

Framing Modern Slavery in the UK

Closing the gaps in public understandings of exploitation

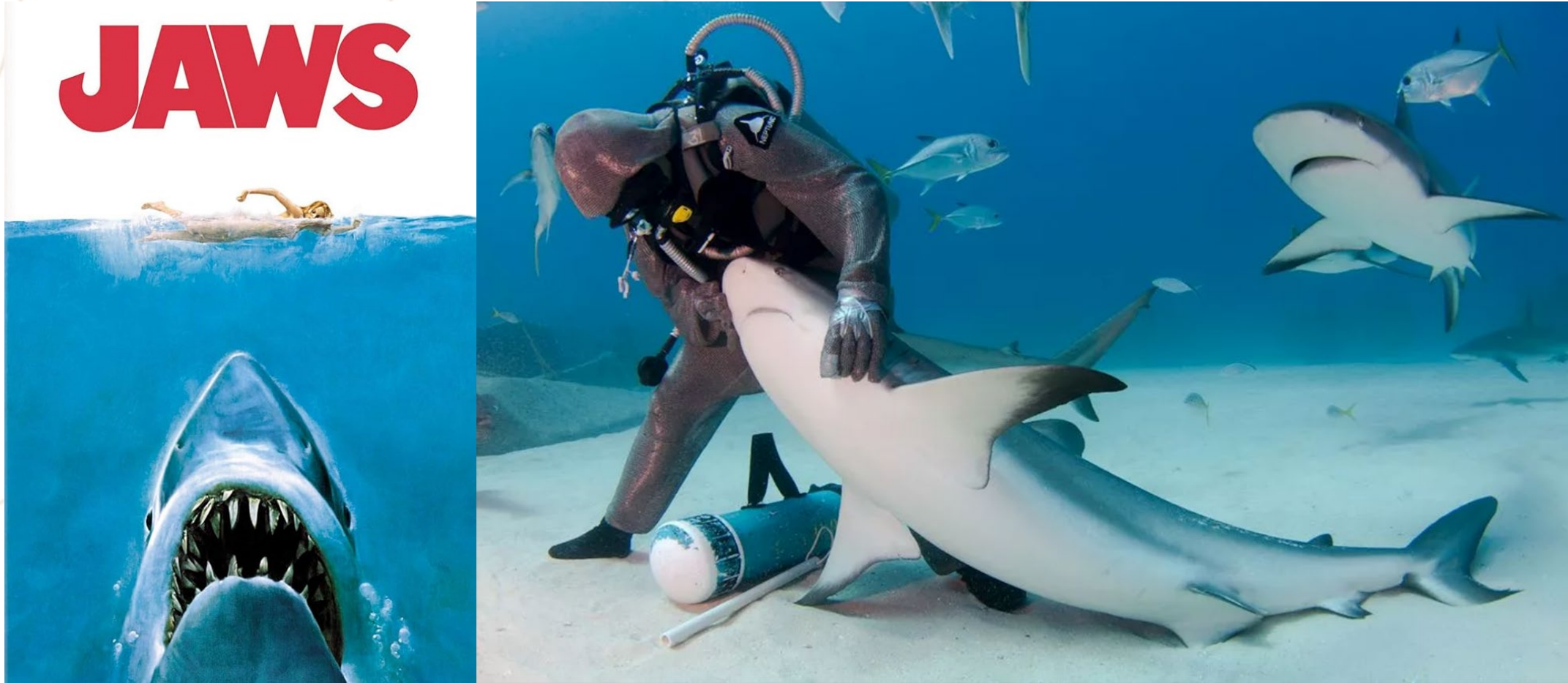
Presentation by James Robertson

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What is framing and why does it matter



**When you're describing
you're prescribing**

Context and Aims

Context:

- Tens of thousands of people estimated to be affected in the UK alone.
- A complex issue too often over-simplified
- This is reflected in the public's understanding

Aims:

- Identify effective frames to enhance public understanding of modern slavery.
- People with lived experience of modern slavery to guide what language should be used and what understandings to prioritise

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Methodology

Desk-based research:

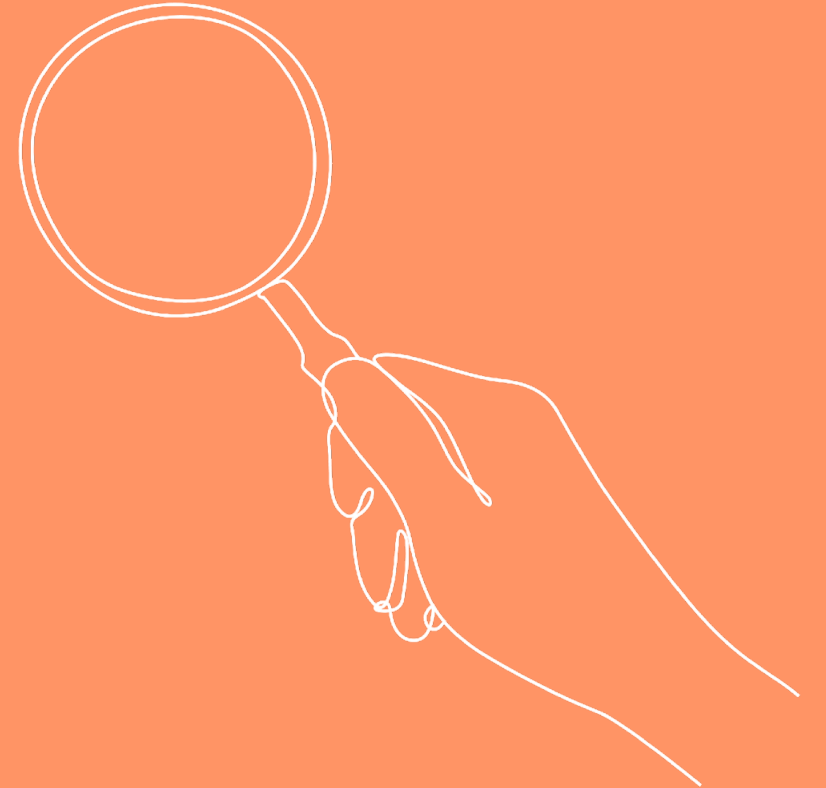
- Public perceptions of modern slavery?
- How is modern slavery being framed?
- What we learn from existing framing research e.g. poverty, immigration, crime?



Methodology

Workshops with people with lived experience:

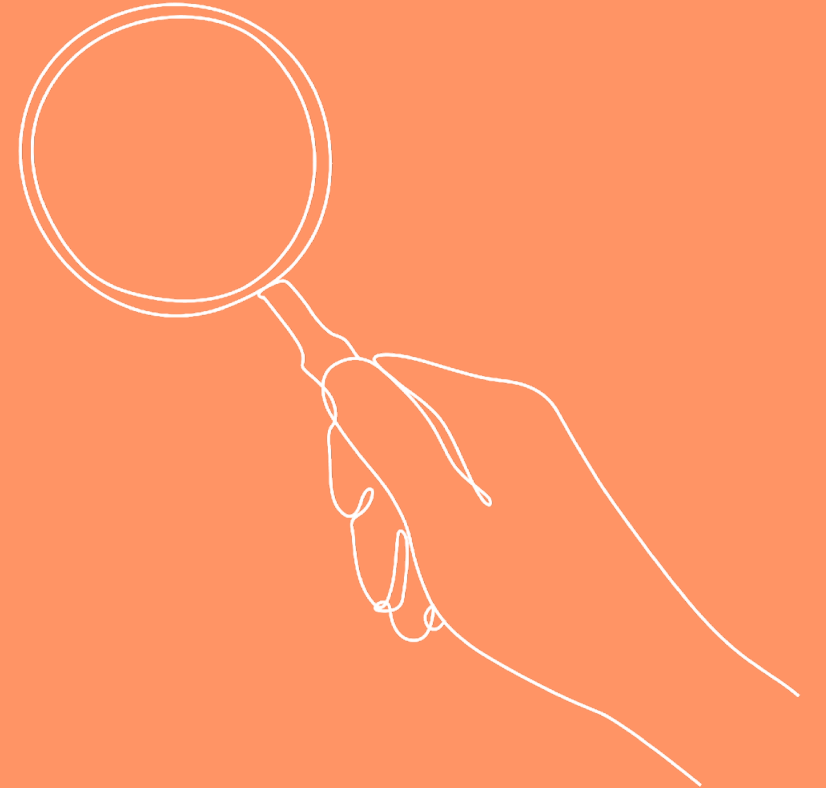
- What is most important for the public to understand about modern slavery?
- What language should be used to describe modern slavery?



Methodology

Focus groups:

- What messages are most effective in achieving our aims with different persuadable groups





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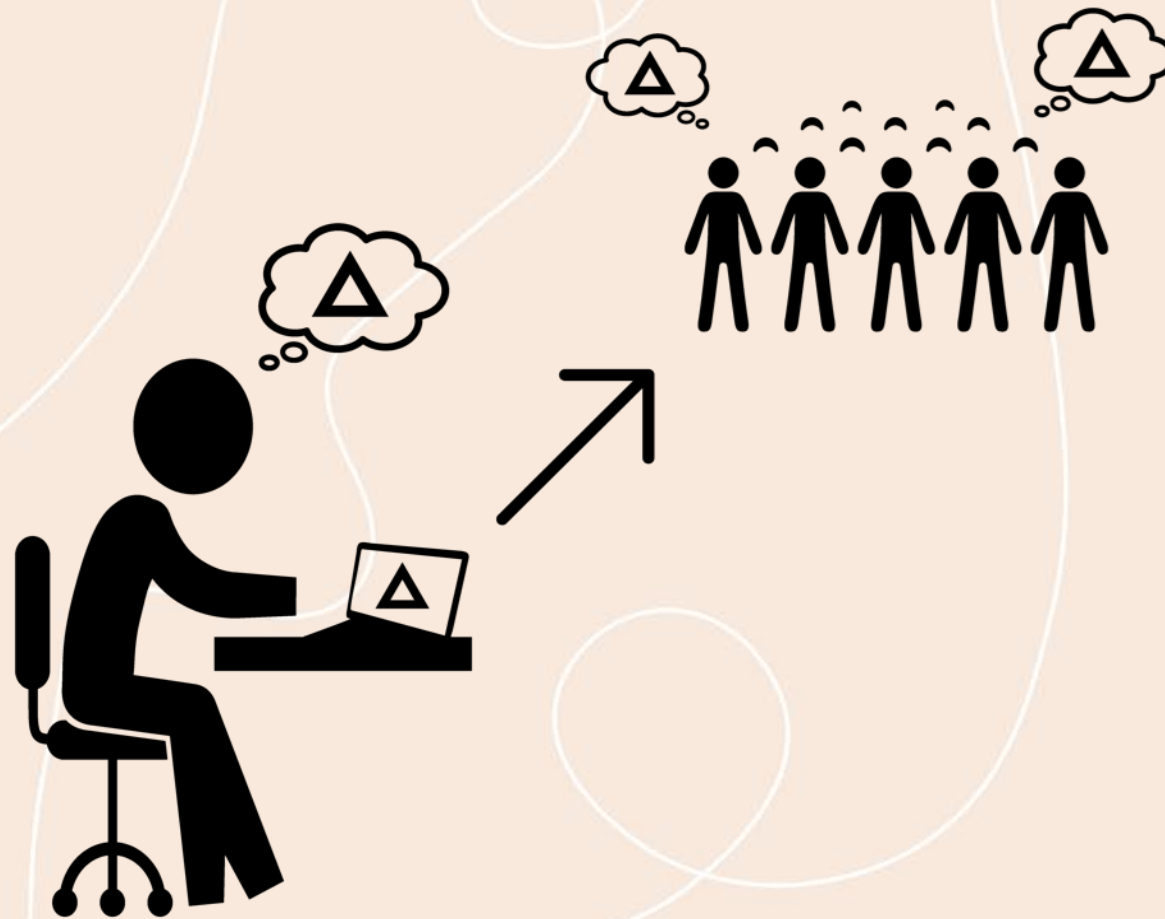


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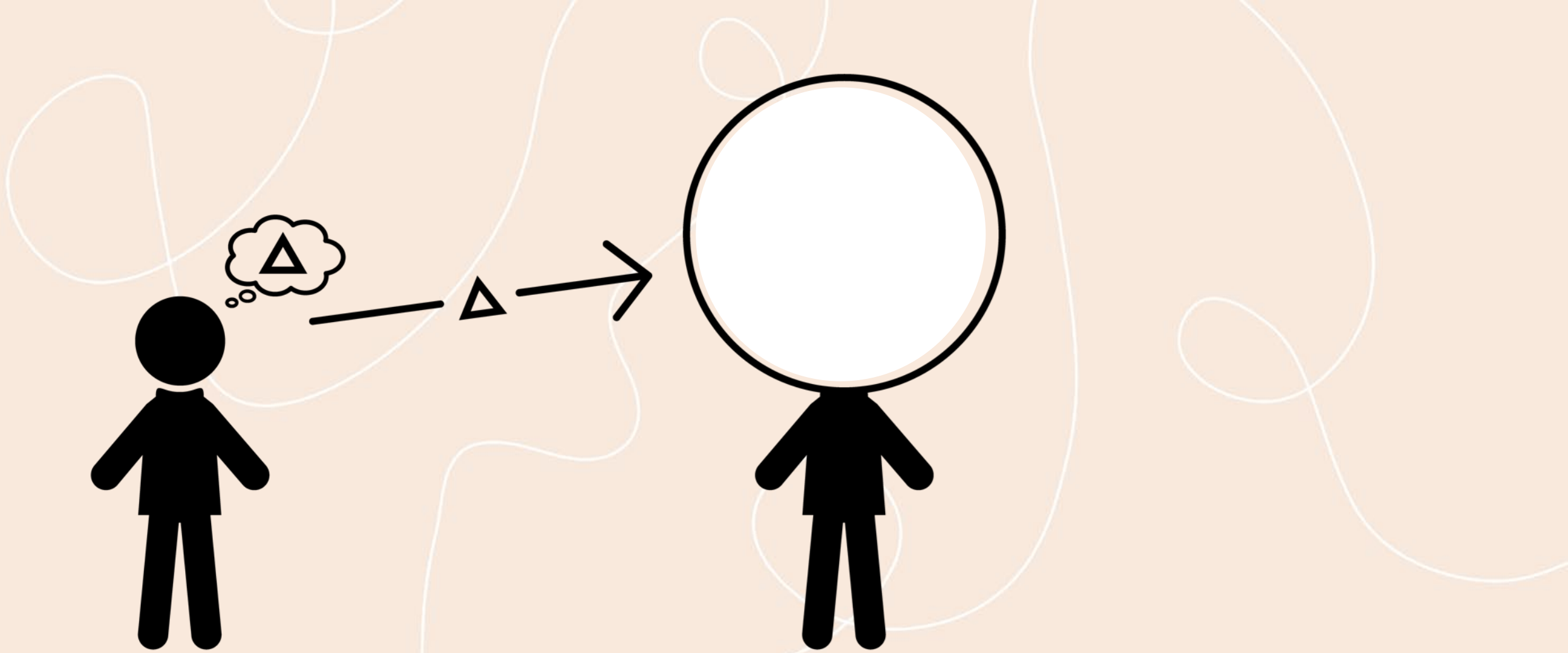
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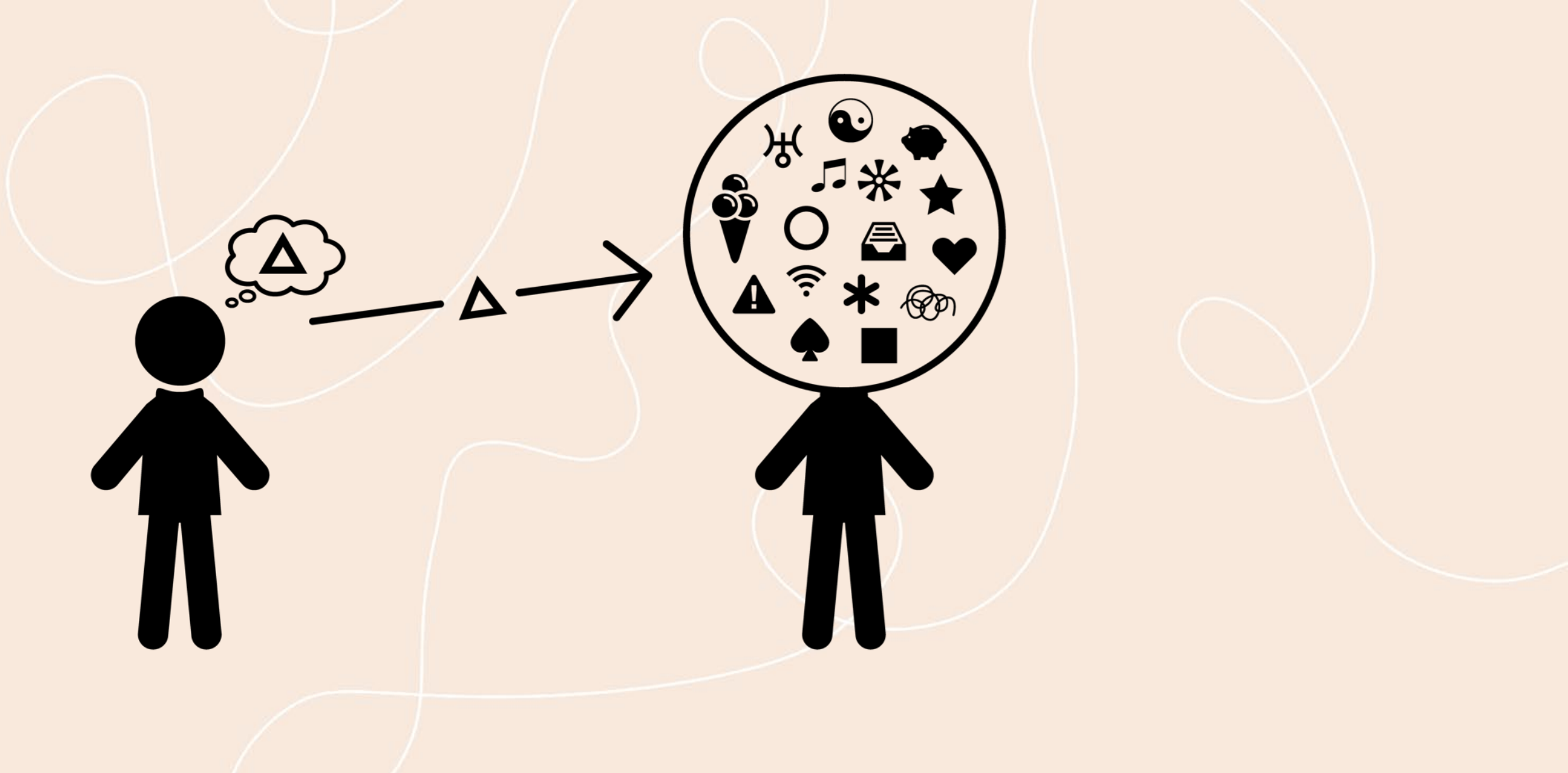




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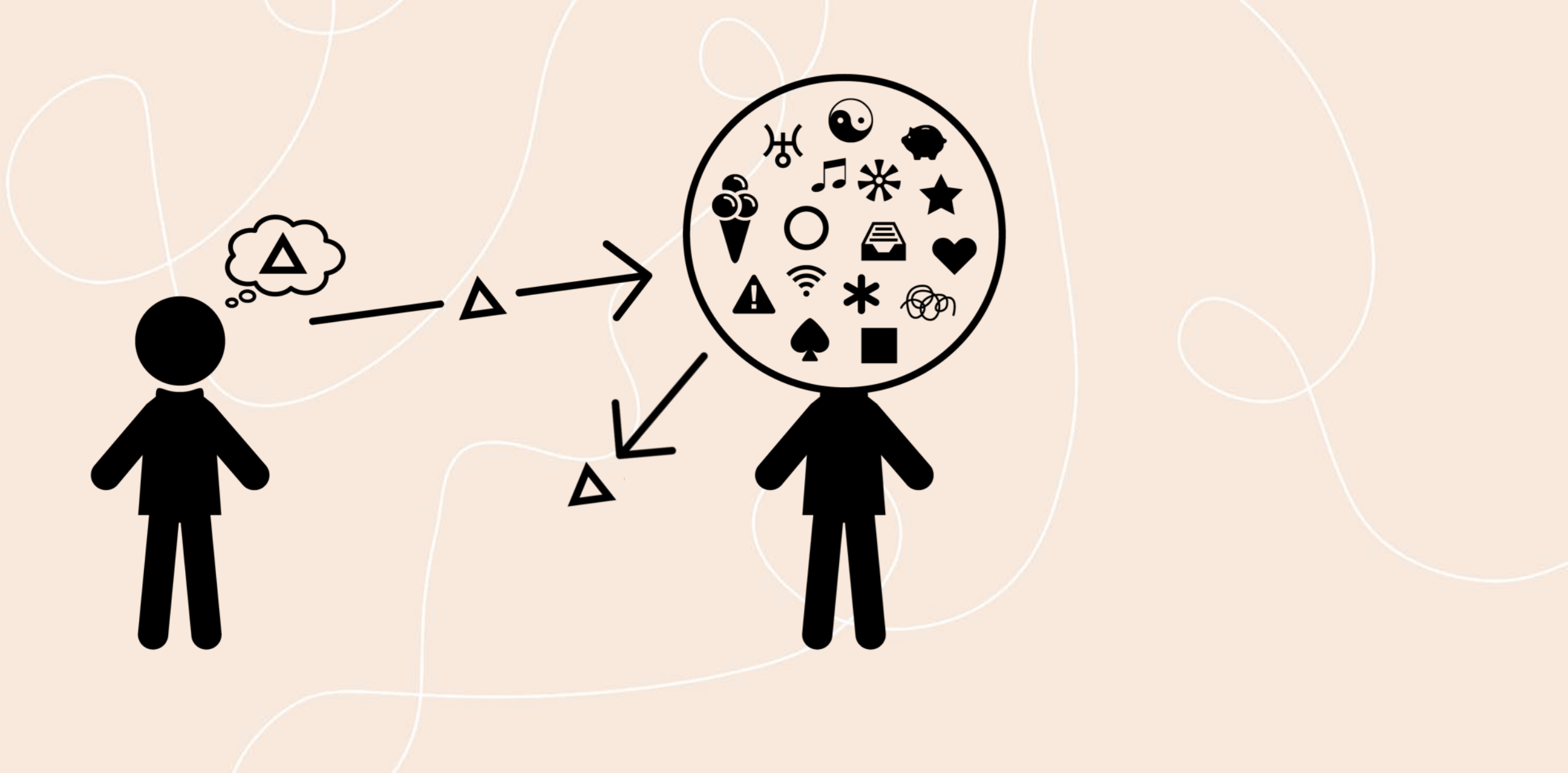
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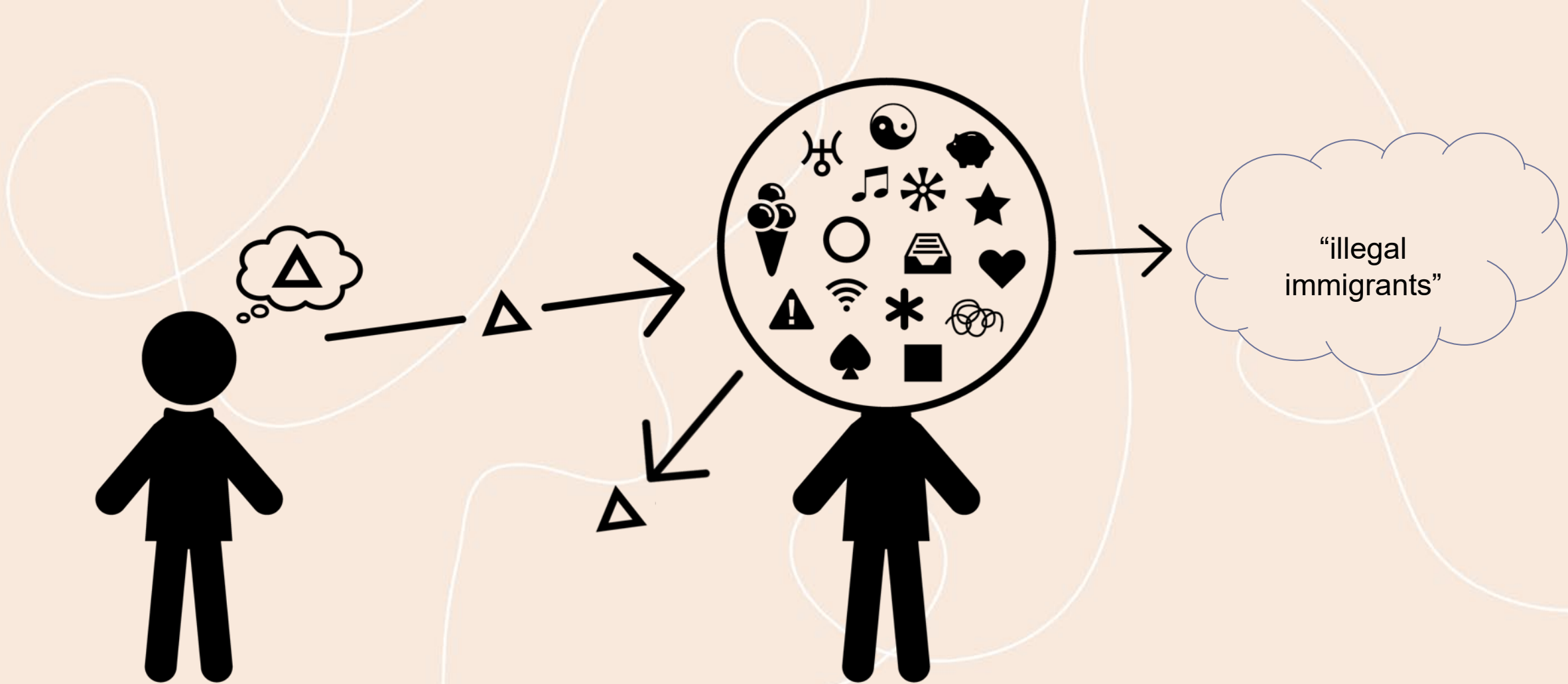
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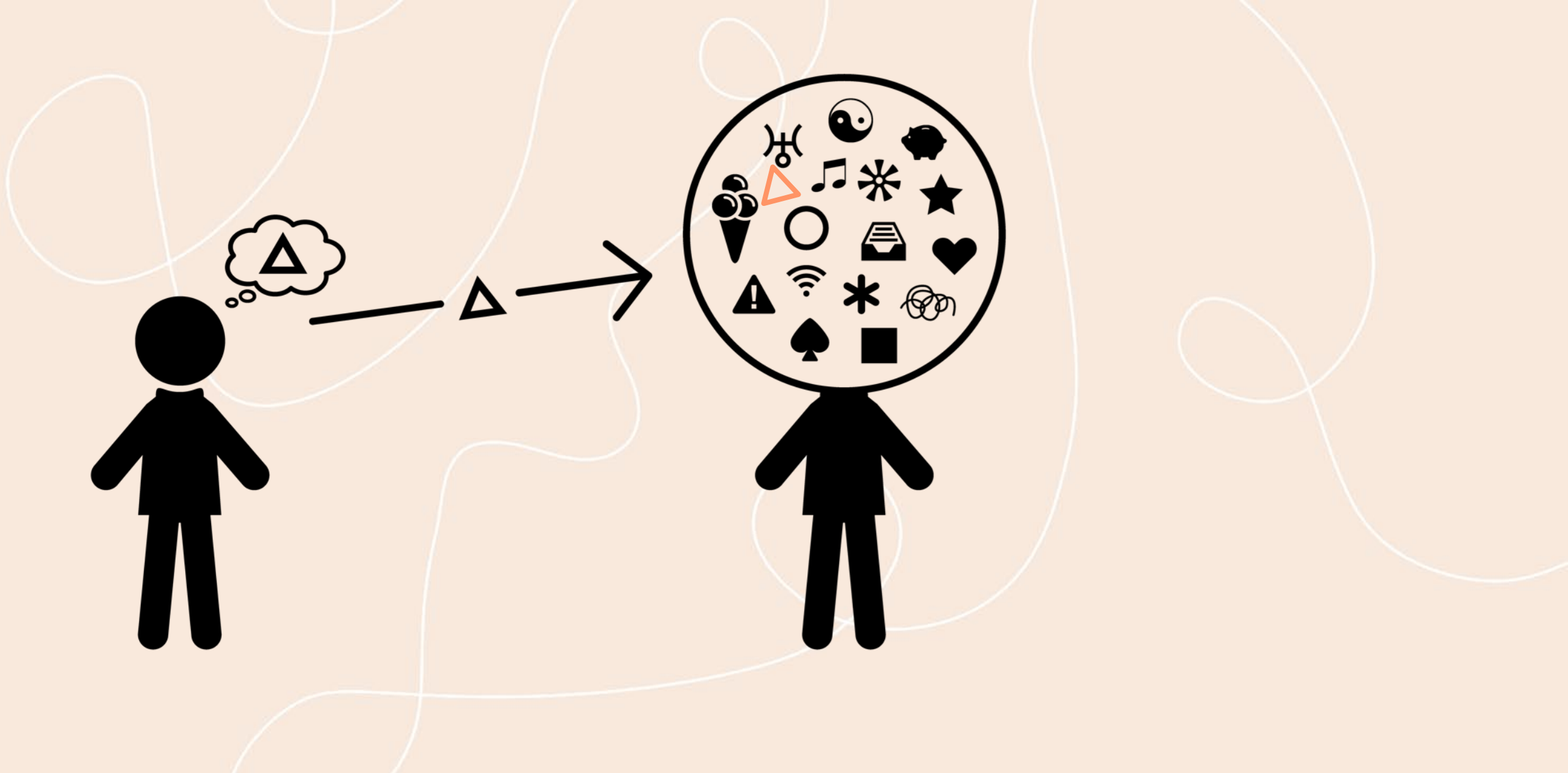


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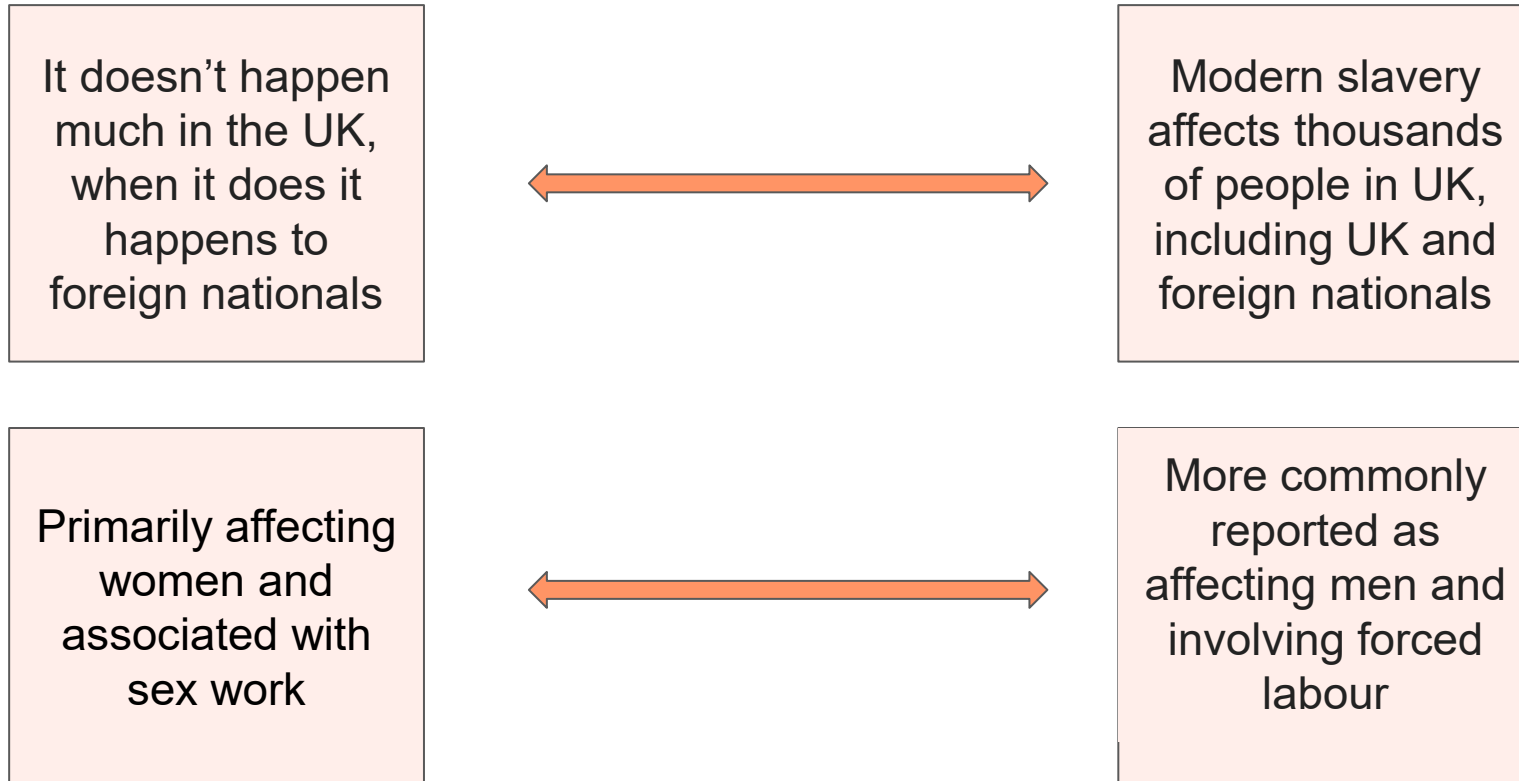
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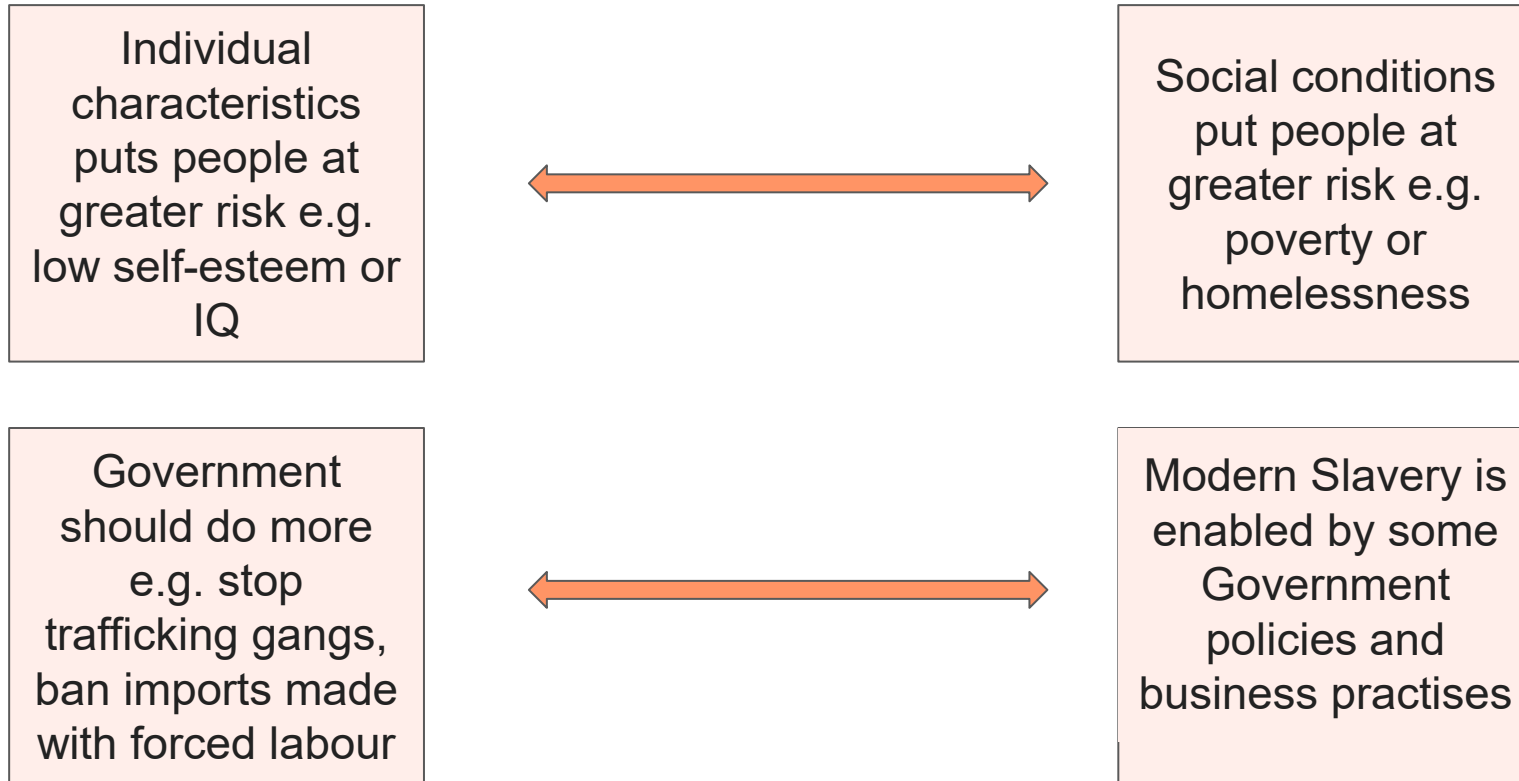
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Key findings

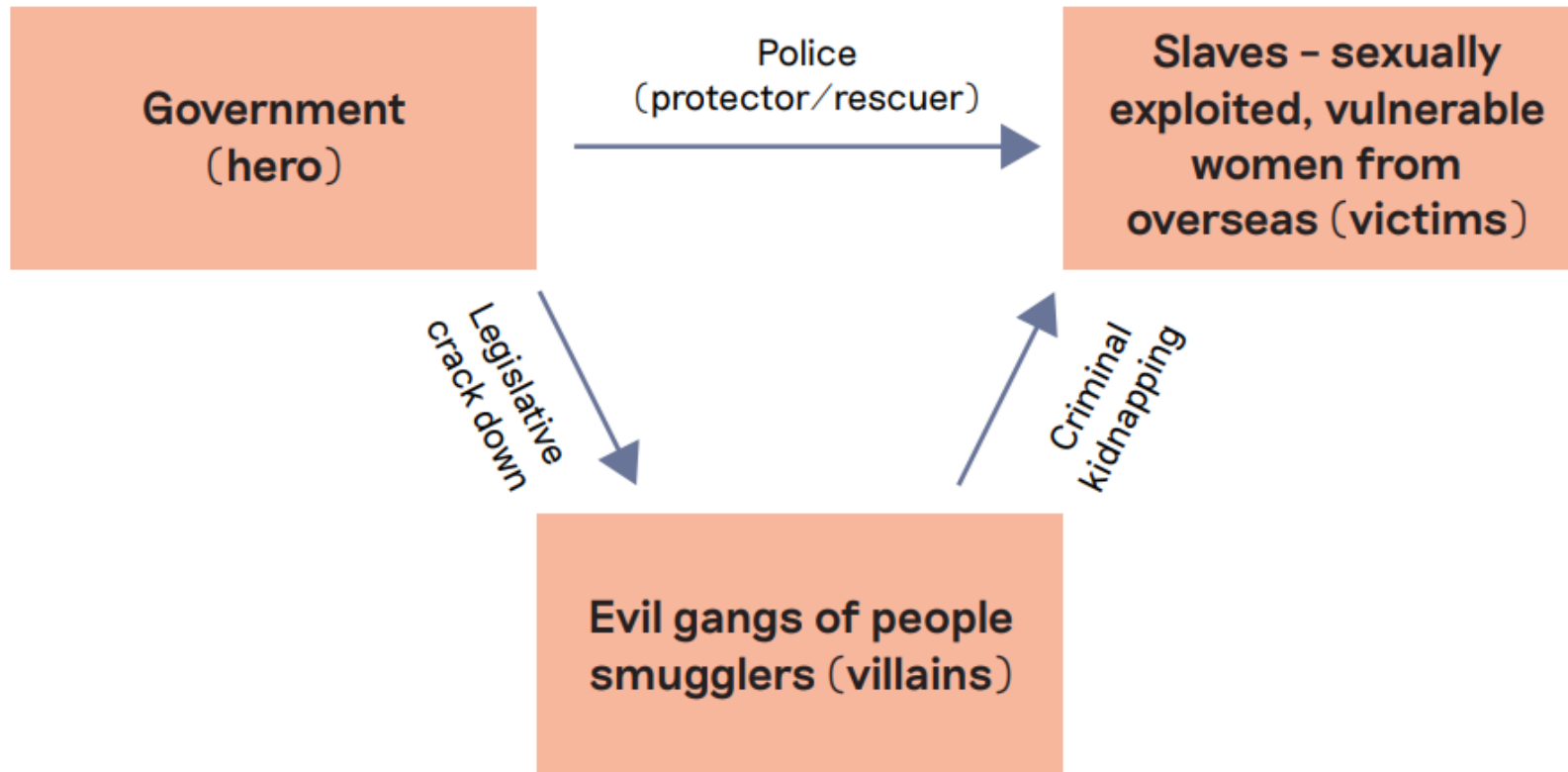
Gaps in perceptions of modern slavery



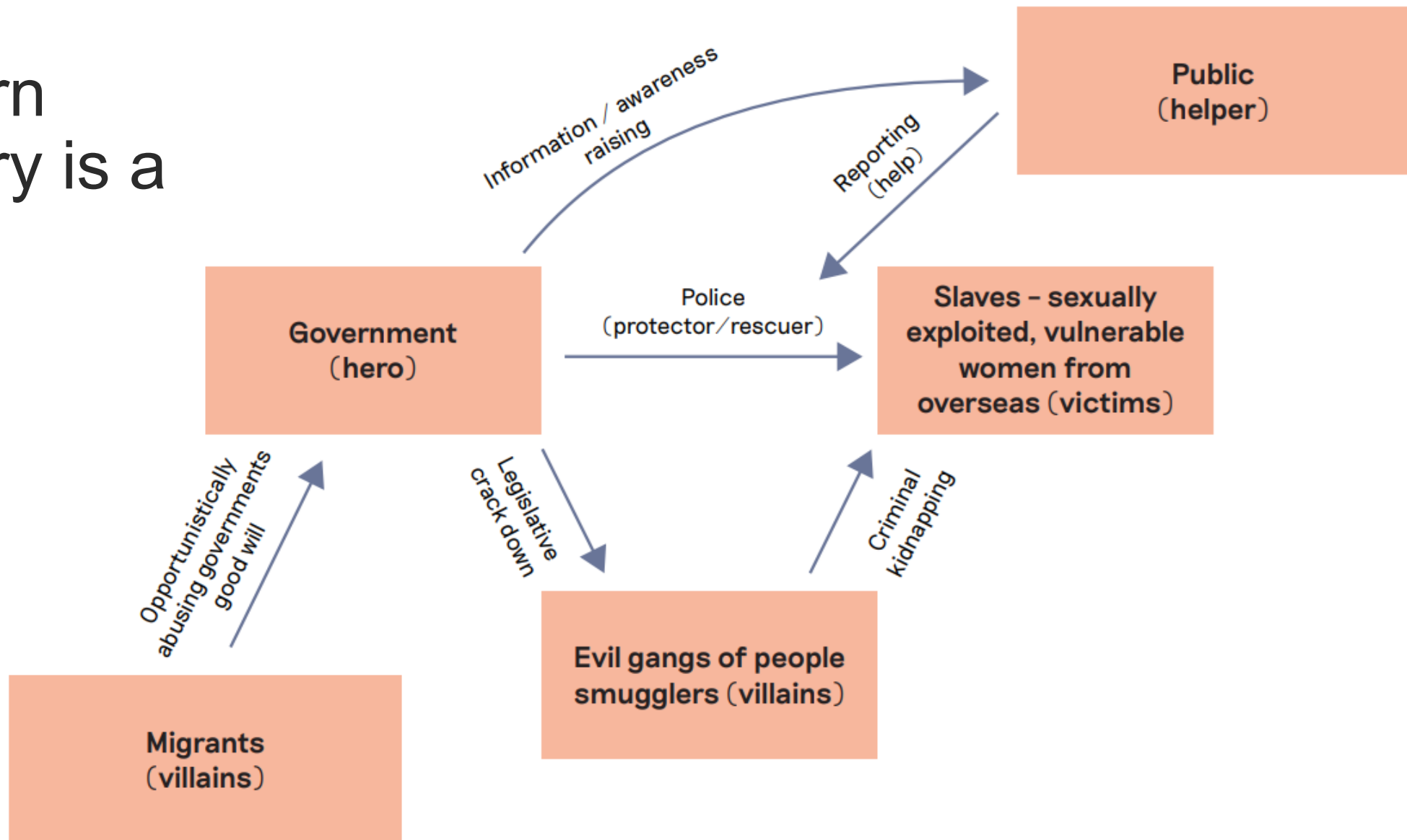
Gaps in perceptions of modern slavery



Common Framing - The Drama triangle is a mask



Modern Slavery is a frame



“Gangs” are free floating

- Risks reinforcing the narrative that **exploitation is inevitable** because people are evil/ greedy
- Targeting defenseless vulnerable individuals
- Prescribes a punitive solution



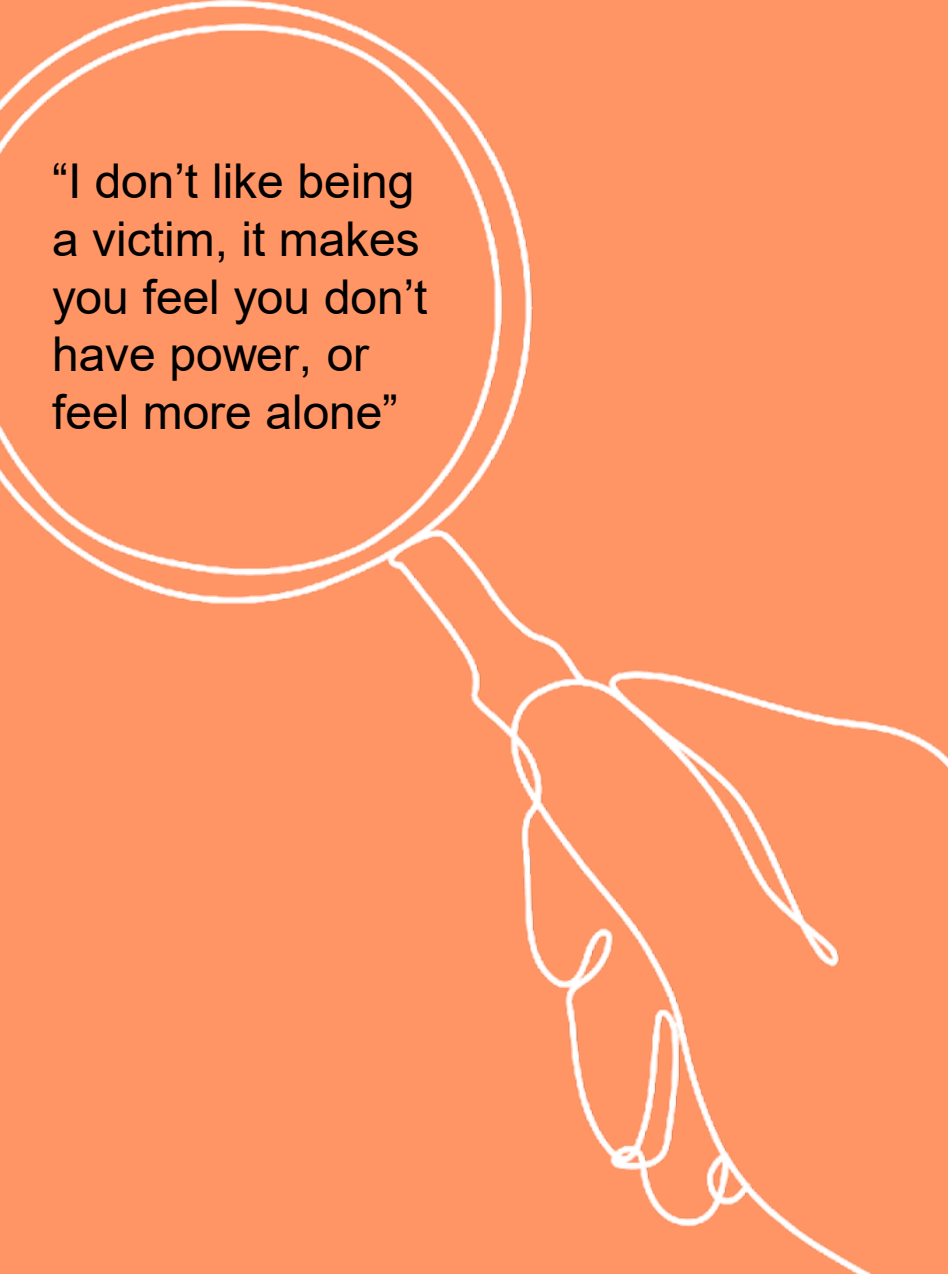
Views of people with lived experience

- That modern slavery is the removal of choice and control over their lives
- That's it's happening now in the UK, not only to migrants or people of colour
- It's not to do with who you are – i.e. your age, gender or migration status
- That it's not the survivors' fault that it happened to them
- That recovery takes a lifetime and that people shouldn't be put in harm's way again



Views of people with lived experience

- The term ‘person with lived experience’ was generally preferred to ‘survivor’ and both were preferable to victim
- Generally using the terms slave, slave labour and to some extent modern slavery were disliked
- The term ‘exploitation’ was generally preferred



“I don’t like being a victim, it makes you feel you don’t have power, or feel more alone”

What can be effective in increasing understanding of modern slavery?

Open with shared values

Open with a shared value of the importance of everyone being free **or** safe to pursue a better life for themselves and their loved ones

Values can:

- Connect when an audience is reading or listening passively
- Help evoke empathy with people experiencing exploitation whose circumstances necessitated making some very difficult choices.

“Regardless of our background, we all deserve a life **free** from harm and exploitation”

“No matter who you are or where you’re from, wanting to guarantee the **safety** and wellbeing of our loved ones is as ordinary as breathing”

“Imagine if you worked non-stop and still couldn’t afford to send your child to school or get your mum the medical help she needs”

Name a specific form of exploitation rather than 'modern slavery'

- Name the specific form of exploitation who it affects, and its prevalence in the UK
- The term 'modern slavery' often brings up the associated drama triangle, it's characters and relationships - which is not a 'neutral' frame
- "Exploitation" - uploads a broader set of associations with "unsafe work for no or little pay"

"Picture a packed concert arena filled with thousands of people — that's about how many British children and young people are being forced to transport and sell drugs in the UK. These are often kids who've been expelled or suspended from school and cast adrift in the streets, where they're swept into a current of criminal exploitation"

Explain the structural drivers - as institutional choices

- Talking about policies “putting people at risk” not essentialising people as “vulnerable”
- Talk about policy **choices** “setting up” conditions for exploitation
- Name the specific policy, it’s impact and who made the decision
- Using verbs like choose, create and decide can help imply current conditions are constructed and so can be reconstructed - and tackle fatalism

“The government’s choice to tie visas to specific employers is a set up for exploitation because unlike everyone else, it’s extremely difficult for workers invited from overseas to seek other jobs in the UK even if they’re mistreated”

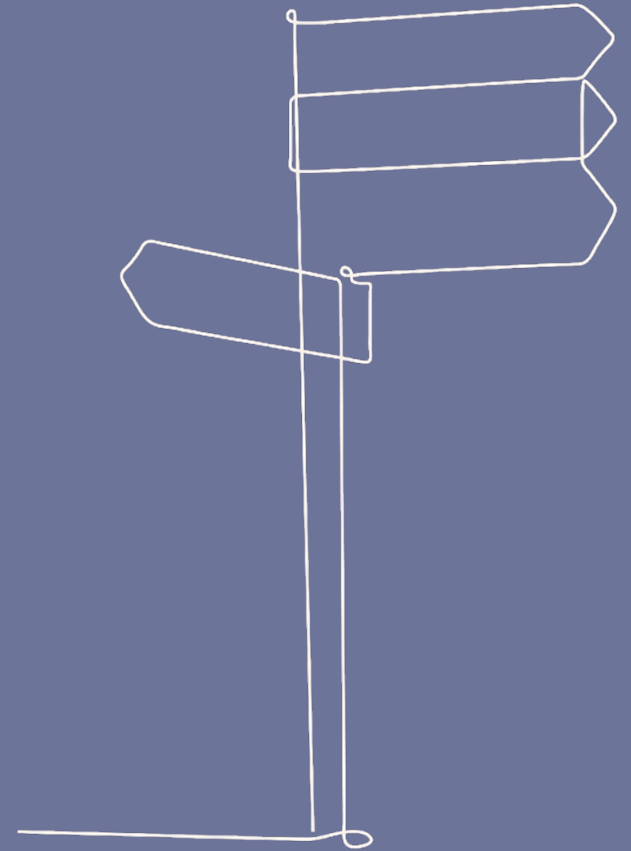
Spell out specific, proportionate solutions

- Just talking about the need to “address root causes” is too vague and cues ambivalence and/ or fatalism
- Naming specific, short and longer term solutions cues hope and engagement

“Together we can begin to stop exploitation in the UK by allowing those who’ve been invited to work and live in our communities to switch jobs like anyone else. Long term, we must ensure there are enough workplace inspectors to weed out exploitation”

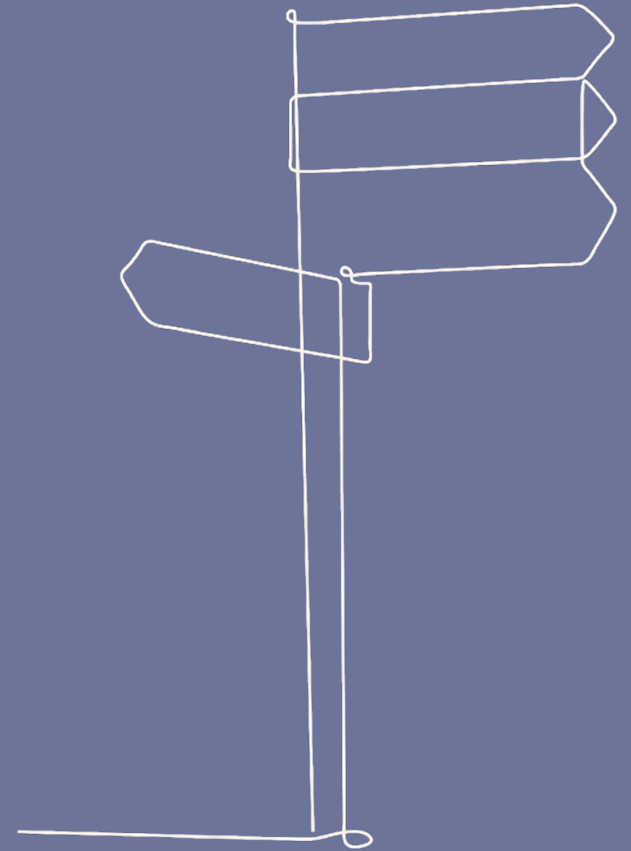
Evoke respect and empathy, not pity and sympathy

- **'Victim'** evokes pity - not empathy
- **'Survivor'** - individual's strength and resilience (with caveats)
- **'Person with lived experience'** – leadership role
- Empathy helps reduce the dehumanisation



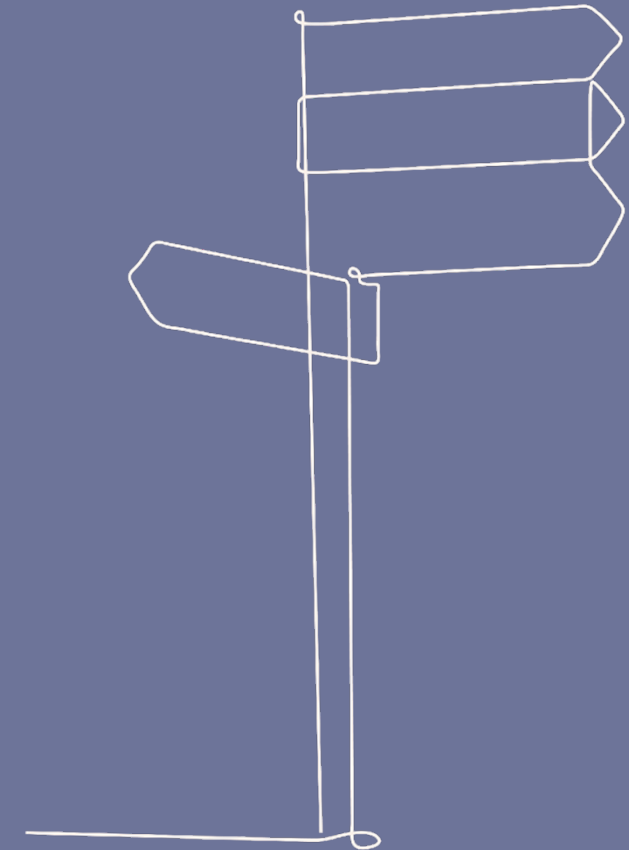
Tensions

- Personal narratives, told by those with lived experience, connected with the public and evoked an appetite to engage and develop a less reductive understanding of the issue. At the same time, we must not cause whilst not causing further exploitation and harm
- **People with lived experience must be in control of their stories:** Control must extend to what is told and not told, how long the story takes to write, when the story is shared, how long the story is shared for, and what it gets used for



Tensions

- People with lived experience may not favour the messages that are favoured by the broader public - **are we here to take the temperature or change it?**
- It all depends on your strategy - **some campaign groups may actively seek to divide or isolate their opposition**
- This is just initial insights, needs further research, but better than nothing



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