characteristics (employment status, self-rated income band, benefit status and occupation). Presented thematically, the analysis explores whether perceptions have changed, between groups and over time.

##### **4.1.1 Perceptions of income inequality, findings**

Chapter 2 demonstrated how income inequality in the UK has grown substantially and is set to worsen further (Belfield et al., 2014; Dorling, 2014; McKenzie, 2015; Springford, 2015). Prior to the recession and implementation of austerity measures, inequality persisted alongside rising affluence and these differential consequences for many, became increasingly more pronounced (Irvin, 2011; Dorling, 2014; Belfield et al., 2015; TET, 2016). Not only were services cut, many saw their household incomes fall as their

living expenses increased, for others cuts to benefits and sanctions meant their benefits became frozen or reduced due to ineligibility (Levitas, 2012; Penny, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Lupton et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). The use of food and clothing banks, providing basic necessities to individuals and families (O'Hara, 2014), are now not only considered a permanent fixture, but a stark reminder that members of the British public are struggling to "keep afloat financially" (O'Brien and Kyprianou, 2017:120).

Despite growing income inequality, however, for many people both poverty and inequality are considered experiences that exist outside of the UK, rather than within it (Park et al., 2012b; Hall et al., 2014) and this is problematic. As evidenced throughout this research, public support is paramount to ensure social policies and measures to tackle such growing inequality of income and of opportunity, are not only implemented but sustained (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhakar, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2015). Whilst it has been argued that people are concerned about the prevalence of inequality (Irwin, 2016), this does not, however, necessarily mean that this concern will increase, as inequality intensifies (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007). On the contrary, ignorance towards the suffering of others operates as a barrier to successfully removing obstacles, like that of inequality of income and of opportunity.

Alongside a lack of acknowledgement toward inequality and poverty and an acceptance of their existence, Kyprianou contemplates whether people have simply "become inured to the statistics on poverty" (2015:12). Kyprianou's query points to the suggestion that for those able to acknowledge their presence, both poverty and inequality have become something that is considered inevitable and as something that will always be with 'us'. Suggesting that to confront mounting income inequality, prevailing levels of inequality alongside their causes must also be understood by the public. Suggesting, further, that if people are unable to conceive of the extent of income inequality, they will be less likely to support initiatives to combat problems they do not believe exist. Subsequently, progress towards income equality will be halted.

In light of this, this section explores whether members of the British public recognised widening income inequality between groups as an issue. To do this, BSAS data from 2009, 2012 and 2015 is analysed, intent on understanding which groups are more likely to agree that 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large' and the extent of change, if at all, over the years studied. To understand the changes between the years, CI's are first



constructed around the point estimate for each year. To determine significant relationships between groups based on shared social identities and their attitudes toward the income gap, this analysis is followed by MVA and finally, BLRA.

Table 4.1.1 shows the CI's constructed around the point estimates in each year. The findings show that in 2009, 80.6% stated that 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', the 95% CI is between 78.9% and 82.2%. By 2012, the proportion of people in agreement that the income gap is 'too large' increased to 84.4%, the 95% CI is between 83.1% and 85.6%.

**Table 4.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point [pp] difference of levels of agreement with: 'The gap between high and low incomes is too large', by year, with C.I.'s (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

The gap between high and low incomes is too large		Agree (%)			<i>pp</i> change by year and CI by year (95%)		
		2009	2012	2015	2009-12	2012-15	2009-15
<b>Year</b>							
<b>All</b>		80.6	84.4	78.0	+3.8	-6.4	-2.6
<b>CI</b>	<i>Lower</i>	78.9	83.1	76.5	sd	Sd	ns
<i>Bound</i>		82.2	85.6	79.4			
<i>Bound</i>	<i>Upper</i>						
CI – Confidence Interval, sd-significant difference (at 5.0% level), ns-not significant							

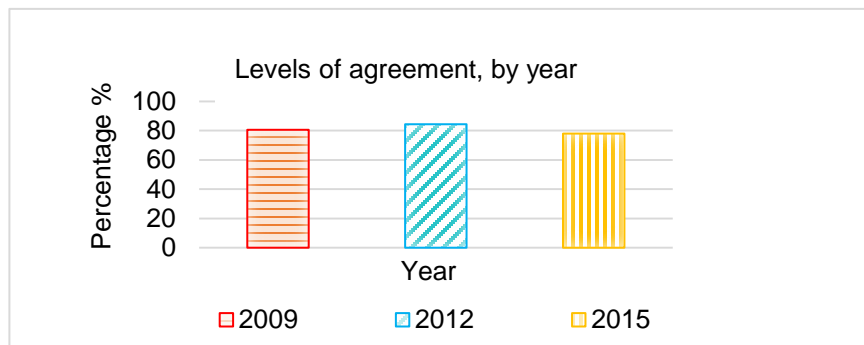
Table 4.1.1 shows that the differences between 2009 and 2012 are significantly different at the 5.0% level. These findings suggest that the attitudinal change (increase in agreement) between 2009-2012 is significantly different. By 2015, however, attitudes changed. The proportion of people in agreement (78.0%) decreased by 6.4% from 2012. The findings also suggest that the changes between 2012-2015 are significantly different (at the 5.0% level), suggesting that there was a significant decrease in levels of agreement between 2012-2015. However, these findings also suggest that the overall decrease in agreement between 2009-2015 is not significantly different. To summarise, these findings suggest that changing attitudes toward income inequality between 2009-2012 and 2012-2015 are significantly different at the 5.0% level, but that the changes between 2009-2015 are not significantly different. To understand these findings further, MVA was conducted. Highlighting the proportion of people in agreement, Table 4.1.2 and Figure 4.1.1, show the results of this analysis.

Figure 4.1.1 shows that in 2009, 2012 and 2015, a considerably large proportion of the British public recognised the polarisation of income between groups in the UK. Thus,

suggesting that the majority of the British public in 2009 (80.6%), 2012 (84.4%) and 2015 (78.0%), recognised the significance of income inequality between groups. The proportion of people in agreement increased between 2009 to 2012, before declining in 2015, to a level lower than observed in 2009 (*pp* decrease of 6.4). Whilst the proportion of people recognising the scale of income inequality as ‘too large’ remained substantial, increasing initially into 2012, by 2015 attitudes appeared to have changed. Whilst the findings outlined in Figure 4.1.1 show how attitudes changed over time, Table 4.1.1 shows that not all of these changes were significant.

These findings suggest two things. First, since a considerable proportion of people recognised income inequality between groups as a gap ‘too large’, this appears to reinforce Irwin’s point that the public “do care about inequality” (2016:15) or at the very least, are able to recognise it.

**Figure 4.1.1:** Levels of agreement with: ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’, by year (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



The findings also suggest, however, that despite large proportions of people holding this view, concern for the inequality of income between groups fell significantly, as the impact of austerity measures became more pronounced (2012-2015).

To explore which groups were more likely to perceive the income gap as ‘too large’, Table 4.1.2 shows how this perception varied by socio-economic and demographic characteristics. As emphasised in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, experiences of inequality by and between groups diverge and these differential experiences are expected to impact on perceptions of income inequality (UKCES, 2014; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; UNCESCR, 2016). Notably, the experience of inequality for men and women is often different, which should be reflected in their attitudes towards inequality. Women continue to face inequalities of income and of opportunity (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Nandi and Platt, 2012; Conley, 2012; UKCES, 2014), consequently women are expected to express more

concern towards others and hold views based on the principles of fairness and equality of opportunity, to a greater extent than men (Goerres and Jaeger, 2016).

**Table 4.1.1.2:** Percentages and percentage point difference of agreement with: ‘The gap between high and low incomes is too large’, by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

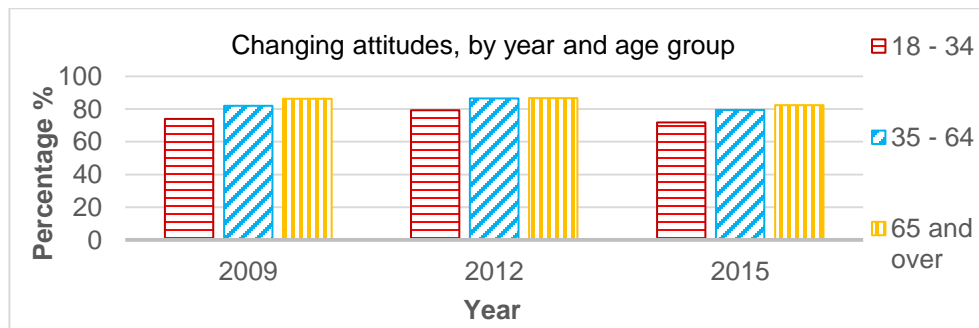
Socio-demographic and economic characteristics	‘Too Large’ %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 – 15
<b>All</b>	80.6	84.4	78.0	+3.8	-6.4	-2.6
<b>Gender</b>	ns	ns	*			
<i>Male</i>	79.8	83.0	77.9	+3.2	-5.1	-1.9
<i>Female</i>	81.4	85.7	78.1	+4.3	-7.6	-3.3
<b>Age</b>	***	***	***			
18-34	73.9	79.3	71.9	+5.4	-7.4	-2.0
35-64	82.0	86.4	79.4	+4.4	-7.0	-2.6
65+	86.3	86.7	82.4	+0.4	-4.3	-3.9
<b>Ethnic group</b>	ns	ns	*			
<i>White ethnic groups</i>	76.3	84.7	78.9	+8.4	-5.8	+2.6
<i>BAME groups</i>	81.1	81.9	72.4	+0.8	-9.5	-8.7
<b>Income</b>	***	***	***			
<i>High</i>	67.4	76.8	71.0	+9.4	-5.8	+3.6
<i>Middle</i>	77.3	80.9	75.4	+3.6	-5.5	-1.9
<i>Low</i>	85.4	89.4	81.9	+4.0	-7.5	-3.5
<b>Benefit status</b>	***	**	***			
<i>Yes</i>	82.9	85.8	79.9	+2.9	-5.9	-3.0
<i>No</i>	76.8	82.3	75.8	+5.5	-6.5	-1.0
<b>Employment Status</b>	***	**	ns			
<i>In employment</i>	78.1	83.5	78.3	+5.4	-5.2	+0.2
<i>Not in employment</i>	84.2	85.5	77.4	+1.3	-8.1	-6.8
<b>Qualifications</b>	ns	ns	*			
<i>Degree and above</i>	80.3	82.8	80.6	+2.5	-2.2	+0.3
<i>Below degree</i>	81.2	85.0	77.2	+3.8	-7.8	-4.0
<i>None &amp; Other</i>	79.9	83.6	77.1	+3.7	-6.5	-2.8
<b>Occupation</b>	ns	ns	***			
<i>Managerial &amp; Professional Occupations</i>	81.1	84.8	78.1	+3.7	-6.7	-3.0
<i>Intermediate occupations</i>	80.7	84.3	79.1	+3.6	-5.2	-1.6
<i>Routine and Manual occupations</i>	80.7	85.1	78.3	+4.4	-6.8	-2.4
<i>Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: *p&lt;0.05 **p&lt;0.01 ***p&lt;0.001 ns – not significant</i>						

In the context of this research, two assumptions can be made. Firstly, women will not only be more likely to recognise growing income inequality and thus more likely to agree than men, but secondly, that these proportions will also increase. As expected, the proportion of women in agreement, is greater than amongst men in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Despite this attitudinal gender gap narrowing in 2015; during this period women were more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’ in comparison to men ( $\chi^2=7.131$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.028$ ).

Although these findings support Goerres and Jaeger's (2016) contention, the secondary assumption that levels of agreement will increase at a faster pace amongst women, is not supported by the findings. Instead, these findings demonstrate that by 2015, as inequality of income increased, declining levels of agreement are observable not only overall ( $pp$  decrease of 6.4), but also amongst men ( $pp$  decrease of 5.1) and to a greater extent, amongst women ( $pp$  decrease of 7.6).

Varying levels of agreement are also notable by age group. As Chapter 2 and Chapter 6 illustrate, age also impacts upon perceptions of income inequality (Busemeyer et al., 2009). Identified as a group more vulnerable to age related ill health and disabling conditions, pensioners are often subject to greater levels of inequality and poverty (Ginn, 2013; Habibov, 2013). For these reasons, it can be assumed that people aged 65 and over will be more likely to recognise income inequality. As Table 4.1.2 and Figure 4.1.2 show, opinions towards the income gap in Britain vary significantly by age.

**Figure 4.1.1.2:** Levels of agreement with: 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', by year and age (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Whilst people aged 18-34 were least likely to agree, despite economic difficulties during these periods, older members of the public (65 and over) were, as expected, more likely to agree than both people aged 18-34 and 35-64 in 2009 ( $\chi^2=28.556$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2=27.935$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=31.865$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In 2015, a notable shift in overall levels of agreement amongst older members of the public (65 and over) is observable, where despite increasing levels of agreement in 2012, levels of agreement fell amongst this group.

This result may be surprising, given the assumption noted above. However, as also demonstrated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, despite ongoing vulnerability to poverty and

inequality amongst older individuals, positive changes have occurred, meaning that pensioners incomes have in part been protected (Tucker, 2017). That said, greater protection for older members of the public has not ceased vulnerability (Ginn, 2013; JRF, 2016), which perhaps explains the higher proportions of agreement amongst this group and a greater recognition of income inequality, in comparison to people aged 18-64. As Figure 4.1.1.2 shows, between 2009-2012, whilst levels of agreement increased amongst people aged 18-34 and 35-64, they fell again between 2012-2015 and at a faster pace amongst younger people aged 18-34 (*pp* decrease of 7.4).

The lowest levels of agreement each year are observable amongst younger members of the public (18-34), who are the least likely to assert that the income gap is 'too large'. Following the assumption that people more susceptible to inequality are often more likely to recognise income inequality and recent findings illustrating how younger members of the public fared worse during austerity (Belfield et al., 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015), it would have also been feasible to suggest that this would have been reflected in the analysis, with levels of agreement increasing amongst this group. However, results in Table 4.1.1.2 and Figure 4.1.1.2, do not support this.

Alongside women, pensioners and young adults, people from BAME backgrounds are also identified as a group more vulnerable to the experience of poverty and inequality, due to ongoing disadvantage and prejudice (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010). People from BAME backgrounds are often subject to injustice and greater experiences of inequality, and as a consequence of such disadvantage, it can be assumed that the likelihood of agreement will be higher, than in comparison to people from white ethnic backgrounds, who are less likely to face ethnic prejudice. As Table 4.1.1.2 shows in 2009 people from BAME groups were more likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large' compared with people from white ethnic backgrounds. However, in both 2012 and 2015, attitudes appeared to change with people from white ethnic backgrounds more inclined to state that the income gap is 'too large' (in 2015  $\chi^2 = 10.469$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ).

Between 2009-2015 levels of agreement declined amongst people from BAME backgrounds, thus although the gap between those in agreement from white ethnic backgrounds and people from BAME backgrounds appeared to narrow 2009-2012, between 2012-2015 they more than doubled. This suggests that in 2015, at least, the assumptions put forth above, were not supported by the findings. Instead, despite ongoing

ethnic disadvantage (Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015; Equality and Human Rights Commission [EHRC], 2015; TUC, 2017) amongst many people from BAME backgrounds, people from white ethnic backgrounds were more likely to agree that income inequality between groups is 'too large'.

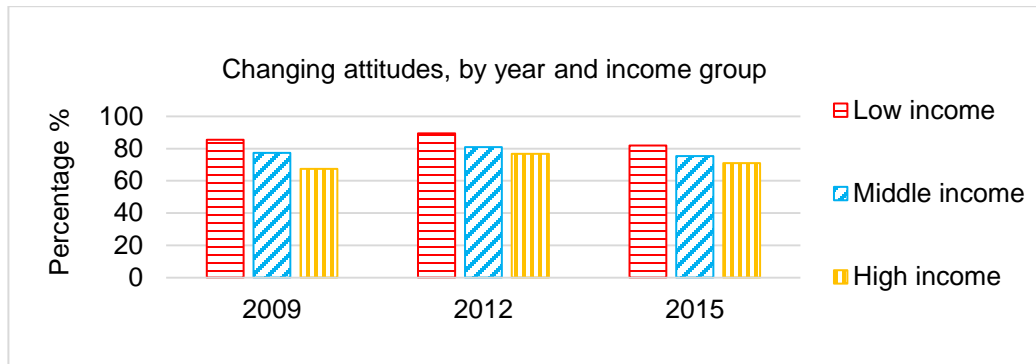
Notably, both perceptions of inequality and the experience of inequality, differ between men and women and also by age and ethnicity. Although not the focus here, these aspects of identity intersect, impacting upon perceptions of inequality and complicating the experiences of disadvantage for many (Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015). What is also emphasised is how other aspects of identity, like that of socio-economic positioning, also impact both perceptions and experiences. Notably, a number of groups sharing the same aspects of social identities, are more vulnerable toward the onset of inequality and poverty than others (UKCES, 2014; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; UNCESCR, 2016). Furthermore, other factors, like educational attainment, occupation and level of income, often play a part in the likelihood of these experiences but also impact on attitudes towards inequality (Park et al., 2012b).

Table 4.1.1.2 shows how opinions toward income inequality varied by socio-economic characteristics, including the level of income received, benefit and employment status, the level of educational attainment achieved, and the type of occupation undertaken. Notably, where people are situated in relation to socio-economic characteristics, often influences or indeed, impedes the type of lifestyle individuals and families are able to lead (Holman, 1978; Esping-Anderson, 1999; UKCES, 2014; Finch, 2015; Padley et al., 2017). In this way, because unemployment and benefit take up often results in a low income or indeed are a consequence of low income, it can be assumed that people in the low-income group, those in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is) and those who are not in employment, will be more likely to recognise growing economic inequality, due to their own experiences of need and limited incomes (Holman, 1978; Finch, 2015).

It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that low-income earners, benefit recipients and people who are not in employment, will be more likely to agree that 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large'. Whereas, people in receipt of higher incomes, people who do not receive benefits and those in paid employment, will be by comparison, less likely to recognise income inequality, perhaps because they are often both economically and socially distant from these experiences (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007). As Table 4.1.1.2

and Figure 4.1.1.3 show, there is a significant relationship between self-rated income level and perceptions of the gap between high and low incomes.

**Figure 4.1.1.3:** Levels of agreement with: ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’, by year and income group (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



As expected, in 2009 ( $\chi^2=32.224$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2=53.652$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=43.158$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), people who specified that they had a low income, were significantly more likely to state that the income gap is ‘too large’. Further, as an individuals’ financial position improves, thus moving them further away from income vulnerability, the proportion believing that the income gap is ‘too large’ decreases. In summary, although levels of agreement increased (by 3.6 *pp*) amongst people in receipt of high incomes between 2009-2015, this group who are less likely to experience inequality directly and perhaps socially, are less likely to perceive the income gap as ‘too large’.

These findings do however suggest that between 2009-2015, high-income earners became more likely to recognise income inequality. Nevertheless, despite falling levels of agreement between 2009-2015 (3.5 *pp*) people who are in receipt of low incomes, who are more likely to experience the consequences of economic inequality, due to lower incomes, are more likely to assert that the income gap is ‘too large’. Not only were declining levels of agreement notable amongst low-income groups between 2009-2015, levels of agreement also fell by 1.9 *pp* amongst the middle-income group.

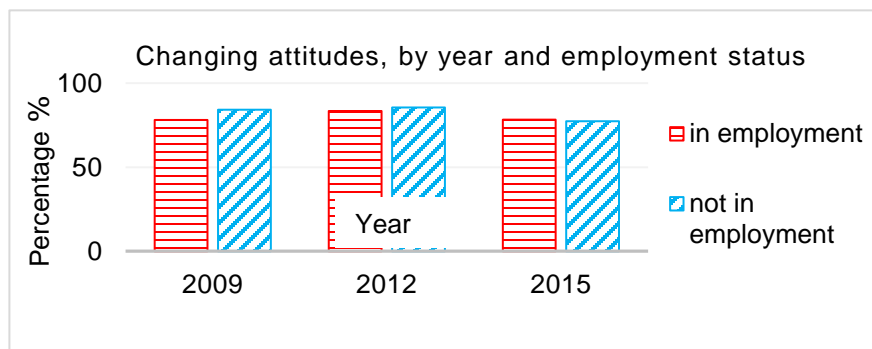
Similarly, perceptions differed by employment and benefit status. As highlighted in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, because benefit recipients (or their spouses) are often in receipt of lower incomes, it was expected that this would be reflected in the analysis. As expected, people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was), were more likely to state that the income gap is ‘too large’, in comparison to those not in receipt of benefits in 2009 ( $\chi^2=12.385$ ,  $df=1$ ,

$p < 0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 11.111$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 15.084$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

Interestingly, although levels of agreement decreased amongst both groups, the decline in agreement between 2009-2015, is three times higher amongst those who were in receipt (or whose spouse was) of benefits, in comparison to people who were not receiving benefits. Thus, suggesting that despite increasing levels of inequality and changes to the receipt, eligibility and sanctions imposed upon benefit recipients, people who were in receipt or whose spouse was, became less inclined to see the income gap as 'too large'. Perhaps reflecting their own financial insecurity and vulnerability toward the experience of inequality, despite falling levels of agreement amongst this group, people who claimed benefits or whose spouse did, were as expected, more likely to recognise income inequality, than those not receiving benefits.

Much like people in receipt of benefits are expected to be in receipt of lower incomes, Chapter 2 and Chapter 6 stressed how people who are not in employment, are also expected to receive and feel constrained by less than adequate financial resources (Holman, 1978; McKendrick et al., 2008). Given this, it can be assumed that people who are not in employment will be more likely to agree, reflective of their own experiences of income inequality. As Figure 4.1.1.4 shows this was, in part, reflected in the findings. In 2009 ( $\chi^2 = 12.751$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 12.660$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), as expected, people who were not in employment were more likely to state that the income gap is 'too large'. By 2015, however, this had changed with people in employment more inclined to hold this view, than those not in employment. That said, this difference was not statistically significant.

**Figure 4.1.1.4:** Levels of agreement with: 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', by year and employment status (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Overall, between 2009-2015, people in employment became more likely to state that the income gap is 'too large'. Conversely, as Figure 4.1.1.4 shows, levels of agreement



amongst those not in employment declined between 2009-2015 (by 6.8 *pp*). The gap in agreement levels between those in and those not in employment in 2009, appeared to narrow into 2012 and 2015.

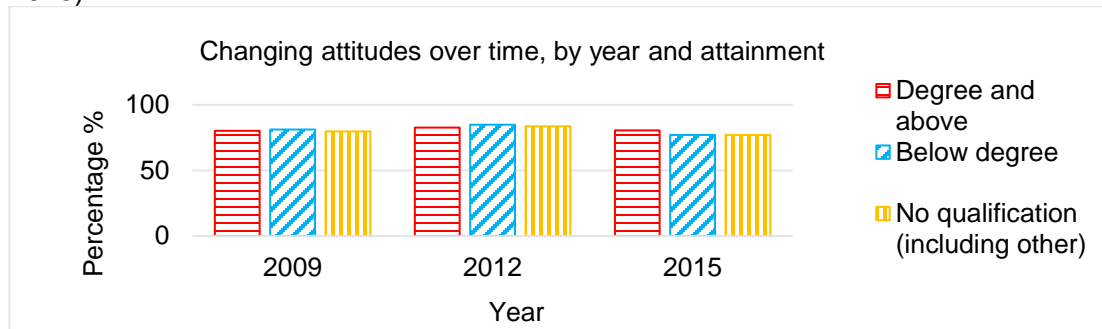
As emphasised in Chapter 6 these changing attitudes amongst people in employment mirror research which has shown that 'in work poverty' is increasing (Patrick, 2012; Kingman, 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015; JRF, 2016; Oxfam, 2016a; Oxfam, 2016b; Kingman and Seager, 2014), with some positions poorly paid, insecure, often offered on the basis of zero hours contracts and with wages not covering the financial commitments of both individuals and families. With these factors in mind, people who are in employment may also be experiencing income inequality and therefore, may also be increasingly more likely to recognise the extent of income polarisation. To summarise, despite attitudinal shifts, in both 2009 and 2012, perceptions of income inequality were related to employment, with people who were employed less likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large' compared with those outside the labour market.

Highest level of education achieved and type of occupation, may also prove useful indicators of monetary position and thus exposure to the experience of inequality (Holman, 1978; Hills et al., 2010; UKCES, 2014; Finch, 2015). As people with lower qualifications often work in lower-paid occupational roles and are therefore, more vulnerable to income inequality, it is expected that this group will be more likely to state that the income gap is 'too large'. Comparatively, people with higher level qualifications and those in higher paid occupational roles, who are often protected by higher incomes, will be less likely to recognise income inequality. Figure 4.1.1.5 shows how attitudes differed by the type of qualifications held. The highest proportion of agreement in 2009 is amongst people qualified to degree level and above. By 2012, this had changed, people with qualifications below degree level were instead most likely to agree (although in both these years the differences were not statistically significant).

By 2015, attitudes mirrored those in 2009, with people with higher levels of educational attainment (a degree or above) more likely to agree (80.6%), followed by people with below degree level qualifications (77.2%) and people without or with other forms of qualifications, who were the least likely to agree (77.1%,  $\chi^2=42.753$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These findings suggest that the assumption that lower educational attainment would result in greater levels of agreement, is not supported by the findings. Instead, in 2015, at least,

the opposite is observable, with levels of agreement increasing as the level of educational attainment increased.

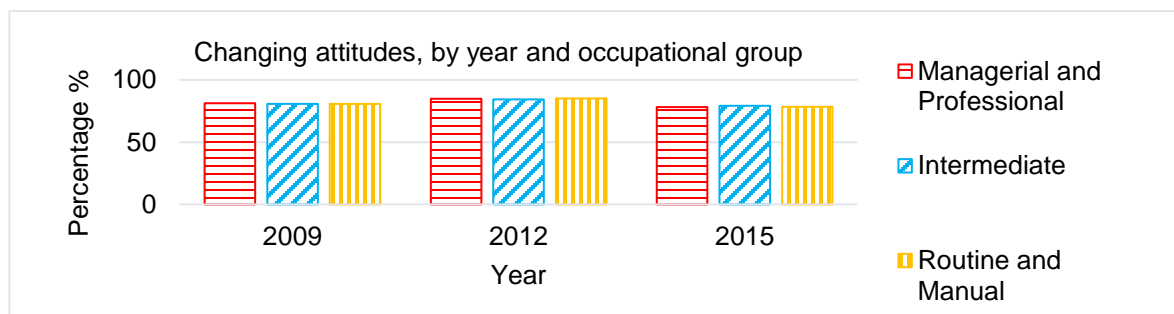
**Figure 4.1.1.5:** Levels of agreement with ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’, by year and educational attainment (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



As Table 4.1.1.2 and Figure 4.1.1.6 show, opinions varied by occupational position. Because occupational position often dictates the level of income received, it can be assumed that people employed in managerial and professional roles will be less likely to recognise income inequality and to experience poverty and in the context of this research, less likely to state that the income gap is ‘too large’. By extension it can also be assumed that people occupying routine and manual roles, often in receipt of lower pay, will be more likely to recognise income inequality. However, a different picture emerged, with no significant differences in the proportion of agreement by occupation in 2009 and 2012.

However, in 2015 ( $\chi^2=27.064$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) people working in intermediate professions, were more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’, compared with those in managerial and professional occupations and those in routine and manual jobs.

**Figure 4.1.1.6:** Levels of agreement with ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large, by year and occupation (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



This suggests that in 2015, at least, people working in managerial and professional occupations, who are more likely to receive greater monetary rewards, were less likely to

perceive of the income gap as 'too large', perhaps because they occupy socially and economically distanced positions, that are some way away from the experiences of income inequality. This also suggests that people employed in intermediate occupations, whom are closer to the experiences of inequality, due to lower incomes than those in managerial and professional roles, were more likely to recognise income inequality and in this context, more likely to regard the income gap between groups as 'too large' in 2015.

To summarise, these findings not only suggest that perceptions of income inequality vary by socio-demographic and economic characteristics, but also that there is a relationship between social identities and attitudes. To understand attitudes toward income inequality further, the following section uses merged data to explore relationships using BLRA.

#### **4.1.2 BLRA**

To understand these findings further, the individual datasets from 2009, 2012 and 2015 were merged to create one dataset. Following this process, BLRA is used to not only describe the data, but to also explain the relationship between one dependent binary variable, in this case 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', and a selection of IV's (year, age, employment status, benefit status, gender and income group).

Table 4.1.2.1 shows the findings of the BLRA, along with C. I.'s. Taking into account all the other variables in the analysis, the findings suggest that people were more likely to agree that the income gap was 'too large' in 2012 ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $p < 0.05$ ), than in 2009, with the C.I.'s also suggesting a significant relationship. Further, this analysis also suggests that whilst men and benefit recipients (or those whose spouse was in receipt) were also more inclined to agree that the income gap was 'too large' in comparison to women and non-claimants, these findings are not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The relationship between employment and perceptions of the income gap, is however, significant.

Again, taking all the other variables in the analysis into account, compared with people who were not in employment, people who were in employment were more likely to agree ( $p < 0.05$ ). Factoring in all the variables in the analysis, the associated C.I.'s, further suggest a significant effect between employment status and attitudes.

**Table 4.1.2.1:** BLRA of the levels of agreement with: ‘The gap between high and low incomes is too large’, with C.I.’s, by variable (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Variables included in the analysis		Odds Ratio (OR)	95% C.I. for Exp (B)	
Variable	Categories		Exp (B)	Lower
<b>Year</b>	2009	1.000	-	-
	2012	1.338 ***	1.157	1.547
	2015	0.867 *	0.756	0.995
<b>Gender</b>	Male	0.934 ns	0.835	1.045
	Female (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Age</b>	18-34	0.483 ***	0.401	0.583
	35-64	0.813 *	0.679	0.972
	65+ (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Income</b>	middle-high income	0.536 ***	0.475	0.606
	low income (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Benefit status</b>	Yes	1.090 ns	0.963	1.234
	No (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Employment Status</b>	In employment	1.186 *	1.035	1.359
	Not in employment (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Constant</b>		7.551 ***	-	-

*Statistical Significance of OR's represented by asterisk symbols: \*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001, ns not significant, - no figure to display*

Comparatively, compared with people aged 65 and over, younger people aged 18-34 ( $p<0.001$ ) and 35-64 ( $p<0.05$ ), were significantly less likely to agree. Based on this analysis, a significant relationship between income and attitudes toward the income gap is also evident. Compared to people who are in receipt of low incomes, people in receipt of middle-high incomes are also significantly less likely to agree ( $p<0.001$ ). A significant effect is further supported by the C.I.'s.

### 4.1.3 Summary

To summarise, this section has demonstrated that based on this analysis, in 2009, 2012 and 2015, large proportions of the British public described the income gap as ‘too large’. It has also shown how attitudes changed over time and differ between groups, with some patterns emerging in the data. BLRA has also shown, once taking into account all the other variables in the analysis, that people were more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’ in 2012 and 2015, than in 2009. This section has also demonstrated how people in employment are more likely to agree than those who were not in employment, but that middle-high income earners are less likely to agree, in comparison to people in receipt of low incomes. Finally, the analysis has demonstrated, taking all these all variables into account, that age and attitudes toward the income gap are also related, where compared with people aged 65 and over, younger people aged 18-34 and those aged 35-64 are significantly less likely to agree. These findings are discussed in more

detail in Chapter 6. Intent on understanding perceptions of redistribution, the following section introduces the second DV, ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off’, before bringing both variables together for further analysis in Section 4.3.1.

## **4.2 Perceptions of redistribution, introduction**

Drawing on the literature outlined in Section 2.6.2, this section focuses on exploring attitudes toward income redistribution. Exploring attitudinal differences by year, but also socio-economic and demographic characteristics, to understand not only how attitudes may have changed over the course of austerity, but to also understand who is more likely to support redistribution.

### **4.2.1 Perceptions of redistribution, findings**

As Chapter 2 has already explained, whilst people are able to conceive of income inequality, this does not necessarily mean they are fully supportive of redistribution (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007). Given this and the high proportions of the British public who noted that the income gap is ‘too large’, the second question analysed explored the extent of agreement with the statement: ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off’. As identified in Chapter 2, people’s perceptions are often conflicting and change over time, they are however often gaugeable due to the possession of specific social identities (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Underwood, 2009; Luttig, 2013; Voas, 2014). In the same way it is possible to deduce that peoples’ attitudes toward income inequality will differ depending on their susceptibility to, and their experiences of inequality, it is also likely attitudes towards redistribution will vary, based on similar principles.

As Section 2.6.2 illustrated, attitudes towards redistribution can be understood in different ways. Given this, this section draws on the theories identified in Section 2.6.2 to explore attitudinal differences toward the redistribution of income. These theories and attitudinal differences are considered alongside Anderson and Curtis’s (2015) postulation, that as inequality increases in any given society, this will positively influence the perceptions of fellow citizens, who will then increasingly desire more redistributive spending. Following this, and because large proportions of the British public felt that the income gap in Britain is ‘too large’, it may have been feasible to suggest that similar proportions of people would

support the redistribution of income and that support for redistribution would increase, as the consequences of austerity measures continued to impact people in Britain. Table's 4.2.1.1 and 4.2.1.2 show the results of the analysis.

Table 4.2.1.1 first shows the CI's constructed around the point estimates in each year, demonstrating that in 2009, 37.3% supported the redistribution of income (the 95.0% confidence interval is between 35.5% and 39.0%). By 2012 support toward income redistribution had increased to 42.1%. Based on this analysis, the findings suggest that the changes between 2009-2012 are significantly different at the 5.0% level, and thus that there was a significant increase in the proportion of the British public in support of income redistribution, between 2009-2012.

**Table 4.2.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point difference of levels of agreement with: 'The Government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off', by year, with C.I.'s by year (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

The Government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off	Agree (%)			pp change by year and CI by year (95%)		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 –15
<b>Year</b>						
<b>All</b>	37.3	42.1	44.7	+4.8	+2.6	+7.4
<b>CI</b>						
<i>Lower Bound</i>	35.5	40.2	43.0			
<i>Upper Bound</i>	39.0	43.9	46.3	sd	ns	sd
CI – Confidence Interval, sd – significant difference (at 5.0% level), ns-not significant						

By 2015, support toward redistribution had increased again. That said, the changes between 2012-2015 do not appear to be significantly different (at the 5.0% level), the changes between 2009-2015 are, however, significantly different. To summarise, these findings suggest that the change in levels of support toward income redistribution between 2009-2012 and 2009-2015 are significantly different, suggestive of significant increases in support toward income redistribution.

Table 4.2.1.2 shows the proportion of people in agreement by year, and socio-economic and demographic characteristics. The findings suggest the assumption that given the considerably large proportions of people in agreement that the income gap is 'too large', similar proportions of people would support the redistribution of income and that support toward income redistribution of income would increase over the period of austerity examined here, was partly reflected in the analysis. Support towards the redistribution of income did increase, supporting the contention put forward by Curtis and Anderson (2015). Yet, in comparison to the perceived need for monetary redistribution to bridge the gap

identified in Section 4.1.1, support amongst the British public is also particularly low. In 2009 less than half of the respondents (37.3%) supported the redistribution of income. Though this proportion increased in 2012 (42.1%) and increased further in 2015 (44.7%), the increase between 2012-2015 is not significantly different. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the desire to redistribute income between groups increased as inequality did.

**Table 4.2.1.2:** Percentages and percentage point difference of levels of agreement with: 'The Government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off', by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

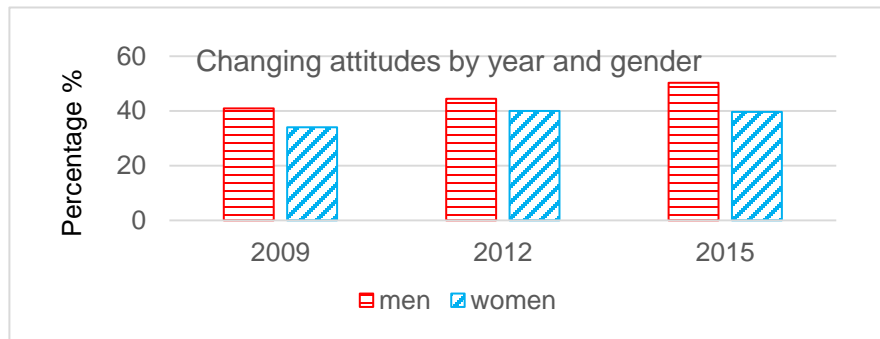
Socio-demographic and economic characteristics	'Agree' %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009-12	2012-15	2009-15
<b>All</b>	37.3	42.1	44.7	+4.8	+2.6	+7.4
<b>Gender</b>	***	*	***			
Male	40.9	44.4	50.2	+3.5	+5.8	+9.3
Female	34.0	39.9	39.6	+5.9	-0.3	+5.6
<b>Age</b>	ns	ns	ns			
18-34	36.5	42.3	43.6	+5.8	+1.3	+7.1
35-64	37.6	40.5	44.8	+2.9	+4.3	+7.2
65+	37.9	45.7	46.0	+7.8	+0.3	+8.1
<b>Ethnic group</b>	ns	***	*			
White ethnic groups	42.0	40.8	44.0	-1.2	+3.2	+2.0
BAME groups	36.9	53.5	49.8	+16.6	-3.7	+12.9
<b>Income</b>	***	**	***			
High	27.8	38.1	43.9	+10.3	+5.8	+16.1
Middle	30.8	39.2	39.5	+8.4	+0.3	+8.7
Low	44.9	45.7	50.0	+0.8	+4.3	+5.1
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	*	*			
Yes	38.3	43.7	46.9	+5.4	+3.2	+8.6
No	35.8	39.8	42.2	+4.0	+2.4	+6.4
<b>Employment Status</b>	*	***	*			
In employment	35.5	37.4	42.7	+1.9	+5.3	+7.2
Not in employment	39.9	47.9	47.2	+8.0	-0.7	+7.3
<b>Qualifications</b>	***	**	***			
Degree and above	39.9	44.1	52.1	+4.2	+8.0	+12.2
Below degree	34.5	39.0	40.1	+4.5	+1.1	+5.6
None & Other	43.3	47.3	49.3	+4.0	+2.0	+6.0
<b>Occupation</b>	ns	**	***			
Managerial & Professional Occupations	35.6	39.0	44.0	+3.4	+5.0	+8.4
Intermediate Occupations	35.7	38.0	39.7	+2.3	+1.7	+4.0
Routine & Manual Occupations	42.6	45.6	47.9	+3.0	+2.3	+5.3
Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$ ns – not significant						

These findings also, however, show that this was an opinion shared by less than half of the British public. Given that support from members of the public is an important factor in both policy implementation and the eradication of inequality (Whiteley, 1981; Burstein, 2003; Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; McKendrick et al., 2008; Leon, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2015), these findings are problematic. To understand which groups are more likely

to support the redistribution of income and where future targeting for support may be necessary, the findings outlined in Table 4.2.1.2 are analysed thematically throughout, intent on understanding who is more likely to support redistribution and conversely which groups are less likely to do so.

Table 4.2.1.2 and Figure 4.2.1.1 shows how attitudes differed by gender. As explained previously, due to ongoing disadvantage women are expected not only to be more likely to recognise inequality, but also more likely to experience it (Browne, 2011; Oxfam, 2012; O'Hara, 2014; Rubery, 2015; De Henau and Reed, 2016).

**Figure 4.2.1.1:** Levels of agreement with: 'the Government should redistribute income from the 'better-off' to the 'less-well-off', by year and gender (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



As a result, it is often assumed that women will be more likely to support the redistribution of income, in part due to their reliance on the services provided, but also because they hold more egalitarian, altruistic values than do men (Goerres and Jaeger, 2016). At the same time, because men are less likely to experience inequality and less likely to need, nor anticipate the need for services offered by monetary redistribution in comparison to women, they are expected to be less likely to support redistributive measures.

Based on these assumptions and because Table 4.1.1.2 showed that women were more likely to state that income inequality was 'too large' in 2015, it was expected that women would be more likely to support the redistribution of income, in comparison to men. Instead, men were more likely to agree with the redistribution of income, than women in 2009 ( $\chi^2 = 15.044$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 5.803$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 40.859$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The gap between the levels of agreement between men and women widened further by 2015, with the proportion of men agreeing that the government should redistribute, increasing both between 2009-2012 (3.5 pp) and 2012-2015 (5.8 pp).



These findings suggest that despite women being more likely to recognise income inequality, men were more likely to support the redistribution of income than women. In the context of this research at least, these findings therefore, do not support those identified by Goerres and Jaeger (2016). Instead, these findings appear to reflect those drawn on in Chapter 6, which identify men as a group struggling in austerity Britain. In this way and strengthening the assumptions of need explanations, theories of risk aversion and self-interest, as more men moved towards the vulnerability and experience of inequality, this group became increasingly more likely to support measures to combat inequality. That said, this explanation does not explain why men were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

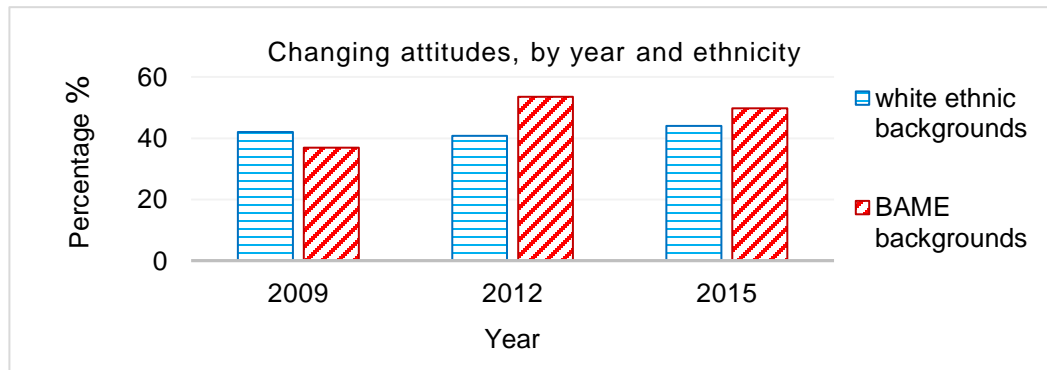
As Table 4.2.1.2 shows, support for the redistribution of income also varied by age. Emphasis has been placed on the experience of inequality by age, noting that older people are often perceived as more vulnerable to poverty and subsequently, are also more likely to need services related to adverse health (Busemeyer et al., 2009; Ginn, 2013; Age UK, 2014; Vass, 2014; JRF, 2016). It is postulated that older people will be more likely to support the redistribution of income because they are likely to benefit from redistributive measures (Busemeyer et al., 2009). In the context of this research and reflecting similar findings to the previous question, the older the recipient, the greater the support for the redistribution of income. Comparatively, although in 2009 and 2015, younger members of the public (18-34) were the least inclined to agree, in 2012 people aged 35-64 were the least inclined to agree. Moreover, support toward the redistribution of income increased amongst each age group, across each year. These differences reflect some of the findings drawn out in Section 4.1.1 and support the assumptions of Busemeyer et al. (2009).

Amongst the groups identified as more vulnerable to poverty and inequality, people from BAME backgrounds feature, more so than people from white ethnic backgrounds (Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015). Following the recession and the implementation of austerity measures, concern grew that the consequences of austerity would further impede the lives of people from BAME backgrounds, resulting in already unequal positions, deteriorating further (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; Oxfam, 2012; EHRC, 2015; Jasper, 2015; TUC, 2017). Much as it is expected that women, as a group more vulnerable to inequality, will be more likely to support redistributive measures, by extension it can also be assumed that due to prevailing levels of ethnic disadvantage,

people from BAME groups will also be more likely to support the redistribution of income, than people from white ethnic backgrounds.

As Figure 4.2.1.2 shows, perceptions did differ by ethnic group. Support for the redistribution of income decreased between 2009-2012, before increasing to the highest level in 2015 (44.0%) amongst people from white ethnic backgrounds.

**Figure 4.2.1.2:** Levels of agreement with: ‘the Government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less well-off’, by year and ethnicity (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

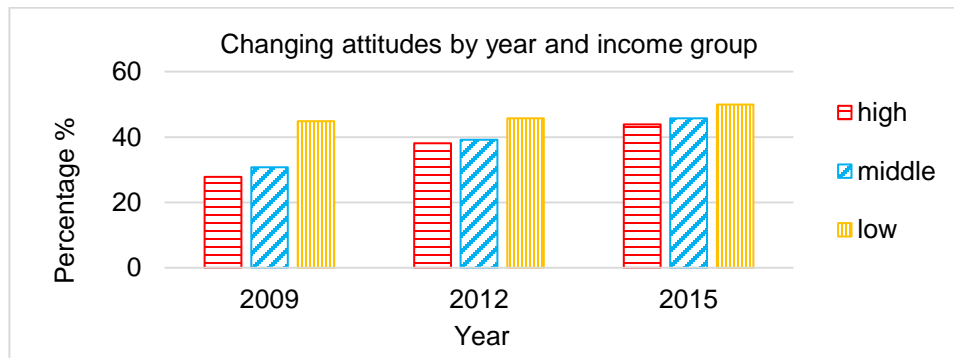


Comparatively, support amongst the BAME group, increased considerably between 2009–2012 (16.6 *pp*), before declining to 49.8% in 2015. Whilst levels of support increased amongst people from white ethnic backgrounds between 2009-2015, the change was greater amongst the BAME group (12.9 *pp*). Although in 2009 people from white ethnic groups were more inclined to agree than those from BAME groups, this finding was not statistically significant. In comparison, in both 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 15.535$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 5.128$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ), perhaps reflecting continuing positions of disadvantage, people from BAME groups were as expected, more likely to agree than people from white ethnic backgrounds.

Support for the redistribution of income, also varied by socio-economic characteristics, such as income and benefit and employment status. As emphasised in section 4.1.1, where people are situated in relation to their income, either strengthens or impedes their opportunities and choices. In comparison to people with higher levels of income, people who are in receipt of lower incomes, are therefore considerably more restricted both economically and socially. Accordingly, it can be assumed that people who specified they were in receipt of low incomes, were in receipt of benefits (or their spouse was), and people not in employment, will be more restricted financially than those on a high income, non-benefit claimants and people in employment and as a result more vulnerable to the

experience of inequality. It was expected that this would be reflected in the analysis, with people in receipt of low incomes, in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) and not in employment, more likely to support the redistribution of income, based both on vulnerability and the need to access services provided and the protection offered by income redistribution.

**Figure 4.2.1.3:** Levels of agreement with: ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off’, by year and income group (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



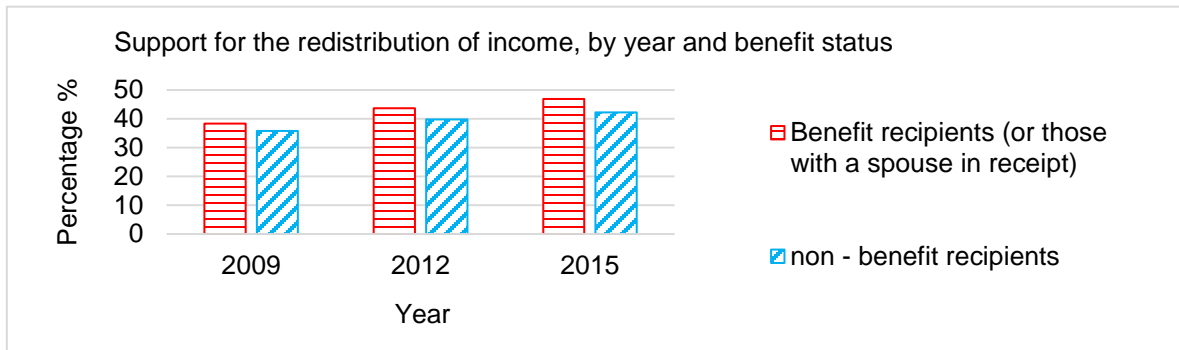
As Figure 4.2.1.3 shows, perceptions differed by income group. People on low incomes were more likely than those on higher incomes to agree with the redistribution of income, reflecting the social and economic distance from income inequality (in 2009  $\chi^2=40.997$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ , 2012  $\chi^2=12.236$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.002$  and in 2015  $\chi^2=28.110$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the higher the income band, the less likely people were to support the redistribution of income. However, the gap between those on high and middle incomes narrowed from 2009 to 2012. By 2015, rather than people in receipt of high incomes being the least likely to agree, this group were the second most likely to agree after people on low incomes.

Although levels of agreement across each income band increased between 2009-2012 and 2012-2015, the largest increase in levels of agreement are observable amongst people with high incomes (16.1  $pp$ ). These findings suggest that despite people in receipt of low incomes being more likely to support the redistribution of income, the proportion of those in agreement increased most amongst those who received middle and high incomes, suggesting that as inequality increased, so too did the desire for the redistribution of income, by income band.

Similarly, whether an individual is in receipt (or their spouse is) of benefits, also has an impact on the level of income received with those in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is in receipt) expected to be in receipt of lower incomes than those who do not claim

benefits. Further, because benefit recipients stand to gain more from redistribution, it can be assumed that this group will be more likely to wish to see income redistributed. Table 4.2.1.2 and Figure 4.2.1.4 show how attitudes differed by benefit status.

**Figure 4.2.1.4:** Levels of agreement with: ‘the Government should redistribute income from the ‘better-off’ to the ‘less-well-off’, by year and benefit status (analysis based on from BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Although support toward redistribution increased amongst both non-claimants and claimants, these increases are higher amongst those in receipt (or whose partner was). Higher levels of support for the redistribution of income in 2009, 2012 and 2015, are as expected, seen amongst people who receive benefits (or whose spouse is in receipt). People who received benefits (or whose spouse did) were as expected, more likely to agree than non-claimants (a difference that is statistically significant in 2012,  $\chi^2=4.116$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.042$  and 2015  $\chi^2=8.028$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.005$ ). These findings illustrate that benefit status is related to support for the redistribution of income, with people more vulnerable to income inequality and the most likely to benefit from the redistribution of income, more likely to support redistribution.

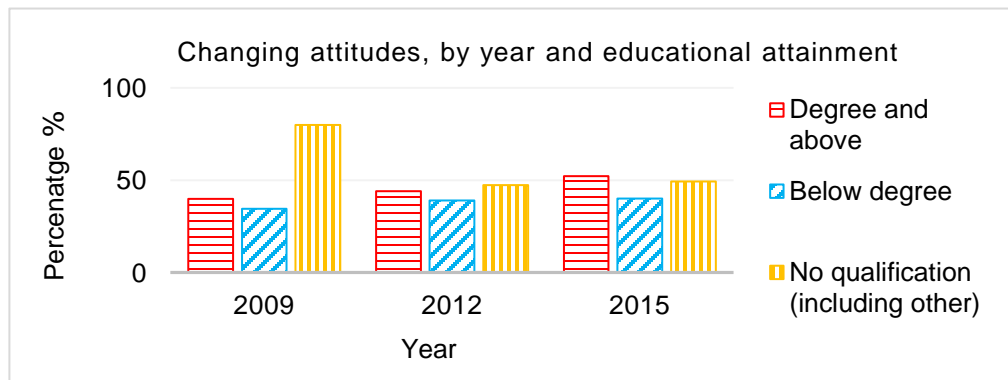
Similarly, people who are not in employment are expected to be in receipt of lower incomes and therefore more likely to be restricted by a low income, in comparison to people in employment (Holman, 1978; McKendrick et al., 2008). Given this and that Table 4.1.1.2 illustrated how people who were not in employment were more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’, it was expected that similar findings would be reflected in this analysis. Table 4.2.1.2 shows how levels of agreement increased amongst people who were working between 2009-2015 (7.2 pp), For those not in employment, however, levels of agreement declined between 2012-2015.

Despite increasing levels of agreement amongst both groups, in comparison to people who were working, those not in employment were as expected, consistently more likely to

agree with redistribution of income (in 2009  $\chi^2=5.729$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.017$ , 2012  $\chi^2=31.044$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$  and 2015  $\chi^2=7.042$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.008$ ). Notably, not only are people not in employment more likely to assert that the income inequality is too great, this group are also more likely to support measures to combat income inequality, like that of redistribution.

Much like perceptions of inequality are related to educational attainment, as Figure 4.2.1.5 shows, the level of qualification is also related attitudes. The type of educational attainment received, often dictates the type of role fulfilled within the labour market and thus upon the level of income received. It can be assumed that people who hold degree and above level qualifications, will be less likely to experience income inequality compared to people who hold no (or other) qualifications, because they are afforded more choice and have more opportunities for better paid work in the labour market (Hills et al., 2010; UKCES, 2014; Finch, 2015; JRF, 2016).

**Figure 4.2.1.5:** Levels of agreement with: 'the government should redistribute income from the 'better-off' to the 'less-well-off', by year and educational attainment (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



By extension, it can be assumed that people with higher levels of educational attainment, will be less inclined to support the redistribution of income, not only because they are less likely to benefit from redistributive measures, but also because they will be subject to greater levels of taxation, due to higher earnings (Whiteley, 1981). Thus, support for redistribution will be lower, due to concern toward the level of taxation necessary to sustain monetary redistribution between groups. This also implies that the opposite will be observable amongst people without qualifications (or other types of qualifications). This group, whom face restricted job opportunities and poorer access to better paid roles, are thus expected to be more likely to support the redistribution of income.

As expected, the findings suggest there is a relationship between educational attainment level and support for income redistribution (2009  $\chi^2=15.249$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ , 2012  $\chi^2=12.250$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.002$  and 2015  $\chi^2=42.753$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and in 2009 and 2012, greater levels of support for the redistribution of income, are observable amongst people with no (or other) qualifications. However, rather than the group with the highest level of educational attainment (degree or above) being the least likely to support the redistribution of income, people with qualifications below degree level, were instead less likely to support redistribution.

This is an unexpected finding. Whilst support toward redistribution increased between 2009-2015 within each attainment group, the greatest change is evident amongst people with higher levels of educational attainment ( $p$  increase of 12.2 between 2009-2015). Whilst people with no or other types of qualifications were the most likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009 and 2012, by 2015 this had changed. Instead, people with higher levels of educational attainment (degree or above) were most likely to support the redistribution of income. This latter finding is similar to that observed in Table 4.1.1.2, where people with higher levels of educational attainment in 2015, were also more likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large'.

The type of occupational position held, also dictates the level of income awarded to individuals. Thus, it was assumed that people in managerial and professional roles, who are less likely to experience inequality due to higher incomes and therefore less likely to need nor benefit from the redistribution of income, will be less likely to support redistribution. By extension, it can also be assumed that people occupying routine and manual occupations, who are expected to be more vulnerable to the experiences of inequality, will be more likely to support the redistribution of income, reflected by the anticipated future need due to lesser incomes or indeed current need (Whitely, 1981). This expectation is reflected in the findings, where support toward redistribution is related to occupation, and is highest amongst people employed in routine and manual occupations.

These differences were statistically significant in 2012 ( $\chi^2=12.708$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.002$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=13.240$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Although in 2009 the lowest levels of support toward the redistribution of income, as expected are seen for those working in managerial and professional occupations, in 2012 and 2015 this changed. Instead, people working in

intermediate occupational roles were the least likely to agree. Although support toward redistribution increased between 2009-2015, the greatest change in attitudes were found amongst those in managerial and professional occupations, who became increasingly more likely to agree over the period of austerity examined here.

In summary, this section has shown how support toward redistribution differs over time (2009-2012 and 2009-2015) and between groups. The findings suggest a relationship between qualifications, occupations and attitudes is evident, and that compared to women, men were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009, 2012 and 2015. The analysis has also shown how, compared to people from white backgrounds, people from BAME backgrounds were more likely to support redistribution in 2012 and 2015. Low income earners and people who were not in employment, were also more likely to agree than those in receipt of middle or high incomes or those in employment. In 2012 and 2015, benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) were more likely to agree than those who do not claim benefits. The next section builds on this analysis, using merged data to further explore the relationships between attitudes and characteristics.

#### **4.2.2 BLRA**

To understand these findings further, BLRA is used to not only describe the data but to also explain the relationship between one dependent binary variable, in this case “the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off and a selection of independent variables (year, age, employment status, benefit status, gender and a two category, income group). Alongside C.I ‘s, Table 4.2.2.1 shows the results of the BLRA by variable.

Taking into account all the other variables in the analysis, based on this analysis, age group and benefit status do not appear to have a significant effect on attitudes toward the redistribution of income. Thus, although the results show that benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) are more inclined to support the redistribution of income, than those who did not claim benefits, this finding is not significant. Further, though not significant, the findings also suggest that people aged 18-34 and 34-64, are more inclined to support monetary redistribution than older people. Notably, however, significant relationships are identifiable between attitudes and income, employment status, gender and year.

**Table 4.2.2.1:** BLRA of the levels of agreement with: ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off’, with C.I.’s, by variable (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Variables included in the analysis		Odds Ratio (OR)	95% C.I. for Exp (B)	
Variable	Categories		Exp (B)	Lower
<b>Year</b>	2009	1.000	-	-
	2012	1.242 ***	1.099	1.402
	2015	1.383 ***	1.224	1.564
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1.421 ***	1.292	1.563
	Female (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Age</b>	18-34	1.114 ns	0.952	1.304
	35-64	1.118 ns	0.970	1.289
	65+ (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Income</b>	middle-high income	0.710 ***	0.643	0.784
	low income (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Benefit status</b>	Yes	1.094 ns	0.983	1.218
	No (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Employment Status</b>	In employment	0.722 ***	0.643	0.811
	Not in employment (base category)	1.000	-	-
	<b>Constant</b>	0.618 ***	-	-
<i>Statistical Significance of OR's represented by asterisk symbols: *p&lt;0.05 **p&lt;0.01 ***p&lt;0.001, ns not significant, - no figure to display</i>				

Table 4.2.2.1 shows, having taken into account all the other variables in the analysis, people were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 ( $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $p<0.001$ ), than in comparison to 2009. This relationship is strengthened by the C.I.’s. In comparison to women, men were also more likely to support the redistribution of income ( $p<0.001$ ). People in receipt of middle-high incomes were significantly less likely to agree than those in receipt of low incomes ( $p<0.001$ ). Similarly, in comparison to people not in employment, people in employment were less likely to agree that income should be redistributed ( $p<0.001$ ). These findings suggest that taking into account all the other variables in the analysis, significant relationships are identifiable between attitudes and aspects of identity like that of employment status, but also income, gender and year.

### 4.2.3 Summary

To summarise, attitudes towards the income gap and the redistribution of income differ amongst groups and change over time. Thus far, the findings suggest that there is a relationship between attitudes toward inequality and redistribution, and some aspects of identity. The analysis found that the majority of the British public agreed that income inequality between people with high and low incomes is ‘too large’, across each of the years studied. However, what is also demonstrated is that despite increasing levels of



support toward redistribution, support remains low. This could be a problem, given that public support is needed to ensure social policies to tackle inequality are implemented (Whiteley, 1981; Burstein, 2003; McKendrick et al., 2008; Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Leon, 2012; Prabhakar, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2015). To understand these findings further, the following section focuses the analysis on the proportion of people (by group) who stated that the income gap is 'too large', to explore whether these people also supported the redistribution of income.

### **4.3 Introduction: Perceptions of income inequality and redistribution, revisited**

Section 4.1.1 demonstrated that the majority of the public agreed that the income gap is 'too large'. Section 4.2.1 suggested, however, that the support needed to reduce this gap, was lacking amongst the British public. These findings appeared both contradictory and concerning, thus raising a question already queried by others (Rowlingson et al., 2010); if concern toward the inequality of income between groups is so large, why is support toward redistribution so low? Given that the redistribution of income is one of the methods used to combat income inequality, and that public support is a necessary component, this section focuses on understanding what proportion of people, whom specified that gap between high and low incomes is 'too large', also supported redistribution.

#### **4.3.1 Refocusing the analysis**

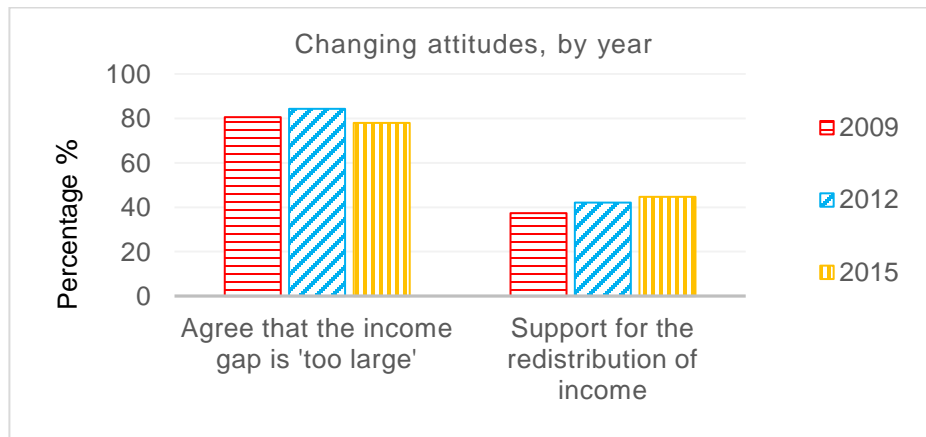
Figure 4.3.1.1 illustrates the large proportions of the British public in agreement that the gap between high and low incomes is 'too large', alongside the proportion of the public in support of the redistribution of income. Whilst the proportion of people agreeing that the income gap between groups is 'too large' increased significantly between 2009-2012, by 2015 this proportion fell to a level lower than observed in 2009 (this was also a significant finding). Although increasing support for the redistribution of income is also observable, less than half of the British public supported this combative measure in each year.

To further explore this disparity, Table 4.3.1.1 shows the proportion of people who agreed that the income inequality gap is too large, and also supported redistribution. A comparison of these findings in relation to those in Table 4.2.1.2 suggest that support toward income redistribution is more likely amongst people who also agree that the income gap is 'too large', and that support toward redistribution increased significantly from a little

over two fifths in 2009 ( $\chi^2=42.761$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) to 45.8% in 2012 ( $\chi^2=75.354$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). By 2015, a little over a half of the British public stated that not only is the income gap 'too large', but that income should be redistributed between groups ( $\chi^2=138.182$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Whilst these findings do suggest that support toward redistribution is stronger amongst people who hold this perception, further comparison of the findings presented in Section 4.1.1 and 4.2.1, also highlight how the public's attitudes appeared contradictory. To illustrate, whilst 80.6% agreed that the income gap was 'too large' in 2009, just 40.1% also supported redistribution. In 2012, a little under 85% stated that the income gap is 'too large', with just 45.8% also in support of redistribution. By 2015, people became less inclined to conceive of the income gap as 'too large', of this proportion support for the redistribution of income increased to a little over half (50.5%).

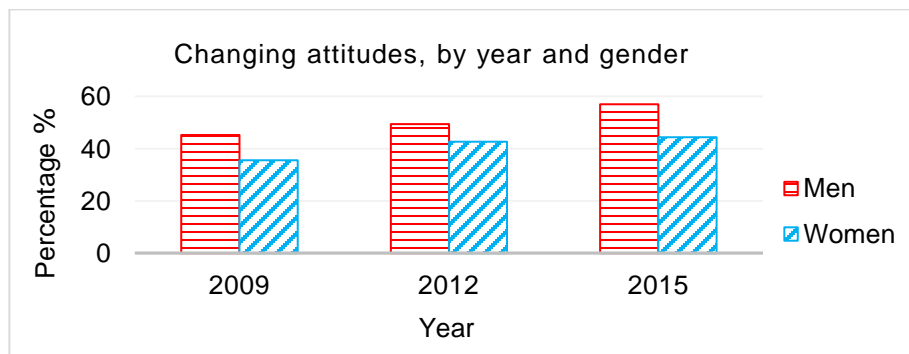
**Figure 4.3.1.1:** Levels of agreement with: 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', and 'the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off', by year (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



These findings further reiterate how despite the majority of the British public agreeing that the gap between high and low incomes is 'too large', not everyone who shares this attitude, is also in agreement that income should be redistributed. Thus, this may signify a lack of support toward the eradication of income inequality and, this may pose a problem. To explore these findings further and to outline which groups are more likely to support the redistribution of income, the socio and demographic characteristics of the public were also explored.

Section 4.1.1 demonstrated how attitudes toward income inequality and redistribution varied by gender, Table 4.3.1.1 and Figure 4.3.1.2 show how variation continued in this analysis. Whilst women were more likely than men to agree that the income gap is 'too large' in 2015, men were consistently more likely to support the redistribution of income. Table 4.3.1.1 and Figure 4.3.1.2 show a similar pattern is evident in this analysis, with men more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they also agree that the income gap is 'too large'. These findings further highlight how attitudes change over time, but also draw attention toward their inconsistency.

**Figure 4.3.1.2:** Levels of agreement with the 'gap between high and low incomes is 'too large', and 'the government should redistribute income from the 'better-off' to the 'less-well-off', by year and gender (Analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



To illustrate, in 2009 79.8% of men said that the income gap is 'too large', however just 45.2% also supported the redistribution of income. Further, of the 81.4% of women in agreement that the 'gap between high and low incomes is too large', just 35.6% supported redistribution. Such disparities are observable in 2012 and 2015, where the gap between men and women's level of support toward redistribution also changed. Although both men and women became more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they also felt that the income gap is 'too large' over time, the gap in levels of agreement between men and women by 2015 had increased by 12.6 *pp*.

To summarise, of the proportion of men and women who stated that the income gap is 'too large', support for the redistribution of income is much lower than the perceived income inequality gap, particularly amongst women. Men, however, remained more likely than women to agree with the redistribution of income (2009 ( $\chi^2 = 14.286$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 10.800$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 32.693$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )). These findings suggest that amongst those who also agreed income inequality between groups is 'too large', there

is a relationship between support toward redistribution and gender, where support toward redistribution is greater amongst men and women whom share the view that the income gap is 'too large'.

**Table 4.3.1.1:** Percentage and percentage point difference of agreement with: 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large', and 'the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off', by year, socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Socio - demographic and economic characteristics	'Agree' %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 – 15
<b>All</b>	***40.1	***45.8	***50.5	+5.7	+4.7	+10.4
<b>Gender</b>	***	***	***			
<i>Male</i>	45.2	49.4	57.0	+4.2	+7.6	+11.8
<i>Female</i>	35.6	42.6	44.4	+7.0	+1.8	+8.8
<b>Age</b>	ns	ns	ns			
18-34	42.0	44.6	52.2	+2.6	+7.6	+10.2
35-64	39.6	44.8	49.7	+5.2	+4.9	+10.1
65+	39.6	49.8	50.1	+10.2	+0.3	+10.5
<b>Ethnic group</b>	ns	*	ns			
<i>White ethnic groups</i>	39.9	44.9	49.9	+5.0	+5.0	+10.0
<i>BAME groups</i>	42.7	54.0	55.2	+11.3	+1.2	+12.5
<b>Income</b>	***	*	***			
<i>High</i>	35.8	50.6	56.6	+14.8	+6.0	+20.8
<i>Middle</i>	35.6	43.1	46.0	+7.5	+2.9	+10.4
<i>Low</i>	46.0	48.5	54.8	+2.5	+6.3	+8.8
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	ns	ns			
<i>Yes</i>	40.0	47.1	52.2	+7.1	+5.1	+12.2
<i>No</i>	40.4	43.9	48.3	+3.5	+4.4	+7.9
<b>Employment Status</b>	ns	***	***			
<i>In employment</i>	38.2	42.2	47.4	+4.0	+5.2	+9.2
<i>Not in employment</i>	42.8	50.2	54.6	+7.4	+4.4	+11.8
<b>Qualifications</b>	ns	**	***			
<i>Degree and above</i>	41.9	50.4	58.6	+8.5	+8.2	+16.7
<i>Below degree</i>	37.5	42.8	45.5	+5.3	+2.7	+8.0
<i>None &amp; Other</i>	45.1	49.9	54.6	+4.8	+4.7	+9.5
<b>Occupation</b>	ns	**	***			
<i>Managerial &amp; Professional Occupations</i>	32.9	42.9	50.6	+10.0	+7.7	+17.7
<i>Intermediate occupations</i>	31.9	42.7	42.2	+10.8	-0.5	+10.3
<i>Routine and Manual occupations</i>	34.8	50.0	53.7	+15.2	+3.7	+18.9
Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$ ns – not significant						

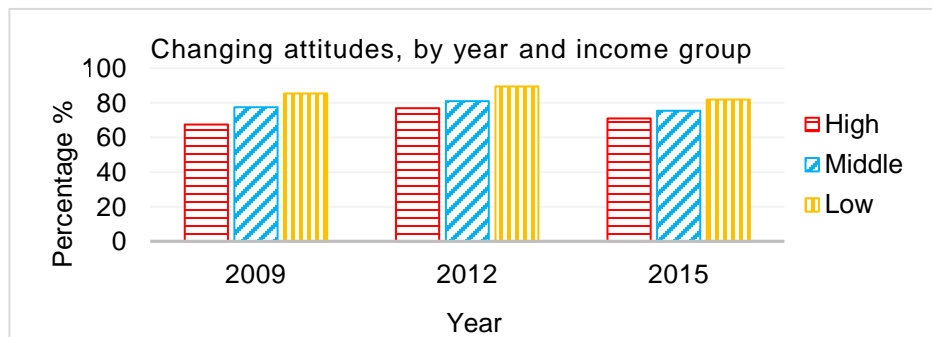
As demonstrated in Section 4.1.1 and 4.2.1, age also influences attitudes towards income inequality and redistribution. Table 4.3.1.1 reflects similar findings, with higher levels of support for the redistribution of income observable amongst older members of the public (65 and over) in 2012. Yet, of the 86.7% of people aged 65 and over, who stated that the income gap is 'too large' in 2012, just 49.8% also supported the redistribution of income. In contrast, despite lower levels of agreement that the income gap is 'too large', in 2009 and 2015 greater levels of support for redistribution are observable amongst younger members

of the public (18-34). Though these findings suggest that support for redistribution of income grew as inequality amongst this group did, these findings are not significant ( $p>0.05$ ).

Section 4.1.1 and 4.2.1 suggested a relationship between ethnic background and perceptions of inequality and redistribution, but no patterns emerged. Table 4.3.1.1 also shows conflicting attitudes by ethnic group. This analysis suggests that of the proportion of people who agreed that the income gap is 'too large', people from BAME groups were consistently more inclined to support the redistribution of income, than those from white ethnic groups.

Though not significant in 2009 and 2015, in 2012 of the proportion of people in agreement that income inequality between groups is too great, compared to people from white ethnic backgrounds, people from BAME groups were significantly more likely to support the redistribution of income ( $\chi^2=6.410$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.011$ ). Notably, attitudes differ by income group. As demonstrated in Section 4.1.1 and Figure 4.3.1.3, people who stated they received low-incomes were more likely to agree that the income gap was 'too large' in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Comparatively, people with high incomes were less likely to agree.

**Figure 4.3.1.3:** Levels of agreement with the 'gap between high and low incomes is 'too large', by year and income band (analysis based on BSAS 2009,2012 and 2015)

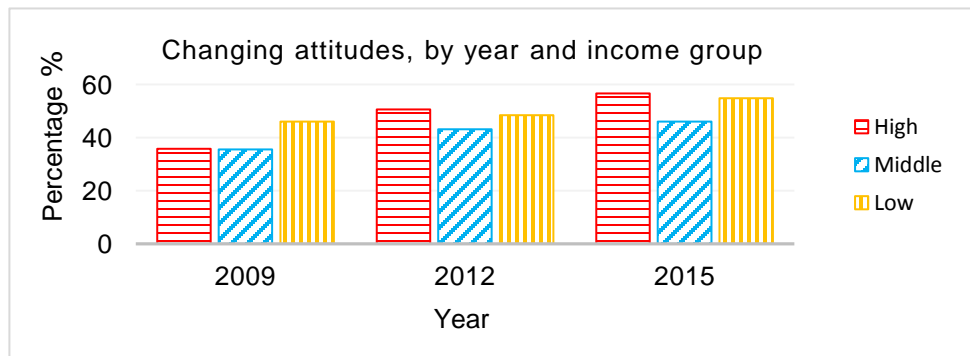


These findings were not surprising, given income often influences the likelihood of experiencing or indeed being aware of the inequality of income between groups. It was expected that similar trends would be observable in this analysis. As Figure 4.3.1.4 shows, in 2009 based on the proportion of people in receipt of a low income, who also agreed that the income gap is 'too large' (85.4%), 46.0% also felt that income should be redistributed. As expected, people in receipt of low incomes were more likely to support the redistribution of income if they also believed that the income gap is 'too large'.

The findings outlined in Figure 4.3.1.4 further reiterate how attitudes are often inconsistent and that because individuals are able to recognise income inequality, does not necessarily also secure their support towards initiatives to combat income inequality. As an example of such contradictory attitudes, in 2009 people from the low-income band group were more likely to agree ( $\chi^2=16.443$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) with the redistribution of income, if they also agreed that the income gap is 'too large'. Comparatively, both Table 4.3.1.1 and Figure 4.3.1.4 show how attitudes changed.

By 2012 ( $\chi^2=7.280$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.026$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=16.975$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) of those who agreed that the income gap is 'too large', people on self-specified high incomes were more likely to support the redistribution of income, followed closely by those on low incomes. Despite the lowest levels of agreement in 2012 (76.8%) and 2015 (71%), people who stated they received a high income were more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they also agreed that the income gap was 'too large'. These findings show that in 2009, 2012 and 2015, of the proportion who agreed that the income gap is 'too large', people on middle-incomes were less likely to support redistribution.

**Figure 4.3.1.4:** Levels of agreement with the 'gap between high and low incomes is 'too large', and income redistribution, from the better-off to the less-well-off', by year and income band (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



To summarise, the findings presented in Table 4.3.1.1 and Figure 4.3.1.4 suggest that as consequences of austerity measures became more pronounced, people on high-incomes who stand to lose, rather than gain financially from the redistribution of income, became more supportive of measures to combat income inequality. These findings also show how people on middle-incomes, became less likely to do so. These findings further suggest that there is a relationship between support toward redistribution and income group, amongst people who also agree that income inequality between groups is too great. These findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

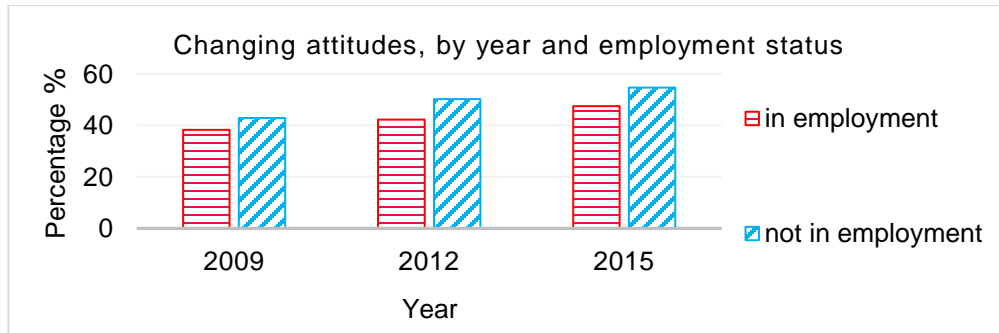
Notably, Section 4.1.1 also suggested the existence of a relationship between benefit status and attitudes toward inequality, with those in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) more likely to perceive of the income gap as 'too large' than those who were not in receipt of benefits. Similarly, in 2012 and 2015, benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) were also more likely to support the redistribution of income, than those who did not claim any benefits. It was expected that this analysis would highlight similar findings, with benefit recipients more likely to support income redistribution, if they also agreed that income inequality between groups is 'too large'. Although the benefit status of the public did initially appear to show a relationship, with benefit recipients in both 2012 and 2015 more inclined to support the redistribution of income, if they also agreed that the 'gap between high and low incomes is too large', these changes are not statistically significant.

As Table 4.3.1.1 shows, there is however, a significant relationship between employment status and attitudes toward inequality and redistribution. Section 4.1.1 also showed how employment status is related to attitudes toward income inequality, with people not in employment more likely to recognise the income gap as 'too large', in comparison to those employed in 2009 and 2012. Similarly, Section 4.2.1 also found that people not in employment were more likely to support redistribution in 2009, 2012 and 2015, in comparison to those who were in employment. A similar pattern emerged in this analysis. As Figure 4.3.1.5 shows, support toward income redistribution is higher amongst those who believe income inequality between groups is 'too large', whether they are in employment or not in employment.

Further, of the proportion of people who stated that the income gap is 'too large', people not in employment were the most likely to support the redistribution of income in both 2012 ( $\chi^2=14.845$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=10.414$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). This was expected, given that people not in employment are often in receipt of lower incomes than those in employment. This also shows how support for the redistribution of income amongst people in and not in employment, whom also said that the income gap is 'too large', increased in 2012 and 2015, yet is still considerably lower than the proportions observed in Table 4.1.2. By way of an illustration, in 2012 85.5% of people not in employment felt that the income gap was 'too large', whereas just 50.2% also felt that income should be redistributed between groups.

Despite the gap between levels of support between people in and not in employment, by 2015 people in employment who stand to lose the most through taxation-based income redistribution, were less inclined to support initiatives to combat inequality and the income gap they recognised in 2012 and 2015.

**Figure 4.3.1.5:** Levels of agreement with the ‘gap between high and low incomes is ‘too large’, and income redistribution, from the better-off to the less-well-off’, by year and employment status (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Comparatively, people not in employment who stand to gain the most from redistributive processes were more likely to do so. Thus, in 2012 and 2015, amongst people who agreed that the income gap is ‘too large’, employment status significantly influenced the likelihood of support toward redistribution, with people not in employment the most likely to support income redistribution.

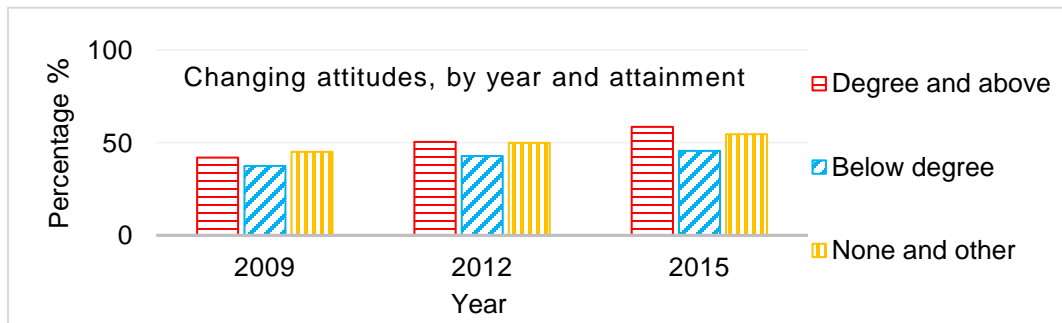
As Table 4.3.1.1 and Figure 4.3.1.6 show, perceptions differed by educational attainment. Previously, Section 4.1.1 demonstrated how attitudes toward the income gap were related to qualifications in 2015, with people with higher levels of educational attainment (degree or above) more likely to state that the income gap is ‘too large’. This was unexpected, given that people with no or few qualifications often have limited access to better paid employment roles, thus increasing their susceptibility to income inequality. In this way it was expected that this group would be more likely to hold this opinion, than those who are more socially and economically distant from this experience.

Section 4.2.1 also showed how in 2015 support toward income redistribution was also greater amongst those with high level qualifications (degree or above), though in 2009 and 2012, support toward income redistribution was greater amongst people with no (or other) qualifications, and less likely amongst people with below degree level qualifications. As Figure 4.3.1.6 shows, some similarities are observable in this analysis. Of the proportion of people who agreed that the income ‘too large’, in 2009 people who held no (or other)



qualifications, were more likely to support redistribution ( $\chi^2=5.758$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.056$ ). Comparatively, reflecting similarities to the findings outlined in Section 4.2.1, people with below degree level qualifications were the least likely to agree. By 2012 and 2015, however, a slightly different picture emerged. Levels of agreement were significantly greater amongst those with higher levels of attainment, with levels of agreement remaining lower amongst those with below degree level qualifications.

**Figure 4.3.1.6:** Levels of agreement with the ‘gap between high and low incomes is ‘too large’, and income redistribution, from the better-off to the less-well-off’, by year and educational attainment (BSA Survey: 2009, 2012, 2015)



Not only did people with higher levels of educational attainment become more likely to agree over time, in 2012 ( $\chi^2=11.365$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.003$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=28.497$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), this group were more likely to support the redistribution of income, followed by those with below degree level qualifications. These findings also emphasise the disparities in attitudes towards inequality and support for combative measures, given that of the 80.6% of people with a higher level of attainment who agreed that the income gap is ‘too large’ in 2015, just 58.6% also supported the redistribution of income.

As demonstrated in Section 4.1.1, in 2015 people working in intermediate occupations were more likely to perceive the income gap as ‘too large’. Comparatively and as expected, people working in managerial and professional occupations were the least likely to agree. These findings were explained in relation to the income yielded by occupation and the differential experience of inequality amongst people in these types of employment. It was expected that similar patterns would be observable in this analysis, and that people employed in managerial and professional occupations, would be less likely to support the redistribution of income, despite large proportions maintaining that income inequality between groups is ‘too large’. It was assumed that these attitudes could be explained in relation to both income and perceived benefit, thus often in receipt of a higher income,

people in professional and managerial roles stand to lose more through the process of redistribution, than they would gain.

By comparison it was expected that the opposite would be observable amongst people working in routine and manual occupations. As Table 4.3.1.1 shows, although not statistically significant, in 2009 levels of agreement were higher amongst those in routine and manual occupations as expected. This demonstrates that of the 80.7% of people working in routine and manual occupations, who stated that the income gap is 'too large', just 34.8% also agreed with the redistribution of income. By 2012 and 2015, this pattern remained unchanged. In 2012, rather than those in managerial and professional roles, people working in intermediate occupations were less likely to support the redistribution of income ( $\chi^2=10.855$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.004$ ). Thus, in both 2012 as noted above and 2015, people working in routine and manual occupations, who are expected to stand to gain the most from redistributive processes, were more likely to agree, followed by those in managerial and professional occupations ( $\chi^2=14.719$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). These findings suggest that in 2012 and 2015, occupational position is related to attitudes toward inequality and redistribution.

#### **4.3.2 Summary**

This section has shown how attitudes toward income redistribution differ amongst people who also agree that the income gap is 'too large'. Whilst support toward redistribution is greater amongst people who also perceive the income gap as 'too large', the level of support expressed by the public remains low. Having focused on extending the analysis by exploring support toward income redistribution amongst people who perceive of the income gap as too large in this section, the following section brings each of the findings section of this chapter together. Prior to introducing the final findings chapter, the following section, thus, restates the key findings identified in this chapter.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter sought to understand whether members of the public are aware of growing income inequality and whether they also support combative measures like income redistribution. In doing so, this chapter has demonstrated where support toward redistribution may need to be targeted. This chapter has also demonstrated the extent of

changing attitudes over time and between groups. Perceptions of the income gap and support for redistribution differed amongst groups, in and between 2009, 2012 and 2015. What is clear from the analysis is that despite large proportions of people specifying that the income gap is 'too large', taken together much smaller proportions supported the redistribution of income.

This analysis has, however, also shown that support for the redistribution of income is greater amongst people who perceive the income gap as 'too large' (Table 4.3.1.1), but nevertheless remains low, despite this recognition. Table 4.1.1.1 showed that between 2009-2012, the public became increasingly more likely to recognise the income gap as 'too large', but between 2012 and 2015, this concern appeared to decline. Concurrently, Table 4.1.2.1 also showed that between 2009 and 2015, support toward redistribution increased, but remained low. Of those more likely to recognise the income gap as 'too large', women were more likely in 2015, than men, comparatively and consistently, people aged 65 and over were also more likely. In comparison, men were consistently more likely to support the redistribution of income. Whilst people in the white ethnic group were more likely to agree that income inequality was a gap too large in 2015, in 2012 and 2015, people from BAME groups were more likely to support the redistribution of income.

Unsurprisingly, people on low incomes were consistently more likely to recognise the extent of income inequality and were also more likely to support redistribution. People in receipt of benefits (or those with a spouse in receipt) were also, unsurprisingly, consistently more likely to recognise income inequality. This group was also more likely to support income redistribution in 2012 and 2015, a similar pattern is evident amongst people who are not in employment. Further attitudinal variations are recognisable based on occupation and educational attainment. Thus, this Chapter not only highlights how attitudes change, this chapter has also demonstrated how attitudes are often contradictory.

To understand these findings further and provide a more nuanced account of these attitudes, alongside the social, political, cultural and economic environment, these findings are discussed in Chapter 6. Given that how people perceive of the causes of disadvantage are related to their attitudes toward combative measures (Mack and Lansley, 1985), the following chapter draws on key themes identified in Chapter 2 to explore negative perceptions of people experiencing inequality and poverty, and how these relate to redistributive support.

## Chapter 5

### Research Findings 2

#### 5.1 Perceptions of welfare recipients and support toward redistribution, Introduction

Chapter 4 demonstrated how attitudes changed over time and appeared contradictory. Although the majority of the British public agreed that the income gap is ‘too large’, they were less inclined to reduce this gap. Given that public support toward redistribution is necessary to ensure inequality of income is eradicated, these findings are problematic (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhakar, 2012; Wu and Chou, 2015). Although support toward redistribution was greater amongst people who also agreed that income inequality between groups is ‘too large’, support toward the redistribution of income between groups, remained low. The ‘puzzle’ noted by Rowlingson et al., (2010) became evident within this research and reinvigorated a question already held by others; why, if so many believe income inequality is too great, do so few support initiatives to combat this form of inequality?

Keeping this question in mind, this chapter builds on these findings. The stereotypical rhetoric identified in Chapter 2, is drawn on this chapter, focusing on negative attitudes toward social security recipients and the relationship between negative attitudes and support toward redistribution. The first section explores how many people agreed with the statement: ‘many people who get social security don't really deserve any help’ (5.1.1). Comparatively, the second section explores the extent of agreement with the statement: ‘most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another’ (5.2.1). The third section examines responses to the statement: ‘if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’ (5.3.1). The final two sections explore possible relationships between negative attitudes toward social security recipients and support toward redistribution (5.4.1-5.5.1).

The analysis explores whether opinions have changed over the period of austerity examined here and the extent of change (if at all) between groups. Attitudes were investigated in relation the literature outlined in Chapter 2 and in relation to specific demographic (gender, age, ethnic background and educational attainment), and socio-economic characteristics (employment status, self-rated income band, benefit status and

occupation). The following section begins the analysis, focusing on public perceptions of ‘deservingness’ amongst benefit recipients.

### **5.1.1 Public perceptions of deservingness**

It has been emphasised that attitudes toward social security recipients are often negative (Alcock, 1987; Bennett, 2012; McKenzie, 2015; Beatty and Fothergill, 2016; JRF, 2016), with social security recipients’ level of need questioned, and their neediness often not considered genuine. Indeed, as Stanley remarks, it has become increasingly apparent that “conflicts over the uses and abuses of taxpayers’ money” once again “come to the fore, with concerns over seemingly unfair redistribution to those deemed undeserving of it particularly prominent” (2016:393). These accusations and conflicts are, however, not new but were arguably reinvigorated during the period of austerity examined here. Following the implementation of austerity measures, questions of need and deservingness, thus resurfaced. As evidenced in Chapter 2, this was a topic discussed more readily on social media platforms, within broadcasted and printed media and reflected in political rhetoric.

People in receipt of social security benefits were met with increasing scrutiny, as were their life and consumer choices. Newspaper headlines, political rhetoric and broadcasted media became replete with the negative portrayal of classed identities, of people whom were labelled as morally and culturally impoverished and who were, as a result of their own failings, relying on a social security system they did not truly need, nor truly deserve (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Penny, 2013; Jensen, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015).

This rhetoric is expected to impact on people’s perceptions of inequality and poverty, alongside those experiencing them (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Penny, 2013; Shildrick, 2018). To understand the extent of negative sentiments toward people in receipt of social security assistance, and how this changed (if at all) over the period of austerity examined here, this section focuses on exploring the extent of agreement with the statement: ‘many people who get social security don’t really deserve any help’. Given that much of the literature suggests that attitudes toward social security recipients are negative, it was expected that this would be reflected in the analysis, with large proportions of people believing that recipients are undeserving, with this proportion increasing over the period of austerity investigated here. Yet, as Table 5.1.1.1 and 5.1.1.2 show, this was not the case.

Intent on understanding the significance of attitudinal changes between 2009-2012, 2012-2015 and 2009-2015, Table 5.1.1.1 shows the CI's constructed around each point estimate in 2009, 2012 and 2015. The findings show that in 2009, 35.3% of the British public stated that benefit recipients were undeserving, the 95.0% CI is between 32.2% and 38.4%. By 2012, the proportion of people in agreement increased to 36.2%, the 95.0% CI is between 34.4% and 38.8%. These findings suggest, however, that the increases between 2009-2012 are not significantly different. In 2015 attitudes appeared to change. Between 2012-2015, the proportion of people in agreement fell by 7.5 *pp*, to 28.7%. The proportion in agreement also fell between 2009-2015, as Table 5.1.1.1 shows, these findings suggest that the changes between 2012-2015 and 2009-2015 are statistically significant.

**Table 5.1.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point difference of levels of agreement with: 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help', with CI's by year (Analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

many people who get social security don't really deserve any help'	Agree (%)			<i>pp</i> change by year and CI by year (95%)			
	Year	2009	2012	2015	2009-12	2012-15	2009-15
<b>All</b>		35.3	36.2	28.7	+0.9	-7.5	-6.6
<b>CI</b>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	32.2	34.4	26.9	ns	sd	sd
	<i>Upper Bound</i>	38.4	38.0	30.3			
CI – Confidence Interval, sd – significant difference (at 5.0% level), ns – not significant							

Thus far, the findings suggest that the assumption that the proportion of people in agreement would increase, reflecting the literature which suggest negative attitudes are prevalent, was reflected in the analysis between 2009-2012, but that this attitudinal change between years is not significantly different. The findings also highlight how, in 2009 in the aftermath of recession, over a third of the public (35.3%) agreed that people were undeserving of help. By 2012, when austerity measures led to changes to the tax and benefit system, cutting the public spending budget further, more members of the British public shared the view that social security recipients did not deserve the help they were receiving (36.2%), though this change was small.

By 2015, inequality increased, with austere cuts continuing to impact the provision of benefits and services. Concurrently, the proportion believing that people did not 'really deserve any help' fell by 7.5 *pp* to 28.7%, a level lower than observed in 2009. Thus, despite an initial increase in levels of agreement, the British public became less inclined to

agree that the majority of people in receipt of benefits were undeserving of help. Despite falling levels of agreement, these findings nevertheless suggest that for a considerable proportion of the British public, people in receipt of benefits are perceived as ‘undeserving’ of help. This further supports the contention that benefit recipients in Britain evoke feelings of negativity, and the attribution of stereotypical assumptions amongst the public (Baumberg et al., 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Hall et al., 2014; Hills, 2015; Toyne and Walker, 2015; JRF, 2016).

To understand which groups were more likely to agree that most social recipients are undeserving of help, attitudes were investigated in relation to specific characteristics. These findings are discussed more extensively in Chapter 6. Table 5.1.1.2 shows the proportion of people in agreement by socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

**Table 5.1.1.2:** Percentages and percentage point difference of ‘many people who get social security don't really deserve any help’, by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Socio demographic and economic characteristics	‘Agree’ %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009-12	2012-15	2009-15
<b>All</b>	35.3	36.2	28.7	+0.9	-7.5	-6.6
<b>Gender</b>	ns	ns	ns			
Male	36.5	36.0	30.4	-0.5	-6.4	-6.1
Female	34.3	36.4	27.1	+2.1	-9.3	-7.2
<b>Age</b>	***	***	***			
18-34	34.7	31.1	20.5	-3.6	-10.6	-14.2
35-64	31.3	33.9	28.4	+2.6	-5.5	-2.9
65+	47.2	49.0	39.0	+1.8	-10.0	-8.2
<b>Ethnic group</b>	ns	***	ns			
White ethnic groups	35.5	37.5	28.6	+2.0	-8.9	-6.9
BAME groups	33.3	23.8	28.9	-9.5	+5.1	-4.4
<b>Income</b>	ns	ns	*			
High	27.7	30.7	20.3	+3.0	-10.4	-7.4
Middle	36.7	36.0	30.5	-0.7	-5.5	-6.2
Low	34.5	37.1	27.4	+2.6	-9.7	-7.1
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	ns	***			
Yes	36.1	36.8	31.5	+0.7	-5.3	-4.6
No	34.1	35.4	25.3	+1.3	-10.1	-8.8
<b>Employment Status</b>	ns	ns	ns			
In employment	34.9	35.7	27.6	+0.8	-8.1	-7.3
Not in employment	36.2	36.9	30.1	+0.7	-6.8	-6.1
<b>Qualifications</b>	***	***	***			
Degree and above	25.5	23.9	20.1	-1.6	-3.8	-5.4
Below degree	33.8	35.6	29.1	+1.8	-6.5	-4.7
None & Other	45.3	50.6	39.5	+5.3	-11.1	-5.8
<b>Occupation</b>	ns	***	***			
Managerial & Professional Occupations	36.4	30.8	23.3	-5.6	-7.5	-13.1
Intermediate occupations	34.3	41.8	34.8	+7.5	-7.0	+0.5
Routine and Manual occupations	41.0	39.7	31.6	-1.3	-8.1	-9.4
Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$ , ns – not significant						

Attitudes toward social security recipients varied by gender. Section 4.1.1 illustrated that women were more likely to regard the income gap as 'too large' in 2015. Comparatively, as Section 4.2.1 and 4.3.1 highlighted, whilst a relationship between attitudes toward inequality and redistribution is also observable, in comparison to men, women were consistently less likely to support the redistribution of income. Given that the literature pointed to ongoing and intensifying experiences of disadvantage as a result of austere changes amongst women (Conley, 2012; Oxfam, 2012; Ginn, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; De Henau and Reed, 2016) this may be surprising. Men, identified as a group in a far better position than women, were expected to feel the consequences of austerity to a lesser extent than women (Seguino, 2010). However, as McKay et al. (2013) noted, this group were not consequence free.

Nevertheless, as illustrated throughout the research, women are identified as a group more susceptible to income inequality, and as a group more likely to access social security provisions, relative to men (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Nandi and Platt, 2012; UKCES, 2014). In light of these factors, it may be feasible to suggest that women, in comparison to men, will be less likely to agree that the majority of people in receipt of social security provisions are undeserving of the help received. Whilst in 2009 and 2015, more men than women agreed that many benefit recipients were undeserving of help, Table 5.1.1.2 shows the opposite in 2012. Though these findings suggest that men, as a group less likely to access social security provisions, are largely more inclined to view people in receipt of undeserving, these findings are not statistically significant. Thus, the analysis suggests that there is not a significant relationship between attitudes toward benefit recipients and gender.

The likelihood of agreement also varied by age group. Chapter 2 and 4 demonstrate that older members of the public, are not only a group more vulnerable to inequality but are also a group more likely to access social services (Ginn, 2013; JRF, 2016; Age UK, 2017). Reflecting these positions, people aged 65 and over were not only more likely to recognise income inequality between groups, this group were also more inclined to support redistribution. Given these factors, it might be expected that people aged 65 and over would be less likely to agree that social security recipients were undeserving of assistance. As Figure 5.1.1.1 shows, this was not the case. Instead, in 2009 ( $\chi^2 = 14.196$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 52.949$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 56.551$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),

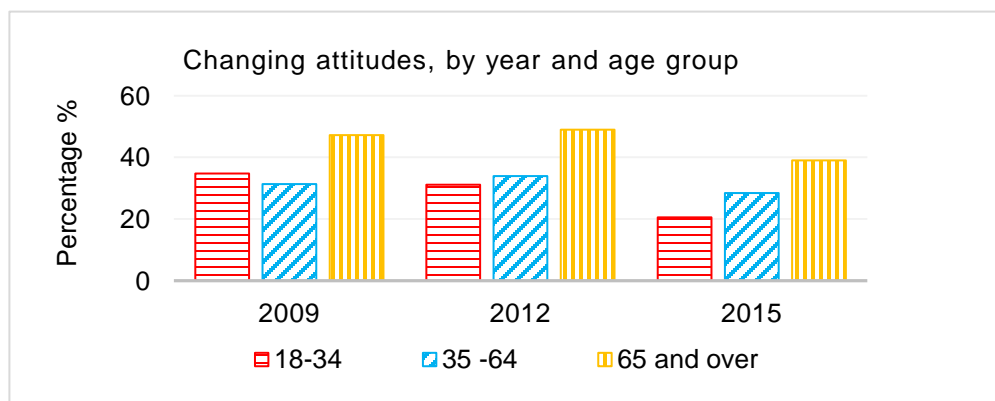


people aged 65 and over were more likely to agree that benefit recipients were undeserving of help, than people aged 18-64.

Given the factors identified above, this is particularly surprising. Whilst in 2012 and 2015, the likelihood of agreement decreased as age did, in 2009 people aged 35-64 were the least likely to agree. Between 2009-2015, attitudes amongst those aged 35-64 and 65 and over, appeared to change.

Decreasing levels of agreement were observable amongst both 35-64-year olds (2.9 *pp*) and people aged 65 and over (8.2 *pp*). The greatest changes were observed amongst younger members of the public, where levels of agreement decreased at a much faster pace (14.2 *pp*).

**Figure 5.1.1.1:** Levels of agreement with ‘many people who get social security don't really deserve any help’, by year and age group (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



These findings may be reflective of young people’s own insecure economic positions during the course of austerity examined here (Kingman and Seager, 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015; Kingman, 2016). That said, this not explain why people over the age of 65 are more likely to state that people in receipt of benefits are largely ‘undeserving’ of help. These findings are explored in greater depth in Chapter 6.

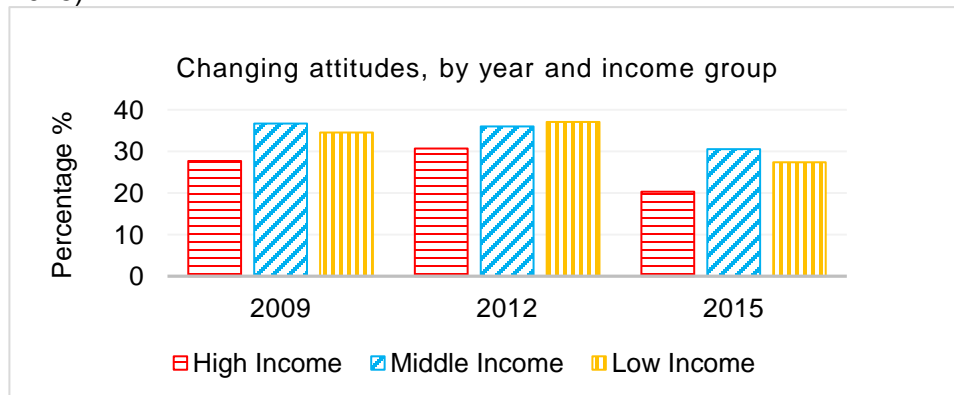
Table 5.1.1.2 illustrates that perceptions of need amongst claimants are related to ethnicity, alongside age. People from BAME groups are identified as a group subject to ethnic penalties within the labour market, prejudice and greater levels of inequality, relative to people from white ethnic backgrounds (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; O’Hara, 2014; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015; EHRC, 2015; Khan, 2015; TUC, 2017). For these reasons, it might be expected that people from BAME backgrounds would be less likely to agree. In 2012, this expectation was reflected in the

findings. Between 2009-2012, whilst levels of agreement were seen to increase amongst those in the majority ethnic group, levels of agreement fell by 9.5 *pp* amongst the ethnic minority group.

In 2012 at least, ethnic background were related to perceptions of deservingness. People from white ethnic backgrounds were more likely to agree than people from BAME backgrounds ( $\chi^2=19.099$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These findings suggest that in 2012 perceptions of deservingness were related to the ethnic backgrounds of the public, with the majority ethnic group more likely to perceive of benefit recipients negatively. This was also observable in 2009, but by 2015 the opposite was found, with the minority group slightly more inclined to hold this view, though neither are statistically significant.

The findings outlined in Table 5.1.1.2 also suggest that income is related to perceptions of deservingness in 2, with Figure 5.1.1.2 showing changing attitudes by income group, over time. As Chapter 2 and 4 emphasised, people who are in receipt of low incomes are more vulnerable toward inequality, and more likely to need social security provision, than those with higher incomes. Not only were people on low incomes more likely to recognise income inequality as a gap 'too large', they were also more likely to support the redistribution of income.

**Figure 5.1.1.2:** Levels of agreement with 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help', by year and income band (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



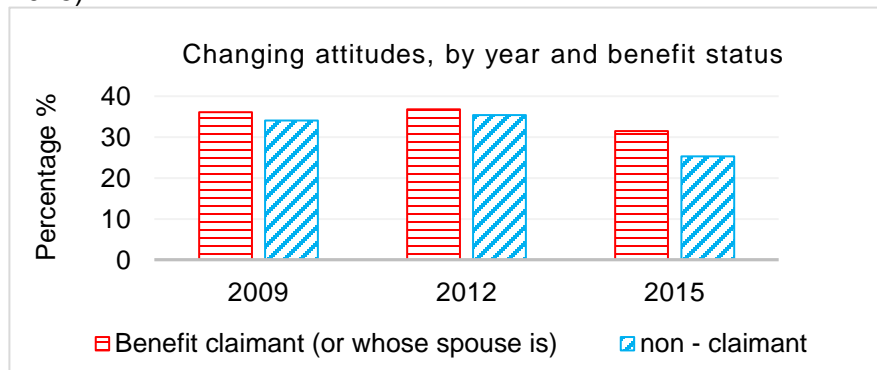
Given these factors, and that people on low incomes are more likely to access social security provisions, it was expected that this group would be less likely to agree that people in receipt of social security payments are undeserving of help. By extension, it was expected that those who are less likely to access nor need social security assistance (high income groups), would be more likely to hold this view.

As Table 5.1.1.2 and Figure 5.1.1.2 show, a different picture emerged. Between 2009-2012, people in receipt of high and low incomes became more inclined to perceive of those in receipt of benefits as 'undeserving', whereas middle-income earners became slightly less inclined to agree. By 2015, this view became less prevalent amongst the public based on their income group, particularly amongst high income earners (10.4 *pp*). People who specified they received a high income, were also the least inclined to agree in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Whilst the findings were not significant in 2009 and 2012, in 2015 attitudes were related to income. High income earners were less likely to agree, and middle-income earners more likely to hold this view ( $\chi^2 = 8.466$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ).

Although low-income earners were more inclined to agree that benefit recipients were largely 'undeserving' of help in 2012, in both 2009 and 2015, people in receipt of middle incomes were more likely to agree. Between 2009-2015, attitudes changed, with falling levels of agreement observable amongst high (7.4 *pp*), middle (6.2 *pp*) and low-income earners (7.1 *pp*). These findings show that this opinion became less popular over the course of austerity examined here but was more likely amongst middle income earners in 2015.

As Figure 5.1.1.3 shows, opinions also differed by benefit status. In comparison to those who do not claim benefits, the receipt of benefits often signifies a lower income.

**Figure 5.1.1.3:** Levels of agreement with 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help', by year and benefit status (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



This, as illustrated in Chapter 4, offered an explanation as to why benefit claimants or those whose spouse received benefits, were more likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large' and more likely to support the redistribution of income.

It was posited that this group held these attitudes, based on their personal experiences of income inequality, and because they were a group who would benefit directly from redistribution. Given these factors, and that benefit recipients are in receipt of social security payments themselves (or their spouse is), it might have been expected that this group would be less likely to hold negative views toward benefit recipients, Figure 5.1.1.3 show the results of this analysis.

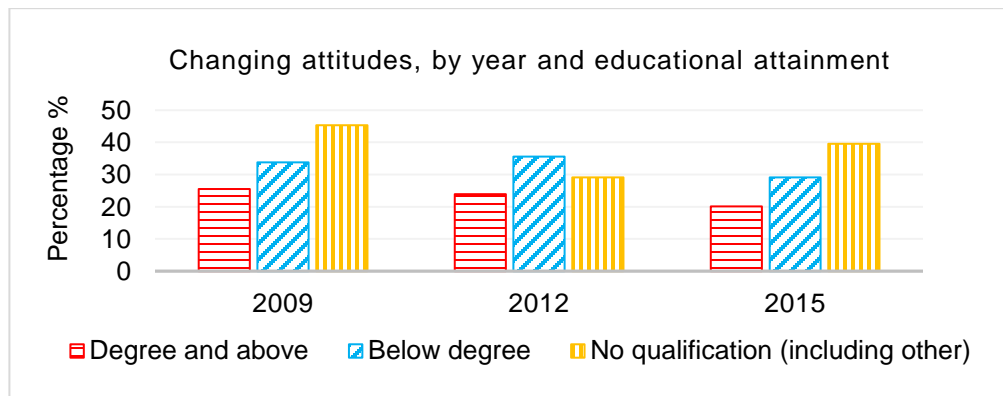
In comparison to non-claimants, people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) were instead more inclined to agree in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Compared to benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt), between 2009-2015, non-claimants also became increasingly less inclined to agree. Not only did the gap between claimants and non-claimants widen in 2015, these findings were also significant. In 2015 a relationship between benefit status and perceptions of deservingness is thus evident, with people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) more likely to agree that benefit recipients are undeserving of help, in comparison to non-benefit claimants ( $\chi^2 = 12.473$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This was particularly surprising given that the group more likely to agree that most benefit claimants did not deserve help, were in receipt of this assistance themselves (or their spouse was). These findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Changing attitudes were also observable by employment status and educational attainment. People who are not in employment are identified as a group who are largely, more likely to experience inequality of income, compared to those who are in employment (Holman, 1978; Finch, 2015; Wu and Chou, 2015; JRF, 2016). Unemployed people were more likely to perceive of the income gap as 'too large' in 2009, 2012 and 2015, and more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009 and 2012. Given these findings and that unemployment often signifies a low-income or indeed may result in the take up of benefits, it was expected that this group would be less likely to agree that people in receipt of benefits were 'undeserving' of help. Instead, as Table 5.1.1.2 shows, in comparison to people in employment, levels of agreement are consistently higher amongst people who were not in employment. These findings suggest that the group, often more susceptible to income inequality, are more inclined to believe that benefits claimants are 'undeserving', though these findings are not significant.

As Table 5.1.1.2 and Figure 5.1.1.4 show, a relationship between educational attainment and attitudes towards benefit recipients is evident. Given that educational attainment often

dictates the type of employment undertaken and affords greater access to better paid employment roles (Hills et al., 2015; Finch, 2015; JRF, 2016), it is reasonable to suggest that individuals who have no (or other qualifications) may be more likely to be in receipt of a low income and/or perhaps more likely to access social security assistance. Accordingly, it was expected that this group would be less likely to agree, than those with higher level qualifications.

**Figure 5.1.1.4:** Levels of agreement with ‘many people who get social security don't really deserve any help’, by year and educational attainment (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



As Figure 5.1.1.4 shows, the opposite is observable. People with people with no qualifications (or other) were more likely to agree in 2009 ( $\chi^2=14.117$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2=83.144$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=51.563$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Comparatively, levels of agreement were significantly lower amongst people with higher levels of educational attainment each year.

These findings suggest that the higher the level of educational attainment gained by members of the public, the lower the likelihood of agreement. Further, whilst levels of agreement fell amongst people with higher level qualifications between 2009-2012 (1.6  $pp$ ), they increased amongst people with below degree level qualifications (1.8  $pp$ ) and those with no or other types of attainment (5.3  $pp$ ). Opinions appeared to change amongst each group between 2012-2015, and between 2009-2015, suggesting that the likelihood of agreement fell over time and between groups.

Given that the type of occupation fulfilled, often determines income, it might have been expected that people working in managerial and professional roles, who are less likely to experience inequality and more likely to be socially distant from the consequences of

inequality, would be more likely to agree. As Table 5.1.1.2 shows, this is not reflected in the analysis. Instead in 2012 ( $\chi^2=26.840$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=29.143$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), the type of occupation undertaken by members of the public, is related to attitudes, with people employed in intermediate occupations most likely to agree, followed by those in routine and manual occupations. Comparatively, people working in managerial and professional roles were the least likely to agree. Whilst levels of agreement decreased amongst people working in managerial and professional occupations each year, and amongst those working in routine and manual occupations, people occupying intermediate positions became more inclined to hold this view between 2009-2012 (increase of 7.5 *pp*) and overall between 2009-2015.

In summary, these findings suggest that the group less likely to receive benefits and more likely to pay higher rates of taxation, were the least likely to hold negative attitudes towards those in receipt of social security recipients. These findings are discussed in relation to the literature in Chapter 6. Bringing together attitudes from 2009, 2012 and 2015, the following section explores attitudes toward benefit recipients further.

### **5.1.2 BLRA**

Intent on exploring these findings further, merged data from 2009, 2012 and 2015, allows for the inclusion of BLRA. In this section, the focus is on exploring the relationship between six independent variables (year, age, employment status, benefit status, gender and a two-category income band group) and the dependent binary variable: “many people who get social security don't really deserve any help”. Table 5.1.2.1 show the results of this analysis.

Taking all the other variables in the analysis into account, in comparison to people in 2009, people were significantly less likely to agree that many benefit recipients were undeserving of help in 2015 ( $p<0.001$ ). Though people appeared more inclined to agree in 2012, than in 2009, these findings are not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). Similarly, based on all the factors in the analysis, whilst men appeared more inclined to agree than women, this finding is not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). Based on this analysis, there is however a significant relationship between age and attitudes. In comparison to people aged 65 and over, people aged 18-34 were 0.389 times less likely to agree, whereas people aged 35-64 were 0.466 times less likely to agree that benefit recipients were undeserving of help ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Table 5.1.2.1:** BLRA of the levels of agreement with: ‘many people who get social security don't really deserve any help’, with C.I.'s, by variable (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Variables included in the analysis		Odds Ratio (OR)	95% C.I. for Exp (B)	
Variable	Categories	Exp (B)	Lower	Upper
<b>Year</b>	2009	1.000	-	-
	2012	1.047 ns	0.894	1.227
	2015	0.717 ***	0.610	0.843
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1.069 ns	0.961	1.190
	Female (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Age</b>	18-34	0.389 ***	0.325	0.466
	35-64	0.466 ***	0.397	0.547
	65+ (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Income</b>	middle-high income	0.956 ns	0.855	1.069
	low income (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Benefit status</b>	Yes	0.964 ns	0.854	1.089
	No (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Employment Status</b>	In employment	1.316 ***	1.149	1.507
	Not in employment (base category)	1.000	-	-
	<b>Constant</b>	0.900 ns	-	-

*Statistical Significance of OR's represented by asterisk symbols: \*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001, ns not significant, - no figure to display*

Though not significant, once all the other variables have been controlled for, middle-high income earners and people in receipt of benefits also appeared less inclined to agree, in comparison to the low-income group and non-claimants. Based on this analysis, employment position does significantly relate to attitudes, with people in employment 1.316 times more likely to agree than those not in employment. In summary, these findings suggest that once all the other variables in the analysis are controlled for, year, age and employment status are related to attitudes toward people in receipt of benefits.

### 5.1.3 Summary

To summarise, this section has not only shown how attitudes toward benefit recipients changed, the analysis has also illustrated how social identities are related to attitudes toward benefit recipients. Table 5.1.1.1 showed how between 2009-2012 the proportion of people in agreement increased, but that this change between years was not significantly different. Between 2012-2015 and 2009-2015, however, the proportion of people in agreement fell, and these changes are significantly different. Table 5.2.1.1 showed that negative perceptions are more likely to be expressed amongst particular groups, and this included people aged 65 and over, people from white ethnic backgrounds, people on middle incomes, people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is), people employed in intermediate occupations and those with no (or other) qualifications. BLRA further showed

how, having taken all the other factors into account, year, age and employment status had a significant effect upon attitudes toward benefit recipients.

Remaining focused on negative attitudes toward those in receipt of benefits, the following section explores a further negative perception associated with the social security system; the prevalence of fraud amongst benefit claimants.

## 5.2 Public perceptions of benefit fraud, introduction

Alongside perceptions of deservingness, another negative assumption is also associated with social security provision; fraud. This section focuses on exploring the extent of agreement with the statement: “most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another” and on building on the perceptions emphasised in Section 5.1.1, to further understand attitudes toward social security recipients over the period of austerity examined here.

### 5.2.1 Perceptions of benefit recipients and fraud

Tables 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2 show the results of the initial analysis. Table 5.2.1 begins by showing the CI’s constructed around the point estimates in each year, suggesting that in 2009, the 95.0% CI is between 32.0 and 38.1%. Table 5.2.2 also shows how attitudes changed between 2009-2012, with the proportion of people in agreement in 2012 increasing from 35.1%, to 37.9%. These findings also show that the 95.0% CI for 2012 is between 36.0% and 39.6%.

**Table 5.2.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point difference of levels of agreement with: ‘Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another’, by year, with confidence intervals by year (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another	Agree (%)			pp change by year and CI by year (95%)		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 –15
<b>Year</b>						
<b>All</b>	35.1	37.9	29.8	+2.8	-8.1	-5.3
<b>CI</b>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	32.0	36.0	ns	sd	sd
	<i>Upper Bound</i>	38.1	39.6			
CI – Confidence Interval, sd – significant difference (at 5.0% level), ns – no significant difference						

That said, the changes between 2009-2012 are not significant at the 5.0% level. By 2015, attitudes appeared to have shifted again, with the proportion of people in agreement that benefit claimants were fraudulently claiming in some way, decreasing by 8.1 *pp*, to 29.8%.



Table 5.2.1.1 also shows that the 95.0% CI in 2015 is between 28.0 and 31.5%, and that the changes between 2012 and 2015 are significantly different at the 5.0% level. These findings show that the changes between 2009-2015 are significant at the 5.0% level. To summarise, Table 5.2.1.1 shows a significant decrease in the proportion of people in agreement between 2012-2015 and overall, between 2009-2015.

Table 5.2.1.2 shows attitudinal changes between years, by group. The findings suggest that following the onset of the recession in 2008/09, in 2009 more than a third of the British public agreed that people on benefits were fraudulently claiming (35.1%). By 2012 this proportion had increased to 37.9%, before falling again in 2015 to 29.8% (8.1 *pp*). Comparative analysis of the findings in Table 5.1.1.2 and Table 5.2.1.2 highlight some similarities. In 2009 a similar proportion of the public agreed that social security recipients were undeserving of help (35.3%), with slightly fewer people in agreement that recipients are 'fiddling in one way or another' (35.1%). In 2012 and 2015, however, a larger proportion of the public agreed that 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another'.

Whilst the proportion of people agreeing that recipients were undeserving of assistance increased only slightly (0.9 *pp*), larger increases are observable amongst those who stated that many of those in receipt of benefits were fraudulently doing so (2.8 *pp*). These findings suggest that, whilst initially, the prevalence of undeserving welfare recipients was more of a concern amongst members of the British public in 2009, by 2012, the public appeared to be more concerned by the prevalence of fraud amongst benefit claimants. Between 2012-2015, levels of agreement fell, with the proportion of the public believing that the majority of benefit claimants were undeserving falling (7.5 *pp*) and the proportion of people agreeing that most in receipt of social security were defrauding the system also falling, but at a faster pace (8.1 *pp*). Thus, despite falling levels of agreement, perceptions of fraud amongst claimants, appear to be an issue perceived by a greater proportion of the British public.

To understand which groups are more likely to perceive of benefit recipients as defrauding the system in some way, the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the public were also explored, intent on understanding how attitudes changed (if at all) between groups and over time. Table 5.2.1.2 shows how attitudes varied by gender. Comparing both perceptions of recipients as undeserving of help amongst men and

women, and further perceptions of fraudulence amongst claimants by gender, appear to show some similarities. Though it could be assumed that women would be consistently less likely to hold negative perceptions towards social security recipients than men, given that women are more likely to access services relative to men and are a group more likely to need financial assistance (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Nandi and Platt, 2012; Conley, 2012; UKCES, 2014), this is not reflected in the findings.

**Table 5.2.1.2:** Percentages and percentage point difference of 'Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another', by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

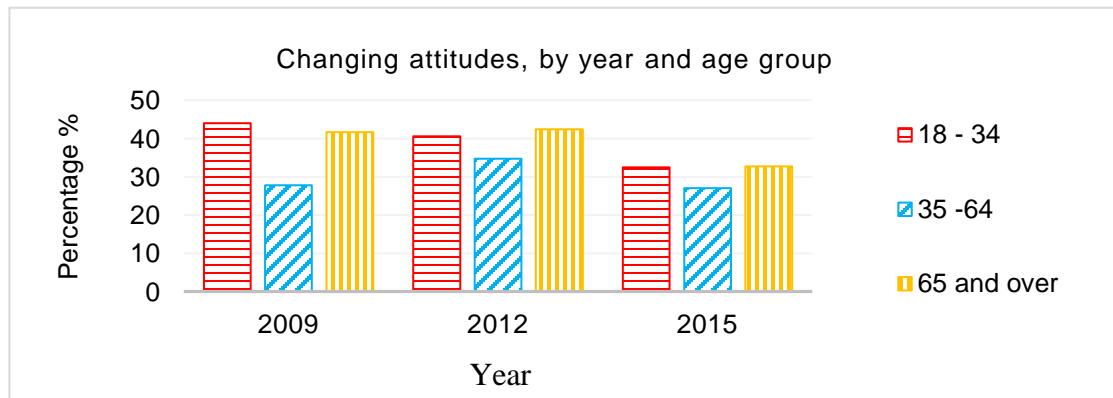
Socio demographic and economic characteristics	'Agree' %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 – 15
<b>All</b>	35.1	37.9	29.8	+2.8	-8.1	-5.3
<b>Gender</b>	ns	ns	ns			
Male	37.0	36.5	31.2	-0.5	-5.3	-5.8
Female	33.2	39.0	28.5	+5.8	-10.5	-4.7
<b>Age</b>	***	***	*			
18-34	44.0	40.6	32.5	-3.4	-8.1	-11.5
35-64	27.8	34.7	27.0	+6.9	-7.7	-0.8
65+	41.7	42.4	32.7	+0.7	-9.7	-9.0
<b>Ethnic group</b>	ns	ns	*			
White ethnic groups	35.4	37.8	29.0	+2.4	-8.8	-6.4
BAME groups	28.6	37.3	35.6	+8.7	-1.7	+7.0
<b>Income</b>	*	***	*			
High	15.2	23.9	17.7	+8.7	-6.2	+2.5
Middle	37.5	35.2	30.0	-2.3	-5.2	-7.5
Low	34.6	41.9	31.0	+7.3	-10.9	-3.6
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	ns	*			
Yes	34.6	37.9	31.7	+3.3	-6.2	-2.9
No	35.8	37.6	27.6	+1.8	-10.0	-8.2
<b>Employment Status</b>	ns	ns	ns			
In employment	35.4	37.7	30.9	+2.3	-6.8	-4.5
Not in employment	34.8	38.0	28.3	+3.2	-9.7	-6.5
<b>Qualifications</b>	***	***	***			
Degree and above	19.5	24.5	17.8	+5.0	-6.7	-1.7
Below degree	37.6	36.8	31.3	-0.8	-5.5	-6.3
None & Other	41.8	52.9	41.8	+11.1	-11.1	0
<b>Occupation</b>	ns	***	****			
Managerial & Professional Occupations	33.1	27.8	22.3	-5.3	-5.5	-10.8
Intermediate occupations	36.2	38.8	33.9	+2.6	-4.9	-2.3
Routine and Manual occupations	39.0	46.9	35.4	+7.9	-11.5	-3.6
Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$ , ns – not significant						

Instead, in 2009 larger proportions of men, than women, agreed that many recipients were fraudulently claiming. By 2012, the proportion of agreement fell amongst men, with men becoming less inclined to state that benefit recipients were undeserving of assistance and

fraudulently claiming, comparatively the proportion of women in agreement increased. Thus, in 2012, women were more inclined to state that fraud was an issue, alongside perceiving recipients as undeserving to a greater extent than men. By 2015, however, attitudes by gender appeared to change again. Reflecting the same pattern observed in 2009, men became more inclined to believe that the majority of social security recipients were ‘fiddling in one way or another’. Though these findings are not significant, these findings suggest that negative perceptions of social security recipients were less favourable amongst women, than men. Reflecting a similar pattern to the findings outlined in Table 5.1.1.2, as Table 5.2.1.2 shows, with exception to 2012, more men than women agreed.

As Table 5.2.1.2 and Figure 5.2.1.1 show, perceptions also varied by age group. Notably, older members of the public are identified as a group who suffer the consequence of economic inequality and of ill health, and rely on social security provisions, often to a greater extent than younger members of British public (Ginn, 2013; JRF, 2016; Padley et al., 2017).

**Figure 5.2.1.1:** Levels of agreement with: ‘most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another’, by year and age group (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



That said, research has also shown that inequality amongst younger generations has increased, with younger people as a group, facing inequalities of opportunity and of income, and as a group feared to have fared worse during the period of austerity examined here (MacInnes et al., 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015).

It was expected that these changes would be reflected in the analysis, yet as Chapter 4 demonstrated, older members of the public, aged 65 and over, were not only more likely to perceive of the income gap as ‘too large’, but also more likely to support the redistribution

of income. Whilst it was expected that this group (65 and over) would be the least likely to purport that social security recipients are undeserving of help, based on these findings, this group was instead found to be the most likely to hold this view. As Figure 5.2.1.1 shows, this pattern reoccurred, in part, in this analysis.

In 2012 ( $\chi^2= 13.591$ ,  $df =2$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=10.239$ ,  $df =2$ ,  $p=0.006$ ) people aged 65 and over were more likely to agree. In 2009, however, younger members of the public (18-34) were more likely to agree ( $\chi^2= 24.331$ ,  $df =2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Thus, in 2012 and 2015, despite being identified as a group more vulnerable toward the onset of inequality and a group more likely to access social security provisions, older members of the public (aged 65 and over) were more likely to agree that fraud is an issue amongst the majority of benefit recipients. Comparatively, people aged 35-64 were the least likely to agree each year.

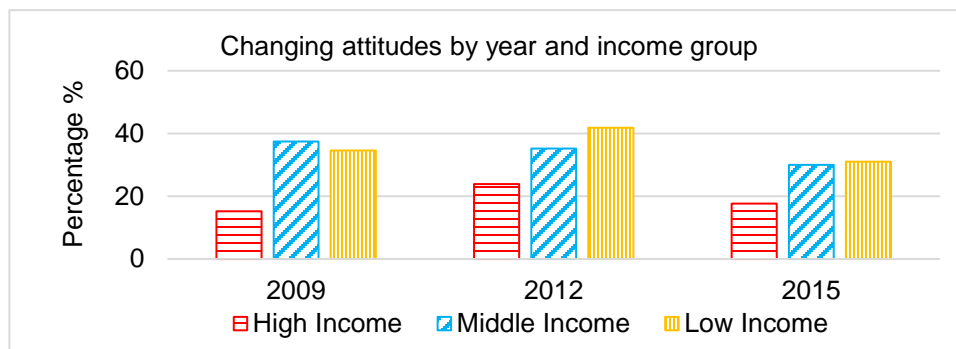
In 2015, ethnicity was related to perceptions. It was expected that levels of agreement would be lower amongst people from BAME backgrounds, reflecting ongoing ethnic disadvantage, relative to people from white ethnic backgrounds (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al.,2010; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015). Again, attitudinal similarities toward benefit recipients, by ethnicity are observable. Largely mirroring the findings outlined in Section 5.1.1, in 2009 and 2012 people from white ethnic backgrounds were more inclined to agree that most benefit claimants were doing so fraudulently, though these changes were not statistically significant. By 2015, however, these findings had once again reversed. In comparison to people from white ethnic backgrounds, people from BAME groups were not only more inclined to agree that benefit recipients were undeserving, this group was also more likely to agree that “most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another” ( $\chi^2= 5.875$ ,  $df =1$ ,  $p=0.015$ ). This was particularly surprising given the relationship between inequality and ethnic background.

As Figure 5.2.1.2 shows, attitudes varied by income group. Whilst it would have been feasible to assume that those in receipt of high-incomes, would be more likely to perceive of benefit recipients negatively, this is not reflected in this analysis. Largely mirroring the findings outlined in Table 5.1.1.2, in 2009, 2012 and 2015, despite increasing levels of agreement overall, people who stated that they had high incomes were less likely to agree than people in the middle or low-income groups. Comparatively, although in 2009 ( $\chi^2= 9.356$ ,  $df =2$ ,  $p=0.009$ ) people in receipt of middle incomes were more likely to agree that

may benefit recipients were 'fiddling', by 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 22.297$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 11.123$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), this had changed, with people stating they had low-incomes more likely to agree.

Thus, suggesting that people in receipt of high-incomes, who are further removed from the experiences of inequality and poverty, and less likely to need to claim benefits, are less likely to hold negative attitudes towards social security recipients.

**Figure 5.2.1.2:** Levels of agreement with: 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another', by year and income group (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Much like low-income earners are vulnerable toward the experience of inequality and poverty, whether or not an individual (or their spouse) receives benefits, also impacts on a household's income. Whilst it would have been feasible to suggest that benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) would be less likely to perceive of benefit claimants as fraudulently claiming in some way, as Table 5.2.1.2 shows this was not reflected in the findings. Between 2009-2012, the proportion of people agreeing increased amongst both non-claimants (increase of 1.8 *pp*) and those who were in receipt of benefits themselves or their spouse was (3.3 *pp*). Though this increase was greater amongst benefit recipients themselves (or those with a spouse in receipt).

In 2009 people who did not claim benefits were more inclined to agree, by 2012 the gap in levels of agreement began to close, with benefit claimants themselves more inclined to agree that fraudulent claiming was something most benefit recipients engaged in. Between 2012-2015, attitudes changed, with a considerable decrease in the proportions of claimants (decrease of 6.2 *pp*) and non-claimants (decrease of 10.0 *pp*) in agreement. Thus, by 2015, the gap between those in agreement by benefit status widened, with people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse) more likely to agree that people on benefits

were ‘fiddling’ the system (31.7%), than people who did not claim benefits (27.6%) and nor did their spouse ( $\chi^2= 5.338$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.021$ ).

These findings suggest that, despite being in receipt of benefits, or their spouse being in receipt of social security assistance, perceptions of benefit claimants as ‘fiddling in one way or another’ were more likely amongst those who did claim, than those that were not in receipt of benefits. This is a similar finding to that identified in Section 5.1.1, where benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) were also more likely to perceive the majority of benefit claimants as undeserving of help in 2015, despite their apparent shared status as benefit recipients. These findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

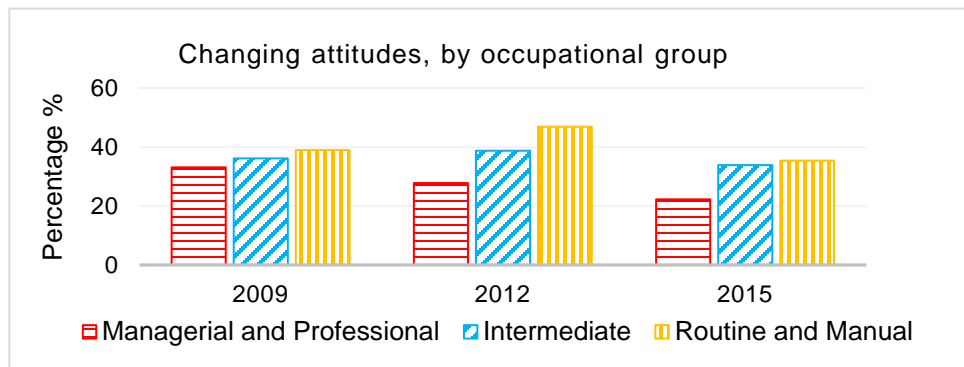
Attitudes also differed by employment status, educational attainment and occupation. People not in employment, people with no (or other) qualifications and those in routine and manual occupational roles, are often expected to receive lower levels of pay. These groups are also expected to be more likely to need to access social security provisions due to low incomes. Given this, it can be assumed that these groups would be less likely to agree. By extension, as groups further away from the vulnerability of inequality and more likely to pay a higher level of income tax (Anderson and Curtis, 2015), it was expected that people in employment, people with higher level qualifications and people in managerial and professional occupations would perhaps be more likely to share negative attitudes toward benefit recipients. The findings in Table 5.2.1.1 show that although levels of agreement between people in employment and not in employment fell between 2009-2015, people in employment in 2009 and 2015 were more inclined to agree than those who were not in employment, as expected. Though these findings were not significant. These findings differ to those identified in Section 5.1.1, whereby people who were not in employment were more inclined to state that benefit recipients were largely undeserving of help in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

Mirroring the findings outlined in Table 5.1.1.2, exploring attitudes toward benefit claimants and the prevalence of fraud by educational attainment, suggest further relationships. People with degree and above level qualifications were, consistently, the least likely to agree, whereas people with the lowest levels of educational attainment (none or other) were the most likely to agree in 2009 ( $\chi^2= 22.780$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2=93.114$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2= 80.975$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). As the level of educational attainment declined, the likelihood of agreement increased. Given that qualifications often dictate

access to employment and better paid roles, limiting choices, this was surprising. These findings suggest that educational attainment is related to attitudes, with those more likely to access social security benefits, due to low income earnings and restricted labour market access, more likely to share negative perceptions of benefit recipients.

As Figure 5.2.1.3 shows, similar findings are notable in relation to occupational position. Not only were people working in managerial and professional occupations less likely to perceive the majority of benefit recipients as undeserving of help in 2012 and 2015, this group were also less likely to agree that the majority of benefit recipients were fraudulently claiming benefits. This is particularly surprising given the relationship between occupational position and income.

**Figure 5.2.1.3:** Levels of agreement with: ‘most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another’, by year and occupation (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Given that managerial and professional roles often result in greater economic rewards (usually signalling higher tax brackets), it could be assumed that this group would be more likely to share negative perceptions, further reflective of how this group are both economically and socially distant from the experience of inequality, poverty and the need for social security assistance. Instead, people in lower occupational groups were more inclined to agree than those in higher occupational categories across each year, followed by people in intermediate occupations.

To summarise, this analysis thus suggests that in 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 81.642$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 48.222$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), people working in routine and manual occupations were more likely to agree that people in receipt of benefits were fraudulently doing so in some way. Comparatively, people in managerial and professional occupations were the least likely to agree. With a focus on year, gender, age, income group, and benefit and

employment status, the following section explores attitudes towards the prevalence of fraud amongst benefit recipients further.

### 5.2.2 BLRA

In this section, the focus is on exploring the relationship between the IV's (year, age, employment status, benefit status, gender and a two-category income band group) and the DV: "most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another". Table 5.2.2.1 shows the results of this analysis. Controlling for all the other variables (age, employment status, benefit status, gender and income), in comparison to 2009, people in 2015 were 0.776 times less likely to agree ( $p < 0.01$ ). Whilst people in 2012 appeared more inclined to agree than those in 2009, this finding is not significant. Though not significant, based on this analysis, men were also more inclined to agree than women ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 5.2.2.1:** BLRA of the levels of agreement with: 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another', with C.I.'s, by variable (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Variables included in the analysis		Odds Ratio (OR)	95% C.I. for Exp (B)	
Variable	Categories		Exp (B)	Lower
<b>Year</b>	2009	1.000	-	-
	2012	1.120 ns	0.959	1.309
	2015	0.776 **	0.662	0.910
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1.017 ns	0.915	1.131
	Female (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Age</b>	18-34	0.848 ns	0.713	1.009
	35-64	0.605 ***	0.515	0.710
	65+ (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Income</b>	middle-high income	0.820 ***	0.735	0.916
	low income (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Benefit status</b>	Yes	1.092 ns	0.969	1.230
	No (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Employment Status</b>	In employment	1.378 ***	1.208	1.572
	Not in employment (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Constant</b>		0.640 ***	-	-

*Statistical Significance of OR's represented by asterisk symbols: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , ns not significant, - no figure to display*

In this analysis, age is also related to attitudes. Whilst 18-34-year olds were less inclined to agree, than older people (aged 65 and over) this was not a significant finding ( $p > 0.05$ ). As Table 5.2.2.1 shows, however, based on this analysis, people aged 35-64 were less likely to agree in comparison to people aged 65 and over ( $p < 0.001$ ). Having taken all the other variables in the analysis into account, income also significantly affected attitudes, with people in receipt of middle-high incomes less likely to agree ( $p < 0.001$ ). Whilst benefit



claimants (or those with a spouse in receipt) appeared more inclined to agree than those not in receipt of benefits, this finding was not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). People in employment, were however, significantly more likely to agree than those not in employment ( $p<0.001$ ).

### 5.2.3 Summary

In summary, the analyse presented in this section suggest that a number of groups are more likely to agree that people in receipt of benefits are, in some form, claiming benefits fraudulently. These include: people from BAME backgrounds, largely those aged 65 and over, people in receipt of low incomes, those in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is), those with no (or other) qualifications and those occupying routine and manual employment positions. Table 5.2.1.1 shows that the increase in the proportion of those in agreement increased between 2009-2012, but that this change is not significantly different. Declining levels of agreement between 2012-2015 (falling from 37.9% to 29.8%) and 2009-2015 (falling from 35.1%) are however significantly different. Suggesting that, despite an initial peak in levels of agreement in 2012, the British public became less likely to agree between 2012-2015 and over all between 2009-2015.

Table 5.2.2.1 also shows how, once controlling for all the other variables in the analysis, year, age, income and employment status also significant effect attitudes. Based on this analysis, not only were people less likely to agree in 2015, than they were in 2009, people aged 35-64 were also less likely to agree compared to those aged 65 and over. The findings also show that middle-high income earners were less likely to agree, than those in receipt of low incomes. Whereas, comparatively, people in employment were more likely to agree that benefit recipients were fraudulent claiming in some way, in comparison to people not in employment.

Not only are these findings discussed in Chapter 6, these findings are subject to further comparisons in the following section. Exploring responses to a further negative evaluation of social security provision, the following section explores attitudes toward the level of provision awarded, intent on understanding whether the public think that welfare generosity results in dependence amongst social security recipients.

### 5.3 Public perceptions of generosity and dependence, Introduction

This section focuses on exploring the levels of agreement with the statement ‘if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’. The direction of this analysis is thus focused on another claim made against the welfare state and its recipients; that people are reliant on support from the state and that if social security provision was not as generous, people would no longer rely on benefits. Thus, the removal of over generous benefit provision would both promote and enable independence amongst individuals (Wiggan, 2012).

For Wiggan this is descriptive of one of the key narratives of welfare, which centres around the existences of “a culture of dependency...that is supported by costly, yet ineffective and damaging state intervention” (2012:385). Similarly, Shildrick and MacDonald found that “moral assessments” were frequently imposed upon social security recipients, amongst their participants they found that the prevalence of poverty was thus “viewed as a consequence of individual ineptitude or moral failure” (2013:292). Those in need were accused of monetary incompetence, “blamed for their inability” or indeed their apparent “unwillingness to manage” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2012:292). In accordance with these views, the reach of the welfare state has rendered too many dependent, whereby the “welfare net is seen to have been spread too far” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:85).

The view that generous benefit payments reduce peoples “incentive to work” or that this generosity results in people becoming “content with life on the dole” (Holman, 1978:71) are not, however, new. As Golding and Middleton pointed out, people believe that the point of the welfare state has been missed, or indeed corrupted, this is evident where they state that “what should have been a restricted emergency service for the helpless” has been accused of developing “uncontrollably into the [a] nanny state” (1982:85). In this way, welfare for some members of the British public, “is not merely reaching the wrong people but has totally outgrown its utility to the point where it is weakening our whole social fabric” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:87). Indeed, as Dorey highlights, poverty is often “pathologised by being attributed to defective or dysfunctional individuals” (2010:334), where poor choices thus signify “a fundamental moral weakness and/or a lack of guiding vision” (Castell and Thompson, 2007:17).

What is therefore seemingly evident is how narratives portray people as the “authors of their own downfall and deprivation by virtue of their alleged lack of industriousness, motivation or moral fibre” (Dorey, 2010:334). Dorey argues further that much of the “British people believe that social security benefits are either now at an appropriate level or are too high” and that this means benefits act as “a disincentive for the poor to become more self-reliant and/or obtain employment”. (2010:337). Given these longstanding narratives, it was expected that this would be reflected in the analysis, with large proportions of the British public in agreement with the statement: “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet”. The following section presents the findings of this analysis.

### 5.3.1 perceptions of benefit generosity and dependence

Table 5.3.1.1 shows the proportion of agreement each year, alongside CI’s constructed around the point estimates in each year. In 2009, 53.5% agreed that dependency was a feature amongst welfare claimants due to generous payments. The 95.0% CI is between 50.2 and 56.5%. Notably, by 2012, there was a slight increase in the proportion of agreement amongst the sample. The findings also show that for this period the 95.0% CI is between 52.0% and 55.7%. This analysis also shows that the differences between 2009-2012 are however not significantly different. In 2015 the proportion of people in agreement fell slightly to 52.9%, the 95.0% CI is between 51.0 and 54.7%. As Table 5.3.1.1 shows, however, the increase in agreement between 2012-2015 and 2009-2015 are not significantly different.

**Table 5.3.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point difference of levels of agreement with: ‘if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’, by year, with confidence intervals by year (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet	Agree (%)			<i>pp</i> change by year and CI by year (95%)			
	Year	2009	2012	2015	2009-12	2012-15	2009-15
<b>All</b>		53.5	53.9	52.9	+0.4	-1.0	-0.6
<b>CI</b>	<i>Lower Bound</i>	50.2	52.0	51.0	ns	ns	ns
	<i>Upper Bound</i>	56.6	55.7	54.7			

CI – Confidence Interval, SD – significant difference (at 5.0% level), ns – no significant difference

In 2009, 2012 and 2015, more than half the British public agreed with the statement: ‘if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’.

These findings show that not only do members of the public believe that generosity and dependence are an issue, to a greater extent than the belief that social security recipients are undeserving of help or are defrauding the system in some way. They also show that the British public appear to feel more strongly that generosity and dependence is an issue to a greater extent than the need for income redistribution.

**Table 5.3.1.2:** Percentages and percentage point difference of 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet', by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Socio demographic and economic characteristics	'Agree' %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 – 15
<b>All</b>	53.5	53.9	52.9	+0.4	-1.0	-0.6
<b>Gender</b>	ns	ns	ns			
Male	56.2	54.6	54.1	-1.6	-0.5	-2.1
Female	50.7	53.2	51.8	+2.5	-1.4	+1.1
<b>Age</b>	**	***	***			
18-34	60.2	53.4	50.5	-6.8	-2.9	-9.7
35-64	48.3	50.3	50.3	+2.0	0.0	-2.0
65+	57.4	63.9	61.4	+6.5	-2.5	+4.0
<b>Ethnic group</b>	ns	*	ns			
White ethnic groups	53.0	53.1	52.8	+0.1	-0.3	-0.2
BAME groups	58.9	60.5	54.0	-1.6	-6.5	-4.9
<b>Income</b>	***	*	**			
High	45.7	50.0	48.3	+4.3	-1.7	+2.6
Middle	58.9	56.3	56.0	-2.6	-0.3	-2.9
Low	47.2	51.3	49.6	+4.1	-1.7	+2.4
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	ns	ns			
Yes	51.1	53.0	52.7	+1.9	-0.3	+1.6
No	57.1	55.1	53.0	-2.0	-2.1	-4.1
<b>Employment Status</b>	**	*	ns			
In employment	57.2	55.7	54.4	-1.5	-1.3	-2.8
Not in employment	47.5	51.7	50.9	+4.2	-0.8	+3.4
<b>Qualifications</b>	*	***	***			
Degree and above	44.7	44.3	43.4	-0.4	-0.9	-1.3
Below degree	55.8	53.9	55.1	-1.9	+1.2	-0.7
None & Other	54.5	61.7	59.3	+7.2	-2.4	+4.8
<b>Occupation</b>	ns	***	**			
Managerial & Professional Occupations	59.9	49.4	49.3	-10.5	-0.1	-10.6
Intermediate occupations	57.1	59.2	57.7	+2.1	-1.5	+0.6
Routine and Manual occupations	56.0	56.3	55.1	+0.3	-1.2	-0.9

Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , ns – not significant

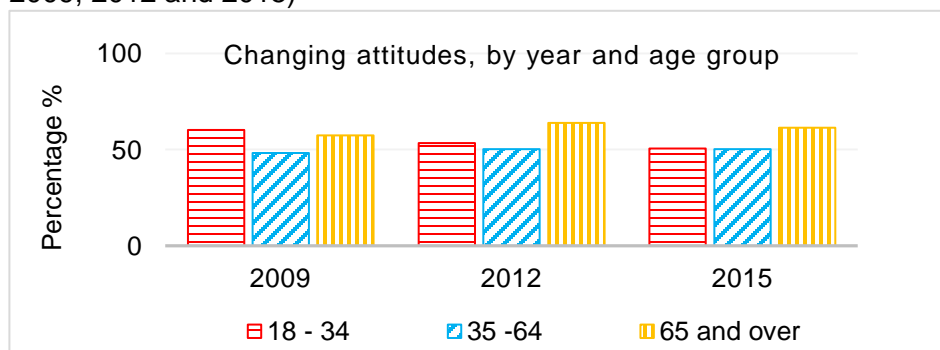
In 2009 53.5% of the public agreed that welfare generosity led to dependency, this proportion increased, albeit slightly, in 2012 (53.9%), before falling to a level lower than those seen in 2015 (52.9%). Although these changes appear minimal and do not appear to support the claim made by Dorey (2010), they appear to show how ideas of generosity and dependence remain consistent amongst at least half the British public. To understand

which groups are more likely to hold this view, the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the public were also explored (Table 5.3.1.2).

Attitudes towards welfare generosity and benefit dependency varied by gender. It was expected that these findings would reflect the literature, with women less likely to agree that the generosity of benefit payments led to dependency. Given that this group are often more likely to be vulnerable to the onset of inequality, and more likely to need access to social security provision (Oxfam, 2012; Conley, 2012; Ginn, 2013; UKCES, 2014; De Henau and Reed, 2016). Though not statistically significant, as expected in comparison to women, men were consistently more inclined to hold this view.

As Figure 5.3.1.1 shows, a relationship between attitudes and age is however evident. Though it is feasible to suggest those most likely to be in receipt of benefits themselves will be less likely to hold negative perceptions toward benefit recipients, Section 5.1.1 and 5.2.1 show that this is not always necessarily the case. Older members of the public, aged 65 and over, were more likely to perceive of benefit recipients as undeserving of help in 2009, 2012 and 2015. In 2012 and 2015, this group were also more likely to agree that the majority of people in receipt of benefits were doing so fraudulently. A similar pattern is evident in Table 5.3.1.2. In 2009 people aged 18-34 (60.2%) were more likely to believe that welfare generosity led to dependence ( $\chi^2= 11.412$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.003$ ), comparatively people aged 35-64 were the least likely to hold this view. However, in both 2012 ( $\chi^2= 31.002$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2= 23.312$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) people aged 65 and over were more likely to agree that welfare generosity resulted in dependency.

**Figure 5.3.1.1:** Levels of agreement with: ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’, by year and age group (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Between 2009-2015, overall, levels of agreement fell amongst those aged 18-34 (decrease of 9.7 *pp*) and 35-64 (decrease of 2.0 *pp*) yet increased amongst older

members of the public, aged 65 and over (4.0 *pp*). Thus, suggesting that older members of the public's attitudes toward people in receipt of social security payments, changed over the course of austerity examined here.

Table 5.3.1.2 shows how attitudes differ by ethnic identity. In 2009, 2012 and 2015, in comparison to the minority group, people from white ethnic backgrounds were less inclined to agree, though not all of these changes are statistically significant. In 2012, however, a relationship between ethnic background and attitudes is evident, with people from BAME groups (60.5%) more likely to agree that welfare generosity resulted in dependence, than those from white ethnic (53.1%) backgrounds ( $\chi^2= 5.133$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.023$ ). Given that people from BAME groups were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 and 2015 and that much of the literature suggests that minority ethnic groups fared worse during austerity, are a group more vulnerable toward inequality, and are therefore more likely to need social security provision or indeed access financial support, this was surprising (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; Oxfam, 2012; Catney and Sabater, 2015; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; TUC, 2017).

Notably, where an individual placed themselves in relation to (self-rated) income band, also impacted on the likelihood of agreement. Given that the level of income received impacts lifestyle and opportunities (Holman, 1978; Fong et al., 2003; Busemeyer, 2009; Finch, 2015; Lansley and Mack, 2015; JRF, 2016), it was expected that people further from need, would be more likely to believe that generous payments resulted in dependence. By extension, the opposite was expected of those in receipt of a low income, given that this group are more likely to benefit from social security provision. As Table 5.3.1.2 shows, a different picture emerged. Not only were high income earners less likely to perceive of those in receipt of benefits as fraudulently claiming benefits in 2009, 2012 and 2015, this group were also less likely to assert that welfare generosity led to dependency. Instead, middle-income group earners were more likely to agree in 2009 ( $\chi^2= 13.161$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2= 7.339$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.025$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2= 11.562$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.003$ ). By comparison, people on low incomes were the second most likely to agree.

That said, between 2009-2015, whilst levels of agreement increased amongst those in the low and high-income band groups, levels declined amongst those in the middle-income group (decrease of 2.9 *pp*). Despite these changes, these findings show that people with self-rated high incomes, were the least likely to agree in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Given that

this group are further removed from the vulnerability of poverty compared to low and middle-income earners and are a group who are more likely to contribute more in taxation, this was an unexpected finding, but one that is also evident in Table's 5.1.1.2 and 5.2.1.1.

Given the relationship between income and benefit status, it was expected that people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) would be less likely to hold negative opinions toward the social security system, given that they recipients of the services offered (or their spouse is). By extension, it could be assumed that non-claimants would be more likely to agree. That said, as noted in Section 5.1.1 and 5.2.1, in 2015 in comparison to people who did not claim benefits, people who were in receipt of benefits (or had a spouse in receipt of benefits) were more likely to agree that benefit recipients did not really deserve any help, and that the majority were fraudulently doing so. As Table 5.3.1.2 shows, a different picture emerged in this analysis. The highest proportion of agreement is amongst those who were not in receipt of benefits, who were more inclined to agree, in comparison to people who were in receipt of benefits (or their spouse was). These findings point to the disparities in attitudes toward the level of benefits received and dependence amongst people close to benefit recipients, or in receipt themselves, in comparison to people not in receipt of benefits, nor spouse to someone who is. That said, these findings are not statistically significant.

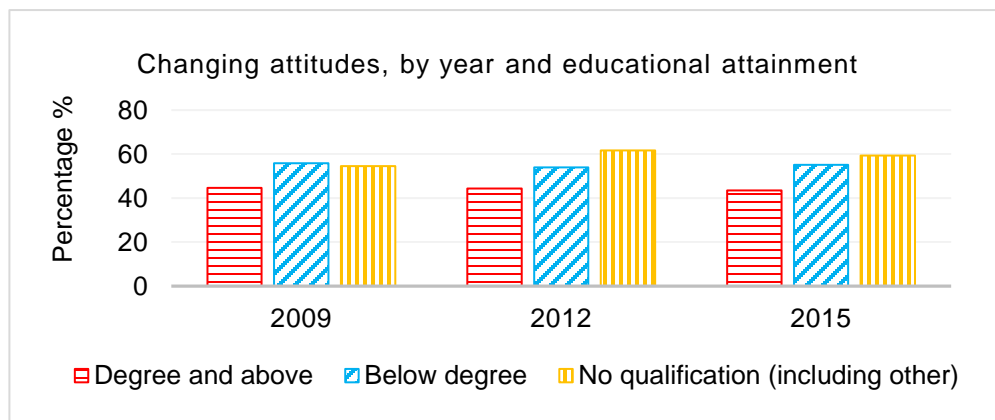
Attitudes varied by employment status. Section 5.1.1 demonstrated that people who were not in employment in 2009, 2012 and 2015 were more inclined to agree that the majority of benefit recipients were undeserving of help. This was surprising given that those outside of the labour market are often in receipt of low incomes or are in receipt of social security assistance. It was expected that people in employment, and therefore less likely to claim benefits themselves and instead more likely to contribute toward the redistribution of income through income taxation, would be more likely to agree. This was also an assumption made in this analysis. As Table 5.3.1.2 shows, as expected, people in employment were more likely to agree that benefit generosity resulted in dependency in both 2009 ( $\chi^2 = 8.382$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 4.377$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ), than those who were not in employment.

Notably, although people who were not in employment were less likely to agree, this group became more likely to agree over time (increase of 3.4 *pp*), whereas comparatively the level of agreement amongst people in employment fell (decrease of 2.8 *pp* between 2009-

2015). These findings show that in 2009 and 2012 a relationship between attitudes toward welfare generosity and dependence is evident, with those not in employment and thus more likely to benefit from social security provisions less likely to agree.

As Table 5.3.1.2 and Figure 5.3.1.2 shows, attitudes varied by educational attainment, with attitudes toward benefit generosity and dependence related to level of education attainment. Given that educational attainment often dictates employment opportunities, furnishing those with higher levels of attainment with greater access to better paid roles (UKCES, 2014 Finch, 2015; JRF, 2016) it was expected that people with no (or other) qualifications would be less likely to agree, given that this group may perhaps be more likely to need to claim benefits to top up their incomes. As Table 5.3.1.2 shows, between 2009-2012, levels of agreement declined amongst those with qualifications below degree level (decrease of 1.9 *pp*) and those with degree or above level qualifications (decrease of 0.4 *pp*).

**Figure 5.3.1.2:** Levels of agreement with: ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’, by year and educational attainment (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)



Conversely, amongst those who held no qualifications (or other) levels of agreement increased considerably (7.2 *pp*). Similar changes are also notable between 2009-2015. Mirroring the findings outlined in Section 5.1.1 and 5.2.1, the expectation that those with no or other qualifications would be the least likely to agree, was not reflected in this analysis.

Instead, people with higher level qualifications were not only less likely to agree that benefit recipients did not deserve any help and less likely to perceive the majority of social security recipients as fraudulently claiming ‘in one way or another’. This group were also



less likely to agree that ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’ in 2009 ( $\chi^2 = 6.520$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.038$ ), 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 33.027$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 35.198$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Comparatively, in 2012 and 2015, people with no qualifications (or other) were the most likely to state that welfare generosity led to dependency.

A similar expectation was by occupation position. Occupational position often reflects the income of the public, meaning that those employed in routine and manual occupations are often expected to be paid less, with those in managerial and professional occupations receiving a higher income and again better labour market access. For these reasons it can be assumed that this will be reflected in the analysis with people in managerial professions more likely to perceive of benefit payments being too generous and leading to a lack of independence. Instead, people employed in intermediate occupations were more likely to agree that the generosity of welfare payments resulted in dependence, in both 2012 ( $\chi^2 = 17.285$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2 = 12.501$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.002$ ). By comparison, reflecting similar findings to those outlined in Section 5.1.1 and 5.2.1, in 2012 and 2015 people within managerial and professional occupations were less likely to agree. In summary, the findings suggest that the likelihood of agreeing with the statement: “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet” is significantly greater amongst people working in intermediate occupation, and is surprisingly, less likely amongst those in managerial and professional occupations, where levels of agreement also decreased between this latter group over time. These findings are discussed in Chapter 6.

The following section builds on this analysis, using BLRA and confidence intervals to explore the relationship between the dependent variable “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet” and the independent variables (year, age, employment status, benefit status, gender and income).

### **5.3.2 BLRA**

Intent on exploring these findings further, merged data from 2009, 2012 and 2015, allows for the inclusion of BLRA. Table 5.3.2.1 shows the results of this analysis. The focus of this section is on exploring the relationship between the independent variables: year, age, employment status, benefit status, gender and a two-category income band group

included within the analysis and the final dependent variable: “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet”.

Controlling for all the other variables (age, gender, income, benefit and employment status), in comparison to 2009, people in 2012 appeared more inclined to agree, whereas people in 2015 were less inclined to agree, though these findings are not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). In comparison to women, the analysis also showed that more men than women held this view, though this was not a significant finding. Taking into account all the other factors in the analysis, in comparison to people aged 65 and over, people aged 18-34 were 0.514 times less likely to agree ( $p<0.001$ ), whereas people aged 35-64 were 0.430 times less likely to agree ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Table 5.3.2.1:** BLRA of the levels of agreement with: “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet”, with C.I.’s, by variable (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Variables included in the analysis		Odds Ratio (OR)	95% C.I. for Exp (B)	
Variable	Categories		Exp (B)	Lower
<b>Year</b>	2009	1.000	-	-
	2012	1.036 ns	0.892	1.204
	2015	0.959 ns	0.825	1.115
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1.043 ns	0.943	1.153
	Female (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Age</b>	18-34	0.514 ***	0.434	0.608
	35-64	0.430 ***	0.369	0.502
	65+ (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Income</b>	middle-high income	1.174 *	1.057	1.304
	low income (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Benefit status</b>	Yes	0.893 *	0.798	1.000
	No (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Employment Status</b>	In employment	1.577 ***	1.393	1.785
	Not in employment (base category)	1.000	-	-
<b>Constant</b>		1.561***	-	-
<i>Statistical Significance of OR's represented by asterisk symbols: *<math>p&lt;0.05</math> **<math>p&lt;0.01</math> ***<math>p&lt;0.001</math>, ns not significant, - no figure to display</i>				

Based on this analysis, a significant relationship between income and attitudes is also evident, with people in receipt of middle-high incomes 1.174 time more likely to agree, than those in receipt of low incomes. Whilst benefit status also appears to influence attitudes ( $p=0.05$ ), with people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is) 0.893 times less likely to agree than those who do not claim benefits, the confidence intervals suggest that this is not a significant effect. Employment status does however show a significant effect, with people in employment 1.577 times more likely to agree than those not in employment ( $p<0.001$ ).

### 5.3.3 Summary

To summarise, this section has highlighted how people perceive of social security recipients, and the 'generosity' of the payments afforded to benefit recipients. The analysis explored whether these opinions have changed over time. Though the analysis suggested that the increase in levels of agreement between 2009-2012, and the decreases between 2012-2015 and 2009-2015 are not significant, the findings nevertheless, demonstrate that over half the British public shared negative views of welfare recipients each year. This section has shown that the likelihood of agreement is also greater amongst particular groups. These include: people aged 18-34 in 2009, older members (65 and over) of the public in 2012 and 2015. People from BAME groups in 2012, people in receipt of self-rated middle incomes, people in employment, those in intermediate occupations, people with below degree level qualification in 2009 and those lacking (or holding other forms) qualifications in 2012 and 2015.

BLRA has also suggested that, having taken into account all the variables in the analysis, people on middle-high incomes were more likely to agree than those on low incomes. In comparison to non-claimants, benefit recipients were less likely to agree. With further attitudinal differences seen by age group and employment status. To explore the relationship between negative attitudes toward welfare recipients and support toward redistribution, and how this changed over time (if at all), the following sections build on this analysis, comparing the findings outlined in this chapter so far.

## 5.4 The relationship between perceptions of deservingness and the redistribution of income, Introduction

Chapter 2 and 5 explored how people in receipt of welfare benefits have been characterised as undeserving for a number of generations. It has also been stressed that perceptions of inequality reflective of stereotypical rhetoric, can stand in the way of initiatives to combat societal issues. Where a lack of support from the British public toward redistributive strategies poses problems (Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Wu and Chou, 2015). Chapter 4 emphasised that just over two fifths of the British public supported the redistribution of income in 2009. This proportion increased slightly into 2012 and once again into 2015. Whilst support for income redistribution amongst the public increased between 2009-2015, support remained low. Chapter 4 also highlighted that support toward

the redistribution of income is, however, more likely amongst people who also believe that ‘the gap between high and low income is too large’. Suggesting a relationship between attitudes towards income inequality and income redistribution.

Although increasing support toward redistribution amongst the public is notable, much smaller proportions agreed with redistributive measures than those who agreed the income gap was ‘too large’. To understand how, if at all, other perceptions relate to support toward redistribution, this section explores the extent of the relationship between negative perceptions of welfare recipients and support toward the redistribution of income. Focused on investigating the question: of the proportion of people who agreed that “many people who get social security don’t really deserve any help”, what proportion also agreed that “the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off”?, the following section presents the findings of this analysis.

#### **5.4.1 Deservingness and redistribution, findings**

Section 5.1.1 demonstrated that in 2009 and 2012 over a third of the British public agreed that many social security recipients were undeserving, by 2015 this proportion had fallen to 28.7%. At the same time, the public appeared to hold stronger views toward the redistribution of income, with 37.3% in agreement that the government should redistribute between income groups in 2009, 42.1% in 2012 and 44.7% in 2015. To understand how negative perceptions, relate to the support expressed toward the redistribution of income, Table 5.4.1.1 shows the level of support toward redistribution expressed amongst people who also perceive benefit recipients as undeserving of help.

The analysis suggests that in 2009, amongst the proportion of the public who agreed that many benefit recipients were undeserving of help (35.3%), support toward redistribution was considerably lower (28.5%). Comparing these findings to those outlined in Section 4.2.1, this is a *pp* decrease of 8.8. These findings suggest that in 2009, amongst people that perceive benefit recipients as largely undeserving of the help they receive, support toward the redistribution of income is less likely ( $\chi^2=11.361$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Thus, negative attitudes toward welfare recipients relate to the level of support expressed toward the redistribution of income, where such views are held, support toward income redistribution declines and this is problematic.

In 2012, as Section 5.1.1 shows, the public became more likely to believe that many social security recipients were undeserving of help, but also more likely to support the redistribution of income (Section 4.2.1). Amongst the proportion of people who said that recipients were largely undeserving, just 36.9% also agreed with the redistribution of income. Comparing these findings, this analysis suggests that in 2012, amongst the public who felt that benefit recipients were largely undeserving of help, redistributive support was reduced by 5.2 *pp*.

**Table 5.4.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point difference of ‘many people who get social security don’t...deserve help’, and ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off’, by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Socio demographic and economic characteristics	‘Agree’ %			<i>pp</i> change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 – 15
<b>All</b>	***28.5	***36.9	***39.2	+8.4	+2.3	+10.7
<b>Gender</b>	ns	ns	ns			
<i>Male</i>	28.7	37.3	40.8	+8.6	+3.5	+12.1
<i>Female</i>	28.7	36.5	37.7	+7.8	+1.2	+9.0
<b>Age</b>	ns	ns	ns			
18-34	32.2	34.9	40.4	+2.7	+5.5	+8.2
35-64	25.2	34.7	35.6	+9.5	+0.9	+10.4
65+	30.5	43.1	44.5	+12.6	+1.4	+14.0
<b>Income</b>	***	**	***			
<i>Middle-High</i>	21.1	32.6	33.3	+11.5	+0.7	+12.2
<i>Low</i>	40.7	42.2	48.4	-1.5	+6.2	+7.7
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	*	**			
Yes	28.1	39.9	43.7	+11.8	+3.8	+15.6
No	29.0	32.4	32.9	+3.4	+0.5	+3.9
<b>Employment Status</b>	*	***	ns			
<i>In employment</i>	24.6	31.5	36.0	+6.9	+4.5	+11.4
<i>Not in employment</i>	35.5	43.6	43.1	+8.1	-0.5	+7.6
<i>Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: *p&lt;0.05 **p&lt;0.01 ***p&lt;0.001 ns – not significant</i>						

These findings suggest that in 2012 negative perceptions related to the level of support expressed toward the redistribution of income, with negative opinions reducing the support expressed toward redistribution ( $\chi^2=16.562$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

This pattern reoccurred in 2015. Whilst 44.7% of people believed that the government should redistribute income, 28.7% of the public also felt that the majority of those in receipt of support did not deserve any help. Of the proportion of people who held this view, support toward the redistribution of income was lower (39.2%). Thus, in 2015 negative perceptions of welfare recipients were related to the level of support expressed toward monetary redistribution, reducing this support by 5.5 *pp* ( $\chi^2=11.029$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

To summarise, this analysis highlights how perceptions of those in receipt of social security are related to the likelihood of agreement with the redistribution of income. Where people agree that people in receipt of benefits do not deserve help, they are also less likely to support initiatives to combat inequality, like that of the redistribution of income. Although this may have been expected, due to the complex formation of social attitudes, this required evidencing and exploring further. To understand which groups are more likely to share these opinions, the findings were also explored in relation to specific socio-economic (self-rated income group, benefit status and employment status) and demographic (gender and age) characteristics.

As Table 5.4.1.1 shows, in comparison to the level of support toward redistribution amongst the public by gender (Section 4.2.1), support toward the redistribution of income is lower amongst men and women who also agree that people are largely underserving of help. These findings appear consistent with those highlighted in Section 4.2.1, where men were identified as a group more likely to support the redistribution of income in comparison to women. Although these findings show how attitudes toward income redistribution amongst men and women who also agree that ‘many people who get social security benefits don’t really deserve any help’ differ, these findings are not significant. Table 5.4.1.1 also shows how perceptions by age also suggest that support toward the redistribution of income is reduced, amongst people who feel welfare recipients are undeserving of the assistance received. Largely mirroring the findings outlined in Section 4.2.1, with exception to 2009, older members of the public remained more inclined to support the redistribution of income, despite holding negative perceptions of those in receipt of social security assistance. Though these findings show how attitudes toward redistribution differ amongst people based on their age, and perceptions of social security recipients, these findings are not significant.

Table 5.4.1.1 shows how opinions continued to differ by income group. Section 4.1.1 showed how people on low incomes were more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’, this group were also more likely to support the redistribution of income (Section 4.2.1) than those in receipt of middle or high incomes. This was expected, given that people in receipt of lower incomes are expected to have personal experiences of income inequality and are more likely to benefit from the redistribution of income. Section 5.2.1 however, also showed that this group were more likely to agree that benefit recipients were largely defrauding the system in some way in 2012 and 2015, but that low income

earners felt less strongly that recipients were undeserving of help (Section 5.1.1). Given that perceptions of benefit recipients as undeserving, reflect stigmatising views of those in receipt of assistance it was expected that support toward redistribution amongst those who held this belief, would be lower than those identified in Section 4.2.1. This assumption is reflected in this analysis.

Comparing the findings outlined in Section 5.2.1, as Table 5.4.1.1 shows, support toward redistribution by income group, is lower amongst people who perceive benefit recipients as undeserving. In 2009, 44.9% of low-income earners supported redistribution, as Table 5.4.1.1 shows, amongst those in receipt of a low income who felt that social security recipients were undeserving, this proportion fell to 40.7% (a decrease of 4.2 *pp*). Similarly, in 2009 redistributive support was also less likely amongst those in the middle-high income group ( $\chi^2=14.229$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This pattern reoccurred in 2012, where redistributive support was significantly lower amongst low and middle-high income groups, if they also agreed that benefit recipients were undeserving of help ( $\chi^2=9.677$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.002$ ).

In 2015 amongst people in receipt of low and middle-high incomes, redistributive support was less likely amongst both groups if they also agreed that social security recipients were undeserving of help ( $\chi^2=17.666$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These findings suggest that in 2009, 2012 and 2015 amongst those who agreed that people in receipt of social security provisions did not deserve any help, their own financial positions, significantly related to their opinion toward the redistribution of income. In other words, amongst people in receipt of low and middle-high incomes who agreed that welfare recipients were undeserving of help, support toward income redistribution reduced in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

The benefit status of members of the public or their spouses, also related to attitudes. Whilst people who were in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 and 2015, they were also more likely to agree that many people in receipt of benefits 'don't really deserve any help' in 2015. This was particularly surprising given that this particular group are in receipt of benefits themselves, or they have a spouse in receipt. As Table 5.4.1.1 shows, in comparison to the level of support noted in Table 4.2.1.2, support toward redistribution was lower amongst benefit claimants (or people whose spouse claimed) who agreed that benefit recipients were

undeserving of help, and amongst people who did not claim benefits who also shared this perspective in 2012 ( $\chi^2=5.792$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.016$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=9.025$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.003$ ).

In 2009, though not statistically significant, support toward redistribution was reduced to a greater extent amongst benefit recipients (decreasing from 38.3% to 28.1%), in comparison to non-claimants (decreasing from 35.8% to 29.0%). In 2012, this was reversed, with falling levels of support greater amongst non-claimants (decreasing from 39.8% to 32.4%) than benefit claimants or those with a spouse in receipt (43.7% to 39.9%). This pattern continued into 2015, where support amongst non-claimants fell from 42.2% to 32.9%, and from 46.9% to 43.7% amongst benefit claimants (or those with a spouse in receipt). To summarise, these findings show that support toward redistribution, is significantly lower amongst benefit recipients and non-claimants who also agree that social security recipients are undeserving of help.

Employment status also related to perceptions. As Table 4.2.1.2 shows, people who were not in employment were consistently more likely to support redistribution than people who were in employment. This was expected, given that people who are not in employment are often more likely to benefit from income redistribution, even if those in employment are also struggling in work. Amongst the proportion of people that felt welfare recipients were undeserving of help, people who were not in employment were also more likely to support redistribution, than those in employment in 2009 and 2012. In 2009 amongst those who felt that benefit recipients were undeserving of help and were in employment support toward redistribution fell from 35.5% to 24.6% (a decrease of 10.9 *pp*). Support toward redistribution fell by 5.9 *pp* in 2012, and by 0.4 *pp* in 2015.

Accordingly, for those in employment, support toward redistribution is lower amongst people who also perceive social security recipients as undeserving. This was also apparent amongst people who were outside of the labour market, where support declined in 2009 (falling from 39.9% to 35.5%), 2012 (47.9% to 43.6%) and 2015 (47.2% to 43.1%). To summarise, amongst those who agreed that benefit recipients are undeserving, support toward redistribution declined amongst both groups in 2009, 2012 and 2015. These findings suggest there is a relationship between negative attitudes toward benefit recipients, support towards redistribution and employment status in 2009 ( $\chi^2=4.407$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.036$ ) and 2012 ( $\chi^2=9.025$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).



### **5.4.2 Summary**

To summarise this section has explored how perceptions toward social security recipients are related to support toward the redistribution of income. Amongst members of the public in agreement that ‘many people who get social security don’t really deserve any help’, support toward the redistribution of income is significantly reduced. This suggests that negative attitudes towards people in receipt of social security benefits are related to redistributive support, where negative opinions reduce the likelihood of the public support income redistribution between groups. The following section explores how attitudes toward the level of benefits awarded may also relate to the level of support toward redistribution.

### **5.5 Perceptions of dependence and the redistribution of income, introduction**

This section explores how members of the British public perceived the level of benefit payments awarded and how (if at all) this related to attitudes toward the redistribution of income. As Section 4.2.1 highlighted, support for redistribution increased between 2009-2015, yet remained particularly low. In 2009, less than two fifths of the British public agreed that income should be redistributed from the ‘better-off’ to the ‘less-well-off’. This proportion increased in 2012, before increasing again in 2015. Concurrently, perceptions of the generosity of social security payments and consequent dependency amongst recipients, were also notable.

A considerable proportion of the British public agreed that welfare generosity resulted in dependence amongst people in receipt of benefits. In other words, if people did not receive state benefit payments this would enable them to provide for themselves, independent of support from the welfare state. Once presented with the statement ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’, over a third of the public agreed in 2009, this proportion increased in 2012 and decreased to less than a third in 2015. Although levels of agreement fell, a considerable proportion of people, maintained that welfare generosity resulted in dependence amongst benefit recipients. These findings appeared to support much of the literature, which also highlighted how people’s perceptions of the welfare state and benefit claimants, often impact the willingness to support initiatives to combat inequality, like that of the redistribution of income (McKendrick et al., 2008; Clarke and Newman, 2012).

To understand these findings further and the extent, if at all, negative attitudes toward welfare impact on support for monetary redistribution, the focus of this section is on exploring the proportions of people who agreed that that welfare generosity resulted in dependency, also agreed that the government should redistribute income. The following section presents the findings of this analysis.

### 5.5.1 Benefit dependency and redistribution, findings

Table 5.5.1.1 shows the proportion of people in agreement that that welfare generosity resulted in dependency, whom also agreed that the government should redistribute income. The findings in Table 5.5.1.1 can be interpreted in different ways.

**Table 5.5.1.1:** Percentages and percentage point difference of: ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet’, and ‘the government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off’, by year and socio demographic and economic characteristics (analysis based on BSAS 2009, 2012 and 2015)

Socio demographic, Socio economic and geographic characteristics	‘Agree’ %			pp change		
	2009	2012	2015	2009 -12	2012 – 15	2009 – 15
<b>All</b>	*** 30.5	*** 36.4	*** 36.0	+5.9	-0.4	+5.5
<b>Gender</b>	ns	ns	ns			
Male	32.5	37.0	38.5	+4.5	+1.5	+6.0
Female	28.6	35.9	33.7	+7.3	-2.2	+5.1
<b>Age</b>	***	ns	ns			
18-34	41.9	35.3	33.8	-6.6	-1.5	-8.1
35-64	23.8	35.2	34.5	+11.4	-0.7	+10.7
65+	28.6	40.4	40.8	+11.8	+0.4	+12.2
<b>Income</b>	***	***	***			
High	14.3	21.1	31.0	+6.8	+9.9	+16.7
Middle	25.1	31.7	31.0	+6.6	-0.7	+5.9
Low	41.9	43.7	43.9	+1.8	+0.2	+2.0
<b>Benefit status</b>	ns	ns	***			
Yes	28.4	37.8	41.5	+9.4	+3.7	+13.1
No	33.5	34.4	29.6	+0.9	-4.8	-3.9
<b>Employment Status</b>	ns	***	***			
In employment	30.1	31.5	32.4	+1.4	+0.9	+2.3
Not in employment	31.2	43.2	41.4	+12.0	-1.8	+10.2
<i>Statistical Significance test results represented by asterisk symbol: *p&lt;0.05 **p&lt;0.01 ***p&lt;0.001 ns – not significant</i>						

Firstly, the findings suggest that amongst those who agreed that welfare generosity resulted in dependency, levels of agreement with the redistribution of income increased between 2009-2015 yet remained low.

In 2009 just 30.5% of people shared this attitude also supported the redistribution of income between groups, this proportion increased to 36.4% in 2012 before declining again in 2015, to 36.0%. Comparing these findings to those identified in Section 4.2.1 show how support toward redistribution amongst people who held negative perceptions of welfare recipients relates toward redistributive support. Section 4.2 showed how support toward income redistribution increased in 2012 and 2015, comparatively amongst people who agreed that benefit generosity led to dependency support declined in 2015.

These findings also highlight how perceptions of those in receipt of benefits relate to attitudes toward income redistribution. Comparing the findings outlined in Section 4.2.1 and Table 5.5.1, the findings show that support toward income redistribution is significantly reduced amongst people who also agree that welfare generosity leads to dependency. For instance, in 2009 Table 4.2.2 shows that 37.3% supported the redistribution of income, whereas Table 5.5.1.1 shows that of the proportion of people who agreed that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous people would learn to stand on their own two feet' just 30.5% supported redistribution. These findings suggest that in 2009 redistributive support fell by 6.8 *pp* amongst people who perceived welfare generosity as resulting in dependency ( $\chi^2=16.233$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

This also occurred in 2012. As Table 4.2.1.2 shows, 42.1% of the public supported income redistribution, yet of the proportion of who agreed that generosity led to dependence, support toward income redistribution declined by 5.7 *pp* to 36.4% ( $\chi^2=41.157$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In 2015, support toward income redistribution (44.7%) amongst people who held this negative perception (36.0%) fell to a greater extent, declining by 8.7 *pp* ( $\chi^2=82.146$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). These findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between negative attitudes toward benefit recipients and support toward income redistribution amongst the public.

To understand how attitudes changed (if at all) between groups, attitudes were also explored in relation to specific socio-economic (self-rated income group, benefit status and employment status) and demographic (gender and age) characteristics. Not only were men more likely to support the redistribution of income in comparison to women, this group were also more inclined to agree that welfare payment generosity led to dependency amongst benefit recipients. Though it was surprising that men were more likely than women to support income redistribution, given that women are more likely to access social

security provisions due to positions of disadvantage relating to their gender (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Conley, 2012; Nandi and Platt, 2012; Oxfam, 2012; Ginn, 2013; UKCES, 2014; De Henau and Reed, 2016), it was posited that these findings may have been a reflection of a growing awareness of income inequality and of changing positions amongst men. That said, as Table 5.3.1.1 shows, men despite this awareness, were more inclined to agree that independence was lost due to more than adequate welfare provision amongst benefit recipients.

As Table 5.5.1.1 shows, a greater proportion of men than women also agreed that income should be redistributed, despite also agreeing welfare generosity resulted in dependence in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Table 5.5.1.1 also shows that support toward redistribution amongst men and women decreased amongst men and women who also agreed that welfare generosity led to dependence in 2009. Whilst 56.2% of men agreed that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet', of this proportion just 32.5% also supported the redistribution of income, compared to the 40.9% of men that supported the redistribution of income (Table 4.2.1.2), this is a decrease of 8.4 *pp*.

This pattern also occurred amongst women, where 50.7% agreed that independence was lost due to generous benefit payments and of this proportion, support toward redistribution fell by 5.4 *pp* to just 28.6%. In 2012, 54.6% of men held this negative perception, of this proportion just 37.0% supported monetary redistribution. Compared to the support toward income redistribution identified in Table 4.2.1 this is a decrease of 7.4 *pp*. Support toward income redistribution amongst women (39.9) who also agreed that benefit recipients were dependent due to generosity (35.9) also fell by 4.0 *pp*.

Falling levels of support toward redistribution continued in 2015, where support toward income redistribution amongst men (50.2%) and women (39.6%) as identified in Section 4.2, were lower amongst men (38.5%) and women (33.7%) who also agreed that benefit recipients were dependent on their payments due to generosity. Although these findings show how attitudes towards redistribution differ amongst men and women who also agree that welfare benefits are too generous and lead to dependency, these findings are not significant.

Age however related to perceptions in 2009. Section 4.2.1 demonstrated that income redistribution is more favourable amongst older members of the public, but with exception to 2012, was less favourable amongst younger people aged 18-34. Perceptions of benefit claimants as dependent due to generous benefit payments, were also more likely amongst older members of the public in 2012 and 2015, though in 2009 this perception was more likely amongst people aged 18-34. Table 5.5.1.1 shows how attitudes toward redistribution amongst people who also agreed that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet' changed. For the most part, amongst people who agreed that high benefit payments led to dependency, support toward redistribution decreased amongst each age group, in each year.

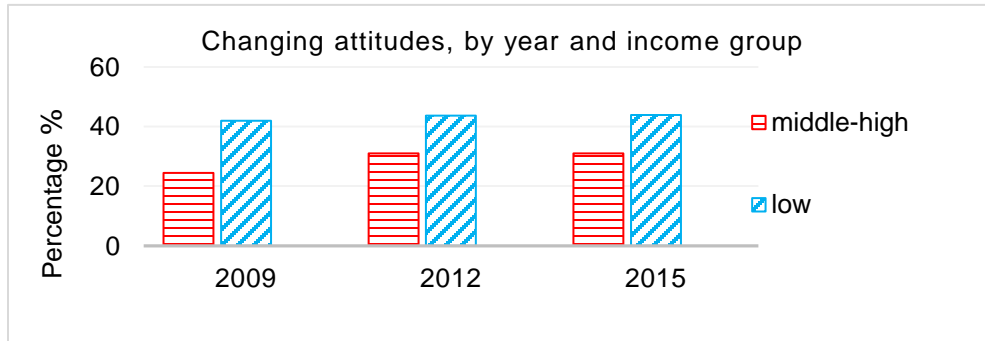
In 2009, amongst people who perceived of benefit payments creating dependency, support toward redistribution decreased by 13.8 *pp* amongst people aged 35-64, and by 9.3 *pp* amongst people aged 65 and over. Support toward income redistribution, however, increased by 5.4 *pp* amongst people aged 18-34, increasing from 36.5% (Table 4.2.1.2) to 41.9%. These findings show that perceptions are related to age in 2009 ( $\chi^2=15.111$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). For the most part, negative attitudes towards benefit recipients reduces the likelihood of support toward redistribution by age, with exception to 2009, where young people became more likely to agree if they also agreed that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet'.

As Figure 5.5.1.1 and Table 5.5.1.1 show, attitudes toward the redistribution of income amongst people who agreed that the generosity of welfare benefits led to dependency, also differed by income group. Section 4.2.1 showed how people with low incomes were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009, 2012 and 2015. People in receipt of high income in 2009 and 2012 were less likely to support monetary redistribution, in 2015 however it was people on middle incomes who were least likely to agree that the government should redistribute income.

It was expected that similar findings would be observable in this analysis, with low income earners remaining more likely to support income redistribution, despite also agreeing that welfare generosity led to a lack of independence. It was also expected, however, that support toward redistribution would be lower than the proportions observed in Table 4.2.1.2, given that benefit dependency is reflective of a common negative attitude toward welfare recipients.

As Table 5.5.1.1 shows, this latter expectation was reflected in this analysis. Support toward the redistribution of income is less likely amongst people in receipt of middle-high and low incomes who also agreed that a lack of independence was fostered amongst benefit recipients due to the generosity of the benefit payments awarded.

**Figure 5.5.1.1:** Levels of agreement with: ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet’, and ‘the government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off’, by year and income group (analysis based on BSA Survey, 2009 and 2015).



In 2009 support for the redistribution of income fell amongst low income earners, decreasing by 3.0 *pp*, from 44.9% (Table 4.2.1.1) to 41.9%. These findings show that support toward income redistribution remained much higher amongst low income earners in 2009, but that attitudes are also related to perceptions of welfare recipients, where there is a relationship between negative attitudes and redistributive support ( $\chi^2=16.654$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Similarly, in 2012 support toward redistribution amongst middle-high income earners fell amongst those who also agreed that welfare generosity resulted in a lack of independence amongst benefit claimants. Of the proportion of low-income earners who agreed with this perspective (51.3%) support toward income redistribution declined (decreasing by 2.0 *pp*, from 45.7% to 43.7%). These findings suggest that in 2012 there is a relationship between negative perceptions and support toward redistribution, where negative perceptions amongst low income earners reduce this groups willingness and the likelihood of this group supporting income redistribution ( $\chi^2=24.823$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

People in receipt of low incomes were also less likely to support redistribution, if they also agreed that welfare benefits were too generous in 2015. As Table 4.2.1 and Table 5.5.1.1 show, support toward government income redistribution decreased from 50.0% to 43.9%. These findings suggest that there is a relationship between attitudes toward welfare

recipients as dependent and support toward redistribution by income group in 2015 ( $\chi^2=24.441$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Similar findings were observed by benefit status. As Table 5.2.1.1 shows, people who were in receipt of benefits were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009, 2012 and 2015 (though in 2009 the findings were not significant), this was expected given that this group benefit from the redistribution of income. As Table 5.3.1.1 shows, in comparison to non-claimants, this group were also less inclined to agree that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet', though these findings were not significant in 2009, 2012 or 2015. Table 5.5.1.1 shows how attitudes towards redistribution amongst benefit recipients and non-claimants differed, if they also shared this common negative opinion.

People who were in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was) and whom are therefore more likely to be in receipt of lower incomes, were more likely to agree with the redistribution of income in 2015, in comparison to non-claimants in 2015, despite holding this perception. These findings also show that compared to the findings outlined in Section 4.2.1, support toward the redistribution of income is less likely amongst benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) and non-claimants in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Support amongst benefit recipients decreased by 9.9 *pp*, falling from 38.3% to 28.4% in 2009, decreasing further by 2.3 *pp* amongst claimants (or those with a spouse in receipt). These findings appear to suggest that amongst benefit claimants and non-claimants who agreed welfare generosity led to dependency, support toward income redistribution was reduced, though these findings are not significant.

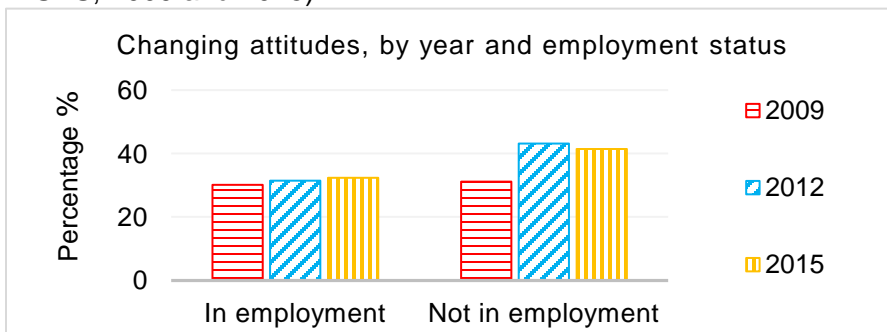
In 2012 support toward redistribution continued to decrease amongst both groups who shared this view, falling from 43.7% to 37.8% (decrease of 5.9 *pp*) amongst benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) and by 5.4 *pp* amongst non-claimants (falling from 39.8% to 34.4%), though these findings are not statistically significant. In 2015, the findings show that attitudes amongst claimants and non-claimants who held this negative perception, changed, with the likelihood of supporting redistribution decreasing. These findings suggest that in 2015 negative perceptions toward welfare recipients amongst claimants and non-claimants are related to redistributive support, with benefit recipients remaining more likely to support income redistribution, but with this proportion falling

amongst benefit recipients who also agree that welfare generosity leads to dependence ( $\chi^2=21.755$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Similarly, as Figure 5.5.1.2 shows, in 2009, 2012 and 2015, amongst people who agreed, support for the redistribution of income were lower amongst those in employment, than those not in employment. In both 2012 ( $\chi^2=21.316$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and 2015 ( $\chi^2=12.059$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), people who were not in employment were more likely to support the redistribution of income, than those in employment, despite also expressing the opinion that generosity of benefit payments resulted in dependence amongst benefit recipients. These findings also show how attitudes changed amongst people who shared a negative assumption toward benefit recipients.

In comparison to the support toward income redistribution by employment status outlined in Section 4.2, and with exception to 2009, support amongst people in and outside of the labour market was significantly reduced in 2012 and 2015. Redistributive support amongst people outside of the labour market who also agreed that welfare generosity fostered dependence fell by 8.7 *pp* in 2009, though this change was not significant. In 2012, support amongst people outside the labour market declined significantly, if they also agreed that a lack of independence was a result of generous benefit payments (decreasing from 47.9% to 43.2%) and by 5.8 *pp* in 2015 (decreasing from 47.2% to 41.4%).

**Figure 5.5.1.2:** Levels of agreement with: ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet’, and ‘the government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off’, by year and employment status (Analysis based on BSAS, 2009 and 2015).



This pattern also occurred amongst people who also shared this opinion, who were in employment in 2012 and 2015. Support fell by 5.9% in 2012, decreasing from 37.4% to 31.5% (Table 5.5.1.1) and by 10.3 *pp* in 2015, decreasing from 42.7% to 32.4%. These



findings suggest that support toward income redistribution, amongst both those inside and outside of the labour market, is reduced where negative attitudes are also held.

### **5.5.2 Summary**

This section investigated the relationship between redistributive attitudes and attitudes reflective of stereotypical and negative discourse toward benefit recipients. This analysis has shown that amongst people who agree with the statement: 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet', support toward income redistribution is considerably lower. The findings suggest a relationship between negative attitudes and support toward redistribution amongst people by age group in 2009, income group in each year, by benefit status in 2015 and by employment status in 2012 and 2015. Prior to their analytical discussion in Chapter 6, the following section provides a conclusion to this chapter, discussing these findings in relation to the findings identified throughout this chapter.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how attitudes towards people in receipt of support from the welfare state changed during the period of austerity examined here and how attitudes are related to the support expressed toward the redistribution of income. Section 5.1 began by exploring the extent of agreement with the statement: 'many people who get social security don't really deserve any help'. Demonstrating that this perception was one shared by a considerable proportion of the public in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Though the level of agreement increased between 2009-2012, this increase was minimal and was not significant (Table 4.1.1.1). In comparison, the changes between 2012-2015 and between 2009-2015 are significant, with people becoming less likely to perceive of benefit recipients as undeserving. Perceptions of welfare recipients as undeserving were also more likely amongst particular groups. This includes, people aged 65 and over and people with no or other forms of qualifications in 2009, 2012 and 2015, the white majority ethnic group in 2012, the middle-income group and people in receipt of benefits in 2015, and people occupied in intermediate positions in 2012 and 2015. With exception to people working in intermediate positions, for the most part, between 2009-2015 the level of agreement fell within each group.

Comparing the findings outlined in Section 5.1, to those in Section 5.2 suggested some similarities. Between 2009-2012, members of the public became more inclined to agree with the statement: 'most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another', though as Table 5.2.1 shows, this increase was not significant. The changes between 2012-2015 and overall between 2009-2015 are, however, significant and show how people became less likely to perceive fraud as an issue amongst benefit recipients. In 2012 and 2015, people aged 65 and over were also more likely to hold this perception, though in 2009 this was an opinion more likely amongst younger members of the public aged 18-34. People in receipt of benefits themselves (or with a spouse in receipt) were again more likely to hold negative opinions toward welfare recipients in 2015, as were people from minority ethnic groups. In 2009, middle income earners were more likely to agree, whereas in 2012 and 2015 low income earners were more likely to hold this view.

In 2012 and 2015 people working in routine and manual occupations were more likely to perceive fraud as an issue amongst benefit claimants. Mirroring the findings outlined in Section 5.1, people who lacked qualifications were more likely to hold negative perceptions of those in receipt of benefits. This finding also reoccurred in Section 5.3, with this group also more likely to perceive of benefit recipients as dependent due to generous benefit payments, though in 2009 this was more likely amongst people with below degree level qualifications. In 2009, younger members of the public were, as they were in Section 5.2, more likely to share negative perceptions, though in 2012 and 2015 people aged 65 and over were more likely to agree.

People from BAME groups in 2012 were also more likely to agree than people from the majority white ethnic group. Comparatively, in 2009, 2012 and 2015, people in receipt of middle incomes were more likely to perceive of benefit recipients as lacking dependence due to generous welfare payments. This view was also more likely amongst people in employment in 2009 and 2012 and employed in intermediate occupations in 2012 and 2015. Overall between 2009-2015, with exception to women, people aged 65 and over, high and low-income groups, benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt), people not in employment, with no (or other) qualifications and people employed in intermediate occupations, the level of agreement declined.

Section 5.4 and Section 5.5 sought to understand how attitudes toward benefit recipients related to support toward income redistribution. Section 5.4 demonstrated that support

toward income redistribution continued to increase between 2009-2012, 2012-2015 and overall between 2009-2015, but that the proportions observed in Table 5.4.1 were smaller than those identified in Section 4.2. With exception to 18-34-year olds, Section 5.5 demonstrated that support toward income redistribution was lower overall and by socio-economic and demographic characteristics than the support identified in Section 4.2. These findings suggest that amongst people who agree that 'many people who get social security don't deserve any help' and amongst people who agree with the statement: 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet', support toward income redistribution by the government is less likely and this, as identified throughout this research is a problem. These findings are discussed in more detail in the following discussion chapter, which in providing a critical narrative of perceptions of the welfare state and its clients, discusses public perceptions alongside wider social and economic changes in austerity Britain between 2009-2015.

## Chapter 6

### Public perceptions, an analytical discussion

#### 6.1 Introduction and structure of the discussion

Responding to the research questions, this chapter provides an analytical discussion of the findings outlined in Chapter 4 and 5. Providing a backdrop to austerity Britain, this chapter begins with a short, yet critical narrative of the observable social and economic consequences of life lived in austere Britain. Having set the scene, to explore attitudinal changes amongst the British public during the period of austerity examined here, this chapter provides a discussion of attitudinal findings by year. Having discussed perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution by year, thus allowing for an overall picture of attitudes in austerity Britain, attitudinal differences are presented and discussed thematically. Having re-identified why the inclusion of socio-economic and demographic characteristics allows for a greater understanding of attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution, it is argued that this approach will not only inform future attitudinal sociological research but will also highlight where future support may need to be targeted.

During this discussion, not only is recent research drawn upon, the theories identified in Chapter 2 are also revisited alongside the research findings. Thus, the Rational Choice Theory, the spiral of silence model (Scheufele, 2008), the theory of risk aversion and risk exposure (Leon, 2012) are revisited, whilst critically examining social inequalities, alongside attitudinal findings. To further explore attitudinal changes and differences within this chapter, the reference group theory and the reference group reality blend theory (Evans and Kelley, 2017) is considered. The role of altruism, social values and of “empathy and socio-cultural distance” (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:34) are also restated, alongside the inclusion of Cannadine’s “vernacular model” of “us and them” (Cannadine, 1998:19-20).

The first section (6.3.1) begins by discussing perceptions by gender. Drawing on sociological literature, alongside theory, gendered inequalities are thus explored, noting how gendered identities may relate to perceptions. To provide a more nuanced understanding of perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution amongst men and women during this period of austerity, the findings outlined in Section’s 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5

are therefore reexamined together, drawing out both comparisons and disparities in the findings by gender. Having presented an analytical discussion of the findings by gender, the chapter moves to a discussion of attitudinal findings by age (Section 6.3.2).

To provide a broader understanding of perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution by age, the findings presented in Section's 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5 are again refocused within this chapter, drawing out disparities, alongside similarities. Concurrently, perceptions by age are further considered in relation to sociological literature, highlighting inequalities of age, understood in relation to redistributive theories and preferences. Having highlighted how age relates to perceptions, alongside experiences of disadvantage, the same approach is taken to critically understand perceptions by ethnic group. Restating the findings outlined in Section's 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5, perceptions by ethnic group are thus examined in relation to widening instances of inequality (Section 6.3.3). Having provided an analytical account of the experiences of inequality, alongside perceptions the final section brings together the remaining characteristics.

To simplify the analysis, the research findings from Section's 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5, by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status are incorporated into one discussion section (Section 6.3.4). Social inequalities are considered critically, alongside the attitudinal findings, intent on providing a more nuanced understanding of perceptions, drawing on redistributive theories to explore similarities, alongside differences in perceptions toward inequality, poverty and redistribution. Having provided an analytical discussion of the findings by year and characteristic, drawing on research to explore attitudinal changes, sociologically, this chapter is summarised, prior to the introduction of the final chapter of this thesis.

### **6.1.1 Austerity Britain, backdrop**

Following the Beveridge Report in 1942, the Welfare State was restructured, bringing to the fore "a new political commitment; a rewritten social contract between the state and the people" in the UK (Esping-Anderson, 1999:34). Yet, following its inception, it has been considered "contested terrain" (Esping-Anderson, 1999:147), its function questioned (Bartholomew, 2013), alongside who should be responsible for paying for it. For some members of the British public, social security may be regarded as a beneficial resource, for others however, it is regarded a needless expenditure (Alcock and May, 2014). For

Bartholomew, the price to be paid for the welfare state is not only financial, but also social, where for him, it has generated both “morally and culturally impoverished” individuals (2013:352). Whose only prerogative, for others (Humpries, 2013), is to take all they can and input nothing. Similarly, Lowe maintained that the welfare state is accused of being responsible for depleted levels of initiative and for the “creation of a dependency culture or nanny state” (1994:38).

However, and as already emphasised, the “threat of the scrounger” (Deacon, 1978:120) and such “negative sentiments toward the welfare state and a perceived culture of idleness” (Finlay et al., 2013:13) are not new. What is notable, however, is that such attitudes have arguably become more explicit throughout the period of austerity examined here. This kind of rhetoric was also reflected in responses toward the programmes discussed in Chapter 2 and more generally, reflected in attitudes toward inequality and poverty, as a whole. What was less understood was how over the course of austerity examined here, such narratives were reflected amongst the British public, how these related to redistributive support and to what extent this changed over this period of time.

Notably, despite increasing hostility toward taxation (Alcock and May, 2014), the welfare state and its recipients as a whole, the welfare state has nevertheless, survived “one crisis after another” (Esping-Anderson, 1999:147). The latest test was, arguably, brought about by the Coalition and subsequent Conservative government. Where, accompanied by reignited “moral panics” over the welfare state, like those seen during Thatcher’s reign (Friedmann et al., 1987:16), a new attempt to dismantle the welfare state began (Mendoza, 2015), with a familiar target. In the wake of the recession, neo-liberal austerity measures were implemented in an effort to “roll back the state” and thus reduce public spending and the deficit (HM Government, 2010; Crawford et al., 2012; Levitas, 2012; Brady and Bostic, 2015). These changes placed increasing strain on this social contract, where both “tension and anxiety about the role and the future of the welfare state” appeared to intensify (Castell and Thompson, 2007:11), alongside “fears and anxieties” toward people who accessed it (Tyler, 2013:9) or indeed those accused, once again, of “sponging” off of it (Holman, 1978:81).

Whilst previously, the welfare state promised a “guarantee against social risks” (Esping-Anderson, 1999:31), contemporarily, it is accused of creating welfare dependency, rather than that of “opportunity” (O’Hara, 2014:17). Like before, the idea that the “welfare state

cosseted the people, 'sapped their moral fibre', ruined character and destroyed...sturdy independence", returned (Seabrook, 2015:149). The welfare state, understood as a system that not only "feather-bedded" people, but "provided a refuge for the idle and workshy" was thus reignited (Seabrook, 2015:149).

The introduction of austerity measures focused on reducing the deficit by reducing welfare spending and making cuts and changes to the benefit system, have placed further strain on individuals already struggling (Cooper and Whyte, 2017). Indeed, as Esping-Anderson highlighted, "a paradox of our times is the more that welfare states seem unstable, the greater...the demands for social protection" (1999:145). Social protection has arguably been reduced by the consequences of this economic, or indeed ideological plan, and these consequences have been widely evidenced throughout this research. To reiterate, food bank use has increased, signalling the rise of hunger and food poverty (O'Connell and Hamilton, 2017), as have reports of fuel poverty (London, 2017) and personal debt (Ellis, 2017). Alongside this, suicide rates have increased (O'Hara, 2017), as have mortality rates (Dorling, 2017). People have found themselves increasingly more likely to be evicted from their homes, or have seen them repossessed (Paton and Cooper, 2017), and as McCulloch (2017) argues, whilst the prevalence of homelessness has increased, so too has the violence toward rough sleepers.

Whilst these changes have occurred, rising "anxieties and hostilities" toward those in receipt of benefits, also re-emerged (Tyler, 2013:9; Toynbee and Walker, 2015), with the rhetoric of the 'skiver', of the 'work shy' and fraudulent benefit claimant, appearing in tabloid newspapers, broadcasted media, alongside political rhetoric and manifestos (Castell and Thompson, 2007; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Burnett, 2017). People in receipt of benefits were depicted as individuals who had nothing to offer society, but much to draw from it. Borrowing from Seabrook, this perhaps signalled the onset of a reinvigorated "attack on the poor" (2015:151), where as Cooper and Whyte suggest, "pro-austerity governments" found their "scapegoats for the financial crisis", and these were benefit recipients (2017:7-8). Those 'living off the social', were thus the 'others', and needed to be stopped from 'bleeding society dry' (Castell and Thompson, 2007; Bamfield and Horton, 2009).

Issues of whether people were deserving of their circumstances, became of public interest, once more. Those who had made "poor personal choices" (Horton and Gregory, 2009:11),

who failed to strive in a meritocratic society like that of Britain, were the objects of scorn and ridicule (Castell and Thompson, 2007; Dorey, 2010). Notably, both representations and discussions of poverty and inequality, often emphasise how notions of others as “selfish, self-determined, free-riding, anti-social individuals, taking the system for what they can get” predominate (Castell and Thompson, 2007:14-15). Where welfare recipients are often described with both “pejorative and emotive language”, including the label ‘chav’ (Tyler 2008; Tyler 2013).

What is often emphasised less, is that although people are mostly supportive of the welfare state, largely because it corresponds with “deeply held norms of reciprocity and conditional obligations to others” (Fong et al.,2003:1), this conditionality often centres around why people believe others are in the situation they are in, and their apparent “moral failings”, thus whether they could have avoided it, had they tried harder (Clarke and Newman, 2012: 310). Contemporary explanations for why people are impoverished and experiencing inequality, appear to chime with those present in Victorian England, where “fears...about the disorderly, dangerous and depraved lower orders” predominated (Clarke and Newman, 2012:310). Although the demeaning language used to describe the ‘less well off’, is not new and has been in use for a number of generations, it is however powerful, acting as a form of symbolic violence (Mooney and Hancock 2010; Mckenzie, 2015).

The apparent “dysfunctionality” of the poor seeks to “construct and reinforce...attitudes to poverty and welfare”, often hardening attitudes and justifying “harsher welfare policies”, aimed at individuals and groups that need the most support (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination). By contrast to developing countries, the existence of poverty and inequality in the UK, fails to illicit the same response, where an unwillingness to offer “the same kind of sympathy and support” is often observed (Castell and Thompson, 2007:10). Like the language used to describe people in inequality and poverty, stereotypical assumptions and beliefs are also powerful, directing people’s attitudes and behaviours toward others (Glynn et al.,1999; Tyler, 2013). In this way stigma and stereotypical assumptions have “practical consequences” of which are of “great significance for poverty prevention” (Horton and Gregory, 2009:88).

Horton and Gregory argue that the stigmatising process:

*influences social behaviours in ways that can directly affect policy effectiveness; for example, resulting in low take-up of benefits or lack of*



*compliance with policy on the part of the stigmatised. But it is in its effect on social relations, and the resulting negative attitudes towards welfare recipients, that stigma exerts its most pernicious effect (2009:88).*

It can be argued then, that the reinforcement of negativity and prejudice towards those living with the experience of inequality and poverty, has many possible significant outcomes. Not only can they work against preventative strategies, but they also have a detrimental impact on those in receipt of support from the welfare state. The consequences of stereotypes are thus not only “profound” but are also formed as a result of “direct” and indirect experiences, “from what we are told by other people or by the media”, alongside what we observe for ourselves (Glynn et al., 1999:148). Although the effects of mediated discourse are questionable (McQuail, 1994), and the extent of impact the media has on shaping attitudes, and behaviours, remains subject to debate (Holman, 1978), this is one that is not entered into here. Instead, it is recognised that the world is largely “saturated by media sounds and images” (McQuail, 1994:327), and that this does “have some impact” (Holman, 1978:210) on people’s perceptions of others, at least. Hanley reinforces this view, arguing that the media remains a “major influence on public debate, in being both reflectors and shapers of attitudes” (2009:6).

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, more recently the British media has become “saturated” (McQuail, 1994:327) with newly televised images of people who are poor, yet are represented as engaging in the “abuse” of the “social security system”, who “chose [choose] not to work” and who are “scroungers”, who “deserve their poverty” (Holman, 1978:212-213). In the midst of crisis, a genre termed ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) thus emerged, enabling what Shildrick refers to as ‘poverty propaganda’ (2018). Concurrently, concern that these programmes would result in the reinforcement of the perception that people who experience inequality and poverty, do so at their own hands grew (Horton and Gregory, 2009; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Lansley and Mack, 2015; Shildrick, 2018).

Much like Holman observed in the late 1970’s, today people experiencing poverty and inequality are, thus, “cast in an unfavourable light” (1978:212). This genre of television programme, alongside headlines from the printed media and political rhetoric, as emphasised in Chapter 2, can be considered ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) and have an important function and even more important consequences. Because the media has the capacity to “connect people”, it also has the capacity to “build public support for addressing poverty” (Hanley, 2009:7), to provide space to debate, to inform, but also to

neglect important issues. Rather than instances of poverty and inequality in the UK being neglected, however, the consequences of living life on little to no income has become something of a “spectator sport” (Hanley, 2009:7). Thus, as emphasised in Chapter 2, instead of mediated representations seeking to inform others of the extent of poverty and inequality in the UK, the prevalence of ‘scroungers’ has predominated, where the term “scroungerphobia” (Golding and Middleton, 1982:59) can, once again, be utilised to describe the public’s feelings and “intolerance towards those at the bottom” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:296).

Notably, this research has emphasised how people’s attitudes towards those at the “top”, are thus, often considerably different to those directed at people on lower incomes, where “negative and punitive” attitudes prevail (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6; Dorey, 2010). Programmes like Benefit Street arguably seek to reinforce this and, as Burnett argues “to reduce their subjects to objects of ridicule and contempt, turning human struggles into a sneering form of entertainment” (2017:217). People in receipt of benefits or those who are unemployed, have thus become “figurative scapegoats” who are now “imagined to be a parasitical drain and threat to scarce...resources” (Tyler, 2013:9). Whilst the media has the scope for information to be presented to the public, for the stimulation of debate (McKendrick et al., 2008:6), it also has the scope to reinforce these ideas (Tyler 2013), and to reinforce the rhetoric of the undeserving poor, as whole.

For Shildrick and MacDonald these kinds of narratives prove more salient, and “sell better than would the mundane reality” (2013: 296). These “mundane” realities would, should they become the focus of the British tabloid press, and indeed politicians, include headlines concerning the reliance on food that is past its sell-by date, how working for a minimum wage means “drudgery”, and how many individuals and families are “going without”; instead they are focused on fraud, and the imagined “luxurious lives of families on benefits” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:296). Whilst an analyse of the relationship between the media and perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution is beyond the scope of this thesis, the prevalence of ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) and ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) have been incorporated to highlight the social and cultural climate in austerity Britain.

Whilst it has been noted that these representations are not, nor are the associated stereotypical assumptions, new; they are frequent and have incited “outrage against

people in poverty” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:296). Resulting, further, in members of the public struggling to imagine people experiencing disadvantage “in positive terms” (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6). Indeed, whilst research demonstrated how people did believe that the recession had negatively impacted the lives of others, including those on low incomes, attitudes remained centred around the idea of a “culture of poverty” and an “intergenerational transmission of disadvantage” (Fahmy et al., 2012:6). Some considered how structural inequalities created disadvantage, yet highly individualistic “moral distinctions” were also drawn-out between those who deserved help, and those who did not (Fahmy et al., 2012:6).

Both representations, explanations of and attitudes towards people experiencing poverty and inequality, like these are important (Leon, 2012), often feeding into a “widespread belief that, where poverty does exist, it must be self-imposed” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:296). It is argued that stigmatising expressions towards others, function as tool insuring “a form of governance”, resulting in the legitimatisation of both the “reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices” (Tyler, 2013:8). This is also supported by Shildrick (2018). Thus, the longer people experiencing poverty and inequality are framed as deserving of their circumstances, the more difficult these attitudes will be to overcome (Williamson, 1974; Larsen and Dejgaard, 2013).

Understanding how people experiencing poverty and inequality are represented, alongside how people conceive of others in these situations, “provides...insights into the legitimisation of social and economic inequality”, alongside the “legitimacy of collective responses” towards these social issues, like that of initiatives to combat inequality and poverty, and perceptions of the welfare state (Oorschot, 2000:3). As Evans and Kelley stress, if inequality fails to be recognised, “it may have no political consequences; but if it is recognised (or imagined) it will have consequences, perhaps grave ones” and it is for these reasons “it is essential to understand how people perceive their society” (2017:316). As Prabhakar adds, the attitudes of the British public “act as a constraint upon politicians and policy-makers” (2012:78), where public support is necessary to combat inequality and poverty in the UK. Yet, to reiterate, hardening attitudes may also mean that “harsher welfare policies” are supported (Mooney and Hancock, 2010: no pagination) by the British public, rather than challenged. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to determine whether the public supported austerity policies between 2009-2015, the relationship

between negative attitudes toward people experiencing inequality and poverty and support toward redistribution during this period are examined critically.

For Horton and Gregory, writing before austerity measures were enacted, both diminishing levels of “support for redistribution and declining sympathy for those in poverty” were already “reaching crisis proportions” (2009:50-51). Given the level of public resistance towards redistribution, and that much of the literature suggests that attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits are often negative (Holman, 1978; Castell and Thompson, 2007; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Orton and Taylor, 2010; Tyler 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015), it was expected that this would be reflected in the analysis. Thus, it was expected that increasing hostility toward benefit recipients would be observable, and these attitudes would reduce the likelihood of people expressing support toward redistribution. However, it was also expected that the inequality faced by a significant proportion of the British public would also be reflected in the analysis, and that particular groups may not only be more likely to recognise the extent of income inequality, but also found to be becoming increasingly more likely to support measures to combat disadvantage over time.

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, however, attitudes are complex, contradictory and change, and this is also reflected in societies in which they are formed (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007; Voas, 2014; Evans and Kelley, 2017). The findings of the analysis presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 further support this contention. With this in mind, whilst this section has set the scene, the following section draws on the available research, alongside the research questions, critically discussing the findings outlined in Section’s 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5 to explore public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution over the course of austerity examined here (2009-2015).

## **6.2 Public perceptions, by year**

This section focuses on exploring British social attitudes between 2009-2015 and on the research questions outlined in Section 1.3. A range of the available social, political and economic literature is drawn on to explore the attitudes of the British public, bringing together the findings from Section’s 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5, to understand how people perceived of income inequality between groups, the extent of support for redistribution and how benefit recipients were perceived during this period. Concurrently, the relationship

between negative attitudes toward those in receipt of benefits and support toward income redistribution is also considered critically.

In doing so, this discussion is focused on exploring the following research questions:

- To what extent have attitudes towards poverty and inequality changed following the introduction of austerity measures in 2010?
- How are people in receipt of social security benefits perceived by others?
- To what extent do negative attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits relate to the level of support expressed toward income redistribution?

Over the course of austerity examined here, inequality and poverty have increased, with the consequences of austere policies already emphasised (Chapter 2). As this chapter sought to reiterate, the social, cultural, political and economic environment in austerity Britain has been a key part of the focus of this research. Intent on the provision of a sociological exploration of social inequalities and attitudes during this period, this meant drawing on a wide range of research to explore austerity Britain through a sociological lens. Demonstrating the importance of sociological research, this section focuses on bringing key elements of this research together, discussing social inequalities and attitudinal differences, to explore attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution by year. To do so, the available literature is drawn on, alongside the provision of a critical narrative, highlighting the findings but also the expectations, prior to analysis.

Whilst Orton and Rowlingson (2007) suggest that concern for inequality should rise in line with increasing inequality, it was however, unclear whether the findings outlined in Section 4.1 would reflect this assumption. Despite growing social inequalities, the prevalence of 'poverty porn' (Jensen, 2013) and 'poverty propaganda' (Shildrick, 2018) also predominated during the period of austerity examined here. Though not unchallenged (Section 2.5.2), not only was this present in broadcasted and printed media, this was discussed on social media platforms and reflected in political rhetoric. Given these factors, it might be expected that this would be reflected in the analysis, where the extent of income inequality would be underestimated, and perhaps reduce over time. In this way, not only would a small proportion of the public agree that 'the gap between people on high and low incomes is too large', this proportion would decrease from 2009, into 2012 and 2015.

Instead, Orton and Rowlingson's assumption is, in part, reflected in the analysis. Not only did a substantial proportion of the public agree that the income gap is 'too large', levels of agreement increased significantly between 2009-2012 (Section 4.1.1). Findings from Table 4.1.1.1 also support this, suggesting that in comparison to people in 2009, people in 2012 were significantly more likely to agree. Thus, rather than reflecting popular discourse, these findings appear to echo those of Irwin's (2016) and Fahmy et al. (2012), suggesting that people were both aware of and concerned about the prevalence of income inequality in Britain. Perhaps then, given these findings it could be argued that the "mundane" realities (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013:296) of life lived on a low income, began to resonate amongst the public to a greater extent than before austerity measures were enacted.

Between 2012-2015, however, attitudes changed (Table 4.1.1). Concern toward income inequality, declined significantly, falling to a level lower than observed in 2009. The findings identified in Table 4.1.1.1 also reflect this, where compared to people in 2009, in 2015 people were less likely to recognise the income gap as 'too large'. In the context of austerity Britain, this attitudinal change amongst members of the British public occurred following key changes to the administration of benefits and cuts to public spending, with the changes implemented resulting in further inequality of income, (Fawcett, 2013; Ginn, 2013; WBG, 2013; Rubery, 2015; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Mendoza, 2015; UNCESCR, 2016), thus widening the gap between those on high and low incomes.

Alongside these changes, what is also particularly interesting to consider, is how between 2012-2015, there was a rise in the number of broadcasted television programmes, depicting those in receipt of low incomes and in receipt of benefits, in often exploitative and derogatory ways (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Penny, 2013; Jensen, 2013). The programmes noted in Section 2.3, reinforce a number of long running stereotypes attributed to benefit claimants, this includes: fraudulence, dependence, criminality, over reproductivity amongst mothers on benefits, and an unwillingness to work (Baker and McEnergy, 2015; Brooker et al., 2015; Paterson et al., 2016; van der Bom et al., 2018). Another focus within these programmes concerned the consumption patterns of those experiencing inequality, here responses to these programmes involved queries surrounding purchases made, including tobacco and alcohol. Thereby implying that benefits were generous, but also that those featured in these programmes were both

'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 2007) alongside irresponsible (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Brooker et al., 2015; Paterson et al., 2016; van der Bom et al., 2018).

Alongside broadcasted media, tabloid newspapers and politicians also, arguably, engaged in the spreading of 'poverty propaganda' (Shildrick, 2018). This was particularly prevalent in 2015's General Election and the Conservative Manifesto (Conservative Manifesto, 2015). Theorists have, subsequently, questioned both the timing of these programmes and the producers' intentions, suggesting the focus sought to divide the public, in order to validate austere cuts to benefits and public spending (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Penny, 2013, Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Shildrick, 2018). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to suggest that the media directly influenced the attitudinal changes observed in this research, as McKendrick et al. (2008) explain, how individuals come upon poverty, and by extension inequality, not only guides their understanding, but also their responses toward it. In this way, not only are the processes of attitude formation complex (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007), attitudes occur as a result of social and cultural interaction (Voas, 2014), varying, as do the "cultural and social conditions" (Underwood, 2009:113) wherein they are formulated. It is therefore necessary to understand what available narratives were prevalent during the period of austerity examined here.

Whilst it remains unclear how members of the British public formed their attitudes, what is clear from the findings outlined so far, is that following the onset of the recession and the implementation of austerity measures, concern toward income inequality rose as inequality did. Yet, as key changes were ushered in and the effects of austerity became explicit, concern toward inequality of income between groups, declined. These declining levels of agreement also occurred alongside the rise of the programmes considered 'poverty porn' (Jensen, 2013) or containing what Shildrick (2018) refers to as 'poverty propaganda' and following the election of a new Conservative government in 2015. That said, despite falling levels of agreement, a large proportion of the public continued to recognise the extent of income inequality, through the shared view that the income gap is 'too large'.

As Evans and Kelley (2017:316) remind us, there is an ongoing conflict, one that exists "between the equality advocated by the left and inequality favoured by the right" and this conflict has shaped "modern western politics" and continues to do so. This conflict was arguably observable in both 2010 and 2015's General Elections. Alongside the enactment and continuation of austerity policies, what has also been increasing, is what

Hatzisavvidou described as a rise in the number of “agents of [an] anti-austerity rhetoric” (2018:no pagination) and this has included: UK Uncut, the People’s Assembly, Left Unity, SNP, and the Green Party. In the 2015 General Elections, leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, became an influential voice in the wider anti-austerity campaign, demonstrating the need to end austerity and highlighting the consequences of the related policies over time (Grierson and Slawson, 2017). Whilst it might have been expected that this would also have been reflected in these findings, given that these findings were collected (July) shortly after the election (May), the decrease in the number of people subscribing to the view that income gap is too large could suggest that this may not be the case.

That said, More recently, as Clery and Dangerfield highlight, “the proportion favouring the view that the income gap is too large has remained relatively stable across the lifetime of the survey”, and this, they highlight, has fluctuated between 72% and 85%, meaning that “the proportion expressing this view has remained relatively stable over the past decade” (2019:13). As a result, they question whether “attitudes here align more closely with objective trends in inequality”, as opposed to “political and media discourse around this issue” (Clery and Dangerfield, 2019:13). Clery and Dangerfield also add, however, that “the fact that a substantial majority support this view” also means there may be “less potential to see an upward shift in views” (2019:13).

The extent of support expressed toward the redistribution of income by the British public was another key focus of this research. Whilst, as already emphasised, Fong et al. note that as a result of “norms of reciprocity” people are largely supportive of the welfare state, they also stress the conditional element of this support (2003:1). Thus, support is often extended only toward those who are considering ‘deserving’ of help. Prior to the introduction of austerity measures, and the rise of ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018), Horton and Gregory had already observed falling levels of redistributive support, alongside diminishing levels of “sympathy for those in poverty” (2009:50-51). Given these observations and that, as Section 2.4.1 and 2.5.1 emphasised, negative attitudes towards people in receipt of redistributed income prevail (Holman, 1978; Castell and Thompson, 2007; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Orton and Taylor, 2010; Tyler 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015), it was expected that this would be reflected in the analysis. Thus, that low levels of agreement with the statement



'the government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well off' would be observable, alongside declining levels of redistributive support, as austerity continued.

Notably, these assumptions are partly reflected in the findings outlined in Section 4.2. Support for the redistribution of income between groups is particularly low, resonating amongst less than half of the British public in 2009, 2012 and 2015. This suggests that whilst the British public largely agree the income gap between those with a high and low income is 'too large', much fewer support a method to reduce this income gap. What Table 4.2.1 also shows, however, is a significant increase in the redistributive support extended by members of the public between 2009-2012 and 2009-2015. Table 4.2.1.1 also suggest that year has a significant effect on attitudes, where in comparison to people in 2009, people were 1.242 times more likely to agree in 2012 and 1.383 times more likely to support redistribution in 2015.

Given these findings, public perceptions of redistribution appeared to be reflective of the thermostat effect in both 2012 and 2015 (Curtice, 2010), and more recent data suggests that this continued to be reflected amongst attitudinal data post 2015 (Curtice, 2016). As Curtice highlighted, in 2016 there were "signs of a reaction against the fiscal discipline of recent years", where reflecting the 'thermostat' (Curtice, 2010), and with a greater proportion than in a decade, 48% of the British public felt that "the government should increase taxes and spend more" (2016:1). Perhaps then, based on this argument, the findings outlined in this research, could be understood as signalling a loss in support toward austerity policies or at the very least, some agreement amongst the public "that government cuts back on spending" resulted in the provision of "less satisfactory" services (Curtice, 2016:3) and indeed greater levels of inequality. That said, despite these increases, again in comparison to the perceived need of intervention to reduce the income inequality gap, these proportions remain particularly low.

These findings appeared contradictory and led to further analyse, focused on exploring the possible relationship between perceptions of the income gap and of the redistribution of income. Section 4.3 illustrated how attitudes are often marked by contradiction. This statement is supported by the disparities between the proportion of people who agreed that 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large' and the proportion amongst this group, who also agreed that 'the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off'. These proportions are, however, observably greater than those

identified in Section 4.2. Whilst this analysis may have seemed common-sense and thus futile, with the results expected; given that attitudes are often inconsistent, this 'puzzle' (Rowlingson et al., 2010) warranted further investigation during this period.

These findings can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, support for the redistribution of income is more likely amongst people who also agree that income inequality between groups is 'too large'. Thus, members of the public whom recognise income inequality as an issue, are more likely to support measures to combat it. Secondly, and further demonstrating the contradictory nature of attitudes, although people may regard the income gap between those with high and low incomes as one that is too large, this does not mean they too are entirely supportive of the redistribution of income as a method intent on "narrowing the gap between rich and poor" (Mack and Lansley, 1985:223).

Since McKendrick et al. (2008), Monnickendam and Gordon (2010) and Prabhaker (2012) place strong emphasis on the role of the public and social policy, these findings are problematic. Both McKendrick et al. (2008) and Clarke and Newman (2012) consider how members of the public are often supportive of measures to tackle inequality (like that of redistribution) but stress how attitudes relating to why people are experiencing hardship may stand in the way of full support being extended. Mack and Lansley support this, highlighting that a "moralistic stance" is taken by the public, thus reflecting the contention that "some groups are poor or are in need because of their own personal failing than society's" (1985:210). In this way, if personal circumstances reflect "individual inadequacies" like that of "fecklessness, mismanagement and feebleness", then "disapproval" will often follow (Mack and Lansley, 1985:210). By extension, this may reduce the likelihood of people extending their support toward redistribution.

This is descriptive of the "conditional obligations" considered by Fong et al. (2003:1), further implying that if people fail to meet these conditional requirements, support for redistribution will be lacking. Given this, and the evidence drawn on in Section's 2.4.1 and 2.5.1, Chapter 5 explored negative attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits, reflective of some of the key themes drawn out in the literature. Accordingly, emphasis was placed on the rhetoric of the undeserving poor, of fraudulence amongst benefit recipients and a culture of dependency as a result of generous benefit payments. As Section 2.5 emphasised, much like Townsend (1979:427) observed, "punishing attitudes to poverty" continue, with the "the notion of the undeserving poor" remaining popular (JRF, 2016:8).

Toynbee and Walker note the contrasts between the two groups, one distinguished as “moral” and “deserving”, the latter depicted as “undeserving” and “immoral” (2015:9).

Seabrook sought to understand how this has occurred, exploring the historical representations of people in poverty and reactions towards them (2015). Noting continuities over time, he argues whilst “the savagery is mitigated with time; the odium remains” (2015:45). Here, Seabrook is referring to the practice of branding those considered Vagabonds with the letter V, more contemporarily, however, people experiencing inequality continue to be represented unfavourably (Holman, 1978), figuratively branded “immoral, godless, ignorant, feckless, infantile” (Ferdinand, 2010:175), alongside ‘shirkers’, ‘lazy’, ‘profligate’, ‘work shy’ (Pantazis, 2016). Because these descriptions are individualistic (Pantazis, 2016), as Shildrick and MacDonald note, such portrayals lead to the assumption that hardship is “self-imposed” (2013:296). This has continued to occur during austerity, with welfare claimants arguably framed to reinforce this rhetoric in programmes like Benefits Street (Paterson et al., 2016; Shildrick, 2018).

Given these factors, Chapter 5 thus explored the extent of negative attitudes towards recipients of welfare support, but also considered again, support toward income redistribution. Not only did this Chapter respond to the first research question: How are people in receipt of social security benefits perceived by others? This section also sought to respond to the third research question: to what extent do negative attitudes toward those in receipt of benefits relate to the level of support expressed toward income redistribution? Further, in considering attitudinal differences between years, the second research question: to what extent have attitudes towards poverty and inequality changed following the introduction of austerity measures in 2010? was also explored.

It was expected that the findings outlined in Chapter 5 would reflect the growing body of literature discussed in this research (Section 2.5), which suggests that attitudes toward benefit recipients and people experiencing inequality are hostile, alongside punitive. However, as Table 5.1.2 shows, a different picture emerged. In 2009, in the aftermath of the economic crash, a little over a third of the British public agreed that ‘many people who get social security don't really deserve any help’. Concurrently, Table 5.2.2 also showed that a similar proportion of the public also agreed that fraudulence was an issue amongst “most people” in receipt of benefits in 2009. These findings initially suggested that in the wake of recession, the majority of the public expressed more benevolence towards people

receiving benefits, than negative sentiments toward this group. Thus, supporting those of Taylor-Gooby, who demonstrated that in times of national economic hardship, like that of recessions, people are often more compassionate towards those in receipt of social security benefits (2004).

That said, the findings in Table 5.3.2 suggest, however, that this may not be reflective of the whole picture. Not only did the public regard welfare generosity and dependency as an issue amongst benefit claimants, by comparison to the findings outlined in Table 5.1.2 and 5.2.2, this was an issue that resonated amongst more members of the public. In 2009, over half the public agreed that ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’. This latter finding points to research that has shown how this perception is one that is reoccurring (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Hills, 2015) and as Mooney and Hancock (2010) and Penny (2013) argue, was one given prominence in programmes depicting the lives of people in receipt of benefits. This, for Mooney and Hancock, was achieved with a focus on their consumption patterns, or rather on “non-essentials” like alcohol, cigarettes and electrical goods, thus they argue, leading viewers to conclude that “the benefits which claimants receive must be ‘too much’...” (2010: no pagination). As already stated, this was also reflected amongst political rhetoric.

By 2012 however, not only had the Coalition been in office, driving a programme of austerity for two years, *The Welfare Reform Act* had also passed, receiving royal assent in March of that year (Park et al., 2012b). This act's purpose was to ensure “far-reaching changes” were made to the “benefits and tax credits system”, thus over time, seeking to “reduce the underlying demand for welfare support” (Park et al., 2012b:3). Given these changes, alongside mediated and political coverage, it was expected that the analysis would reflect this, and that as a result greater proportions of the public may express a more punitive attitude towards those in receipt of benefits.

As expected, attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits did change in this period. The proportion of people agreeing that benefit recipients were undeserving of help and fraudulently claiming in some way, increased. Perceptions of benefit recipients as dependent, due high benefit payments also increased during this period. The greatest changes were, however, observable amongst people who agreed that benefit recipients were ‘fiddling in one way or another’ (Table 5.2.1). These attitudinal changes suggest that between 2009-2012, attitudes toward those in receipt of benefits hardened. Whilst these

changes could reinforce the idea that as a climate of austerity continued, as did rising hostility towards those in receipt of benefits, the public's view too changed direction, hardening as a result. As Park et al. emphasise, such perceptions of others as 'undeserving' have been observable for some time (2012b), and as the findings presented in Table's 5.1.1, 5.2.1 and 5.3.1 suggest, these increases between years are not significantly different.

Despite what could be considered as only a small proportion of the British public holding views that chime with the rhetoric of the 'skiver' and 'undeserving poor' (Holman, 1978; Castell and Thompson, 2007; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Orton and Taylor, 2010; Tyler 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015), it would however be a mistake to offset concerns over the erosion of social cohesion (Orton and Taylor, 2010), and to draw conclusions of the possible impact of 'poverty porn' and 'poverty propaganda', during the period of austerity, based on these findings alone. Instead, because a considerable proportion of the British public have remained consistent in the view that many people are 'undeserving' of help, with the lowest levels of agreement seen in 1993, climbing thereafter, until peaking to 40% in 2005 (Park et al., 2012b:24), this is suggestive of shifts (Tyler, 2008) amongst the British public, with the gaps in social distance (Bottero 2005) arguably extending and retracting over time.

The findings drawn on so far, suggest that the public were not only aware of the income gap, but wished to see income redistributed, though to a much lesser extent. Indeed, those unsure whether they agreed with redistribution, alongside those who disagreed, were closer to the proportion of individuals whom recognised the income gap between groups is 'too large'. Suggesting that although the income gap was perceived of as 'too large', redistributing income was considered less of a priority. Further, these findings reflect a sense of "mistrust" (Penny, 2013: no pagination) among people, who alongside holding these views, were also seemingly dubious of benefits claimants in relation to fraud and to a greater extent dependency, alongside concerned with ensuring help reached the most 'deserving'.

Between 2012-2015, however, attitudes toward benefit recipients appeared to change again. These changes were expected to reflect the political rhetoric during this period, and further the discourse surrounding benefit recipients and the welfare state as a whole. Thus, it was expected that these findings would be comparable with those of the dominant

political narrative of this period. This assumption can be supported by considering the rhetoric drawn on by George Osborne, the then chancellor of the exchequer, at a Conservative party conference in 2012 further, where he remarked:

*where is the fairness...for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next-door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits (in Jowit, 2013: no pagination).*

Such narratives reinforce the rhetoric of the undeserving poor, where the shirker is held in stark contrast to the worker, intensifying public mistrust of those who pay taxes and those in receipt of benefits. This rhetoric also reinforces notions of a dualism between the “bad benefit claimant” and the “good worker” (Patrick, 2012:10). Osborne, was moreover, not the only political figure that expressed such views, nor did he appear to be unsupported by the Conservative government in their manifesto. Indeed, this is observable in the reforming welfare section, where a discussion of the changes to be implemented (should they gain office), concluded with the Conservatives exclaiming that help would be available for those “who really need it” but that the “days of something for nothing” had come to end (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26).

Had the proportions of people in agreement increased, alongside observably low levels of redistributive support, this could at least partially, be understood as further evidence of how “beliefs about the characteristics and behaviour of claimants” are often taken into consideration (Elizabeth Finn care, 2012:14). With “the latter being strongly influenced by media representations and the assertions of politicians”, alongside personal experience (Elizabeth Finn care, 2012:14). However, growing intensity in punitive attitudes toward people in receipt of benefits is not observable within the findings. Instead, the proportion of people agreeing that people were undeserving of help fell, as did the proportion of people agreeing that fraudulence was something “most” benefit recipients engaged in, and these changes are significantly different. Whilst the proportion of people agreeing that generous welfare benefits resulted in dependency also fell, this change was not only small but also not significant.

Tables 5.1.1.1, 5.2.1.1 and 5.3.1.1 also show how, having taken a number of other factors into account (gender, age, income, benefit status and employment status), the findings by year were related to attitudes. Table 5.1.1.1 suggested that in comparison to people in 2009, people were 0.717 times less likely to agree that many benefit recipients were undeserving of help in 2015. Comparatively, Table 5.2.1.1 suggested that levels of

agreement toward the prevalence of fraud was also less likely in 2015, in comparison to 2009 (0.776 times less likely). These findings were surprising. It was expected that wider social and cultural changes would have been reflected in the findings, with people becoming more likely to express punitive attitudes toward benefit recipients. Indeed, what was notable over this period was how the Coalition was replaced by a Conservative government, who were further united in their efforts to continue the programme of austerity, still headed by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron in 2015. Further, and as emphasised in Chapter 2, the rhetoric of the ‘undeserving poor’, and ‘the work shy’ was rehearsed not only amongst politicians, but also by the media, where ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) and the promotion of ‘poverty propaganda’ emerged on a grand scale.

Concurrently, the Conservatives promised reform, and implied the benefits system “allowed or even encouraged” benefits as a choice, rather than encouraging people to seek employment (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:27). This pledge came a year after the British public were introduced to the controversial Benefits Street (Ch4, 2014) and the residents of James Turner Street, Birmingham and those from Stockton-on-Tees. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, segments of the British public were ‘outraged’ (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) alongside disgusted (Mooney and Hancock, 2010), once again by those who are “at the bottom” (Bottero 2005:29). Whilst such perceptions did, arguably, resonate with a considerable proportion of the British public in 2009, 2012 and 2015, these changes were not only not as great as expected, and the proportion of people sharing these attitudes each year, was also expected to be larger. It has been argued that class polarisation and rising moral panics of the ‘lower orders’ were reignited (Clarke and Newman, 2012) during the period of austerity examined here.

The intensification of negative and punitive representations of and behaviour toward those facing inequality, portrayed as ‘others’ from ‘lower’ social strata, however, also reignited debate over social injustice, public manipulation and political (and mediated) agendas (Castell and Thompson, 2007; Bamfield and Horton, 2009; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Levitas, 2012; Baumberg et al., 2012; Tyler, 2013; Who Benefits?, 2014; McKenzie, 2015; Alston, 2018; Shildrick, 2018). Perhaps then, the majority of the British public resisted reflecting the rhetoric of the undeserving poor and of fraudulence amongst benefit recipients. The findings presented in Table 5.3.1, however, suggest that for more than half of the public at least, the rhetoric of a culture of dependency did resonate to a greater extent. Possible solutions to these findings are discussed in Chapter 7.

Focusing on the contradictory formation of social attitudes and of how negative perceptions of people experiencing poverty and inequality can hinder measures to combat these social issues, the analysis presented in Section's 5.4.1 and 5.5.1 sought to explore possible relationship between negative attitudes toward benefit recipients and support toward redistribution. Focused on two popular stereotypical assumptions, the undeserving poor and dependency, Table 5.4.1 first shows the results of the analysis concerned with understanding how perceptions of benefit recipients as undeserving related to support toward redistribution. The findings suggest, unsurprisingly, that support toward monetary redistribution is considerably less likely amongst people who also share the view that 'many people who get social security don't...deserve help'. This finding appears to reflect those of Fong et al. who suggest that perceptions of why need is necessary can impede the likelihood of supporting policy initiatives (2003).

This was also reflected in Table 5.5.1. Amongst those who agreed that 'if welfare benefits weren't so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet', support toward the redistribution of income was both less likely and lower than the proportions observed in Table 4.2.2, in each year. Though this may have been expected, this nevertheless strengthens the assumption that whilst punitive attitudes are shared by the British public, support toward redistribution will be lacking and this is a problem in need of addressing. Chapter 7 discusses this issue further, suggesting what could be done to reduce the impact of negative attitudes toward people in receipt of inequality and poverty on support toward redistribution. The following section summarises the attitudinal findings drawn on in this discussion.

### **6.2.1 Summary**

In exploring the research questions, drawing on findings from Sections 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5, alongside the available literature, this chapter has thus far enabled a sociological discussion of attitudinal changes. Alongside an understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political environment in austerity Britain between 2009-2015. In summary, this section has highlighted that between 2009-2012 the proportion of the British public believing that income inequality is a gap 'too large' increased. But by 2015, the proportion in agreement fell. Despite decreasing levels of agreement, perceptions of the income gap as 'too large' however, remained prevalent amongst a large majority of the British public.



Despite the majority of the public acknowledging the existence of large income gaps between groups, support for the redistribution of income was much lower. Although the public became more likely to support redistribution, reflecting the ‘thermostat effect’ (Curtice, 2010) this was an initiative supported by less than half of the British public in 2009, 2012 and 2015. As demonstrated in Section 4.3, support towards the redistribution of income is, however, related to perceptions of the income gap. More specifically, support for the redistribution of income is significantly greater amongst people who agree that ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’. But, as these findings suggest, recognition of the extent of the income gap does not necessarily result in support toward measures to close this gap.

Alongside these attitudinal differences, attitudes that arguably reflect the ‘poverty propaganda’ Shildrick (2018) observed, are also present amongst the public. Between 2009-2015, attitudes toward benefit recipients fluctuated. In 2009, more than half of the British public regarded benefit payments as too generous and thus resulting in dependency. Though to a lesser extent, over a third of the public, also agreed that ‘many’ people in receipt of social security do not ‘really deserve help’, with slightly fewer in agreement that many of those in receipt of benefits were doing so fraudulently in some way. By 2012, shared attitudes reflective of this stereotypical discourse, appeared to increase. Though these increases between years were not statistically significant, they show how attitudes changed from those observed in 2009 and those collated in 2012. By 2015, however, the likelihood of agreement fell again. Suggesting that the contention that ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet’ remained more of a concern (52.9%), relative to concerns about deservingness (28.7%), or indeed fraudulence amongst claimants (29.8%).

To reiterate, though much larger proportions of the public recognise the gap between low and high incomes as one that is too large, this does not mean they are also likely to be fully supportive of the redistribution of income. Though the prevalence of stereotypical attitudes is lesser than those expected, as this research has identified, these attitudes are related to support toward redistribution. Thus, attitudes reflective of stereotypical assumptions like that of welfare generosity and dependency or indeed deservingness, reduce the support needed to combat inequality, meaning that efforts to close the gap between groups, thus reducing social inequalities, are hindered if not halted entirely.

With this issue in mind, further exploration was needed. Having discussed the findings in relation to the literature by year, the following sections explore each research question again, focussing the analysis by discussing the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the British public. Accordingly, the following section draws on the findings outlined in Chapter 4 and 5, discussing the findings in relation to the available literature to explore attitudinal differences in relation to socio-economic and demographic characteristics. The section begins with an introduction, noting how attitudes are understood in this research. Not only does this section draw on redistribution preference theories (2.6.2.1), Cannadine's (1998) two-sided model is considered, critically, alongside the findings and the literature presented in Chapter 2.

### **6.3 Public perceptions by socio-economic and demographic characteristics, introduction**

The British public's attitudes have been explored by socio-economic and demographic characteristics, not only to understand how aspects of social identity relate to perceptions, but to also identify the direction of future attitudinal research and where future support may need to be targeted. This is, however, a complex endeavour. Chapter 2 highlighted how attitudes are formed in a number of ways, including through interaction, with attitudes often reflective of social distance and as ways in which people position themselves relative to others (Goffman, 1959; Hogg and Terry, 1980; Bottero, 2005, Underwood, 2009; Voas, 2014). Not only do attitudes reflect personal experiences, some may reflect the attitudes of others or may even differ markedly within some social situations (Goffman 1959; Bottero, 2005). What is also acknowledged, is how individuals possess an array of overlapping social identities and that the possession of certain identities, means that some groups are more vulnerable to the experience of inequality and poverty than others (Taylor and Spencer, 2004; UKCES, 2014).

Despite the complex and contradictory intersection of a number of these identities, it is argued that social attitudes can, nevertheless, be predicted based on these identities (Luttig, 2013). In the following sections, alongside the available sociological literature, a range of alternative theories are considered. These theories include: Reference group theory, reference group and reality blend theory (Evans and Kelley, 2017), Rational Choice Theory, the spiral of silence model (Scheufele, 2008) and the theory of risk aversion and

risk exposure (Leon, 2012). To explore attitudinal changes, the role of altruism, social values and of “empathy and socio-cultural distance” (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007:34) are also drawn on. Alongside this, Cannadine’s understanding of “us” and “them” (Cannadine, 1998:19-20) and Bottero’s explanation of the consequences of “images of inequality” (2005:18) are also incorporated.

Prior to this, it is however, necessary to contextualise further and recognise the shifting landscape of Britain over this period (2009-2015). To reiterate, these data were collected in the wake of an economic crisis, a crisis that was to send “shock waves” throughout the UK (Schifferes and Knowles, 2015:46). Such financial instability paved the way for “unprecedented” and “far reaching” reforms (Lupton et al., 2015:1) to the benefit system, including cuts, sanctions and a subsequent increase in inequality and poverty (O’Hara, 2014; Butler, 2015; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Kyprianou, 2015). By 2015 the UK had been headed by the Coalition government, one that was keen to roll out austerity, reduce the deficit and ensure that the country was performing better economically, for a total of five years. Although the Coalition declared that this form of governmental invention was to create a bigger and better society (Building the Big Society, 2010), unequivocally across these years, Britain became a more unequal and a more divided country.

Notably, this polarisation did not just occur economically, but as Chapter 2 and 5 demonstrate, also socially. The rhetoric of the ‘skiver’, of benefit dependency and fraudulent benefit claimants, arguably, intensified this division. As illustrated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, this discourse was not only prevalent in the print media but also broadcast media and was deliberated further across social media platforms (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Skeggs, 2013; Penny, 2013; Kyprianou, 2015; Mckenzie, 2015; Shildrick, 2018). Importantly, this discourse was also verified and adopted by the Coalition and the subsequent Conservative government (Penny, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Mckenzie, 2015; Kyprianou, 2015; Toynbee and Walker, 2015). Chapter 2 highlighted widening social inequalities in the wake of the crisis and subsequent austerity measures. To understand how people perceived of benefit recipients, the income gap and redistributive support, this section seeks to explore the experiences of austerity by social identity.

Whilst it is important to collate statistical data and demonstrate how poverty and inequality manifests and changes over time for, and between different social groups, to really understand poverty and inequality and moreover perceptions of them, statistical evidence

alone is often insufficient (Holman, 1978). Perceptions are thus not formulated within a vacuum, they are intrinsically entwined with societal experiences, personal feelings and moreover attitudes (Holman, 1978). In this way, rather than merely predicting how people will behave, based on their social identities, a level of understanding as to why they may hold certain views is also pertinent. It is for these reasons that the prevailing social, economic, cultural and political environment in austerity Britain were also closely considered.

From a sociological standpoint, it is posited that different groups of people, bound by the same social identities have been repeatedly identified as being at risk or indeed may already be suffering the ill effects of economic disparities in income, and these experiences may better explain attitudinal patterns and changes. Social inequalities in the context of austerity have thus been emphasised, where to be at risk is to possess certain social identities, including yet not limited to being disabled; a child or a woman; from an ethnic minority and or in receipt of a low income (UKCES, 2014; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; UNCESCR, 2016). Though, as this section highlights, further groups became vulnerable over the course of austerity examined here.

Notably, individuals often possess multiple social identities, which may seek to reinforce inequalities or indeed privilege (Taylor and Spencer, 2004; UKCES, 2014). How each intersect is both complex and contradictory, it is nonetheless often possible to gauge social attitudes based on these identities (Luttig, 2013) and in doing so, gain a firmer understanding of which groups are more likely to support redistributive measures. What has however become increasingly clear, is that whilst “widening income inequalities...heightens the need for redistribution” (Wu and Chou, 2017:738), this does not mean there will be resounding support toward this process amongst the British public. Indeed, Section 4.2 and 4.3 highlighted this.

Having reiterated how identity relates to the experiences of inequality, alongside attitudes, the thematic discussion begins by exploring perceptions by gender, followed by age, ethnic group and finally by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status. This discussion chapter will end with a summary, reflecting on the findings of this research, before concluding this chapter.

### 6.3.1 Perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution, by gender

Drawing on research, sociological theory and the findings outlined in Section's 4.1-4.2 and 5.1-5.5, this section begins by exploring perceptions by gender, using the available literature, to explore the attitudinal findings further.

As Chapter 2 emphasises, gender inequalities persist, despite legislative and attitudinal changes in the UK (Banyard, 2010). The disparities between men and women manifest in a number of ways and appear stubborn. Women are over represented amongst those on low incomes, living in poverty and subject to disadvantage in comparison to men (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Nandi and Platt, 2012; Conley, 2012; UKCES, 2014). Due to such subordinate positioning, it is assumed that women are often more altruistic than men and hold more egalitarian views (Goerres and Jaeger, 2016). For these reasons, it is often assumed that women will be more likely to recognise growing income inequality and, in this context, more likely to state that the income gap is 'too large'. By extension, it can also be assumed that women rather than men, will also become increasingly more likely to recognise income inequality over time.

Assumptions toward the redistribution of income are also understood in relation to those outlined in accordance with self-interest (Rational Choice Theory). This hypothesis stresses that those who are more likely to benefit from the redistribution of income, will be more likely to support the process, than those that stand to gain little (Wu and Chou, 2017). Similarly, Whiteley (1981:465-6) describing need explanations and attitudes toward welfare spending, explains how perceptions are often a reflection of "personal and social circumstances", suggesting that people who are in "greatest need" will prove more supportive than those who are "in least need". Noting further, that the latter group will express more concern toward the necessary taxation required to fulfil this objective (Whiteley, 1981). Similarly, Leon (2012) points to how 'risk-exposure' and 'risk-aversion' may also influence opinions. In this way, those who face greater exposure will be more supportive of redistribution, in an effort to evade future difficulties.

Accordingly, it could be assumed that women will be more likely to support the redistribution of income relative to men, because they are more likely to benefit from these measures than men would. In contrast, it could be posited that men may be more concerned with the level of taxation required to enable redistribution, as a group least likely

to be in need. By extension, it could be assumed that women will be less likely to hold negative attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits. The findings presented in Section 4.1, partially support these assumptions. A relationship between gender and attitudes is evident in 2015. As expected, more women than men agreed that income inequality between groups is 'too large'. However, the gap in levels of agreement between men (77.9%) and women (78.1%) is particularly small. Whilst levels of agreement between both men and women declined over the period, this fall is also greater amongst women, than men. The expectation that the gap in levels of agreement between men and women would widen, as the polarisation of income intensified, is therefore not supported by the findings.

The findings outlined in Section 4.2 are also at odds with the expectation that women will be more likely than men to support the redistribution of income, based on the principles of self-interest, risk aversion, altruism and indeed, need explanations. Instead, Table 4.2.2 shows the relationship between gender and attitudes and how men were consistently more likely to support redistribution, in comparison to women. Whilst support for the redistribution of income grew amongst both men and women throughout the period of austerity explored here, support toward this initiative appeared stronger amongst men. Section 4.3 also illustrated how, compared to women, men were more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they also believed that the income gap is 'too large'. Though men were also identified as the group more inclined to hold negative attitudes toward benefit recipients, relative to women these findings were not significant (Table 5.1.2, 5.2.2, 5.3.2).

To summarise, based on these findings, attitudes towards the redistribution of income and of income inequality, are related to gendered identities. The analysis revealed that despite women being more likely to perceive of income inequality as 'too large' in 2015, men were more likely to support measures to combat inequality, like that of redistribution in 2009, 2012 and 2015. The analysis also highlights how both men and women are more likely to support redistribution, if they also agree that income inequality is 'too large'. Though greater proportions of men appeared to hold negative attitudes toward benefit recipients, the findings do not suggest a significant relationship between gender and attitudes toward benefit recipients.

In accordance with the assumptions of the Rational Choice Theory, risk aversion, need explanations and altruistic understandings and relevant literature, these findings appeared surprising. A number of reports noted how women had and would continue to be 'hit'

harder than men by austerity policies (Oxfam, 2012; O'Hara, 2014; De Henau and Reed, 2016). In the aftermath of the recession, concerns were also raised as to how austerity measures may result in greater disparities and worsening gendered inequalities (Fawcett, 2013; WBG, 2013; Rubery, 2015). Policies that were accused of being “gender-blind” (McKay et al., 2013:120) were enacted and fears that these policies posed a real risk of undoing the gains achieved in the ongoing quest for gender equality intensified (Fawcett, 2013; WBG, 2013). In response to these fears, the Fawcett Society (2013) highlighted how measures outlined within *The Equality Act 2006* were being infringed upon within the Coalition's budget. Whilst their efforts were unsuccessful; their motion for a judicial review of the budget was thus denied in the Royal Court of Justice (Millins, 2017), whereby the policies implemented by the Coalition, were not judged as ‘unlawful’ (Fawcett, 2013), this illustrates further how austerity was set to increase polarisation between groups and how this would impact women, relative to men.

Prior to the recession, women were disproportionately represented amongst those vulnerable to poverty, occupying positions in often precarious, low paid and part-time employment roles relative to men (Browne, 2011; Conley, 2012). Not only do men work more hours and have access to higher paid roles, gender disparities within the labour market also have “significant effects on the...gender pay gap” (UKCES, 2014:41), where women are often paid less than men for the same or equivalent roles. Women also continue to fulfil traditional gendered roles within the family, including unpaid domestic labour and childcare responsibilities (Conley, 2012). Women's position in and access to the labour market and higher earnings, are moreover further inhibited due to the fulfilment of the “primary carer role” (De Henau and Reed, 2016:2) and as a result of the associated “interrupted employment histories” (Longhi and Platt, 2008:1). These gendered roles are also notable within the labour market, where occupational segregation and gendered expectations result in “the largest concentration of women's unemployment in what have been called the five C's: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical” (Catney and Sabater, 2015:14).

Although more women are now entering the labour market and there has been a rise in women occupying ‘female breadwinner’ roles in dual households, women remain disproportionately represented amongst those economically inactive, due to ‘looking after the home’, in comparison to men (ONS 2015). In many households' women are also responsible for budgeting and often seek to prioritise the needs of others within the household (Pankhurst, 2002), often to the detriment of their own needs and health

(Bennett and Daly, 2014; Bennett, 2015). Conley stresses that this means women often become both “the managers” and the “shock-absorbers of poverty” (2012:16), so not only do women seek to provide for their families, but they will prioritise the needs of others and in doing so, ‘absorb’ the negative implications (shock) of living in poverty. Such disparities are further evident and compounded within lone parent families, headed by ‘female breadwinners’ (Karamessini, 2014:183), where women make up 90% of lone parents (Ginn, 2013). De Henau and Reed argue that this is further evidence of how ‘gender norms’ stifle women’s progression in the labour market; meaning women are often in receipt of low incomes (2016) and are occupationally segregated.

As Bennett and Daly point out, although the “risks are also increasing for some men”, poverty is often calculated based on household income and much of the evidence across countries show that more women live in poverty, than do men (2014:17). Bennett and Daly further note, how calculating income and indeed poverty at the “household level” bring forth further complications (2014:17). Documenting further, that income may not be shared equally amongst couples and how this unfair sharing often results in instances of “hidden poverty” (2014:17) or perhaps even control. In this way, whilst it is known that women are more likely to experience income inequality and poverty relative to men, the existence of hidden poverty mean that statistics detailing these experiences amongst women, may not reflect the whole picture. That said, although the picture may not be entirely clear, women as a group were already economically vulnerable and were thus expected to feel and be ‘hit’ harder by the consequences of austere policy changes, relative to men (Oxfam, 2012; Conley, 2012; Ginn, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; De Henau and Reed, 2016).

This was in part, due to continued subordinate positioning in the labour market and the consequent reliance of women on a number of public services and social security provisions, in comparison to men (Oxfam, 2012; Conley, 2012; Ginn, 2013; De Henau and Reed, 2016). Changes such as the funding withdrawal for Sure Start centres, of which were created to support children from low income families (Ginn, 2013), cuts to Child Benefit and Tax Credits and funding for childcare were enacted, alongside restrictions to Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit and changes to Council Tax Benefits (Conley, 2012; Fawcett, 2013; De Agostini et al., 2014). For O’Hara these austere changes meant that a number of groups, including women and children, “were enduring inexplicable suffering on top of existing disadvantage” (2014:4). Subsequently, concern grew for women, as men were in a far better position to “weather the crisis” (Seguino, 2010:185).



That said, the emphasis placed on women and their experiences of austerity, resulted in the accusation that discussions of the impact of austerity (through a gender lens), focused too heavily on women, thus disregarding (McKay et al., 2013) men and their experiences. Rather than women alone feeling the brunt of austere ideology, it was feared that more men were being adversely affected, not only in Britain and the UK but also in the United States (McKay et al., 2013). In the aftermath of the recession, levels of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity fluctuated amongst both men and women. Accordingly, although men may have been in a better position to ‘weather’ the consequences of a dwindling economy and austerity measures, this did not necessarily mean they would be free from the associated consequences.

To explore these attitudinal differences, changes in the labour market were explored. As Table 6.3.1.1 shows, unemployment rates increased between 2008-2009 and 2009-2012. Alongside these increases in the overall rates of unemployment, the proportion of people believing that income inequality is ‘too large’ also increased. These observations seem to suggest that as changes in the labour market occurred, attitudes towards the income gap also changed. Increasing unemployment rates amongst both men and women are observable between 2008-2009, this increase was, however, higher amongst men in comparison to women. These findings appear to reflect literature suggesting that men were “worst hit” by the recession initially (Hills et al., 2015:14). By 2015, the unemployment rate appeared to fall back to the pre-recession rate, as these changes occurred, further attitudinal changes are also notable, where members of the public became less likely to state that income inequality between groups was ‘too large’ (Table 4.1.2).

**Table 6.3.1.1:** Rates of Employment, Unemployment and economic inactivity, by year and gender (Source derived from ONS Labour Market Statistics, 2015)

Status	Changes over time				Percentage (%) point change		
	2008	2009	2012	2015	2009/12	2012/15	2009/15
Unemployment							
All	<b>5.7</b>	8.1	8.2	5.7	+0.1	-2.5	-2.4
Men	<b>6.1</b>	9.1	8.8	5.8	-0.3	-3.0	-3.3
Women	<b>5.2</b>	6.9	7.6	5.5	+0.7	-2.1	-1.4
Employment							
All	<b>74.6</b>	72.5	71.2	73.5	-1.3	+2.3	+1.0
Men	<b>78.6</b>	75.8	76.3	78.3	+0.5	+2.0	+2.5
Women	<b>70.3</b>	68.9	66.1	68.8	-2.8	+2.7	-0.1
Economic Inactivity							
All	<b>20.8</b>	21.1	22.4	22.1	+1.3	-0.3	+1.0
Men	<b>16.2</b>	16.6	16.3	16.9	-0.3	+0.6	+0.3
Women	<b>25.8</b>	26.0	28.5	27.2	+2.5	-1.3	+1.2

Unemployment rates between both men and women had also fallen to similar levels found in 2008, with the gap between men and women’s rates of unemployment closing. At the

same time, the proportion of men and women in agreement that the income gap was 'too large' fell. So far, this suggests that exploring changes in the labour market, alongside attitudinal changes, is beneficial in aiding an understanding of decreasing levels of concern toward inequality, alongside aiding an understanding of attitudinal differences by gender. Thus, suggesting that as unemployment rates improve, concern toward the inequality of income is reduced.

Given that the unemployment rates decreased amongst men at a faster pace than women, with the unemployment rate for women remaining higher in 2015 than prior to the recession, these observations may also account for the attitudinal differences amongst men and women, where women were more likely than men to perceive the income gap as 'too large'. Concurrently, as the proportion of people believing that the income gap is 'too large' increased from 80.6% in 2009 to 84.4% in 2012, Table 6.3.1.1 shows that the employment rate also decreased slightly over the same period (fall of 1.3 *pp*). These findings suggest that as employment rates worsen, concern for the prevalence of the income inequality gap grows. Yet, as employment rates are strengthened, like those between 2012-2015, concern toward inequality decreases. Whilst employment rates amongst men in 2015 returned to a similar rate observed in 2008, for women a slower recovery is notable. Despite improvements, in 2015 the employment rate remained lower than that observed in 2008 and 2009, which may further account for the attitudinal differences between men and women, where women were more likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large' in comparison to men.

Changes in the labour market and the improvements amongst males, appeared to signify the partial end of the "mancession" (Bennett, 2015:59). For others, however, the changes and further the social policy changes enacted, were the beginning of what has been termed the "womancecession" (McKay et al., 2013:120). Further, the assumption that women given their notably precarious positioning within the labour market, would prove more likely to support redistributive measures based on the support offered by the redistribution of income, appears unsubstantiated within this research, at least. Comparative analysis of labour market statistics and attitudinal changes by gender, may thus account for attitudinal changes amongst men and women. Suggesting further, that gendered employment positions impact upon perceptions of inequality, where once positions are improved in the labour market, perceptions of income inequality also change. This may also account for the attitudinal changes amongst the British public, as a whole, whom became more likely

to state that income inequality is 'too large' between 2009-2012 but became less likely to hold this view in 2015.

What this explanation does not account for is the higher levels of support toward redistribution amongst men, relative to women. Closer inspection of the labour market statistics and attitudinal differences in Sections 4.1-4.3, however, also illuminate the extent of the differences between men and women. Whilst women were more likely to state that income inequality is 'too large' in 2015, the gap between men and women's levels of agreement is particularly small. That said, the gap between the proportion of men and women who stated that they supported the redistribution of income is however much greater (see Section 4.2), with Table 4.2.1.1 also suggesting that gender has a significant effect on attitudes toward redistribution, with men more likely to support redistribution, compared to women. The labour market statistics were thus revisited.

Between 2009-2012, the employment rate fell as both economic inactivity and unemployment rates increased, as this occurred the proportion of people in support of the redistribution of income also increased. Suggesting that as positions in the labour market weakened, the public became more likely to support redistribution. Yet, upon closer inspection of the labour market statistics, the extent of change and indeed improvements, appear minimal. Perhaps then, the slow recovery notable within the labour market, may also explain why people became more likely to support the redistribution of income, alongside asserting that income inequality between groups is 'too large'.

As Table 4.2.2 shows, men are consistently more likely to support the redistribution of income than women, with the proportion of men in agreement increasing between 2009-2012 and 2012-2015 and largely at a faster pace than amongst women. At the same time, the gap in levels of agreement between men and women closed between 2009-2012 (falling from 9.6 *pp*, to 6.8 *pp*). Within the labour market, more men moved in to employment over this period, whilst more women moved away from employment. These changes, though slight, perhaps explain the increased levels of agreement amongst women, relative to men. At the same time, labour market statistics show that the employment rate increased amongst both men and women during this period, suggesting that as women's positions improved, the desire for the redistribution of income was not as great, as the desire amongst men.

Looking to the different rates of unemployment amongst men and women and seeking to account for these attitudinal differences, these statistics demonstrate that despite some

improvements, men's rates of unemployment were consistently higher than those observable amongst women, perhaps accounting for disparities in redistributive support by gender. Thus, due to the proportion of men facing unemployment, the perceived need for redistributive spending may have been considered higher amongst men, thus increasing their likelihood of supporting the redistribution of income.

### **6.3.1.1 Perceptions, by gender summary**

To summarise, whilst much of the literature suggests women, relative to men, are more economically vulnerable and are disadvantaged in the Labour market (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Browne, 2011; Conley, 2012; Oxfam, 2012; Ginn, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; UKCES, 2014; Catney and Sabater, 2015; De Henau and Reed, 2016; Scruton, 2016), this was not reflected in the analysis in the way it was initially expected. Instead, men, who faced greater levels of unemployment in comparison to women, were consistently more likely to agree with the redistribution of income. Although these findings do not meet the assumptions of self-interest, need explanations nor risk aversion theories in the way they were initially intended, this does not necessarily mean that these theories are not useful in understanding why men are more likely to support the redistribution of income.

On the contrary, these theories suggest that those who stand to gain the most from redistributive measures will be more likely to express support. Perhaps then, stronger redistributive attitudes amongst men can be understood in relation to greater instances of unemployment amongst men during these periods. In this way, these findings suggest that men became increasingly more likely to anticipate future needs, or perhaps that their attitudes reflected present ones. That said, these attitudinal changes may relate more closely with the social values held (Wu and Chou, 2015), reflecting the experiences of austerity for many people or indeed reflecting the assumptions of the rational choice theory (Prabhakar 2012). Thus, men were perhaps becoming more aware and concerned as to how austerity was increasing inequalities and men as a result became more empathic towards those in similar positions (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007). By extension, the limited support toward the redistribution of income amongst women during these periods, may also be explained in relation to self-interest. Rather than women being free from need and the support redistribution offers, the economic cost of supporting the redistribution of income may have been a concern for women, already identified as a group more vulnerable towards inequality and poverty and therefore offsetting the possible benefits of monetary redistribution of income.

This section has emphasised the experience of men and women during the period of austerity examined in this research, suggesting that men and women's attitudes toward the income gap and redistribution may have been a reflection of their own needs, and indeed financial positions, but in differing ways. Having explored attitudes by gender, the following section continues to explore attitudinal differences, focussing the analytical discussion on perceptions in austerity Britain, by age group.

### **6.3.2 Perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution, by age**

Much like it is expected that women are more likely to hold more altruistic and egalitarian views than men, the age of an individual often influences preferences towards social policies, the need of social services (Busemeyer et al., 2009) but also their perceptions of and experiences of inequality and poverty. With this in mind, this section explores attitudinal differences by age group.

The experience of poverty amongst pensioners is "stubbornly persistent" (Vass, 2014:3), with approximately 1 in 6 pensioners living in poverty in the UK (Age UK, 2017). Pensioners continue to live on less than adequate incomes, where 1.2 million are in receipt of incomes that fall "just above the poverty line"; meaning pensioners have incomes of more than the median 60%, but incomes that are less than 70% of median income (Age UK, 2017:3). Although not focused upon here, differences are further compounded by gender and ethnicity. For example, female pensioners are more likely to experience poverty than men, especially if they are single (Ginn, 2013; Age UK, 2017). Pensioners from BAME groups are also featured more prominently amongst those of pension age living in poverty, relative to those from white ethnic backgrounds (Age UK, 2017). Although pensioners have, at least in part, been financially protected (Lupton et al., 2015), it is postulated that many will have been affected by a reduction in public services.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that incomes amongst those of pension age have increased considerably (MacInnes et al., 2015) and that pensions are protected further by the 'triple lock' (MacInnes et al., 2015). As Stewart (2015:no pagination) explains, the 'triple lock' means state pensions will increase "each year by inflation, average wages, or 2.5%, whichever is the highest". Although, this has "helped to cushion pensioners' incomes" (Stewart, 2015: no pagination), it would be a mistake to consider most older people as "well-off", for many are far from it (Ginn, 2013; JRF, 2016). Whilst Wu and Chou

highlight, “not all of the elderly are poor”, they also highlight that the majority of this group “need more healthcare and other types of social assistance” (2015:4).

Although changes have occurred, and efforts have seen the lives of pensioners improve over recent years (MacInnes et al., 2015), progress has seemingly halted (Age UK, 2017) with large numbers of vulnerable pensioners continuing to live on incomes that are inadequate. Because pensioners have been identified as at risk and as individuals who may be more vulnerable to age related ill health and disabilities (Ginn, 2013), it can be assumed that due to personal experiences, older members of the public may be more aware of inequality and thus more likely to state that the income gap was ‘too large’ and in the context of this research, more likely to support the redistribution of income. This latter assumption is supported by Habibov, whom asserts that “support for redistribution will increase with age” (2013:271). This is reflective of the Rational choice theory, where older members of the public, as a group more likely to gain from redistributive measures, will be more likely to support income redistribution. By extension, it could also be assumed that older members of the public may be less likely to hold negative or stereotypical views of people in receipt of benefits.

As Table 4.1.2 demonstrates, these assumptions are partly reflected within the data. People aged 65 and over were consistently more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’. Notably however, the analysis showed that over time, older members of the population were becoming increasingly less likely to specify that the income gap is ‘too large’, as income inequality was increasing in Britain. A greater likelihood of agreement amongst older members of the public, is nevertheless, also identifiable in Table 4.1.1.1, where in comparison to people aged 65 and over, people aged 35-64 were less likely to agree, and people aged 18-34, were even less likely to agree.

Concurrently, attitudes towards people in receipt of benefits also varied by age. In 2009, despite the findings outlined in Table 4.1.2, Table 5.1.2 shows that older people were also more likely to agree that benefit recipients were undeserving of help, whereas people aged 18-34 were more likely to agree that benefit recipients were fraudulently claiming in some way (Table 5.2.2), and reliant upon benefits as a result of welfare generosity (Table 5.3.2), closely followed by those aged 65 and over. The least likely to agree in 2009, in each analysis, was people aged 35-64. People aged 65 and over, however, were identified as a group more likely to hold negative attitudes in 2012 and 2015 (Table 5.1.2; Table 5.2.2 and Table 5.3.2). Table’s 5.1.1.1, 5.2.1.1 and 5.3.1.1.1 also show that age significantly effects

attitudes toward benefit recipients, where in comparison to people aged 65 and over, negative attitudes toward benefit recipients were less likely amongst the younger and middle-aged groups.

It was expected that older members of the public (those aged 65 and over) would be more likely to support the redistribution of income, in comparison to younger participants. But that the findings would also reflect the financial strain facing younger individuals (18-34), and that they would, consequently, also become increasingly more inclined to support redistribution. The findings presented in Section 4.2, though not significant, supported this expectation, in part. People over the age of 65 were the most inclined to agree, yet despite their position, younger members of the public (18-34) remained the least inclined to hold this view. That said, what is particularly noticeable is how the gaps between older members (65 and over), and younger members (18-34) levels of agreement is narrower than those found in the section 4.1. In 2009, the gap between older members of the public stood at 1.4 *pp*, by 2012 this had widened to 3.4 *pp*. By 2015, this gap had closed, yet remained higher than in 2009.

Although the assumptions of the Rational Choice Theory (Wu and Chou, 2015) appear to have been partially met and the need explanation strengthened based on the findings outlined in Chapter 4, evidently wider attitudinal changes also occurred. As demonstrated above, the effects of austerity have not been felt the same both across and within groups, this is also true by age. Kingman and Seager (2014) emphasise that the intergenerational income gap has been widening since 1997, prior to the recession and introduction of austerity measures; cautioning that these kinds of differences can result in further issues, of which continue within and across the life course. Between 2009-2015, austerity measures widened the differences both within and across age cohorts (Kingman and Seager, 2016). Changes in labour market participation, including earnings, hours and opportunities have occurred, alongside changes in housing tenure, benefits and access to services. These changes have had a different impact on people, depending on their age and life stage.

Despite persistent levels of poverty amongst pensioners, it has been suggested that young people were the most adversely affected by the recession and austerity measures (MacInnes et al., 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015). It is estimated that young adults on average, are now earning less in 'real terms' than other generations, at the same age (Kingman and Seager, 2014; Kingman, 2016). Young people in receipt of housing benefit,

are more likely to be noticing a deficit between the benefit received and their housing costs (Lupton et al., 2015). Due to falling earnings, young people are earning less and thus saving less. This often means that they are unable to secure a mortgage and are less likely to purchase their own home and more likely to be found within private rented housing or remaining in the parental home (Falkingham et al., 2014; Kingman and Seager, 2014; Lupton et al., 2015). Issues of housing tenure by age, is often discussed with the label “generation rent”, used to describe the phenomena whereby more and more young people find themselves unable to own their own homes and are instead, reliant on the private rented sector (Kingman and Seager, 2014:3).

Further, it has been estimated that for people in their 20’s, money spent on renting properties has increased by around 35% in the ten years prior to 2012 (Kingman and Seager, 2014). Therefore, for many young people their incomes are no longer sufficient. With the rise in “tenuous arrangements” like zero-hours contracts, this can prove particularly problematic, given that these types of employment result in unreliable, fluctuating hours and thus earnings (Kingman and Seager, 2014). The changes seen in earnings, particularly among younger workers are expected to have lasting detrimental effects and there is now “a real danger” that what is happening in relation to falling wages, could be “a sign of a cohort effect”, subsequently for Kingman and Seager “condemning today’s young workers to a lifetime of lower wages throughout their careers than previous generations have enjoyed” (2014:6). As others have noted, this could have implications in later life, where low-earnings may mean a reduced standard of living at pension age (Age UK, 2017). People aged 31-64 were ‘less affected’, yet growth has been slow, meaning that their incomes have only slightly improved from pre-recession levels (Hood and Waters, 2017).

As evidenced above young people appeared to be hit harder by austere policies and changes in their participation and gains within the labour market. Because experience often influences perceptions, it could also be assumed that as inequality increased amongst younger members of the public, so too should the proportion of people in agreement that the income gap is ‘too large’, notably however, this was not reflected in the analysis. These findings can be explained in two ways. Falling levels of agreement amongst those of pension age could be a reflection of the improvements discussed above, this would however not explain why people of pension age (aged 65 and over) are more likely to agree that the income gap between groups is ‘too large’ in comparison to younger



members of the public (18-34, 35-64), nor does this explain entirely why older members of the public were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward people in receipt of benefits.

Indeed, although improvements were notable amongst people of pension age, many still face a lower standard of living (JRF, 2016), especially older single female pensioners (Ginn, 2013). Further, because there have been a number of cuts that have impacted services, such as those to Local Authorities, transport and the NHS, services that older members of the population may access more frequently, this could explain why such large proportions maintain that the income gap is 'too large', but again does not explain why negative attitudes are more prevalent amongst this group. Although those of pension age are not free from risk nor experience, it has however been argued they are now in considerably better positions than younger generations; whom are now more likely to face poverty (MacInnes et al., 2015).

Notably then, although the incomes of young people were more severely affected by the economic downturn (Belfield et al., 2014) and subsequently adversely affected by the policies enacted thereafter, this was not reflected within this analysis, where younger generations were consistently the least likely to conceive of the gap as 'too large'. To reiterate, this was particularly striking, given evidence highlighting the risks faced by a number of young people and further how the recession adversely impacted upon their lives and opportunities (UKCES, 2014; Kingman and Seager, 2014; Belfield et al., 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015; Hood and Waters, 2017), and moreover the intergenerational gaps that appeared to be widening.

It could be concluded that the findings outlined in Chapter 5 reflect the fears of Kingman (2016) whom believes that solidarity and understanding between generations are seemingly being eroded due to a lack of interaction and arguably widening social distance. Indeed, although many older members of the public may need to access services, perceptions towards the receipt of benefits, are often negative and are, as Whiteley stressed, centred around how older people have been "socialized into...a time of limited welfare provision" and periods where "welfare was often associated with personal failure and charity handouts" (1981:468). Whilst this argument was formulated in relation to changes following WWII, The Great Depression and consequent double dip recession (Elliott, 2012), in part, Whiteley's observations remain feasible given the popular discourse over this period.

Although, prior to the programme of austerity and deficit reduction plan, welfare rather than limited, was based on means tests, set obligations and criteria, and has more recently been subject to greater conditionality, the negative connotations attributed with welfare receipt, thus remain. Concurrently, these findings could also be reflective of the social values hypothesis in operation amongst older members of the public, whom continue to be aware of the adverse impact of inequality, recognising the extent of the income gap, due in part to their own experiences within austerity Britain (Wu and Chou, 2015).

### **6.3.2.1 Perceptions by age, Summary**

To summarise, this section has discussed the research findings in relation to the available literature. Drawing on perceptions, redistributive theories, alongside inequalities of age, to provide a thorough examination of attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution during this period of austerity. These findings suggest that as inequality increased amongst people by age group (Ginn, 2013; Age UK, 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015), the perceived need and support for the redistribution of income also increased. At the same time, despite showing signs of increasing levels of agreement amongst people aged 35-65 and over, between 2009-2012, negative attitudes toward people in receipt of benefits fell between 2012-2015.

Despite the poor position held by younger people in the aftermath of the recession and throughout austerity, this group (18-34) remained the least inclined to support the redistribution of income. This group also became increasingly less likely to hold negative attitudes toward benefit recipients. Thus, as expected, the older the individual, the more inclined they were to agree that income should be redistributed from the 'better-off to the less-well-off'. Section 4.3 also emphasised how attitudes differed by age, amongst those who agreed that 'the gap between high and low income is too large' and also stated that income should be redistributed. Though support toward redistribution increased amongst this group, the variations by age are not statistically significant.

Having focused the analysis on perceptions by age, the following section continues to explore perceptions by demographic characteristics. Thus, the next section focuses on exploring the attitudinal differences identified in Section's 4.1-4.3 and 5.1-5.5 and the available literature, by ethnic group.

### **6.3.3 Perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution, by ethnic background**

It is clear that a number of groups have been affected by the recession and the cuts pursued by austerity measures, where there have been a number of 'losers' as a result of these policies (Lupton et al., 2015:8). As O'Hara (2014), amongst others (Falkingham et al., 2014; Khan, 2015; Age UK, 2017) note, people from BAME groups are amongst those 'losing', relative to the people from white ethnic backgrounds. This section focuses on exploring attitudinal differences by ethnic group, drawing on the inequality faced by people, often as a result of their ethnic group.

People from ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented amongst those experiencing poverty and inequality, relative to those from white ethnic backgrounds (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015; TUC, 2017). Gulliver emphasises how such disadvantage can be further elucidated by considering the prevalence of homelessness by ethnic background (2017). As already emphasised, homelessness in the wake of the recession and period of austerity, was cited as a one of the key concerns for the UNCESCR in 2016. Chapter 2 further evidenced the rise of homelessness during this period. Although instances of homelessness were increasing across the board, they have been found to be accelerating at a faster pace amongst people from BAME communities. Gulliver (2017:8) emphasises this point, noting changes over time, in 2001, 28.0% of the "total statutorily homeless households" were of BAME backgrounds and that this figure increased in 2011 (33.0%) and 2013 (37.0%).

A number of disparities also exist between ethnic groups, with some groups fairing worse than others (Oxfam, 2012; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015; Khan, 2015; TUC, 2017). Although not focused upon here, these differences are further compounded both between people from BAME groups, but also when considering levels of educational attainment, age and gender (UKCES, 2014; Bennett and Daly, 2014; Khan, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015). For instance, it is widely evidenced that BAME women have been affected at a disproportionate level (Conley, 2012; Jasper, 2015; Khan, 2015), with gender differences also differing amongst ethnic minority groups, where for instance, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women are estimated to be "less than half as likely to be employed" in comparison to the average rates of employment amongst women (EHRC, 2015:99).

What is also made clear throughout a number of sources (Khan, 2015; Jasper, 2015; Fisher and Nandi, 2015), is how, despite ethnic identities being listed as a protected characteristic (The Equality Act, 2010), the UK has failed to eradicate prejudice. Thus, as a result of an ascribed at birth ethnic identity, people continue to face discrimination (Khan, 2015; JRF, 2016), institutional racism (Jasper, 2015) and struggle to participate in and enter the labour market (UKCES, 2014), alongside society. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to detail the extent of racial discrimination in operation, it is understood that this discrimination operates in a number of indirect and direct ways, creating and sustaining barriers, and this is observable beyond the labour market and education system. Although this is acknowledged, to enable discussion the labour market and education system are employed as two sites of ethnic inequality.

Such 'ethnic penalties' are observable in the UK labour market and the initial employment application process (Catney and Sabater, 2015). Research conducted in 2009 highlighted how racial discrimination featured prominently in the job application process. Distributing curricula vitae (CV) to (unrevealed) companies, across both region and skill levels, Wood et al. wished to identify how racial discrimination on the basis of names occurred (2009). The names attached to each, were chosen based on the assumption that they were considered as "widely" recognised by ethnic groups (Wood et al., 2009:2). These included, yet were not limited to, names such as Anthony Olukayode (Black African), Cho Xiang (Chinese), Sunita Kumar (Indian), Nazia Mahmood (Pakistani/Bangladeshi) and a White British name (Wood et al., 2009:19). Wood et al. found clear advantages in favour of the applications with typically white ethnic names, who received a "positive response" in comparison to the other applications (2009:31). This research suggests that individuals from BAME groups face disadvantage prior to entry in to the labour market, restricting equal access.

What has thus become increasingly apparent, is how after approximately "forty years of race relations and equality and human rights legislation", there have been "positive effects", yet both "disadvantage and discrimination persist" (Gulliver, 2017:8). Jasper proclaimed that following the Coalition's 2010 budget this became more pronounced, where it was feared that the "economic impact of austerity measures...disproportionately impacted Black British and ethnic minority groups" (2015; no pagination). From recession through to austerity, earnings fell sharply amongst people from ethnic minorities, what was clear however, was how these disparities also differed amongst and within ethnic groups (Fisher and Nandi, 2015). As the EHRC demonstrated, Black African and Black Caribbean

people faced the greatest fall in income and pay (2015). Most notably, people from BAME groups often find that access to employment is problematic, highlighting how the 'ethnic penalty' (TUC, 2017) impacts upon the lives of many people from BAME backgrounds. Both "racism and discrimination" thus operate as barriers, inhibiting minority ethnic groups from advancing in employment roles (JRF, 2016:16). Subsequently, people from BAME groups are more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive (Brewer et al., 2012) and thus in receipt of lower incomes.

Further, as Fisher and Nandi (2015:8) highlight whilst "there is variation across and within different ethnic minority groups" in comparison to "the white majority group, most ethnic minority groups are more economically disadvantaged". Expanding on this point further, Fisher and Nandi note how "Indian and Chinese groups fare well" in comparison to white ethnic groups, conversely people from "Pakistani and Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean" ethnic groups do less well, with both Bangladeshi and Pakistani minority ethnic groups observably the "most severely disadvantaged" (2015:8). As noted above, further disparities manifest within minority ethnic groups, whereby "a complex relationship between groups characteristics and their performance in the labour market" exists (UKCES,2014:41).

Given these factors and the disproportionate levels of poverty and inequality experienced by people from ethnic minorities (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015) it was expected that people from BAME groups would be more likely to assert that the income gap was 'too large' and by extension, more likely to support redistribution. Similarly, it could also be expected that this group may be less likely to hold negative attitudes towards people in receipt of benefits. These assumptions are based in part on the unequal experiences of austerity Britain amongst people from BAME backgrounds, who are often found to be living on low incomes, their levels of disadvantage perpetuated further by instances of racism and discrimination. These assumptions are, however, also based on the application of the Rational Choice Theory and of need explanations, which points to how people most vulnerable and in need of support are more likely to recognise income inequality, but to also support measures to address these issues (Wu and Chou, 2015).

Section 4.1 demonstrated, as expected, that in 2009 the majority of people who said that the income gap was 'too large' were from BAME backgrounds. By 2012, however, this had changed. Instead, the majority of people in agreement were from white ethnic

backgrounds. This was also true in 2015, with people from white ethnic backgrounds more likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large', than people from BAME backgrounds. As Table 4.1.2 demonstrates, people from BAME backgrounds were becoming increasingly less inclined to perceive of the gap as 'too large' over time, whereas people from white ethnic backgrounds were become increasingly more inclined to perceive the income gap as 'too large'. These findings do not appear to support the assumptions of the Rational Choice Theory and appeared surprising given evidence suggesting that inequality and poverty was increasing amongst individuals from BAME backgrounds (Oxfam 2012; EHRC, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015; Hills et al., 2015; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; TUC, 2017).

Based on the assumptions of self-interest and of need explanations, it was also expected that people from BAME groups would be more likely to support the redistribution of income, in comparison to people from white ethnic backgrounds, based on present and anticipated need. As Section 4.2 illustrated, in 2012 and 2015 people from ethnic minorities (BAME groups) were more likely to support the redistribution of income, in comparison to people from white ethnic groups, and as identified in Section 4.3, of those who agreed that the income gap is too large in 2012, people from BAME groups were also more likely to agree with the redistribution of income.

Attitudes toward benefit recipients differed. Focusing on the significant findings, whilst Table 5.1.2 showed how, in comparison to people in the minority ethnic group, people from the majority ethnic group were more likely to agree that benefit recipients were undeserving of help in 2012, at the same time people from the BAME group were more likely to agree that generous benefit payments led to dependency (Table 5.3.2). In comparison to the ethnic majority group, people from BAME groups were also more likely to agree that recipients were 'fiddling in one way or another' in 2015 (Table 5.2.2). To understand these findings further, data from the UK labour market statistics were explored, not only to understand how disadvantage operates both amongst and between ethnic groups, but to also explore the changing attitudes amongst people from ethnic minorities.

Exploration revealed changing labour market positions amongst these groups, of which coincided with changing attitudes towards inequality. Between 2008-2009 levels of employment amongst BAME groups appeared to worsen, down from 60.4%, to 59.2% (TUC, 2017), at the same time levels of employment also deteriorated amongst people from white ethnic backgrounds, though at a faster pace, falling from 74.1% to 72.5%.

Despite greater decreases, in contrast to employment levels amongst minority ethnic groups, the employment rate remained higher amongst the white ethnic group. As Table 4.1.2 shows, alongside lower levels of employment, levels of agreement with 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large' are also greater amongst the ethnic minority group. By 2012 although there was an increase in the number of people from BAME communities now holding this view, larger increases in the levels of agreement (8.4 *pp*) amongst the white ethnic group, meant that the white ethnic group formed the majority of those in agreement in 2012.

Employment levels amongst BAME groups improved and continued to increase into 2015 (TUC, 2017), although the initial growth appeared minimal (up by 0.3 *pp*), the increase in the employment rate appears to coincide with changing attitudes amongst this group. As levels of employment increased amongst minority groups, the proportion of people from the minority ethnic group who agreed that income inequality was too great fell by 9.5 *pp*. These findings show how the gap in levels of agreement between white ethnic groups and BAME groups appeared to narrow between 2009-2015, falling from 4.8 *pp* in 2009 to 2.8 *pp*. By 2015, however, this gap widened by 6.5 *pp*, with people from the white majority ethnic group more likely to agree that income inequality between groups was 'too large', than people from minority ethnic groups.

At the same time as these attitudinal changes occurred, employment rates amongst both groups saw signs of improvement, but to a greater extent amongst the ethnic minority group (3.4 *pp*) than amongst the white ethnic group (2.8 *pp*). Thus, the change in attitudes towards inequality amongst people from BAME groups, appeared consistent with the improvements seen in the levels of employment in the labour market. Thus, levels of agreement amongst people from BAME groups appeared to change, falling from 2012 through to 2015 and overall between 2009-2015. For the white ethnic group, agreement levels increased overall, rising substantially between 2009-2012, before declining between 2012-2015.

Utilising labour market statistics to explore attitudes in this way, suggests that as ethnic minority groups became better situated within the labour market, with more people moving into employment, concern for the gap between high and low incomes fell. That said, Section 4.2 and 4.3 emphasised how support for the redistribution of income differed by ethnicity and how people from BAME groups were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012, in comparison to people from white ethnic groups, despite improving

positions within the labour market. Thus, whilst changes in the Labour market appear to explain why people from white ethnic groups in 2015 were more likely to agree that income inequality is 'too large', these changes did not impact upon perceptions towards the redistribution of income. These changes may however explain why negative attitudes toward benefit recipients were less likely amongst this group in 2012 and 2015.

In the wake of the recession and consequent austere programme, as Section 4.2 illustrated support for the redistribution of income increased significantly (12.9 *pp*) amongst people from BAME groups, as inequality and poverty were also said to increase amongst these groups (Platt, 2007; Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; Oxfam, 2012). Comparatively, the overall increase in levels of agreement amongst people from white ethnic groups, stood at just 2.0 *pp*, a 10.9 *pp* disparity. Thus, suggesting that as inequality and poverty worsened amongst BAME communities (Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Khan, 2015; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015; Jasper, 2015; TUC, 2017), the perceived need for redistribution increased, where people from BAME groups became increasingly more likely to agree with the redistribution of income.

This contention is further demonstrated in Section 4.3, Table 4.3.1 whereby in 2012, of those who agreed that income inequality between groups is 'too large', support for the redistribution of income was more likely amongst people from the minority ethnic group (54%), than amongst the majority ethnic group (44.9%). The latter findings thus appear to reflect the assumptions of self-interest and those of need explanations, in understanding attitudes and redistributive preferences. What is less clear is why this group were less likely to perceive of the income gap as 'too large' in comparison to the white majority group. Although positive changes did occur within the labour market, the employment level amongst people from ethnic minority groups remained lower than those observed amongst the white majority ethnic group.

### **6.3.3.1 Perceptions, by ethnic background Summary**

This section has demonstrated how attitudes toward inequality and poverty differ by ethnic group, exploring how aspects of identity, like ethnic background, may impede or advantage individuals. Drawing on labour market statistics, and self-interest, alongside need explanations and the spiral of silence of model, attitudinal changes and patterns have been explored. Moving beyond self-interest, to include the 'spiral of silence' model, a different explanation for these patterns may thus be considered. The 'spiral of silence model' is based on the premise that people from marginalised and minority groups, often



mirror the opinions and attitudes of those of the more dominant majority groups (Scheufele, 2008). This behaviour is explained as a result of the “fear of isolation”, where people from disadvantaged groups, remain silent rather than voicing their concerns or indeed their opinions, for fear their opinions may illicit a negative response or that they may find themselves supporting an issue that is not supported by the majority (Scheufele, 2008:175).

Perhaps then, whilst the findings did seem to coincide with the labour market improvements, the attitudes recorded could also have been subject to the processes outlined above. In this way, due to a ‘fear of isolation’ the opinions shared by people from marginalised and disadvantage groups, do not always reflect their attitudes or indeed feelings toward the subject matter. This may account for the perceptions observed amongst people from BAME groups, whom were less likely to assert that the inequality gap is ‘too large’, despite as evidenced above, increasing levels of inequality and disadvantage amongst this group. This model may also explain why this group were also more likely to hold negative attitudes toward benefit recipients in 2012 and 2015 (Table 5.2.2 and 5.3.2).

Having explored attitudes, alongside experiencing of inequality and poverty by ethnic group, to further explore how attitudes, relate to experiences and identity, the following section explores the findings by the remaining characteristics included within the analyse (educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status). To simplify the analysis, perceptions by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status are discussed in one section.

#### **6.3.4 Perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution, by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status**

The impact of the changing economic and social climate over the past ten years on living standards, have been described as the ‘toughest’ period since the 1930’s (Padley et al., 2017). As demonstrated throughout this Chapter and in Chapter 2, large groups of people have been adversely affected by policy changes and further changes in their incomes, alongside rising costs, including increasing housing, food and fuel costs (Fisher and Nandi, 2015; JRF 2016). Whilst almost anyone can find themselves experiencing the consequences of poverty, there are a number of groups who are more at risk than others (Holman, 1978; JRF, 2016). What is also increasingly apparent, is how poverty and

inequality and moreover the risk of encountering them, is not a result of just one factor alone (JRF, 2016).

Alongside disparities in relation to age, gender and ethnicity, factors such as unemployment, occupation, low wages, high costs and insecure employment, alongside an “inadequate benefit system” also seemingly impact upon individuals (JRF, 2016:8). Given this, this section draws on the findings outlined in Chapter 4 and 5, alongside the available literature to critically explore perceptions by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status. Although education is not considered an “economic outcome”, it does arguably impact labour market position (Hills et al., 2010:12). People who are said to fall “at the bottom of educational ratings” (Holman, 1978:39) often face restricted access to greater life chances, compounded further by an apparent “lack of skills” (JRF, 2016:8). For Finch, “educational attainment provides a further indication of the risk of poverty” because “qualifications have a strong bearing on future earnings potential” (2015:7). It is understood, therefore, that people with few or little in the way of qualifications, also face fewer prospects for both employment and earnings (Esping-Anderson, 1999; UKCES, 2014; Finch, 2015).

Thus, people lacking qualifications or possessing lower levels, are more likely to occupy lower paid positions within the labour market and may, subsequently, often rely on social security provision for additional support. Comparatively, people who hold higher levels of educational attainment, have greater access to better opportunities and improved life chances, in both the short and long-term and are thus less likely to claim benefits, nor need additional support. Higher educational attainment, therefore, often results in greater monetary rewards, given that qualifications result in access to better paid occupational roles (Hills et al., 2010; UKCES, 2014; Finch, 2015; JRF, 2016).

Accordingly, it can be argued that educational attainment often strengthens or weakens an individual’s position within the labour market (Hills et al., 2015; Finch, 2015; JRF, 2016). The “risks of poverty” (McKendrick et al., 2008:8) are, therefore, further intensified amongst people who have little or no educational qualifications, people who live in workless households and amongst those claiming benefits (Holman, 1978). Notably, educational attainment, occupation, employment status, level of income and benefit status also intersect, strengthening an individual’s position further or constraining it. For these reasons, and to simplify the analysis, these characteristics are explored together, alongside the literature in this final discussion section.

Not only are these characteristics interrelated, as already stated, perceptions of inequality and redistribution also differ amongst these groups. People who are in receipt of lower incomes and/or are in receipt of benefits, including although not limited to unemployed people, are often found to be less likely to tolerate inequality (Medgyesi, 2013; Wu and Chou, 2015). This is explained as a result of the fact that the people occupying such positions, are in receipt of low, less than adequate incomes and thus may be more aware of the consequences of struggling to manage financially (Holman, 1978; Finch, 2015). Subsequently, it can be assumed that people who are unemployed, on low incomes or are in receipt of benefits will be more likely to acknowledge growing inequality and subsequently more likely to state that the income gap is 'too large', in part because of their direct experiences of inequality (Wu and Chou, 2015). By extension, reflective of the assumptions of the Rational Choice theory, these groups are also expected to be more likely to support the redistribution of income (Wu and Chou, 2015).

This may also mean that attitudes amongst people with little or no qualifications and those within lower occupational paid roles, will mirror those above, with this group also more likely to state that the income gap is 'too large' and more likely to support redistribution. Given these assumptions, the opposite might be expected of those in employment, people who do not claim benefits, those with higher incomes, qualifications and thus stronger occupational positions. Orton and Rowlingson propose that these attitudinal differences may be explained in relation to differential social experiences (2007). Thus, people in receipt of higher incomes and those who are in employment, whom have qualifications and are not in receipt of benefits, often have access to more financial resources. Subsequently, they are also often socially distant (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007) from and further shielded from the consequences of inadequate incomes.

Based on both self-interest and need explanations (Whitely, 1981; Wu and Chou, 2015), it was expected that this would be reflected in attitudes towards income inequality and redistributive preferences, with these groups less likely to assert that the income gap is 'too large' and less likely to support redistribution. Similarly, given the vulnerability associated with these positions, it might be expected that people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is), on low-incomes, working in routine or manual occupations, and those lacking qualifications (or holding other forms) may have been less likely to hold negative views of benefit recipients. As Table 4.1.2 shows people in receipt of low incomes were, as expected, more likely to agree that the income gap was 'too large' in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

This group were also more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2009, 2012 and 2015 (Table 4.2.2).

Attitudes also differed amongst benefit recipients, or those with a spouse in receipt. Not only were benefit recipients consistently more likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large', this group were also more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 and 2015. These findings appear to support those of need explanations and self-interest. Thus, both people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse is) and people in receipt of low incomes are more likely to recognise income inequality, but also more likely to support the redistribution of income. These findings, thus, appear to reflect current or indeed, anticipated future need amongst these groups. Suggesting further, that higher levels of support towards redistribution may be explained in relation to anticipated personal benefit rather than as a result of altruism or reciprocity (Anderson and Curtis, 2015; Padley et al., 2017). These findings also further support those of Anderson and Curtis, whom note that people with "low economic standing have the most to gain from supporting government intervention" and this they argue is "regardless of the level of inequality in society" (2015:267). Given that these groups not only saw the income gap as 'too large' but also supported measures to close this gap, these findings also support the contention that people in receipt of lower incomes are more likely to oppose income inequality (Medgyesi, 2013; Wu and Chou, 2015).

Comparatively, perhaps reflecting a lack of experience (Evans and Kelley, 2017), as Section 4.1 shows in 2009, 2012 and 2015, people who self-rated their income as 'high' were less likely to conceive of the income gap as 'too large'. Similar findings were also observable in the BLRA in Table 4.1.1.1, where based on all the other variables in the analysis, in comparison to people in receipt of low incomes, people on middle-high incomes were 0.536 times less likely to agree that the income gap is 'too large'. The findings shown in Table 4.1.2 are not surprising, given that people in receipt of high incomes are less likely to be affected directly by growing income inequality. What was surprising, however, was the shift in attitudes towards redistribution amongst high and middle-income groups in 2015. Although low-income earners remained more likely to support income redistribution, the gap between this group and high-income earners narrowed. Falling from 17.1 *pp* in 2009, to 7.6 *pp* in 2012, to 6.1 *pp* in 2015.

Given the findings outlined in Section 4.1 and 4.2, it may have been feasible to suggest a similar pattern would occur amongst those who stated that the income gap is 'too large',

alongside expressing support toward the redistribution of income. Section 4.3 found that despite this trend being observable in 2009, with low-income earners more likely to support redistribution, if they also believed the income gap is 'too large', by 2012 and 2015 attitudes appeared to change. Amongst those who said that the income gap is 'too large', people who stated they received high incomes were more likely to support the redistribution of income. Comparatively, amongst these proportions, people in receipt of middle-incomes were less likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 and 2015, despite also agreeing that 'the gap between high and low incomes is too large'.

The findings in Section 4.3 suggest that initially, and as expected, in 2009 people who stood to gain the most from redistributive measures (low-income groups) were more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they also agreed that income inequality between groups is a gap 'too large'. Whilst people in receipt of low incomes are more likely to recognise income inequality, perhaps reflecting their own experiences (Holman, 1978; Finch, 2015), as demonstrated in Section 4.3, this does not, however, necessarily mean they are entirely supportive of measures to eradicate it, like that of the redistribution of income. This further emphasises Orton and Rowlingson's (2007) point that attitudes are often somewhat incongruous. This finding also strengthens the assumption that self-interest and altruism, alone, may be unable to explain redistributive preferences (Wu and Chou, 2015).

Whilst theories of self-interest appear to explain higher levels of redistributive support amongst benefit recipients and people in receipt of low incomes, this theory does not provide an explanation for the levels of agreement amongst people with high incomes. Of those who agreed that income inequality was too great, and also supported redistribution, high income earners were more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 and 2015. Despite high income earners standing to lose, rather than gain, from the redistribution of income (Whitely, 1981). Moving away from self-interest, toward the social values hypothesis, these patterns have been explored. Wu and Chou (2015) consider how redistributive preferences may differ, depending on the individual and their understanding of the prevalence of inequality and why this persists. Accordingly, Wu and Chou propose that because "even individuals who are financially strong may be sympathetic towards heightened welfare redistribution", as was the case in Section 4.3, this suggests that "more stable factors such as social values or ideologies may affect the demand for redistribution" (2015:6).

Wu and Chou explain the social values hypothesis further, whereby they state:

*based on the social values hypothesis the perceived causes of income inequality, magnitude of income inequality and causes of poverty are all associated with public attitudes to redistribution. In particular individuals who perceive income inequality as a consequence of providing benefits of the rich, who are living in a less equal society, and who attribute poverty to social injustice, are more inclined to call for redistribution (2015:6).*

In the context of this research, the social values hypothesis, as highlighted by Wu and Chou, offers a possible explanation for the findings outlined in Section 4.3. Whereby not only did income disparities between groups become more unequal (Clarke et al., 2016), and arguably more visible, people who were in receipt of a high income were more likely to support redistribution, if they also believed that income inequality between groups was a gap 'too large'. In this way, attitudes toward redistribution were significantly impacted by the level of income received, and perceptions of the widening income gap, despite this latter issue not impacting upon this group directly. Such attitudes toward inequality and redistribution, may thus be a reflection of rising income inequality between classes. This is succinctly explained by Curtis and Anderson (2015:270), where they state:

*as income inequality rises, people from other classes become increasingly affected and thus also become much more likely to support government intervention. In other words, the effects of inequality 'climb up' the class ladder as inequality grows.*

Drawing on this explanation, irrespective of whether people in receipt of higher incomes, or those who are more socially distant from the vulnerability of financial inequality will gain from redistribution, they may support this to avoid the perceived non-financial consequences. This appears, in part, to be reflected in this analysis.

Alongside pervasive income inequality between groups, those occupying disadvantaged social positions are further disadvantaged by the value placed on the differential societal positions available. This is explained by Hills et al. where they state (2010:1):

*where only certain achievements are valued and where large disparities in material rewards are used as the yardsticks of success and failure, it is hard for those who fall behind to flourish.*

In this instance, for those *falling* behind, "the risk of social need tends to be concentrated in the lower skills strata" (Busemeyer et al., 2009:199) and thus amongst people who do not hold qualifications. Disabling them from full participation in society, as a result of often low earnings and restricted access to the labour market. As McKendrick et al. note "working age adults living in families in which the adults have no educational qualifications

are more at risk” (2008:10), as are those in workless households. Both “unemployment and low skills” may thus “keep individuals in poverty and can lead to long-term hardship” (JRF, 2016:8).

Research from the JRF also emphasise how the labour market has changed, with “many of the jobs that previously allowed workers with few qualifications to support their families to a decent standard” (2016:8) disappearing, further restricting opportunities. As a result of these changes, those people with less financial resources and lower skills, face disadvantaged access to the labour market, and thus face “low pay and insecurity, unemployment, discrimination and paying more for essentials, like energy and credit” (JRF, 2016:8). Based on the assumptions of self-interest, and this evidence, it was expected that people not in employment and those with no qualifications (or other forms) would be more likely to recognise growing income inequality and also more likely to support the redistribution of income.

As Section 4.1 illustrated, in comparison to people in employment, in 2009 and 2012 people not in employment were more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’. Suggesting that employment status is significantly related to perceptions of income inequality. That said, the BLRA outlined in Table 4.1.1.1 demonstrated that, having taken into account all the other variables in the analysis, in comparison to people not in employment, people who were in employment were 1.186 times more likely to agree. Section 4.2 also demonstrated that those not in employment were also more likely to support the redistribution of income, in comparison to those in employment, in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Because people who are not in employment often experience greater levels of inequality and are a group whom stand to gain more from the redistribution of income, this was not surprising. Table 4.2.1.1 demonstrated similar findings. Having taken all the other variables in the analysis into account, in comparison to people who were not in employment, people in employment were 0.722 times less likely to agree. Section 4.3 also showed how opinions appeared consistent. Thus, of the proportion of people who stated that the income gap is ‘too large’, people who were not in employment, were also more likely to support the redistribution of income in 2012 and 2015, and these proportions are greater than those identified in Table 4.2.1.

Self-interest appears to account for the observably lower levels of agreement amongst people who are in employment, whom are less likely to recognise income inequality, and

less likely to support the redistribution of income. Whilst employment, as Section 2.3 discusses, does not always protect people from the experience of inequality and poverty, people “in workless household’s fare worse than those in working poor households” (Hick and Lanau, 2017:14). Further, because redistributive measures often result in higher levels of taxation, people in employment may stand to lose rather than gain financially during this process. The findings appear to strengthen Wu and Chou’s assertion that since “unemployment is widely considered to be associated with the perceived vulnerability of a worsening standard of living”, as a group, unemployed people are “expected to support redistributive programmes” (2015: 4-5).

Similarly, because of the “risks” associated with poor educational attainment, Busemeyer et al. maintain that people who are “poorly skilled will...be more in favour of spending increases than the rich” (2009:199). Due to the relationship between qualifications and income and that people in receipt of lower incomes are more vulnerable to poverty, inequality and financial constraints (Holman, 1978; Hills et al., 2010; UKCES, 2014; Finch, 2015; JRF, 2016), it was expected that this would be reflected in this analysis. More specifically, that people lacking formal qualifications would be more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’ and more likely to express more support toward redistribution.

Concurrently, it may have been feasible to suggest that the opposite would be observable amongst people with higher levels of educational attainment. Reflecting higher incomes from better paid occupational roles, people with higher level qualifications are often expected to be further removed from the risk of experiencing poverty and inequality. Given this, it was expected that those with a higher level of educational attainment may be less likely to recognise the gap between high and low incomes as ‘too large’, and less likely to support redistribution. As Section 4.1 demonstrated, in 2015 this expectation was not reflected in the analysis. Instead people with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to perceive of the income gap as ‘too large’, and as Section 4.2 shows, more likely to support the redistribution of income. By comparison, people with no or ‘other’ qualifications were less likely to agree that the income gap was ‘too large’ in 2015.

Given that a number of cuts were to impact the chances of both young people and adults entering or indeed returning to education to bolster their opportunities and thus eventually strengthen their financial positions, this was particularly interesting. Due to changes in funding for adult learning centres and courses, who faced particularly large cuts, between 2009-2013/14 it has been evidenced that the number of adult learners declined by 17.0%



(Lupton et al., 2015). Or presented differently, there were 511,400 adults (Lupton et al., 2015) who failed to return to education to strengthen their position and their economic and social outlooks, due to grants being transformed into loans. Further research has also since suggested that “an estimated five million adults in the UK lack core literacy or numeracy skills” and a further “12.6 million lack basic digital skills” (JRF, 2016:11) of which is expected to impact upon access to the labour market, and by extension earnings.

That said, as Table 4.2.2 shows, in both 2009 prior to austerity measures being enacted and in 2012, people with no or ‘other’ types of qualification were found to be more likely to support the redistribution of income, followed by people with a degree and above level qualification. Those with below degree level qualifications were the least likely to agree. Thus, whilst in 2009 and 2012, the group who stood to gain more from the processes of income redistribution were more likely to support this initiative, by 2015 attitudes had changed. Instead, following nearly five years of austerity measures, the group least likely to be the beneficiaries of income redistribution, became more likely to support income redistribution.

As Table 4.3.1 shows, amongst those who said the inequality gap is ‘too large’ in 2012, support for the redistribution of income was however more likely amongst people with higher levels of educational attainment (degree or above). Attitudes towards inequality and redistribution in 2015, however, appeared consistent with the findings outlined in Table 4.1.2 and 4.2.2. Not only were people with higher levels of educational attainment more likely to agree that the income gap is ‘too large’, they were also more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they held this perception. Suggesting support toward redistribution remained more prevalent amongst those with higher levels of educational attainment and thus those who stand to gain least from this process.

Whilst the attitudinal differences observed in 2009 and 2012 (Table 4.2.2) suggest the assumptions of self-interest have been met. The findings suggest that in 2015 attitudinal differences do not reflect these assumptions. Instead, they suggest another reason for redistributive support amongst these groups, the prevalence of social values. In this way, though people with higher levels of educational attainment may not be the direct beneficiaries of income redistribution, greater levels of support toward redistribution may be a result of the perceived benefit to society as a whole during pervasive spells of economic inequality and disadvantage (Wu and Chou, 2015). It has, moreover, been widely evidenced that “people on low incomes face disadvantage that lock them out of

social and economic participation” (JRF, 2016:20), and that the risks of experiencing inequality grew during austerity.

Not only are these risks are often heightened amongst people, based on the type of occupation fulfilled, these differential positions are also expected to continue to impact upon perceptions of inequality and policy preferences toward redistribution. Based on the assumptions of self-interest, it would be feasible to assume that people occupying managerial and professional roles would be less likely to recognise the income inequality gap, and by extension, less likely to support the redistribution of income. By extension, people working in routine and manual occupations, who are expected to receive lower levels of pay by comparison, could be expected to demonstrate a greater likelihood of agreement that ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’. As Section 4.1 demonstrated, these assumptions were partially reflected in the findings. In 2015 people occupying positions in managerial and professional roles were less likely to agree, as expected. This was unsurprising, given that managerial and professional occupational positions, often signify greater wages and thus a lower likelihood of experiencing income inequality directly.

Yet, rather than people occupying routine and manual occupations being more likely to hold this view, it was instead more prevalent amongst people occupying intermediate positions. Whilst similar patterns may have been expected in Section 4.2 and 4.3, a different picture emerged. In both 2012 and 2015, as Table 4.2.2 shows, people who were employed in routine and manual occupations, and thus more likely to benefit from redistribution, were found to be the most likely to support redistribution. Comparatively, in 2012 and 2015, people employed within intermediate occupations were the least likely to hold this view. To understand changing attitudes by occupational position, Section 4.3 sought to understand which occupational groups were more likely to support the redistribution of income, if they also stated that the income gap is ‘too large’. As Table 4.3.1 shows, opinions towards the redistribution of income, remained consistent. Thus, of the proportion of people who stated that the income gap is too large in 2012 and 2015, people who were employed in routine and manual occupations were more likely to support the redistribution of income. By comparison, people working in intermediate positions, remained the least likely to do so. These findings show how occupational position significantly impacts upon perceptions, with those standing to gain most from redistributive measures, more likely to support them.

This discussion has emphasised how perceptions of inequality and redistribution of income differ amongst people by characteristic and over time. The focus has been on exploring these attitudinal differences and explaining these findings, drawing on need explanations, and the assumptions of self-interest, extending the analysis to consider how social values relate to perceptions. Observably high levels of agreement with the prevalence of income inequality have been emphasised, with much lower levels of support toward income redistribution between these groups. Chapter 5 explored this contradiction, intent on understanding why support toward redistribution remained so low over the period of austerity examined here, despite increasing social inequalities.

Whilst, as this section has suggested, the impact of widening income inequality may “climb up the class ladder” (Curtis and Anderson, 2015: 270), Chapter 2 demonstrated that there is also a curious interest in the “social and moral habits” (Bottero, 2005: 24) of people occupying lower positions in the British social hierarchy. Much of the literature drawn on emphasises how stereotypical and negative attitudes prevail and how these attitudes may, in turn be reflected amongst the public in their perceptions of others and in particular, those in receipt of benefits (Holman, 1978; Castell and Thompson, 2007; Dorey, 2010; Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Orton and Taylor, 2010; Tyler 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; O’Hara, 2014; Toynbee and Walker, 2015). Chapter 5 explored the extent of negative attitudes toward people in receipt of benefits (or those with a spouse in receipt) and how these attitudes may relate to support toward income redistribution.

Research has continued to demonstrate the prevalence of individualistic attitudes toward poverty and inequality (Christie and Warburton, 2001; Dorey, 2010; Perry, 2014; Lansley and Mack, 2015; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Pantazis, 2016; O’Connell and Hamilton, 2017). Notably individualistic accounts, where poverty is expected to have been “self-imposed” (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; 296) and reflective of poor choices (Wu and Chou, 2015) have a detrimental impact on those experiencing inequality but are also expected to be reflected in attitudes toward income redistribution. Here support toward redistribution is often a reflection of other attitudes, more specifically, why people are in need of support (Fong et al., 2003).

Toynbee and Walker (2015:9) point to the imagined prevalence of two opposing groups, those who are “moral and deserving” and those who are, in contrast, “immoral and undeserving”. People in receipt of welfare support have been depicted as deserving and undeserving for some time, and whilst this may not be a new revelation (Bottero, 2005;

Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Hall et al., 2014; JRF, 2016), these distinctions have increasingly been drawn out during the period of austerity examined here, and have gained further prominence as a result of ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) and ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018). The ‘images of inequality’ (Bottero, 2005) drawn on by members of the public, may thus enable them to make sense of inequality and poverty and thus decipher who is in need and conversely who is not.

Although it may be expected that people who have experienced inequality, poverty and have claimed benefits themselves (or have a close relationship with someone in receipt) may be reflected in their attitudes toward benefit recipients, Chapter 5 demonstrated that this is not always the case. Amongst people who agreed that ‘many people who get social security don’t...deserve help’, support toward income redistribution was less likely by income, benefit and employment status. Levels of agreement with the statement “many people who get social security don't really deserve any help”, were also consistently lower amongst high income earners. In comparison in 2009 and 2015, the highest levels of agreement were observable amongst middle income earners, and low-income earners in 2012. In 2012 and 2015, a similar pattern emerged by occupation, with people in managerial and professional roles the least likely to hold this view and people in intermediate roles most likely. This was surprising, given that both groups are less likely to need access to benefits, nor experience income inequality due to higher earnings.

What was more surprising, however, was that in 2009, 2012 and 2015, greater levels of agreement were observable amongst people in receipt of benefits (or with a spouse in receipt), those who were unemployed and those with no (or other forms of) qualifications, than in comparison to non-claimants, people in employment and people with higher level qualifications. People who are unemployed and those who lack qualifications might have been expected to express more sympathetic attitudes toward people in receipt of benefits. With those in receipt of benefits themselves (or with a spouse in receipt) not expected to express negative attitudes toward fellow benefit claimants, thus arguably labelling themselves or indeed their spouses as ‘undeserving’.

Benefit recipients were also more likely to agree that people in receipt of benefits were “fiddling” in some way in 2015. Whereas, levels of agreement amongst high income earners were consistently lower. Whilst in 2009, this view was most likely amongst middle income earners, by 2012 and 2015, low income earners were more likely to hold this

perception. In 2009, 2012 and 2015, levels of agreement were also higher amongst people occupied in routine and manual occupations and those with no (or other) qualifications.

Welfare benefit generosity and dependency is cited as a further issue that remains prevalent amongst benefit recipients (Lowe, 1994; Dorey, 2010; Wiggan, 2012; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Humpage, 2016; Pantazis, 2016) and a concern that was reflected amongst the public in this research. Amongst people who agreed “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous people would learn to stand on their own feet’, support toward income redistribution was lower by income, benefit and employment status. Levels of agreement with the statement “if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own feet” were consistently more likely amongst middle income earners, those in employment and amongst non-claimants. Comparatively levels of agreement were consistently lower amongst people with higher levels of educational attainment, and in 2012 and 2015, amongst people in managerial and professional roles. Yet in 2012 and 2015, greater levels of agreement were observable amongst people occupied in routine and manual occupations, a group more likely to access social security support.

These findings can be considered in relation to the stereotypical assumptions attributed to benefit recipients, or rather how particular ‘images of inequality’ (Bottero, 2005) discussed in Chapter 2, have consequences. As already stated, perceptions of people in receipt of help as undeserving, are not new, nor are the stereotypical assumptions that often accompany individualistic explanations of poverty and inequality (Bamfield and Horton, 2009). Throughout the period of austerity examined here, the rhetoric of the undeserving poor has however predominated (Mooney and Hancock, 2010; Jensen, 2013; Toynbee and Walker, 2015; Pantazis, 2016; Shildrick, 2018). Bamfield and Horton (2009) also note how, alongside this, the public are often found to be concerned that their money will be redistributed to individuals that are underserving or lazy, with fraud amongst benefit recipients also cited as an issue (McKendrick et al., 2008; Dorling, 2014; Brooker et al., 2015). This appears to be reflected throughout this analysis.

Whilst this may explain why people in positions of advantage, relative to other groups, may be more likely to hold negative attitudes, this does not account for higher levels of agreement amongst people in receipt of benefits, low-incomes and those in positions of vulnerability. Though these attitudes may be a reflection of the stereotypical discourse that predominated, these attitudes may be further explained by incorporating the reference group theory, the reference group reality blend theory (Evans and Kelley, 2017),

Cannadine's understanding of "us and them" (1998:19-20) and Bottero's understanding of the consequences of "symbolic demarcations between us and them" (2005:234).

Cannadine proposes that historically people in Britain have attempted to "make sense of the unequal social worlds they have inhabited", relying on different "versions or variants of...three basic and enduring models" (1998:19). Cannadine describes these models, succinctly:

*the hierarchical view of society as a seamless web; the triadic version with upper, middle and lower collective groups; and the dichotomous, adversarial picture, where society is sundered between 'us' and 'them' (1998:19-20).*

The two-model system refers to how individuals are conceived of as belonging to one of two groups and are thus for Cannadine "polarised between...two extremes...them and us" (1998:164). Members of the 'us' group are often characterised as 'hard working', 'strivers', 'responsible', 'decent' and 'self-sufficient'. In stark contrast, those labelled 'them' can be understood as a group who are 'work shy', 'skivers', 'delinquent', 'irresponsible' and 'lazy' (Pantazis, 2016). This can be further understood in relation to "good worker-bad benefit claimant dualisms" (Patrick, 2012:10). Patrick, using the language of duty and citizenship, argues that people who are in paid employment are "characterised as independent, responsible citizens", whereas those who are not working are described as "dependent, irresponsible and...even conceptualised as second-class citizens, given their failure to fulfil the most central of citizenship obligations" (2012:9).

The distinctions drawn out above and throughout this research are descriptive of the polarisation between 'skivers' or 'them' and 'strivers' or 'us' (Hills, 2015). These can be understood as "images of inequality" or "social pictures", which enable people to be placed categorically and arguably stereotypical, determining "social worth" and highlighting "social distance" between groups (Bottero, 2005:5-15). Both Cannadine (1998) and Dorling (2014) note that people are not only concerned with where they belong in society, but also how they are regarded by others. This concern for how they are perceived by others, may further embed stereotypical assumptions, where in an effort to avoid fulfilling the 'them' status, people contribute to the maintenance of "scroungerphobia" by labelling others (Golding and Middleton, 1982:59). Thus people engage in a process of 'disidentifying' from "othered groups" in order "to shore up their own identity" (Irwin, 2016:213).

Considering the processes inherent in social perception formation, as understood in relation to reference group theory, people draw on their own experiences, but also the

experiences of others, including their family members and their friends, and this may solidify these distinctions (Irwin, 2016; Evans and Kelley, 2017). Moreover, given that “both reference group forces and the actual material structure of society” impact on perceptions, and that social interaction and “information exposure” is not merely reducible to “social networks” alone, since “interactions with strangers to encounters with institutions to media stimuli” (Evans and Kelley, 2017:322) will also have an impact on social perceptions, this may mean that instances of ‘poverty propaganda’ may further solidify, rather than challenge these distinctions (Shildrick, 2018). Due to the prevalence of stigma and stereotypical labels attributed to those in receipt of benefits, this may explain hostile attitudes amongst people in positions of vulnerability and in receipt of benefits (or those with a spouse in receipt). These findings are similar to those observed by Paterson et al., who found that their research participants, discussing Benefits Street and benefit recipients, were “slightly more sympathetic” toward other benefit recipients, but that these participants stressed their difference relative to other benefit recipients (2016:212).

These findings also support Bottero’s contention that:

*the marking of inequality through the images of other...can also be observed between groups in very similar social positions, as people attempt to avoid the negative collective labels attributed to them by invoking finer social distinctions (2005:28).*

Following this perception, benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) alongside low income earners are perhaps identifying whom they consider “social inferiors” and in doing so, are marking out their own social location (Bottero, 2005:27). In this case, benefit recipients, in labelling other recipients as undeserving, defrauding the system and being reliant on benefits due to generous payments, are marking themselves out as independent, the opposite of deceitful and deserving. What is, moreover, notable is how attitudes towards benefit recipients, hinder support toward redistribution. Amongst those who express punitive attitudes, whom are reflecting wider stereotypical discourse toward the welfare state and welfare recipients, support toward income redistribution is lower.

#### **6.3.4.1 Perceptions, by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status, Summary**

This section discussed perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution, by educational attainment, employment status, occupation, income and benefit status. Notably, perceptions of the income gap amongst the British public remained significant over time and between groups. Whilst the proportion of people in agreement that the income

inequality gap was 'too large' between 2009-2012, increased by 2015, this proportion had fallen, as the consequences of austere policies grew. The findings suggest, for the most part, that people's perceptions of the income inequality gap may be related to their own experiences of income inequality. This is supported by the attitudinal findings amongst benefit recipients and people in receipt of low incomes. People in receipt of benefits (or those with a spouse in receipt) and people in receipt of a low-income were more likely to agree that the "gap between high and low incomes is too large" in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Those not in employment were also more likely to agree in 2009 and 2012, perhaps further reflecting the widening income inequality gap.

Similar findings are also notable by group amongst people who agreed that the government should redistribute income, with people who stand to gain from redistribution more likely to support this initiative. What was also notable, however, was that benefit recipients and low-income earners were also more likely to perceive people in receipt of benefits as undeserving of help and as fraudulently claiming. This is particularly interesting, given that those in receipt of benefits are seemingly labelling themselves (or their spouses) as undeserving, alongside fraudulent. That said, as already suggested, this may be a reflection of the wider rhetoric of the undeserving poor and prevalence of fraud amongst welfare recipients during this period. Reflecting, further, a 'them' and 'us' mentality where welfare recipients, and people occupying positions of vulnerability, attempt to distance themselves from derogatory and damaging stereotypical labels (Cannadine, 1998; Bottero, 2005; Paterson et al., 2016).

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Notably, this Chapter has reiterated how inequality of income impacts groups based on the possession of a number of specific social identities and how these positions in turn, are often related to perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution. Whilst income inequality in the UK predates the recession of 2008/09, following this particular crisis, a number of people and households saw their incomes fall (Clarke et al., 2016). As Padley et al. highlighted, the use of Minimum Income Standard [MIS] measures, enables a thorough understanding of how people were affected following the recession and through austerity (2017). This measure is based on what the public believe are requirements for a decent and thus "acceptable standard of living" (Padley et al., 2017:8). This study highlighted how the proportion of people failing to achieve MIS increased over this period, rising from 15.2 million in 2008/09, to 19.1 million in 2014/15 (Padley et al., 2017).



As demonstrated in Table 4.4.1, levels of unemployment and employment also fluctuated between 2008-2015. Although in 2015, the unemployment rate returned to its 2008 level, in both 2009 and 2012 it peaked. At the same time, the employment rate also saw changes, decreasing from 2008, to 2009, and 2012. Although unemployment rates increased again slightly in 2015, this was still a lower rate than in 2008 (ONS, 2009; 2010; 2012 and 2015). These changes suggest that a number of households continued to be in receipt of lower incomes, especially for those who remained unemployed, or moved into unemployment. This also reflects the findings of others whom suggest that the number of working households struggling to manage on low working incomes was increasing (Kingman, 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015; JRF, 2016; Oxfam, 2016; Kingman and Seager, 2014; CPAG, 2017). Furthermore, Households Below Average Incomes ([HBAI], 2016) data showed how 31.6 million working age adults were in working families, where 3.1 million were in relative low incomes BHC. Thus, emphasising how the protection from poverty employment is said to offer, is not necessarily reflected within austerity Britain (Patrick, 2012; Habibov, 2013).

As McKendrick et al emphasise, there are increasing numbers of people who are struggling, which highlights how “work is not necessarily always a means to escape poverty” (2008:55). Accordingly, the rise in levels of ‘in work poverty’ (Patrick, 2012) appear to correlate with the rise in the proportion of employed people noting that the income gap is ‘too large’ and increasing proportions of people in employment in support of the redistribution of income. Throughout the period of austerity, there has also been an increase in those working part-time, undertaking precarious, low-paid forms of employment, often working to insecure contracts, such as zero hours (Oxfam, 2016; TUC, 2017). Whilst initially it seemed that improvements were observable in the UK labour market given the employment trends, given the types of roles undertaken by members of the public, closer inspection reveals a more complex picture.

What is also clear is how the social identities of those occupying such roles, appears to both reflect but also reinforce the existence and prevalence of poverty and inequality amongst certain groups. For instance, more women than men are found to work part-time, in low-paid positions, this is also true of people from ethnic minority backgrounds (UKCES, 2014; Bennett and Daly, 2014; Falkingham et al., 2014; Catney and Sabater 2015; TUC, 2017; Hick and Lanau, 2017). Furthermore, what these findings also suggest is how the attitudes of people often fluctuate, are subject not only to the role of self-interest (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007), but also subject to what Leon explains as ‘risk-exposure’ and ‘risk-aversion’ (2012:201).

Moreover, as inequality peaks, people who are said to occupy 'relatively high economic' positions, will often feel the consequences of a number of 'social ills' (Anderson and Curtis, 2015:267). Thus, people on higher incomes, become more aware of, and likely to experience these consequences. This may, in part explain why people from the high-income band groups appeared to become increasingly more likely to regard the income gap as 'too large' and more likely to support the redistribution of income. Taken together, these findings seem to suggest that as inequality and poverty increases in a society, the disparities in levels of support amongst groups, do appear to lessen, where convergence means that the 'social ills', stigmatically associated with the prevalence of poverty and inequality, may be subverted (Anderson and Curtis, 2015).

This chapter incorporated the research findings, alongside literature to explore perceptions of inequality poverty and redistribution during austerity Britain 2009-2015. Having set the scene and incorporated redistributive theories, alongside sociological theory, this research has attempted to contribute to a growing body of literature concerned with understanding the impact of austerity. The following, final chapter, concludes this research. Drawing out key findings from this research, recommendations are made, detailing further the contribution of this research.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

#### 7.1 Introduction

This research was conducted with the intention of exploring public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution in austerity Britain between 2009-2015. To achieve this, quantitative secondary analyses of three sets of BSAS microdata have been conducted. The aim of the research was to respond to four research questions:

- How are people in receipt of social security benefits perceived by others?
- To what extent have attitudes towards poverty and inequality changed following the introduction of austerity measures in 2010?
- To what extent do negative attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits relate to the level of support expressed toward income redistribution?
- To what extent do socio-economic and demographic characteristics relate to perceptions of inequality and poverty?

Notably, these research questions overlap. To address these questions, and to do so within the limitations of secondary data analysis, meant also selecting consistent variables from BSAS to explore and subsequently analyse. Consistent with the fourth research question, attitudes were investigated in relation to specific characteristics. This includes demographic characteristics: gender, age, ethnic background and educational attainment, and socio-economic characteristics: employment status, self-rated income band, benefit status and occupation. These characteristics are consistent with the social inequalities prevalent in austerity Britain and meant that patterns of disadvantage amongst and between groups could be considered, alongside attitudinal differences.

Similarly, three of the remaining five variables selected for investigation were reflective of the stereotypical assumptions and discourse associated with people experiencing inequality and poverty. The intention was to understand who is more likely to agree with the following statements, and whether perceptions changed over time and between groups:

- ‘many people who get social security don’t deserve any help’
- ‘most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another’
- ‘if welfare benefits weren’t so generous, people would stand on their own feet’

To understand how people perceived of income inequality and whether members of the British public supported redistribution, two further statements were included within the analysis:

- ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’
- ‘the government should redistribute income from the better-off to the less-well-off’

Focusing on the significant findings, this chapter summarises the key findings of this research. Further demonstrating how these research questions were responded to and specifying the contribution of this research. Following this, the research is brought to an end, highlighting the need to challenge attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution. Thus, the need for further research is emphasised, providing further recommendations for the direction of this research.

## **7.2 Research Findings**

Public perceptions of inequality, poverty and redistribution in austerity Britain, between 2009-2015, have been the focus of this research. Emphasis has, however, also been placed on the need to provide a sociological analysis of the social, cultural, political and economic environment, in which these data were collected. This has been achieved by considering the data in relation to sociological theory and theories of redistribution, with further emphasis also placed on prevailing social divisions and inequalities. This section, in focusing on the significant findings, highlights the key research findings. Demonstrating further how attitudes toward redistribution, inequality and people experiencing poverty, differ between groups and over time.

Chapter 4 suggested that the British public are aware of large disparities in income between groups. There is a strong sense of agreement amongst the public that income inequality between groups is a gap ‘too large’. What was notable was how perceptions of the income gap appeared to change, albeit slightly, yet nevertheless remained substantial. In 2009 over 80% of the British public agreed that income gap was ‘too large’ and in 2012, this increased to a little over 84%. Increasing levels of agreement were notable amongst and within each characteristic group. The largest change in attitudes was, however, observable amongst people in receipt of high incomes, partially supporting Anderson and Curtis, whom suggest that concern toward inequality will grow as inequality does (2015).

By 2015 however, following five years of austerity measures, this recognition amongst the public decreased. The proportion of people in agreement that income inequality was too great fell to a level lower than observed in 2009, yet at 78% remained substantial. Interestingly, the findings in Chapter 4 highlighted that of those becoming less inclined to recognise the extent of income inequality, those with the highest likelihood of experiencing income inequality and poverty, were amongst those becoming less inclined to agree that the income gap is too large. Thus, between 2012-2015, concern toward the income gap fell overall, but this change was particularly striking amongst women, people aged 18-34, people from BAME backgrounds, those in receipt of a low income, people not in employment, and those working in routine and manual occupations.

Despite declining levels of agreement, these findings support those of Fahmy et al. (2012), suggesting people are able to recognise the extent of growing income inequality. These findings also suggest that recognition of the income inequality gap is more likely amongst particular groups. In 2015, this included women, people with higher levels of educational attainment, those in intermediate occupations, and people from white ethnic backgrounds. In 2009, 2012 and 2015, people in receipt of benefits (or whose spouse was), those in receipt of a low income, and people aged 65 and over were more likely to agree. Finally, agreement was also more likely amongst people who were not in employment in 2009 and 2012. These findings further suggest that people are able to recognise the extent of income inequality, evidencing Irwin's claim that people do "care about inequality" (Irwin, 2016:15).

Whilst it might have been expected that support toward redistribution would reflect these attitudes, the findings suggested otherwise. Support toward income redistribution did not resonate amongst more than half of the British public in 2009, 2012 or 2015. In 2009, a little over 37% held this view, though redistributive support increased in 2012 and 2015, support toward a measure to close the income inequality gap, remained low in comparison to the perceived need. As demonstrated in Table 4.2.1.2, some of the attitudinal changes are relatively small, particularly so between 2012-2015 (an increase of just 2.6pp). Given the perceived need for income redistribution as a result of austerity policies, these attitudinal changes were also smaller than anticipated. Keen to understand this disparity, the proportion of people who agreed that the income gap was too large and also supported redistribution was also investigated. This analysis revealed that amongst people who agreed that the income inequality gap is too large in 2009 (80.6%), just 40.1% also expressed support toward income redistribution. In 2012, 84.4% felt the gap was too large,

whereas just 45.8% also supported income redistribution. Similarly, in 2015, of the 78.0% whom said that income inequality was too great, just 50.5% also wished to see income redistributed.

These findings suggest that amongst those that recognise income inequality between groups as a gap 'too large', support toward redistribution is more likely. However, these findings also show that recognising the extent of income inequality, does not necessarily mean people will also support the redistribution of income to close this gap. This is a problem in need of addressing, and given this, this research sought to identify which groups were more likely to support income redistribution and conversely, which groups were less likely.

Chapter 4 highlighted that redistributive support was greater amongst people from BAME backgrounds. Given the disproportionate levels of poverty and inequality faced by people from ethnic minorities (Longhi and Platt, 2008; Hills et al., 2010; Fisher and Nandi, 2015; Catney and Sabater, 2015), this was not surprising. The analysis also identified gendered attitudinal differences, where women were more likely to recognise the extent of the income gap than in comparison to men, though these attitudinal gaps are again, relatively small. Despite this, since women not only face ongoing inequality but were also expected to feel the consequences of austerity to a greater extent than men (Oxfam, 2012; Conley, 2012; Ginn, 2013; O'Hara, 2014; De Henau and Reed, 2016) this attitudinal difference was not surprising. What was, however, surprising initially was the attitudinal findings amongst men, who were consistently more likely to support the redistribution of income. The gap between male and female levels of agreement were not only greater than those observed in Table 4.1.1.2, between 2012-2015, they widened.

That said, as McKay et al. purported, focus of the gendered impact of austerity policies concentrated too heavily on the experiences of women, excluding men (2013). Given fluctuating employment rates, and the increasing financial strain placed on men during austerity it is suggested that these attitudinal disparities reflect the assumptions of self-interest and the prevalence of social values (Wu and Chou, 2015). In this way, it has been argued that men may have desired more redistributive spending as a result of their own economic difficulties, whilst at the same time, becoming more aware of and concerned as to how austerity was increasing inequalities amongst others (Orton and Rowlingson, 2007).

Reflecting self-interest (Wu and Chou, 2015), need explanations (Whitely, 1981) and risk-exposure (Leon, 2012), people in receipt of low incomes and those not in employment were consistently more likely to support the redistribution of income. In 2012 and 2015, people in receipt of benefits or those with a spouse in receipt, were also more likely to express support toward redistribution. These findings suggest that amongst these groups, those standing to gain the most from the redistribution of income, were more likely to support this combative measure.

Attitudinal disparities by age group have also been identified. Whilst younger people were the most severely affected by the economic downturn and austere policies (UKCES, 2014; Kingman and Seager, 2014; Belfield et al., 2014; MacInnes et al., 2015; Hood and Waters, 2017), this did not appear to be reflected in this attitudinal analysis. Instead, younger people were consistently the least likely to conceive of the income gap as 'too large', whereas older members of the public were more likely. For the most part, people aged 65 and over were also more likely to perceive of people in receipt of benefits as undeserving, fraudulently claiming (with exception to 2009) and reliant on benefits as a result of welfare generosity (with exception to 2009). Amongst those aged 65 and over who agreed with this perception, support toward redistribution was also much lower. These findings not only reflect those of self-interest, but also of an assumption made by Whiteley in the early 1980's, where welfare remains "associated with personal failure and charity handouts" (1981:468) amongst older generations.

This latter statement is reflective of a "moralistic stance" amongst the public, and one that has persisted for some time (Mack and Lansley, 1985:210). This stance is made visible further through the "moral distinctions" (Fahmy et al., 2012:6) made between those who are 'deserving' of help, and those who are not. Much like Townsend (1979:427) cautioned, "punishing attitudes to poverty" remain and as this thesis has demonstrated, these were observable amongst the British public. Between 2009-2012, increasing proportions of the British public felt that benefit recipients were undeserving, were fraudulently claiming in some way and that the generosity of benefit payments resulted in welfare dependency. In 2009, 2012 and 2015 the public felt more strongly toward this latter statement than they did toward the government redistributing income between groups. Between 2012-2015, negative perceptions of those in receipt of benefits declined. That said, negative attitudes related to perceptions of the redistribution of income. People who perceived of benefit recipients as undeserving or as reliant on support, thus resulting in the loss of

independence, were less likely to support income redistribution. These findings highlight the consequences of stereotypical discourse and the relationship between negative attitudes, reflective of this discourse and redistributive support. Public support is a necessary component in policy making, sustaining interest and alleviating inequality, this relationship is therefore problematic (McKendrick et al., 2008; Monnickendam and Gordon, 2010; Prabhaker, 2012).

What was also particularly striking were the attitudes of people in receipt of low-incomes, people without qualifications, those in routine and manual occupations and benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt). Whilst it might have been expected that people in receipt of low incomes or those susceptible to low incomes, would, reflecting their own positions of precarity and disadvantage, be less inclined to hold negative views toward benefit recipients, this analysis demonstrated that this is not always the case. In the context of benefit recipients themselves, or people who are spouse to those in receipt, greater levels of agreement are observable. Indeed, the analysis identified benefit recipients (or those with a spouse in receipt) as more likely (than non-claimants) to agree that benefit recipients were undeserving of help in 2015. In comparison to non-claimants, this group were also more likely to agree that “most...on the dole are fiddling” in 2015.

Whilst it may seem surprising that benefit recipients, or those with a partner in receipt of benefits, perceive of others in receipt of benefits as undeserving or indeed fraudulent, Cannadine’s (1998) model was incorporated to explain these attitudinal findings. Cannadine (1998:19-20) refers to a binary “adversarial picture” where people consider themselves in relation to two different, opposing, groups; “us” and “them”. In light of this picture, it has been posited that those who claim benefits, or those with a spouse in receipt, regard themselves as deserving and therefore situated amongst those in the “us” group. Thus, not only are they labelling other welfare recipients as “them” in the process, or in this case the “undeserving” and fraudulent, they are also attempting to exonerate themselves from these stereotypical labels. Thus, these findings appear to provide further evidence of the consequences of the “symbolic demarcations between them and us” noted by Bottero (2005:234). Where, in an attempt to distinguish themselves as different from the popular stereotypical rhetoric and stigma attributed to benefit recipients, “distinctions of social worth” are being made by benefit recipients themselves (Bottero, 2005:15). The consequences of these distinctions are clear, stereotypical assumptions are reinforced and social relationships are eroded.



In short, the findings thus suggest that perceptions of the income inequality gap amongst the public matter, particularly in relation to strategies to narrow or indeed eradicate income inequality through the redistribution of income. Support for the redistribution of income is significantly greater amongst people who agree that ‘the gap between high and low incomes is too large’. But, as these findings suggest, recognition of the extent of the income gap, does not necessarily result in support toward measures to close this gap. Given the rise of and indeed extent of ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018) over the period of austerity examined here, the proportion of the public in agreement that people in receipt of benefits were undeserving of help, were fraudulently claiming and dependent of benefits due to welfare generosity, were smaller than initially anticipated.

Nevertheless, negative attitudes amongst the British public remain prevalent and problematic. Not only do such attitudes impact social relations, they also impede the support necessary to implement policies intended to reduce social inequalities. Whilst public support toward the redistribution of income increased over the period of austerity examined here, the attitudinal changes between 2012-2015 in particular, were quite small. Whilst greater increases are observable between 2009-2015, support toward the redistribution of income between groups, remained particularly low in comparison to the perceived need, and as Chapter 5 demonstrated, these negative attitudes reduce this support further. Based on the findings identified in this research, Section 7.4 proposes recommendations for future research, and where redistributive support may need to be targeted to bolster support.

### **7.3 Contribution**

As Chapter 6 emphasised, it was unclear whether “negative and punitive” (Bamfield and Horton, 2009:6) attitudes towards people experiencing inequality and poverty would be observable within the analysis of BSAS data. Nor was it clear whether negative attitudes would increase amongst the public over time, or whether this would be observable amongst particular groups. However, what was understood prior to the initial analysis, was the importance of exploring social inequalities alongside attitudinal data. This research has contributed to a wider body of research intent on studying the adverse effects of austerity measures in Britain. In a period of diverse social, cultural, political and economic change, this thesis has explored attitudinal changes between 2009-2015. This research, therefore,

has been conducted with a commitment to understanding and highlighting some of the social inequalities faced by a number of groups.

Emphasis has been placed on the social, cultural and economic consequences of austerity, considering the role of political rhetoric throughout this period. The findings of this research, should therefore, be understood against this critical backdrop to austerity Britain. Exploring attitudes in relation to these conditions, has enabled a broader understanding of how life is experienced in austerity Britain. Seeking to reframe austerity and the people living and experiencing further disadvantage as a result of it, anti-austerity campaigns, and new programmes may have emerged. However, despite these acts of resistance and reframing, this was occurring later in the programme of austerity examined here. As a result, much of the research collated has shown how attitudes towards those in receipt of benefits, and the welfare state as a whole, are often coloured by unease, antagonism and negativity. Chapter 2 demonstrated that following the onset of austerity in Britain and throughout the period focused on in this research, this has been both observable, and consistent.

It has thus been evidenced that people in receipt of benefits, whom are experiencing inequality and poverty, have been collectively considered a group who take what they can, but contribute little or nothing back to society (Humphries, 2013). Reflective of these accusations, it has been suggested that quality of life in the UK, would have been much better without the welfare state (Bartholomew, 2013), with the welfare state itself accused of producing people who are reliant on the state for support rather than themselves, whom have little incentive, nor ingenuity (Lowe, 1994). And this position was verified by the Conservative government, where they declared the “days of something for nothing” were “over” (Conservative Manifesto, 2015:26).

Those already experiencing disadvantage have become “figurative scapegoats”, collectively portrayed as group of people who are “a parasitical drain” and thus a “threat to scarce...resources” (Tyler, 2013:9). This collective portrayal is evidenced in programmes like Benefits Street, where those featured were ridiculed and considered with “contempt” (Burnett, 2017:217). With the rise of ‘poverty porn’ (Jensen, 2013) and ‘poverty propaganda’ (Shildrick, 2018), not only are people able “to harshly judge and embarrass” (Couldry, 2011:37) others, “human struggles” have been transformed “into a sneering form of entertainment” (Burnett, 2017:217). For Paterson et al. however, this is not considered

entertainment, but an arena for the “perpetuation of existing stereotypes about benefit claimants” (2016: 212). Not only does this seek to encourage “negative evaluations of poor people and benefit recipients” (Paterson et al., 2016: 212), this further perpetuates stereotypical rhetoric and their consequences.

Poverty and the experience of inequality has thus been trivialised, or as Hanley (2009:7) remarked previously, has been turned into a “spectator sport”. As Shildrick emphasises, such programmes are better understood in relation to ‘poverty propaganda’ and thus as “a form of stigmatisation that damages those with the least and provides a critical resource for those with power” (2018:794). Deacon once referred to the presence of “scroungerphobia” (1978:124) amongst the public, within an austere Britain this has arguably returned. Notably, the consequences of austerity are profound, and this has been evidenced throughout this research. These stereotypical assumptions have predominated prior to the implementation of austerity in Britain, however, what was less understood was whether these attitudes would be reflected over the course of austerity examined here. In producing this thesis, this research has filled this gap.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

As Chapter 3 highlighted, this research has enabled exploration of attitudes toward inequality, poverty and redistribution between 2009-2015, of which would not have been possible had the research design not been selected. Quantitative secondary data analysis has thus demonstrated how attitudes changed over the period of austerity examined here, demonstrating further attitudinal differences between groups. As highlighted in Chapter 4 and 5, some of the changes observed over time, and between groups, were particularly small, and these are discussed, alongside greater attitudinal changes, in more detail in Chapter 6. Thus, in each of the finding’s chapters, and within the analytical discussion chapter, attitudinal changes are outlined, noting relatively small changes, and highlighting patterns within the data. Having completed this research, however, further questions have arisen.

For instance, whilst this research has shown how attitudes toward redistribution differ amongst groups, are related to perceptions of income inequality and toward people experiencing poverty, it has been unable to determine explicitly why this occurs. Similarly, whilst this research has also shown that negative attitudes toward people in receipt of

benefits relate to perceptions toward redistribution, this research has been unable to determine where these attitudes stem from. Whilst this was not the focus of this research, it has become increasingly clear that support toward redistribution is lacking and to attempt to bolster this support, further enquiry is necessary.

Accordingly, further attitudinal research is necessary to explore perceptions and to understand why people do not support income redistribution, despite so many perceiving the income gap between groups as 'too large'. Future research should seek to target particular groups, with the intention of seeking a deeper understanding of underlying perceptions of social security recipients, inequality, poverty and income redistribution. What has been made clear is that attitudes towards social security recipients are related to the level of support expressed toward redistribution. In this way, to increase support toward redistribution, underlying attitudes must be understood, making way for the expungement of popular myths about welfare recipients, and a lack of both empathy and understanding of the existence and consequences of inequality of income and poverty in Britain.

Whilst quantitative investigation alone cannot explain why, it can pave the way for future research and this research has highlighted which groups may need to be targeted. Accordingly, efforts to increase redistributive support should be targeted toward particular groups and this includes people who do not receive benefits, women, high income earners, and those in employment. Concurrently, it is imperative that stigmatising and stereotypical labels be addressed, investigating why negative perceptions continue, despite research invalidating common claims. The focus of this research must not only include those who have lived experiences of income inequality and poverty but needs to be extended to those who lack understanding, and indeed experience. The output from such research should, in an effort to achieve greater impact, be presented in an accessible format, intent on widening its reach. As Larsen and Dejgaard pointed out, stereotypical attitudes may be "difficult to change" (2013: 298), but without further intervention and research, support toward social policies intent on reducing or indeed eradicating disadvantage will be lacking. Though this may prove a challenge, this is a problem that needs to be addressed.

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