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Nobody was Dirty: disrupting inconspicuous consumption in laundry routines

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Nobody was dirty: intervening in inconspicuous consumption of laundry routines

Abstract

Collective conventions play a significant role in resource consumption, in particular habitual, inconspicuous consumption ingrained in daily practices. To embed pro-environmental default practices in everyday life, an understanding of materiality, habits and cultural context is useful. Household rituals consume environmentally critical resources; laundry provides an example of this phenomenon, cleanliness collective conventions leading to inconspicuous routinised consumption of laundry resources (water, energy).

Intervening into cleanliness conventions, thirty-one people in Melbourne were engaged to wear the same pair of jeans for three months without washing them. Transcripts from interviews about their experience were used to draw insights on how individual courses of actions are shaped by collective conventions. Considering participants' experience of materiality, habits and cultural context, indicate that to save environmental resources shifting collective conventions may be more effectual than challenging individual routines. This paper explores some of the opportunities, in intervening into the inconspicuous consumption of laundry routines and shifting collective conventions towards low wash acceptance, with implications for other mundane resource consuming lifestyle practices.

Keywords

Collective conventions, routine, inconspicuous consumption, interventions, cleanliness

OVERVIEW

In this paper I share a recent experience of intervening in laundry practices to save water and energy, and explore some of the implications of disrupting inconspicuous consumption. To interrupt the accepted, resource intensive way of maintaining garments I engaged thirty-one participants to wear the same pair of jeans five days a week for three months without using water, energy or chemicals to wash them. This is a small-scale study, with the modest aim of gathering data into a group experiencing an intervention into accepted conventions, and ways that routines can be brought out of the subconscious to be reflexively considered and reconstructed. By discussing the participants' experience, their self-awareness and the way that they were able to reflect on their practice, I conclude that interventions hold potential for interrupting collective conventions, the routines that they permit and the inconspicuous consumption concealed therein. This study gives a new vantage point to conceptualisations of agency in everyday life, providing a real world example of bringing doxa out of habitus for mindful reflection, and conscious construction of new, pro-environmental ways of doing.

CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE: collective conventions, routines, inconspicuous consumption, and interventions

Collective conventions, 'shared, social conventions', are the basis of action (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012, p. 143), and consumption practices have distinct and collectively regulated conventions (Warde, 2005, p. 141). Collective conventions are active in a variety of daily practices, while people don't explicitly refer to cultural understandings they tend to follow 'general norms' when performing everyday life activities (Gram-Hanssen, 2007a, p. 4). Collective conventions are at best tenuously related to demonstrable efficiency or aesthetic standards, nevertheless they appear to be highly prescriptive. When incorporating sustainability into daily lives eco-ambitious people are generally overcome by the 'prevailing standards of appropriate conduct' (Evans, 2011, pp. 114-115) and individuals' courses of action are 'circumscribed' by social expectations (Davidson, 2012, p. 60). Shove et al. illustrate the power of conventions active in the reproduction of cleanliness practices, remarking that they 'legitimise' and 'demand' accelerating consumption of water and energy (Shove et al., 2012, p. 55). Which means that '[e]cologically damaging patterns of consumption cannot be reduced to a problem of human behaviour because individual acts of

consuming certain things and in certain ways need to be contextualized in relation to the ordering of social practices.'(Evans, 2011, p. 110). To make consumption more sustainable the structural aspects of practices related to cleanliness are more relevant than focusing on individual behaviour (Gram-Hanssen, 2007b, p. 16). Collective conventions therefore have the potential to push sustainability further than individual 'green tinkering', normalising and integrating sustainable forms of consumption into everyday life (Evans, 2011, p. 109). Every time a practice is reproduced, collective conventions are reinforced as 'each practice ... shapes social relations and is itself constructed by the social context in which it is developed' (Davidson, 2012, p. 58). Collective conventions are subtly and compellingly active in everyday life enabling the construction of routines, and routine consumption, and consequently they hold potential to shift practices away from intensive resource consumption in everyday life.

Resources consumed in the course of performing routine social practices are less visible than the 'conspicuous consumption' noted by (Veblen, 2010 [1925]), however these everyday, ordinary actions form a major share of resource consumption (Gram-Hanssen, 2008, p. 1182; Pink, 2011, p. 117; Strengers, 2009, p. 37). Routines help to navigate everyday life by automating decisions and easing debilitating over-involvement in decision-making, establishing a 'secure and liveable everyday life, where we are not compelled to do the overwhelming task of reflecting on every single act' (Gram-Hanssen, 2008, p. 1182), although Warde stresses that practices are not entirely automated, neither 'fully conscious nor reflective' (Warde, 2005, p. 140), and Røpke adds that people are far from passive 'slaves' of routine (Røpke, 2009, p. 2491). Danger lies in the familiarity of routines: Allon and Soufalis caution that the 'ordinary, unspectacular dimensions of daily life' render consumption routine, habitual and thus 'inconspicuous' (Allon & Soufalis, 2006, p. 47). This lack of reflexivity in routines poses a barrier for the inclusion of environmental considerations in carrying out daily life (Røpke, 2009, p. 2496). Routines, while easing the navigation of daily life, conceal the consumption of environmentally critical resources. The threat of non-conscious routine consumption, however, also holds potential to recruit populations to pro-environmental practices, pending a deeper understanding of how routines are formed, and how they can be reformed.

Laundry routines provide a tangible instance of inconspicuous consumption, hiding the use of water, energy and chemicals in an otherwise ordinary practice. Laundry routines are a prime example of habit hiding environmentally taxing practices, the periodicity of cleanliness practices create their own momentum and people continue to use water un-reflexively (Shove, 2003a, p.126). Laundry is performed as a matter-of-

course, differently by everyone, yet all more or less unthinkingly in everyday life, as noted by columnist John Thwaites who has 'never given any thought to simply washing less. Sometimes clothes are thrown in the washer simply because it's that time of the week' (Thwaites, 2012, p. 12). Interventions that address the consumption of resources, hidden in laundry routines, provide the potential to reduce the impact of garment use, which is particularly significant as washing is the most environmentally intense phase in the life cycle of clothing, from production through to disposal (Rigby, 2010). Cultural expectations of cleanliness are not explicit, yet people have an intangible sense of a 'right' way of doing laundry, and presenting the self to others (Pink, 2005, p. 288) and feel embarrassed to wear clothes smelling of body odour (Laitala, Klepp, & Boks, 2012, p. 234). Feedback and social cues can be hard to communicate and harder to receive leaving individuals to second guess expectations, then construct behaviour on perceptions of 'normal' cleaning practice, and often go beyond minimums 'just-in-case', consuming excessive amounts water, energy and chemicals. Dominant in laundry routines is the way that individuals position their own routines within the collective conventions to both justify and provide a guide for their practice (Shove, 2003b, p. 408). Current cleanliness practices operate at a far higher level than those required for hygiene; closing the gap between basic sanitation and current cleanliness practices promises significant resource savings, but requires intervening into accepted ways-of-doing to engage populations in alternative low washing routines.

Intervening in collective conventions is complicated and unpredictable, but potentially useful in attempting to reverse unsustainable paradigms. There is variety in the scale and approach of interventions, from national public awareness campaigns, to friends sharing ways of doing.. Planned interventions contend with a variety of factors that shape outcomes: the complexity of human actions and motivations makes it difficult to speculate on the impact of interventions, or distinguish causal factors of desired outcomes (Jackson, 2004, p. 119). Systems theorists have developed complex models to explain outcomes of interventions, yet the area remains 'slithery' (Meadows, 1999, p. 19). All that would-be-influencers can do is perform informed 'impulses' and then measure the waves to try and understand the best leverage points to direct the next intervention. Interventions must come from within collective conventions; no entity can exist externally to apply an intervention. The activist or policy maker are both operating within the context of collective conventions: there is no external existence, rather conventions themselves are sustained and changed through the 'ongoing reproduction of social practices' (Shove, 2010, p. 1279). Interventions are never static or isolated, but a series of challenges, interpretations and responses in an 'ongoing sequence in which

adjustments are made as environmental conditions change, these changes being, in part, the outcome of previous interventions' (Shove & Walker, 2010, p. 475). Thus an intervention cannot be surgically performed on a single practice; any intervention will move collective conventions and sweep whole bundles of practices along for the ride. This becomes apparent in laundry, accepted ways of doing are formed through the continual interaction and comparisons of practitioners 'intersubjectively and comparatively' (Pink, 2005, p. 287) and so conventions open themselves to interventions that cause practitioners to compare and re-construe practices, changing not just laundry, but entire complexes of cleanliness practices. Furthermore, the plethora of elements that influence collective conventions 'personal motivation, collective practice, peer pressure, habit, subjective norm, and social context' make outcomes unpredictable, and causal factors almost impossible to determine (Jackson, 2004, p. 4). Collective conventions only become visible during the performance of practices, yet because they are all pervasive, interventions by their nature must be ongoing, interactive and volatile. Notwithstanding the current lack of understanding and unpredictable nature of interventions into collective conventions, they could be valuable tools in disrupting routines, and the attendant inconspicuous consumption.

In this paper I conceptualise collective conventions, routine and inconspicuous consumption as triple tiered. At the top, collective conventions are shared accepted ways of doing, encompassing materiality, skills, images and cultural context, and pervade all aspects of life (Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Strengers, 2009, p. 36). Routines are a function of collective convention, the automated carrying-out of accepted ways of doing. Inconspicuous consumption is a function of routines, the resources consumed as a matter of course. These three tiers are inter-active and simultaneous, changing across time and location. Intervening into collective conventions has potential to change routine and thus reduce inconspicuous consumption. Conceptualising collective conventions as determining routines suggests sustainability potential: by initiating conventions that generate pro-environmental routines, I suggest that inconspicuous consumption can be disrupted.

PRECEDENTS: cleanliness dissident literature

Washing less to conserve resources a prima vista seems to be extreme ('what will these dirty hippies suggest next?'), however there is already growing concern around escalating laundry routines. Shove famously explored some of the implications around resources used in pursuing everyday life expectations *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, showing laundry to consume 'copious quantities of energy and water' (Shove, 2003a, p. p117). Rigby further criticises laundering expectations, noting the 'resource, pollution and social problems' inherent in garment maintenance (Rigby, 2010, p. 4). Escalating cleanliness routines use time, water, energy and chemicals, yet offer no obvious increased wellbeing. A Canadian student, Josh Le, wore the same pair of jeans for over a year without washing them and found that 'bacteria growth was virtually the same from the jeans after 15 months with no washing, compared to two weeks after being washed' (Betkowski, 2011). University of Alberta Professor of textile science, Rachel McQueen, swabbed various areas of Josh Le's jeans, as well as testing water used to wash the jeans. Her analysis demonstrated similar counts of bacteria between fifteen months and eleven days, leading her to conclude that bacteria growth on unwashed clothing reaches a plateau that is not harmful to human health (Betkowski, 2011). These researchers all allude to cleanliness being a cultural convention, rather than a physical state. I use this awareness of cleanliness to fuel an intervention into a participant groups' inconspicuous consumption in laundry routines.

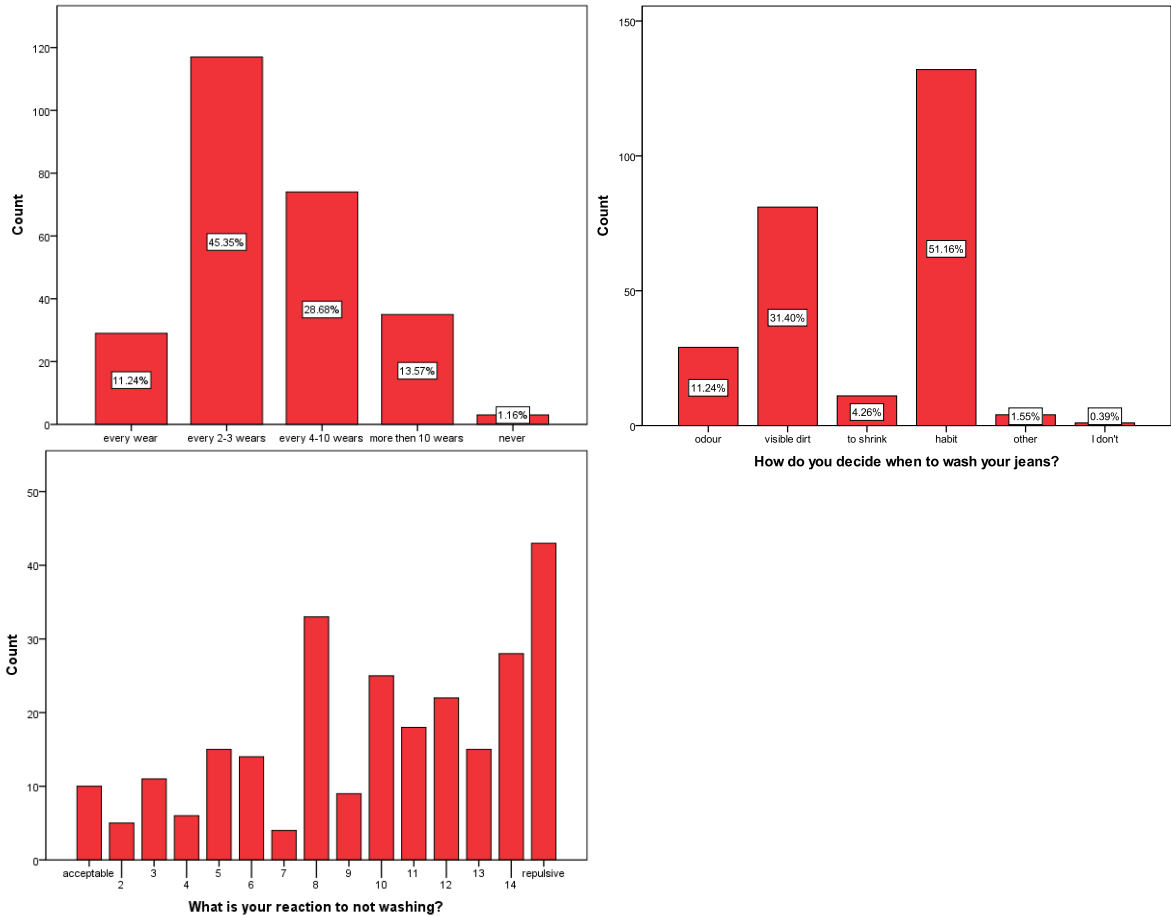
APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY: intervention and interviews

This intervention into laundry routines was conducted during research into the use phase of the fashion life cycle at The University of Melbourne, under ethics approval. I enlisted thirty-one people to wear the same pair of jeans for three months without washing them, and I also joined the study. These people were recruited via social media and snowballing, posting a call for applications on different web platforms, and distributing a press release to Melbourne based lifestyle publications. The thirty-one were selected from a pool of seventy-nine applications, so I was able to achieve some variety in ages, sexes and occupations of participants: there were fifteen females, plus myself, and sixteen males. Selection was based on achieving a purposeful variety. The youngest participant was eighteen, the oldest fifty-six with median age of thirty-one. The intervention began with the provision of a new pair of jeans at a one-hour briefing session. I set the context for the study, sharing information about the environmental impact of washing and provided some

examples of other people who didn't wash their jeans. To intensify and standardise the experience I also set constraints; wearing the jeans at least five days per week for three months without consuming water, energy or chemicals. During the three months there was contact between the participants via a facebook group where they could share occurrences and create community around their shared not washing experience. This also captured their experiential arc of highs and lows during the study period. The aim of the wearing exercise was to enable practices that reduce the resource intensity of garment maintenance; it also, perhaps more interestingly, provided insight into how people experience interventions into collective conventions, and the way that habits can be reflexively reconstructed. An exit interview was completed with the participants at the end of the three months, comments from interviews are interlaced with facebook comments to provide insight into how participants experienced being part of an intervention, and how they constructed their personal narratives and realities about washing less to save water, energy and chemicals. For a full description of the method, data collection, analysis and limitations see also Research Design in my Nobody was Dirty thesis (Jack, 2012, pp. 29-46).

RESULTS: collective cleanliness conventions

The success of the intervention was measured against previous empirical research where I surveyed 263 people in Melbourne to find out more about current laundry routines. Questions included: 'how often do you wash your jeans?' 'How do you decide when to wash your jeans?' and 'What is your reaction to not washing?' Most people washed their jeans after every 2-3 wears, washed because of 'habit' and thought that not washing was 'repulsive' refer to the following graphs. The collected comments from this survey showed a myriad of approaches to laundry. Some people washed frequently and indiscriminately '*I wash everything and anything after wearing it once, even if I only wore it for a couple hours.*' Some washed in a time based routine '*Basically washing everything once a week.*' Others only did laundry when they ran out of clean clothes '*I don't have a routine, once I run out of underwear I do laundry.*' The survey also allowed me to gather data on the (self reported) frequency of washing, motivators for washing, and perception of washing less.



Against this baseline of current laundry practice, the participants in my study enacted divergent behaviour. Part of the enabling process for deviating from the collective convention of cleanliness as revealed by my surveys, was legitimising the desired practice through the use of stories about others, like Josh Le, not washing jeans. The participants felt more comfortable when they saw precedents of the desired courses of action, and had a cultural reference to begin the construction of their own narratives around not washing their jeans. I approached this intervention from the vantage point of practices being less responsive to external pressures, attempting to elicit change from within the study. The legitimating 'special needs situation', participating in a research project, engaged the study group in creating alternative water, energy and chemical saving practices. While the 'study' environment is artificial, it was temporally located in the

participants' life, interacting with other elements of everyday living, thus providing insights into intervening in routines that hold true in the real world.

Participants' reflection on their experience, including intangible elements, was surprisingly perceptive; an ability I consider to be a result of their positioning within the research as co-creators of knowledge. Discussion themes included their washing practices before the intervention, the physicality of the jeans, what they did during the study and their experience of not-washing the jeans. Reviewing their own experience, participants showed differing levels of self awareness, and this method offered some useful insight into how participants saw their own practices (Hitchings, 2011). During the interview it was revealed that the majority of participants (thirty) did not wash the jeans, and did not find the experience challenging. In fact, most communicated their surprise at how easy it was. The interviews demonstrated that the *expectation* of not washing was more repulsive than the *actuality*, hinting that there may be a perception barrier to changing practices. The facebook platform elicited a different discourse on jean cleanliness. There was discussion that challenged the accepted norm that washing is better than not washing: community and continued support seemed to establish context for, and fidelity to, practices. This study provided participants space for mindful reflection on 'doxa, the taken-for-granted rules of common sense, which we never question' (Wilk, 2002, p. 10). Participants relished questioning collective conventions: Simon enjoyed '*getting myself out of an irrational habit. I like not doing things because they're a habit, or culturally the right thing*' although not everyone is able to be so reflexive, and engaging entire populations in mindful consideration of practice poses obvious obstacles of scale, aside from being overwhelming at the individual level. The facebook page also revealed a fluctuation in attitude from the participants who felt different obstacles or 'rough patches', moments when wearing the jeans was undesirable. By the exit interview respondents unanimously signalled their intention to continue washing not only their own jeans, but also other garments less, suggesting that elicited practices, in the sense of objects, skills and images (Shove, 2011), continue beyond the sphere of the intervention jeans and time frame. This may be conceptualised as a disruption of the links between the elements of practice through reflection, 'washing frequently' and 'acceptable jeans' may no longer be connected elements 'competencies' and 'meanings' (Shove et al., 2012). This observation could also just reflect that participants were trying to give pleasing answers. As Jackson alludes, it proved hard to detangle cause, effect, barrier, driver and narratives around the altered practices (Jackson, 2004, p. 119).

The alternative practices that emerged during the intervention raised several interesting insights into the way people experience interventions. Some participants did experiment with alternative strategies to keep their jeans fresh without using 'water, energy or chemicals,' however many did not, preferring to keep wearing the jeans without specific cleanliness efforts, developing routines and meanings that incorporated wearing the jeans without washing them. Participants displayed an air of pride when describing the way that they wore the jeans, and the different ways that they stored the jeans, an affinity with their alternate routine was obvious.

Morgen *'Every single night without fail I turned them inside out. I have a cupboard with a door that stays open that sits near the window. Every night I'd turn them inside out and hang them over there.'*

Luke *'I hang them up by the belt loop on the back, sometimes inside out if I think it needs it at night. If you fold it up and put it away in the cupboard any smells get worse, but if you air them out they get better.'*

Jeremiah *'I'd just air them out if I could, just let them get some sun, try and do that once per week.'*

Self-determination appeared to be a strong element in peoples' ownership of their actions; by stating the problem, and constraints (not using water, energy or chemicals) participants were stimulated to develop their own alternative practices, and these practices were more deeply engrained as a result. I have not yet conducted a longitudinal study to see how these practices have endured: the relationship between affinity and endurance needs further research. Witnessing the affinity of my participants to their non-washing routines, shows that in the domain of interventions, alternative practices elicited can have greater endurance if that person, and their community, develops their own solutions in response to problems or restraints. The experience of the participants and their alternative practices and narratives provides fertile, if complex, discussion matter from which to cultivate some concepts of interrupting resource-consuming routines.

DISCUSSION: collective conventions, awareness and volition

The alternative practices developed lead to further questions around collective cleanliness conventions: participants were invoked to be critically reflective of their practices and discuss what motivated them to wash their garments, given that '[s]ocial rules, predispositions, common sense and even embodied feelings

can all change when they are brought out of the habitus, into the daily world of speech, debate, manipulation, and argument' (Wilk, 2002, p. 10). Because of their immersion in the non-washing practices the participants had heightened sensitivity to cultural influences enforcing their existing practices. They were able to provide some reflections on interpreting, applying and repeating what they guessed to be normal levels of cleanliness that caused their previous cleanliness practices to solidify. Participants discussed a variety of cleanliness motivators, which I attempted to categorise into universal themes; some of the obvious ones, habit, convenience, family, and status are easily recognisable. On a higher level, there seemed to be some intangible conventions that were acting on habits, almost like participants were reading from an invisible script, community censorship and the self-interpretation of community expectations. These motivators of practice were hard to define and on the periphery of participants' awareness, but resonated with the participants. Emily *'we don't have good mechanisms in place for knowing what can and should be washed all the time.'* Gavin *'Every care is taken by the person who is affected [by body odour], to prevent the perpetrator from knowing.'* People rely on unspoken signals to set the standard on cleanliness. Ted *'People at work are usually quite clean.'* Smell is a socially delicate subject not readily discussed, *'As an environmental issue, clothes washing is delicately poised'* (Shove, 2003a, p. 81). The opaque nature of community expectations leads to hyper-vigilant self-auditing of personal cleanliness. Alexandra was worried about body smells *'It's just ... that could be a bad smell to somebody.'* Chris *'Even a look and then your imagination runs wild.'* Ted *'I don't like to feel like I'm standing out.'* This resonates very much with Wilk's speculation that *'[b]ecause so much of consumer society is the fine balancing act between fitting in and standing out, most people are exquisitely sensitive to the possibility that some of their personal routines or habits may be inadequate or offensive to others'* (Wilk, 2009, p. 149).

However, the extent to which people can become conscious of collective conventions is more complex, I suspect that collective conventions are deep, unpredictable and very strong, and observed my participants' struggle to engage fully with concepts on the periphery of consciousness, like community censorship and self-auditing. It was difficult for participants to pinpoint what cleanliness conventions were, what they meant in their own lives or illustrate them with stories from their experience, yet there was homogeneity in the way that participants responded during the interviews, like they were reading from a cleanliness standards text. Moments of contrast did help in eliciting personal reflection on collective conventions: providing a different example, like historical cleanliness expectations (Vigarello, 1988), gave participants a point to compare to their own experience and become more self aware: a continuum between conforming to

unconscious rules, and mindfully plotting courses of action. Wilk also notes the contradictory nature of conscious reproduction of social structures: 'the grey area between structure and agency gives cultural change its paradoxical nature. On one hand, it seems to be the result of decisions and choices made by individuals; on the other hand, people seem to be following the dictates of fashion, patterns of habit common to society, and a kind of mentality which requires thorough precedent and familiarity before any action is taken.' (Wilk, 2009, p. 153). Even though engaging people to reflect on their own practice is inexact, it provides exciting possibilities in understanding laundering conventions. I found that people are generally non-conscious of collective conventions in everyday life, yet that collective conventions attract strong adherence. My participants could reflect on collective conventions, yet they were seen and applied differently and thus do not exist as a constant set of universally binding activity boundaries, but rather implicit guides to action. Understanding collective conventions as practice guides suggests real potential in reducing inconspicuous consumption by initiating conventions that engender pro-environmental routines. By introducing not washing as an accepted way of doing, wider populations could have moments of lucid reflection and also aspire to also wash less, potentially saving significant quantities of resources and thus compounding the shift of collective conventions away from resource intensity.

Although it did not intervene in collective conventions of an entire population, intervening in a micro-community of the thirty-one participants raised some interesting questions to consider when attempting to intervene into collective conventions for sustainability transitions. This experience with small-scale interventions revealed some of the limitations and opportunities of using interventions as a practice transition strategy. I found that interventions where constraints are set, rather than desired actions dictated, enable practitioner-developed solutions to problems, and increase affinity with pro-environmental practices. Small-scale interventions can set up environmentally desirable ways of doing, and act as a living example for eco-innovation dissemination. Interventions can also reveal stimulators of practices, and show some of the areas where influences intersect, for example both habit and status add impetus to cleaning routines. Intervening into laundry routines of this pilot group was time and energy intensive: recruiting people to not wash their jeans required high organisation and consideration, before and during the process. To reach more than thirty people in a similar manner would require high investment of resources: mindful engagement of national populations is implausible for the plethora of inconspicuous consumption active in everyday life. The niche alternative practice elicited in this study is unlikely to attract the mainstream population required for significant environmental benefits, and more niches are rejected than adopted

(Warde, 2005, p. 141). Further limitations of interventions arise from the still emerging understanding of the way that desired practices endure, post-intervention; populations may return to previous practices, or morph into new and unexpected practices (Maller & Strengers, 2012). The fluidity of changing practices, however, does hold potential in transitioning towards sustainability, contingent on further understanding of the way collective conventions are formed.

Perhaps the most interesting discussion to emerge from this data is the insights into interactions between individuals and collective conventions in the performance of resource consuming practices. Participants' experience in changing laundering practices indicates that individual actions are compelled by collective conventions as much as by internal drive. There is a wide variety in the conceptualisation of structure and agency, and the influence and power between the individual and collective conventions. Drawing on previous studies on agency in everyday life is useful in contextualising my findings within current understandings of the tension between individual and collective. Anthropologist Pink, also exploring laundering, found that individuals have differing ways of engaging with or changing laundry habits, but when they do their practices help to change conventions (Pink, 2005, p. 275). Pink ascribes individuals transformative ability, suggesting that it is through resistance of existing conventions individuals participate in constructing new conventions (Pink, 2005, p. 287). Cultural anthropologist, Wilk sees people as more beholden to 'subtle pressures and social conventions' that are not apparent on the surface level, yet still constrain communities within 'narrow limits' (Wilk, 2002, p. 9). Despite this he agrees with Pink, asserting that these can be overcome by mindful engagement: 'Social rules, predispositions, common sense and even embodied feelings can all change when they are brought out of the habitus, into the daily world of speech, debate, manipulation, and argument.' (Wilk, 2002, p. 10). Cowan, however did not experience this, even after spending years researching the 'social rules and predispositions' (Wilk, 2002, p. 9) that construe housework. She struggled to defy collective conventions, which she reveals in a telling postscript to her book, *More work for mother*, where she argues that modern standards of household maintenance are 'outdated symbols', yet she admits to finding herself 'like a somnambulist walking through the rituals' (Cowan, 1983, p. 218). She speculates that these unconscious symbolic rules are all the more potent for their unspoken quality.

Within my own experience of changing my laundry practice during the course of this study there are garments in my wardrobe that have never been washed, and some that are worn many times between laundering. This leads me to think that there is a difference in 'not washing clothes' and 'defying the collective convention of frequent laundering.' Not washing is hidden, but wearing dirty clothes is visible. Visibility may have a role to play in diffusing sustainable practices. A further catalyst may be social credibility. While Cowan was acting in isolation, participants in my original wearing study performed the defiant practice within a group, contributing social credibility, along with the narratives of others not washing, and the legitimising university study. Cowan may not have seen herself as having enough social credibility until years later when she reports that finally she stopped washing as much (Cowan, 1983, p. 219), groups could very well offer the catalytic power to accelerate social transitions.

Visibility and social credibility are potentially useful elements in encouraging the adoption of pro-environmental practices by individuals within collective conventions. Visibility, how easily apparent a practice is to fellow citizens; and social credibility, how a practice fits in with existing socially desirable collective convention, (for example 'hipster'). Visibility may or may not be a useful tool in enabling pro-environmental routines, it varies across practices and there is already discussion on visibility's role in changing consumption, eg (Rogers, 1995). Social credibility on the other hand, appears to contain new potential as a tool that can be utilised to enable pro-environmental interventions. Information, public engagement, the emerging power of social media and cultural events can all lend credibility to desired conventions and can also help to marginalise undesired conventions. Leveraging collective conventions to shape desired pro-environmental practices, appears to exist in tension between the opposing views of people as adherents to collective conventions and being rational actors. I see people on a continuum between the two; some community members have more agency than others, and can be instigated towards pro-environmental practices, which then propagate through various channels to the wider community who rely more heavily on collective conventions to guide everyday practices. Social credibility needs further exploration on its potential in helping to ensure interventions interact meaningfully with collective conventions.

During this study I also noticed the way that collective conventions seem to produce aesthetic arrays of practices, and determine the attendant consumption of resources embedded in those practices. Shifts in practice lead to shifts in the collective convention, and consequently drag along whole complexes of

practices, in more or less resource intensive directions. Attempts to govern collective conventions should be approached with caution, shifting laundry practices could also lead to changes in other areas of everyday life. Furthermore, collective conventions are constantly changing across time and location: as soon as individuals feel that they understand what is expected, they are interpreting accepted ways of doing to suit their lifestyle and reflecting this back to the community, contributing to the direction that collective conventions take. While using an intervention into collective conventions as a sustainability transition framework has potential, more cases are needed before any broad generalisations can be made.

Mandatory Analogy

The bulk of everyday life is like driving on a freeway: most drivers simply mirror those around them. Notwithstanding historical experiences and cultural variation (confirmed by a recent trip to Germany), people generally follow the traffic flow. Before long I found myself effortlessly driving on the right and cruising above 150kmph, the current social context ruling my actions. The jeans experiment was very similar; most people just performed what they considered to be conventional cleaning practices, but they could critically examine the current situation to augment their practices. The point here is that while the bulk of everyday life is ruled by collective conventions, there is definitely room for creating awareness and reflection on practices. Tools like cultural or historical contrasts, infrastructure like roads or plumbing, rules like speed limits or water restrictions, or campaigns like road signs or water saving devices all have potential to leverage practices. The value of this study is showing that while we rely on conventions to short-cut overwhelming minute-by-minute decision-making, we do enjoy becoming aware, reflecting and reconstructing optimised ways of doing.

Concluding remarks

Collective conventions can be questioned, and alternative practices enabled through mindful engagement of a niche group. In so doing, routines and associated inconspicuous consumption can be bought out of the habitus and reconstructed. In the uptake of new ways of doing awareness and habit-momentum intersect. A continuum between mindful engagement and altering collective conventions is apparent: interventions, like not washing jeans, recruit early adopters to trial and model new practices, but it is through mainstream

awareness, interpretation, application and repetition that these altered practices become accepted ways of doing, the new collective conventions. Providing information through my study's briefing and social media acted to stimulate and support the desired courses of action, engaging practitioners at an individual level. Legitimation, or social credibility, granted by the study allowed participants lucid space to consider their laundry routines and social impunity to defy established collective conventions, although I remain unconvinced that we were able to be fully reflexive of all of the causal influences on our laundering practices. Active engagement of a few did change our collective convention of laundry, however it is not yet clear the extent to which changes in niche groups can disseminate to larger populations required for collective conventions to shift. This small-scale intervention into inconspicuous consumption in laundry routines raised interesting considerations around how to conceptualise individuals within collective conventions. Collective conventions are not ossified but dynamic, constantly reproduction by individual performances of practice. Credit should be given to individuals' ability to embrace awareness and reflexivity in the reproduction of consumption practices.

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