

Dr Fiona Spotswood
Bristol Social Marketing Centre
Bristol Business School
University of the West of England
Fiona2.spotswood@uwe.ac.uk

Using Social Practice Theory to frame the contribution of social marketing in the multidisciplinary future of ‘behaviour change’

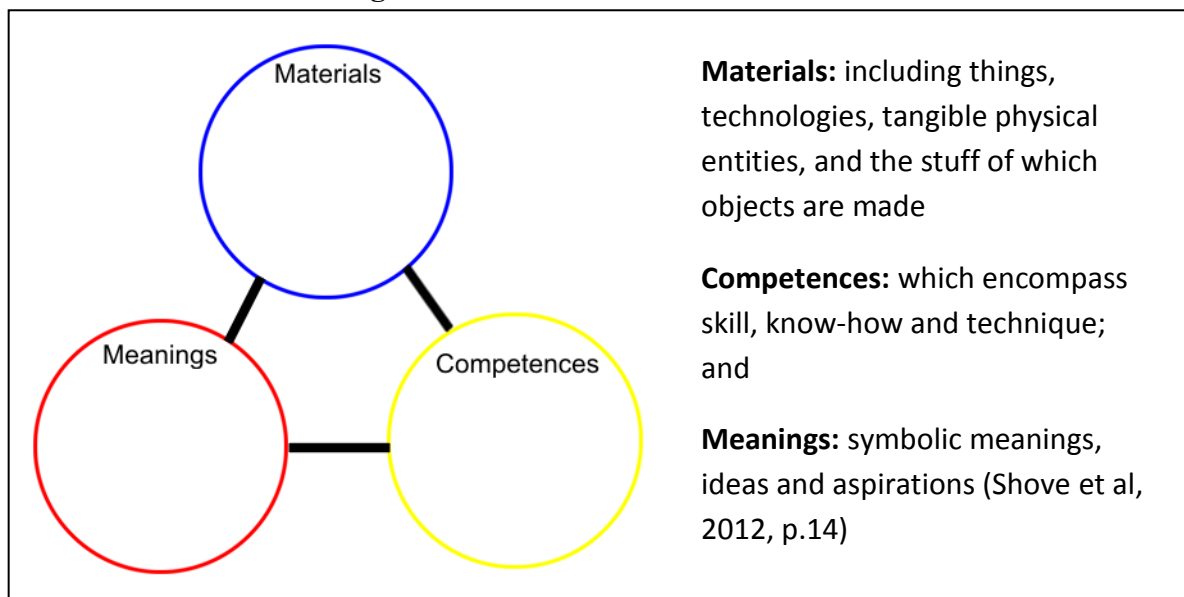
Background

The 2011 House of Lords *Behaviour Change* reportⁱ concluded that ‘behaviour change’ must become multi-disciplinary, criticising the government’s myopic commitment to ‘nudge’. It emphasised that any single-approach strategy will fail to tackle the scale of problems like incommunicable disease. Given this and other calls for multi-disciplinarity^{ii,iii}, the lack of commentary around the place of social marketing (sm) within a multi-disciplinary framework is of concern. Rather, publications tend to focus on effectiveness^{e.g.iv}; definition^{e.g.v,vi}; innovation of sm approaches^{e.g.vii} and practitioner guidance^{e.g.viii}. In response, this paper introduces Social Practice Theory (SPT) as a framework for scrutinizing sm’s contribution to multi-disciplinary ‘behaviour change’.

Social Practice Theory

Practice theories, which have recently regained prominence^{ix}, are a type of cultural theory which consider humans as agents who act within the structures of practice. Agents ‘carry’ practices, which they ‘perform’. Thus understanding society using SPT focuses not on the experience of the individual actor as the subject of research or intervention, but on the practice itself. Practices are deconstructed into “several elements, interconnected to one another”^x, and although various configurations have been proposed^{xi,xii,xiii,xiv} the simplified model devised by Shove *et al*^{xv}, (figure 1), has the most potential when considering ‘behaviour change’ research and intervention/policy response^{xvi}.

Figure 1: The Social Practice Framework



The practice of cycling is used to illustrate. Required ‘competences’ include the skills necessary for riding a bicycle, navigation and time-management. ‘Materials’ include a bicycle, the road network, cycle paths and storage. ‘Meanings’, referring to understandings shared by the group about the practice, include a sense that cycling is not an appropriate method of commuting for ‘important’ people or that cyclists are intimidating^{xvii}. The practice comprises a combination of these elements, and changes to any element will create evolution of the practice. Such deconstruction can enable researchers to achieve a holistic understanding of a practice and also potentially, albeit in an untested way^{xviii}, examine the

ways it might be changed to benefit society. (The approach also holds for social marketers the appeal of avoiding criticisms of political individualism as identified in recent commentary^{xix}, although examining this potential is not the purpose of this paper).

The role of social marketing in multi-disciplinary 'behaviour change'

The SPT framework can help identify how sm, in combination with other approaches, might be used to change the various elements of 'problem' practices. SPT analysis of the low numbers of British utility^{xx} cyclists, for example, provides a range of footholds for change, requiring multi-disciplinary solutions extending beyond sm's core competences. Sm would be suitable for changing the 'meanings' around cycling by using techniques such as branding and integrated marketing communications combined with insights into consumer behaviour to change perceptions and attitudes. (A comparable example of such an approach is the 'Truth' campaign, which changed teen perceptions towards smoking^{xxi}). Analysis using SPT may also illuminate an upstream role for sm to work with local policy makers to establish policies for educational approaches such as adult cycle training. However, other approaches would be required to change 'materials'; such as urban planners for designing cycle paths, law enforcers for restricting driving speeds and engineers for providing 'desire-line' cycle bridges and cycle parking.

Conclusion

This paper does not argue that sm should be reduced to social advertising, and the panoply of marketing-based approaches used by social marketers is wholly acknowledged. Rather, it acknowledges that stand-alone sm interventions have enjoyed limited effectiveness on population-level problems (see^{xxii}), and thus it is posited that social marketers should routinely consider their contribution to 'behaviour change' as part of a multi-disciplinary approach. The 3-element SPT model may provide a useful framework for analysing the potential contribution of sm by assessing which element(s) would be influenced, and for identifying essential collaborators to achieve the multi-disciplinarity that has been called for.

References

- ⁱ The House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee, (2011) *Behaviour Change*. Report number: HL Paper 179. London: The Stationary Office Ltd.
- ⁱⁱ Nash, J.M., Collins, B.N., Loughlin, S.E., Solbrig, M., Harvey, R., Krishnan-Sarin, S., Unger, J., Miner, C., Rukstalis, M., Shenassa, E., Dube, C. and Spirito, A. (2003), Training the transdisciplinary scientist: A general framework applied to tobacco use behavior. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, Vol. 5 Supplement 1, pp.s41-s53.
- ⁱⁱⁱ West, R. (2006) Tobacco control: present and future. *British Medical Bulletin*, Vol. 77-78, pp.123-136.
- ^{iv} Friedman, A.; Bozniak, A.; Ford, J.; Hill, A.; Olson, K.; Ledsy, R.; Inokuchi, D.; Brookmeyer, K. (2014), Reaching Youth With Sexually Transmitted Disease Testing: Building on Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned From Local Get Yourself Tested Campaigns. *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 20, pp.116-138.
- ^v Lefebvre, C. (2011), An integrative model for social marketing. *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 1 No.1, pp.54-72.
- ^{vi} McAuley, A. (2014) Reflections on a decade in social marketing. *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp.77 – 86.
- ^{vii} Bernhardt, J.M.; Mays, D. and Hall, A.K. (2012), Social marketing at the right place and right time with new media. *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 2 No.2, pp.130 – 137.
- ^{viii} Lynes, J.; Whitney, S. and Murray, D (2014), Developing benchmark criteria for assessing community-based social marketing programs: a look into Jack Johnson's "All at Once" campaign. *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 4 No.2.
- ^{ix} Reckwitz, A. (2002), "Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing", *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 243-263.
- ^x *Ibid*, p.249
- ^{xi} Schatzki, T. (1996), *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ^{xii} Reckwitz, 2002
- ^{xiii} Shove, E., Pantzar, M. and Watson, M. (2012), *The Dynamics of Social Practice*, SAGE: London.
- ^{xiv} Warde, A. (2005), "Consumption and Theories of Practice", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp.131-153.
- ^{xv} 2012
- ^{xvi} Chatterton, T. and Anderson, O., (2011) *An Introduction to Thinking about 'Energy Behaviour': A Multi-Model Approach. A Paper for the Department of Energy and Climate Change*. Bristol: University of the West of England.

^{xvii} Leonard, S.; Spotswood, F.; and Tapp, A. (2012), Overcoming the self-image incongruency of non-cyclists. *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp.23 – 36.

^{xviii} Shove *et al*, 2012

^{xix} Raftopoulou, E. and Hogg, M.K. (2010), The political role of government-sponsored social marketing campaigns. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 44 No.7/8, pp.1206 – 1227.

^{xx} Utility cyclists are those who cycle for regular, short journeys, such as to work.

^{xxi} Farrelly, M.C.; Heaton, C.G.; Davis, K.C.; Hersey, J.C.; Haviland, M.L. (2002). Getting to the Truth: Evaluating National Tobacco Countermarketing Campaigns, *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 92, No.6, pp.901-907.

^{xxii} Stead, M.G., Angus, K. and McDermott, L. (2007), A systematic review of social marketing effectiveness. *Health Education*, Vol. 107 No.2, pp. 126-191.