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Editorial: Beyond Behaviour Change.

Introduction

This special issue explores advanced ideas in the study and implementation of behaviour change. Before introducing the papers and some of the key ideas from across this body of work, it is helpful to reflect on the current state of play in behaviour change, which has become a highly recognisable label in policy, research and practice. Broadly speaking, 'behaviour change' refers to the techniques and approaches applied by governments, agencies and third sector organisations to increase efficiency in policy delivery and to decrease the risks and harms to individuals from non-communicable diseases and environmental damage. However, there are inherent assumptions about the phrase itself. For example, does a focus on changing 'behaviour' mean we must centre our efforts on the choices of the people whose lifestyles are suboptimal for their health; abstracting behaviour from its context (Kelly and Barker, 2016), or does it mean we might focus on shaping a society which supports healthier routines? Furthermore, there are other important and increasingly high profile labels within the behaviour change umbrella – such as 'behavioural insights' and 'behavioural science' - which need unravelling. Precision is often lacking in terms of the theoretical assumptions that go with these terms. Within the sphere of behaviour change, 'behavioural insights' is often associated with behavioural economics approaches (<http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/>; Dolan et al, 2012), and behavioural science with knowledge based on psychologically-underpinned intervention studies. The former tends to be preferred by policy teams (especially those in Whitehall, although practice is rather different in Wales and Scotland), the latter by academics. However, these distinctions are far from consistent and both terms are arguably unhelpfully narrow in their theoretical scope. They continue to emphasise ways of thinking about behaviour change which situate individual-level change at the heart of change, thereby excluding sociological approaches which see behaviour as far more interrelated with social relations and routines. If science is the process of moving from confusion to understanding (Greene, 2008), then any furthering of knowledge about the way society works and changes should be viewed as science for the purpose of generating important behavioural insights for behaviour change. Furthermore 'behaviour change' should acknowledge that everything is always changing, and that behaviour is not always the property of individuals and the outcomes of their (more or less) rational choices.

From a range of starting points and with a range of theoretical and methodological dispositions, we continue to grapple with ideas about the best way to head off dangerous societal trends such as obesity or climate change. Human behaviour is at the heart of some of the most intractable problems of our age. What is clear at this point in our journey is that there is no unified 'field' of behaviour change, despite the familiarity of the label. There are a range of different ideas, theories and academic disciplines all contributing to our understanding about why and how societies get locked into unhelpful behavioural patterns (c.f. Darnton, 2010). There are tools for changing the behaviours of individuals and communities (Darnton, 2013; Michie, van Stralen and West, 2011) and tools for diagnosing problems (Chatterton and Wilson, 2014). There is a wealth of established research explaining why humans make seemingly irrational (although highly predictable) choices to the detriment of their health and society (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) and continually emerging ideas which make us think entirely differently about the reasons for the problems the planet faces (Butland, Jebb, Koopelman, McPherson, Thomas, Mardell and Parry, 2007; Crompton, 2010) and the best ways to tackle them (Kiisel, Keller and Vihalemm, 2015). As new ideas have developed, approaches have fallen in and out of favour with policymakers, such as the reduced support for social marketing and the increased interest in behavioural economics triggered by the 2010 change of government. This further adds to the diverse landscape of behaviour change and explains its

miscellany (see Kelly, 2016). Furthermore, behaviour change, as well as being a digested body of theory, is also a practical endeavour – hence, the way in which leading institutions choose to pursue it determines in large part what it comprises. Behaviour change is far from being a stable ‘field’, despite the shared agendas of minimising harms and maximising efficiencies which underpin the dominant approaches.

Within the “contemporary notion” of behaviour change, as Chatterton labels it in this special issue, one idea has emerged that universally resonates: that sustained behaviour change requires interdisciplinary activity. Warning against an over-reliance on ‘nudge’ approaches, The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee’s Behaviour Change Inquiry (2011) concluded that no single behaviour change approach has the capacity to achieve the scale of change that is required for many intractable problems and that a multitude of approaches is optimal. The call for interdisciplinarity has since grown in volume (e.g. Francis, O’Connor and Curran, 2012; Wilson and Chatterton, 2011), although there is no established consensus about what this interdisciplinarity should look like or how it might be achieved. Some even push beyond inter- to trans-disciplinarity, acknowledging that not only should we draw on multiple theories, but also need to draw in what happens when these are applied in practice (Rosenfield, 1992). Seminal work such as the Foresight Obesity map (Butland et al, 2007) emphasises the need to understand the complexity of societal problems and tackle the interrelatedness of factors rather than any particular linear reduction with any one approach. Furthermore, tools have appeared which seek to facilitate the blending of a range of approaches and theoretical ideas. A good example is ISM, which is now used by the Scottish Government to shape their behaviour change interventions (Darnton and Horne, 2013) and is being written into the Climate Change Plan for delivering Scotland’s carbon budget to 2032¹.

The seminar series from which this special issue emerges was centrally based on the principle of interdisciplinarity. The authors are part of a cohort of academics and practitioners invited to take part in an ESRC-funded seminar series entitled “Beyond Behaviour Change”, which ran from 2013 to 2017. Each of the nine seminars tackled a particular societal area of concern; transport, obesity, alcohol, physical activity, eating, cyber security, sustainable consumption and corporate societal responsibility. However, although seminars were organised with these foci, the central purpose was to explore interdisciplinarity in behaviour change; what this means, its potential and how different theoretical ideas can be synergised. In each seminar, speakers were invited from different sectors, disciplines and with very different perspectives; psychologists, sociologists, organisation scholars, policymakers, community activists, social marketers, economists and corporate strategists. Each presented their own ideas about the shape and future of behaviour change and this led to meaningful and purposeful discussion and energetic debate (reports are available at <http://esrcbehaviourchangeseminars.blogspot.co.uk/>). The speakers who chose to submit their work for this special issue have based their ideas on these seminars and they have drawn on this synergy and energy. The result is an important body of work – seven articles and two commentaries – which help push behaviour change thinking into new territory by emphasising significant theoretical developments and offering important perspectives on policy and industry contexts. This special issue is interdisciplinary, as all behaviour change work should be if significant advancements are to be made for the future of our world. Some of the key ideas from across the issue are now explored.

Key themes

Some papers in this issue are concerned with public health (Scally; de Andrade and Spotswood), others with environmental sustainability (Spotswood and Whittaker; Hurth and Whittlesea; Burnes), and others with transport and mobility (Davis and Tapp). Taken together the issue offers a set of ideas for understanding and advancing ‘behaviour change’ in any context. These ideas focus

primarily on how behaviour can be understood (as a starting point for devising programmes of action for change), but also on the political context of behaviour change and evidence. The first theme across the special issue relates to how to think fruitfully about behaviour as action coordinated across society. As Scally, Davis and Tapp, Chatterton, Welch, and Spotswood and Whittaker all emphasise in their papers, traditional approaches to behaviour change have over-emphasised the outcomes possible by focusing on and shaping individual actions. This notion is echoed increasingly in the wider literature (Blue, Michie, Carmona and Kelly, 2016; Maller, 2015; Spotswood, Chatterton, Morey and Spear, 2016). In this issue, Spotswood and Whittaker, for example, review interventions tackling littering and note that overwhelmingly, measures tend to focus on attitude change campaigns or basic infrastructure, ignoring the collective conventions which shape the acceptability and normality of littering in some contexts. At a policy level, Chatterton, and others, critique the emphasis on individualistic approaches to sustainability behaviour change policymaking. He concludes that individualistic approaches are “unlikely to be sufficient to achieve high ambitions”, which mirrors the findings of Spotswood and Whittaker’s downstream intervention review for littering. Chatterton’s conclusion is echoed in Scally’s commentary, based on his own experience of working in public health policy. He argues that grounding major population level health problems in terms of societal and cultural change rather than individual change is the only way to move towards a ‘solution’ to behaviour change problems. Across this special issue, an important foundation for the future advancement of behaviour change is to systematise the move beyond assumptions that individual actions can be shaped without tackling the societal shaping of them. Chatterton provides a list of reasons why individualism is expensive and ineffective, such as that it requires duplicated effort for new generations and fails to tackle the significant institutions which shape society, such as industry and policy; important themes which reverberate in the other works.

The emphasis on a shift away from behaviour change individualism is a core premise across this special issue, and it supports various lines of thought. For a number of authors, practice theories (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002) are used to frame the need to conceptualise behaviour and behaviour change as patterns of coordinated actions rather than the result of decisions by powerful agents. Welch maps out the contribution of the theoretical approach, emphasising that when behaviours are conceptualised not as the sole result of decision making but as the performances of routinized patterns of organised activity, this shifts the way that change interventions are planned. It de-emphasises the targeting of individuals and focuses more on the way that interconnected institutions and actors shape practices. Applying practice theories to the case study of littering that happens at Glastonbury Festival, Spotswood and Whittaker consider the implications of practice theoretical ideas. They emphasise how little reflexive decision making really goes on when people discard their tents or fail to recycle at the end of the festival. As such, interventions focusing on individuals, whether through winning their conscious engagement or less overt nudging, will be unlikely to dent the societal influences which these automated behaviours have evolved and emerged from. Applying practice theoretical ideas to a particularly contentious industry, De Andrade and Spotswood shed light on the ANDS (Alternative Nicotine Delivery System – e-cigarettes and vaping) market. Using empirical research, they analyse the activities of various industry actors whose competitiveness and emotionally-triggered discourse contributes to the way the marketplace works. To understand the relationship between the industry, consumers and their behaviours, the marketplace is fruitfully conceptualised as a complex network of market practices, played out by different practitioners in different ways and for different purposes.

Working across a range of behavioural contexts, Simpson’s theoretically rooted commentary on ‘usness’ does not draw on practice theory, yet he also synergistically argues for a

reconceptualization of human behaviour and behaviour change which takes into consideration the fundamentally social nature of our species. Basing his argument on evidence from fields such as anthropology, linguistics and philosophy, he illuminates the inherently cooperative nature of humans. To understand why behaviours happen, and to change them, Simpson posits that 'usness' should be a vanguard idea. Simpson pitches this argument to behavioural economists, given that in the current political climate this is the UK Government's favoured approach, and it lacks the facility to address the inherent social connectivity and cooperation he expounds. Sharing Simpson's perspective that there is power to be harnessed in the collective organisation of people, and in the light of the signs of a possible downturn in personal car ownership in some population segments, it is significant that Davis and Tapp ask whether social movements might not help force a change to the cycle of 'predict and provide' transport policymaking which ultimately perpetuates car usage, props up the automotive industry, and pollutes the planet.

These socially-grounded ideas frame behaviour as patterns of action emerging from the interaction of technological innovations with everyday life, and are reconstituted through performances (a neat side-stepping of the structure-agency debate - see e.g. Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012)). To date, conventional behaviour change has tended to take the side of agency, in which models of change come from a perspective which amplifies individuals' capacity to achieve change. There is a collective attempt in this special issue to achieve more of a rebalancing in this respect; there is a palpable focus on the role of corporate activity in the shaping of society and the shaping of behaviour. Burnes and Hurth and Whittlesea both offer a compelling critique of the way that business is conducted; the settled routines of marketing which focus on the bottom line and will always put societal wellbeing second. Hurth and Whittlesea's detailed overview and programme for change is based around six principles for holding marketers to account. It considers marketing to have a central role in "transitioning business and society in concert to sustainability". By using the programme of accountability they offer, the paper presents a way of confronting the deeply held assumptions at the heart of traditional business which make it impossible for sustainability to rise to the top of the corporate priority list, whatever the rhetoric. Burnes offers an equally compelling argument for why corporate organisation is not compatible with environmental sustainability. His favoured solution is to focus on effective leadership as a tested route to organisational culture change, which he argues is the only way to put the agreements made in the 2015 Paris UN Conference on Climate Change into practice. Other authors in the special issue also note how important industry is in the shaping of behaviour (Scally, Welch)

For Hurth and Whittlesea, as for Burnes, there is no mention of individuals or their capacity to achieve behaviour change. Individuals are still present, but they exist as shadows - the consumers of products and services created by corporate organisations. The authors' starting point is that corporations have a pivotal role in the shaping of society and that without a focus on shifting their *modus operandi* to ensure it is compatible with sustainability goals, behaviour change will be unachievable, unsustainable or insignificant. De Andrade and Spotswood's paper has a similar starting point, although with a much more granular focus on the Alternative Nicotine Delivery System market, which is in part controlled by the tobacco industry and in part by independent organisations, but wholly entangled with public health and scientific debates and with political tensions. Their paper also barely mentions the end consumer of vaping products, or the smoker wishing to use ANDS products as a route to quitting. They focus instead on the complexities within the highly volatile ANDS marketplace, showing through empirical research how emotions, end-goals, projects and beliefs are entwined with the more visible marketing strategies of the industry players. Individuals are performers of practices, many of which involved moments of consumption (Warde, 2005), that are shaped in a significant way by the activities of corporations.

This special issue's industry-focused papers emphasise the significance of corporate activities when considering human behaviour and how most efficiently to tackle behaviour change, and yet traditional behaviour change policymaking has generally steered clear of involvement in business – beyond frequent calls from outside business or government for bans or taxes. Scally's commentary scathingly critiques the 'Responsibility Deals' for their ineffectiveness in getting to the bottom of complex public health problems, in which industry involvement in consumer practices plays a significant role. Scally argues that the Responsibility Deals put the interests of industry firmly in the driving seat when it comes to steering government policy. The tendency towards a hands-off approach towards business is further critiqued by Chatterton, who draws on Kelly and Barker (2016) to note that taking an individualist behavioural approach has found favour in policy because it avoids having to grapple with the complexity of interrelated factors which influence behaviour, as well as the more everyday political motives for avoiding having to confront the powerful vested commercial interests that may be counterproductive to achieving behaviour change. Chatterton's emphasis on the need to tackle "vested commercial interests" chimes with Welch's helpful analysis of conventional policymaking; that it tends to avoid focusing on corporates because of the limited time, and budgets available, and because of the neoliberal ideology which situates social and systemic problems as the responsibility of individuals.

Clearly, in addition to the shaping of society by industry, the shaping of society – and the assumptions of 'behaviour change' – are strongly shaped by policies, which are in turn shaped by political ideologies. In this vein, Davis and Tapp highlight the paradox of the routine position amongst transport policymakers that is to predict and provide new highway infrastructure, whilst still investing and supporting voluntary behaviour change initiatives to reduce car use. In line with Hurth and Whittlesea's central argument, Davis and Tapp argue that the 'bottom line' paradigm at the heart of industry, detrimentally entwined with policy through the functions of lobbying, is entirely – even 'farcically', as Davis and Tapp write - incompatible with the realisation of a sustainable future.

What becomes apparent through these arguments is that it is not only individuals who are locked into routinized patterns of behaviour, as practice theoretical ideas illuminate (Røpke, 2009), but also the actors in policy and business. Practice (and Systems) theories emphasise that activity in one part of a network of practices, organisations, institutions and actors always effects the way things happen in another. Business, policy and individual 'behaviour' are recursively related. There is no starting point to the bundle, and activities designed to achieve change must necessarily tackle multiple parts of the system at the same time (see again Buckland et al 2007). In this sense, in light of the call for a focus on social ideas in this special issue, we must emphasise that 'social' means far more than the social connectivity of individuals or communities. Emphasising the 'social' in behaviour change means emphasising the connectedness of all relevant institutions, organisations and actors, beyond and including individuals but also reaching to policy and industry. This perspective points towards 'grand scale' interdisciplinarity, where societal problems are tackled by realising change across the network. This kind of interdisciplinarity is perhaps the only way to achieve meaningful societal change. A good example is the reduction in smoking, which has been achieved by people being supported to reduce their addiction, increases in tobacco pricing and regulation to achieve beneficial changes in the societal meanings associated with social smoking (Kelly and Barker, 2016; Blue et al, 2016). This way of understanding behaviour is already influencing government attempts to address policy challenges – such as Public Health England's new workstream to develop 'Whole System Approaches' to tackling obesity. Such grand scale interdisciplinarity will, however, and as many of the authors in this special issue have pointed out, require a different way of handling evaluation and evidence; another notable theme in this body of work.

Through the mapping out of the connections between policy, business and behaviour, authors in this special issue raise the important point that one of the reasons for the traditional focus on individual-level behaviour change is the appeal and fit of being able to simply measure the effectiveness of an intervention on a discrete group of people. Indeed, a point repeatedly made is that the way evaluation and evidence interacts with behaviour change policy is inherently political. Davis and Tapp note that there is a hierarchy of evidence and that 'expert opinion', if it fits with favoured ideological positions, will often be preferred to any form of published research. In other papers (e.g. Chatterton), the point is made that evidence underpinning behaviour change has tended to focus on individualist approaches because of the appeal of quantification, prediction and discrete experiments "which can be tested and modelled" in relatively short timescales. The consequence of this political shaping of behaviour change evaluation and evidence is significant. If policymakers favour a particular type of evidence (methodology) and focus (ontology) (Cairney, 2017) in the knowledge they draw on to create policy, behaviour change approaches lending themselves to these approaches will – indeed have – become hegemonic. The volume and type of evidence being produced and used in policy making twists our perception of the real causes of problem behaviours, such as a focus on personal lifestyle choices and discrete decisions over entrenched cultural worldviews. Furthermore the individualist focus on policy making over the last forty years has, argues Chatterton, shaped the way we behave more profoundly, for example by emphasising self-enhancing values. The vital shift to a more social understanding of behaviour change, which is at the heart of this special issue, requires a different approach to evidence and evaluation; a point made by almost every contributor. Linear models of intervention and measurement are unlikely to capture the full value of socially-grounded thinking and interdisciplinary approaches. Alternative mechanisms are therefore required, and behaviour change researchers need the courage to move outside the limiting spotlight of political favour. The ambition should be to embrace new theoretical ideas and methodologies and start building a more balanced evidence base for both what works and what is going on in behaviour change (Darnton, 2015). Although no paper in this special issue has focused specifically on evaluation and evidence, collectively there is a sense that some key changes are necessary: a more nuanced understanding of causality that goes beyond attribution to include contribution and association; longer time scales; a move away from over-emphasising the insights to be gained from randomised control trials and the evidence hierarchy (Cairney, 2017); more ambition and the embracing of new methodologies and theoretical ideas.

Conclusion

Amidst the debate about whether 'individual' or 'social' approaches are the best routes to behaviour change, Chatterton concludes that pragmatism is essential. In the face of overwhelming societal problems and the relative failure of much voluntary behaviour change intervention (Kelly and Barker, 2016), disciplinary allegiance must play second fiddle to considerations about how best to achieve sustained, societally beneficial change. Removing individuals entirely from our accounts may be as limiting as overly individualistic views – though collectively, 'behaviour change' is a long way from making such an error. A pragmatic conclusion is therefore that theoretical assumptions should not distract from interdisciplinary, ambitious measures which are committed to viewing behaviour in context. This is likely to be underpinned by a range of theoretical ideas and evaluative approaches. As Chatterton poetically notes, our goal should perhaps be to create a "rising tide [of social change] that lifts all [individual] boats".

A final conclusion to be drawn from this special issue is that our route to a more robust approach to behaviour change cannot be achieved through baby steps. Progress within any single discipline, even through rigorous research and amounting evidence, will not lead to a paradigm shift for behaviour change as a whole, and a paradigm shift is what is required. We need to reshape how business is

done (Hurth and Whittlesea; Burnes); how industries are understood (de Andrade and Spotswood); how we understand behaviours to come about (Welch; Chatterton); and how we approach behaviour change intervention (Simpson, Davis and Tapp; Scally; Spotswood and Whittaker) and not overlooking what and how we measure in order to understand 'impact'. For conceptualising behaviour, practice theory has been heralded as a route to achieving a behaviour change paradigm shift (Chatterton; Welch), and its appealing lack of political allegiance has been noted, along with its natural tendency to exhort ambitious interdisciplinary intervention approaches (Welch), (although so has the lack of practitioner application (Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014)). The missing link and a call for future work lies in how grand-scale interdisciplinarity, rooted in socially-oriented understandings of behaviour change, is achieved in practice. The papers in this issue offer sets of usable principles for shaping behaviour change, but next steps must be the implementation of these ideas and the meaningful capturing of the societal impact of these advances.

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ⁱ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/01/2768>