

# How can practice theory inform interventions into the domestic nexus?

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# Three contributions of contemporary practice theory

- A way of understanding the organisation of human activity as nexuses of generic components
- A way of understanding relationships *between* activities (practices)
- A way of understanding social action

# Practices as nexuses of activity

Practices are: organised, and recognisable, socially shared nexuses of activity. Their performance entails the integration of a complex array of components: material, embodied, ideational and affective (Welch and Warde, 2015).

Social practices can usefully be broken down into generic components (Schatzki, 2002):

- Practical understandings: ‘how to go on’ with the activity
- Procedures and rules: explicit directions, instructions, admonishments etc.
- Teleo-affective structure: (normatively ordered) ends, orientations, affective engagements
- General understandings: “common to many practices and condition the manner in which practices are carried out” (ibid.); both discursive and pre-reflexive\tacit. E.g. authenticity, nation, convenience, courtesy, masculinity, eternal salvation, liberty, equality (cf. Warde and Welch, forthcoming)

# Relationships between practices

Important inter-practice relationships within the context of the domestic nexus include those through:

- Shared spatial and material contexts
- Temporal relationships (sequencing, synchronicity, periodicity etc.)
- Shared general understandings which orient multiple practices to shared ends

# Model of social action (behaviour)

Challenges the paradigmatic privilege of “the portfolio model” (Hindess 1988; Whitford 2002)

‘Portfolio model’ assumes that ‘the actor’ is driven by anterior conditions: values\attitudes (psychology), norms (sociology), or interests (economics); and that individuals’ select from a relatively stable portfolio of attitudes and values etcetera to *decide* on a course of action

From perspective of practice, this model overestimates the role of *deliberation* in routine behaviour and fundamentally underestimates the extent to which individuals’ autonomous action is constrained by infrastructures and institutions, conventions and norms and by access to resources: social, cultural and economic (Southerton et al. 2004)

- Emphasises instead the routine, habitual, tacit, embodied, material and affective affordances.
- Social action occurs primarily through the context of practices

# How might this inform interventions in and engagements with the domestic nexus as a specific kind of site?

- Characterising variations in domestic practices (e.g. Browne, et al. 2014)
- Analysing temporal ordering of domestic practices (e.g. Whillans, J., Evans, D. & Southerton, forthcoming)
- Domestic practices in wider cultural context (e.g. Halkier 2010; Halkier & Keller 2014)
- Domestic nexus in wider configurations of infrastructure and systems of provision (sets of practice and material arrangements linking consumption with exchange, distribution & production)

## Limitations of ‘agentless’ practice accounts for interventions the domestic nexus

- Practice theory has made a corrective move against methodological individualism and the current policy landscape by focusing on practice-as-entity & practice as ‘unit of intervention’...but this tends towards technocratic model of interventions as sociotechnical engineering
- However, the practical challenges of the domestic nexus (e.g. domestic energy demand reduction) draws our attention to deliberative and affective contexts of households

# Three reflections for practice theorising prompted by the household context of the domestic nexus

‘Strong’ practice theory’s

- Eliding of actors and interactivity
- Emphasis on the habitual, tacit, pre-reflexive, nondiscursive
- And the place of values, attitudes and emotions (revisiting ‘the value-action gap’ again)



## Eliding of actors and interactivity

- Rebalancing theoretical accounts between nexuses of activity (practices) and nexuses of entities (“sociomaterial networks” [Vihalle, Keller and Kiisel 2015], “material arrangements / social orders” [Schatzki], “agencements / assemblages” [Deleuze, Callon, MacKenzie, Gherardi])
- The domestic nexus happens in *places* through sociomaterial interactivity (more often than not *homes*).

Kemmis et al. (2014) *Changing practices, Changing Education* provide a model explicitly and usefully building on Schatzki's "material arrangements" or "social orders" (nexus of entities) and analytically opening them up for practical intervention

- "We think of 'home'... in terms of shared *language* and shared (and sometimes contested and confused or contradictory) ways of thinking about things. We also think of 'home' in terms of interlocking *spaces* (rooms, favourite chairs) and the various activities (showers, dressing, meals, cleaning) that compose its (sometimes contested and ill-coordinated) daily rhythms. And we think of home in terms of a range of interconnected (and sometimes contesting and conflictual) *relationships* between family members and friends." (Kemmis et al. 2014 p. 4)
- Three dimensions, or intersubjective spaces – semantic (discursive), material and social – which compose the "practice architecture" in which practices happen as situated activity within a place: prefigure, condition or qualify interaction.
- "We cannot transform practices without transforming existing arrangements in the intersubjective spaces that support practices." (p. 6 )

# Emphasis on the habitual, tacit, nondiscursive

- ‘Strong’ practice theory accounts privilege the relation between the tacit, pre-reflexive, nondiscursive & embodied and public culture (Lizardo, forthcoming) - or relationships between disposition and *dispositif*.
- Emphasise the “Nondeclarative” over “Declarative” (Lizardo, forthcoming)

Nondeclarative	Declarative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- know how – tacit</li><li>- skills / competences</li><li>- dispositions</li><li>- embodiments</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- know that – deliberative</li><li>- values / attitudes</li><li>- discourse</li><li>- world views</li></ul>

- “Values are ‘sedimented’ valuations of things (including persons, ideas, behaviours, practices etc.) that have become attitudes or dispositions, which we come to regard as justified. They merge into emotional dispositions, and inform the evaluations we make of particular things, as part of our conceptual and affective apparatus. They may be associated with a particular practice (for example, medical ethics) or be common to many (e.g. valuations of virtues like kindness).” (Sayer, 2012 p. 171)  
... I.e. tacit, intuitive, dispositional *and* discursive
- Values are a particular subset of “general understandings” (Warde and Welch, forthcoming).
- “What specifically belongs to cognition and intelligence in cultural space is not clarified by [Bourdieu’s] logic of practice: it is presupposed by it” (Margolis, 1999, p. 78)

# The value-action gap revisited

The practice theoretical critique of the value-action gap (Welch and Warde, 2015):

- From the perspective of the 'portfolio model' of behaviour the obvious assumption is that changing behaviour presupposes changing those things which drive it - values and attitudes – or remove the 'barriers' blocking the motive force of those values and attitudes
- The gap between values and actions appears mysterious
- Seen from the practice perspective the 'value-action' gap simply arises from the failure of the 'portfolio model' as a paradigm for human activity

However, we cannot adequately make values, attitudes and affects (with which they are interwoven) properties of practice:

- The teleoaffective structures of practices (orientations, affective engagements) are normatively ordered (why do people value comfort over sustainability in their domestic heating?)
- What *does* the normative ordering if values, attitudes and affects are solely properties of practice?

# Teleoaffective projects

- The domestic nexus is the site of multiple projects (sometimes contesting). But it is also the site of overarching projects: e.g. ‘making a home’ ‘running a household’ ‘raising a family’
- Can we understand these as “teleoaffective regimes” (Schatzki 2002)? *NB: An open question.*
- “Teleoaffective regimes” are supra-practice orientations which normatively order the teleoaffective structures of individual practices and subtend subject positions (close to some definitions of institution) (Welch, forthcoming)
- Informed by “general understandings” common to many practices, which may bridge the discursive and the tacit (Warde and Welch, forthcoming)
- We can avoid idealism or reification of teleaffective regimes by always tying them empirically to the normative ordering of the teleoaffective structure of specific practices.

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# ***Thank you***

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