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Pro-environmental interaction: Engaging Goffman on pro-environmental behaviour change

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INTERACTION: ENGAGING GOFFMAN
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BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

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**PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTION: ENGAGING
GOFFMAN ON PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR
CHANGE**

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Abstract

Reductions in the environmental impacts of everyday life are increasingly accepted as a crucial part of any transition to a sustainable economy. Despite profound differences in how it should be achieved, the vast majority of recent research on such pro-environmental action recognises that it poses a fundamentally social challenge – demanding shifts not merely in individuals' attitudes and behaviours, but also in social norms, contexts and practices. Despite this general acceptance of the social nature of the problem, however, to date there has been very little attention paid to perhaps the most basic social medium: social interaction. To address this gap, the paper applies some of Erving Goffman's concepts to an ethnographic case study of a pro-environmental change initiative called Environment Champions. The analysis reveals how interaction processes can both help and hinder the spread of pro-environmental acts, and thus calls for them to be given further attention in future research.

Keywords: pro-environmental behaviour change; social interaction; Erving Goffman; ethnography; conspicuous environmentalism; banal environmentalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The need to reduce the environmental burden of hitherto “normal” and unproblematic ways of life is becoming increasingly recognised and accepted. In recent years within UK policy, for example, a number of reports have set out to address the ways in which behaviour might be changed as a crucial part of wider a societal transition to a sustainable and low-carbon economy (e.g. Halpern *et al* 2004; DEFRA 2008; DECC 2009; Dolan *et al* 2010). In turn, this has led to several policy initiatives to encourage pro-environmental actions among the population including, most recently, the ActOnCO2 campaign (www.actonco2.direct.gov.uk). The environmental social science that underpins these policy drives, however, presents a far from united voice. Whilst some see a need to “work within” (Barr 2008, p.261) the existing system, encouraging individuals to choose incremental shifts to their everyday lifestyles that will, in aggregate, add up to a sustainable future, others call for more radical shifts in social systems and practices as the only appropriate response to pressing challenges (e.g. Shove 2010). This paper attempts to find something a middle path between these two extremes. Despite their general agreement that some kind of broad social change is necessary, strangely neither of these dominant approaches has, to date, paid any meaningful attention to perhaps the most basic social medium: social interaction.

In this paper, I hope to begin filling this gap by examining the potential role that social interaction might play in attempts to reduce the environmental impacts of everyday actions. Drawing on empirical evidence from an ethnographic case study of a pro-environmental behaviour change initiative called Environment Champions, the paper shows how at the most basic and local level, social interaction processes can both help and hinder the spread of pro-environmental acts. As such, the paper’s core argument is that if we are to realise the social changes deemed necessary, more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which social interaction processes shape everyday activity.

The next section briefly reviews existing social science research on pro-environmental behaviour which, despite moving increasingly towards collectively negotiated and contextually-situated understandings, has so far neglected to focus on social interaction processes. To address this, section 3 introduces the work of Erving Goffman, perhaps the theorist *par excellence* of social interaction, whose dramaturgical approach is presented as potentially helpful for examining how and why pro-environmental acts are or are not performed in specific times and places. Section 4 then explores some of Goffman’s ideas in relation to empirical evidence from an ethnographic case study of a pro-environmental behaviour change initiative called Environment Champions. Finally, section 5 concludes the paper by reflecting on some of the practical and theoretical advances that a more sustained focus on social interaction processes may help to realise.

2. CHANGING BEHAVIOUR OR PRACTICE

In recent years, academic debate about how to change people's everyday actions in order to reduce their environmental impacts has arguably settled into two opposing theoretical camps (Shove 2010). On one hand are those, predominantly environmental psychologists and behavioural economists, who understand the task of bringing about pro-environmental behaviour as one of changing the ways individuals' make behavioural decisions either by "nudging" them in particular directions (e.g. Thaler and Sunstein 2008), or encouraging them to take up new pro-environmental attitudes or values (e.g. Barr 2008). On the other hand, environmental sociologists interpret the challenge as one requiring broader changes to the social practices that make up normal everyday life (e.g. Shove 2010). The argument in this paper, however, is that despite their profound differences and disagreements, both of these approaches share a common blind spot: social interaction.

Within environmental psychological approaches, the dominant aim has been to understand the relationships between pro- or anti-environmental attitudes or values, and everyday behaviour. In attempting to overcome a persistent "value-action gap" (Blake 1999), researchers within this tradition have posited countless models and frameworks, each identifying a different array of intermediary variables between attitudes and behaviour (see Jackson 2005 for an excellent review of these models). An important aspect of this work has been to recognise that individuals behave with bounded rationality, and that they are influenced by their surrounding contexts in various ways. Different researchers have understood this context in different ways. Barr (2003) for example, refers to the impact of contextualised social norms on individual's behaviours. Martin *et al* (2006) refer to various practical "situational variables" such as lack of a doorstep recycling scheme or space for a recycling bin as inhibiting pro-environmental decisions. Olli *et al* (2001), meanwhile, highlight an individual's social network as vital in shaping his/her pro-environmental attitudes and actions. Finally, within more recent work developed by behavioural economists, this surrounding context is understood as a "choice architecture" that influences particular decisions in various, and often unconscious, ways (e.g. Thaler and Sunstein 2008; Dolan *et al* 2010). Whilst these developments recognise that individuals do not make decisions in a social vacuum, it not only remains unclear how the surrounding context becomes internalised and embedded within an individual's thought processes, but this realisation has also failed to challenge the central assumption that pro-environmental behaviour is the outcome of a process of ultimately individual decision-making.

By contrast, a more recent body of work led by environmental sociologists, has turned attention away from individuals and their decision-making processes¹, to suggest that attempts to reduce the environmental burden of everyday activities

¹ To be clear, this body of research does not deny that individuals have agency to shape the practices they perform, but understands this agency as positioned within a broader process of Structuration (Giddens 1984) in which actions recursively shape and are shaped by surrounding social structures. There is not space in this article to explore this issue in full, but interested readers should consult Warde 2005; Røpke 2009; and Shove 2010.

should focus instead on the social and cultural organisation of routine and taken-for-granted social practices (e.g. Evans and Abrahamse 2009; Røpke 2009; Shove 2010). As a leading exponent of this approach, Elizabeth Shove has argued that “patterns of consumption [and their associated impacts] follow from the routine accomplishment of what people take to be ‘normal’ ways of life” (Shove 2004, p.117). Research attention, this view suggests, should therefore be focussed on what these normal social practices are made up of (e.g. Gram-Hanssen 2010), and how over time they emerge, stabilise, evolve, and ultimately die out (e.g. Pantzar and Shove 2010). Here, recent research has begun to focus on how social practices shape and co-evolve with individual’s values rather than resulting from them (Hards 2011), and on the extreme difficulties individuals or even teams of individuals face in changing these socially embedded and historically established entities (Hargreaves 2011).

Shove (2010) suggests that “On all the counts that matter, social theories of practice on the one hand, and of behaviour on the other, are like chalk and cheese” (Shove 2010, p.1279). Indeed, both approaches have been criticised and often in equal and opposite ways. Where, for example, social psychological approaches are seen as too individualistic, too rationalist and insufficiently critical of the status quo of neoliberal and consumerist socio-economic systems (e.g. Burgess *et al* 2003; Maniates 2004; Slocum 2004), social practice approaches are seen as excessively structural, insufficiently explanatory, and too radical to generate useful policy prescriptions (see, for example, the exchange between Shove 2010, 2011 and Whitmarsh *et al* 2011). Nonetheless, despite their common moves away from socially isolated individuals as the key unit of analysis, both approaches have left forms of social interaction under-studied and under-theorised (although see Nye and Hargreaves 2010; Halkier 2010).

For environmental psychologists and behavioural economists, irrespective of their recent focus on social norms and networks (Olli *et al* 2001; Barr 2003), the core objective has been understanding individual’s cognitive dispositions and, as such, study of the interactions between multiple individuals has been neglected. Not only does this oversight risk ignoring a crucial vehicle by which attitudes, values and norms may be exchanged, discussed and learnt, I will argue that it also neglects a crucial mechanism through which pro-environmental behaviour is actively encouraged or discouraged in particular situations. Similarly, despite its emphasis on collective conventions (Shove 2003), much social practice theory has, to date, been weak on the ways in which individual practitioners interact with one another when performing particular practices (*cf.* Røpke 2009). Here, more work is needed to understand how these ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger 1998) shape the transmission of practices from one practitioner to another (*cf.* Warde 2005), on how they are negotiated and performed in specific situations, and on how these processes may shape their future development.

Starting from these theoretical deficiencies, the rest of this paper begins to examine the ways in which social interaction processes are involved in and influence pro-environmental change processes - whether in behaviours or practices. To do this, it draws on concepts generated by Erving Goffman.

3. ERVING GOFFMAN, IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND FRAMES

Throughout his career, Goffman sought to understand the structure of the “interaction order” (Goffman 1983). In so doing, his work reminds readers that maintaining the appearance of a normal and competent individual in different times and places, and thus avoiding various social sanctions, requires constant work. This work takes the form of a “skilled watchfulness” (Giddens 1991, p.127) which, albeit often unconscious, monitors each and every situation an individual may find herself in, and decodes the relevant “social values or norms concerning involvement” (Goffman 1963a, p.193) which in turn guides her actions. In unpicking the structure of social situations in this way, Goffman devised numerous “mini-concepts” (Williams 1986) of which I will highlight just two - *impression management* and *frames* – that appear especially helpful in understanding why people may or may not act in pro-environmental ways.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman concerned himself with the ways in which individuals comport themselves when interacting with others in particular situations. Goffman observed that people reveal to, or conceal from, others certain information about themselves when interacting in order to give off particular impressions. Through such impression management, people perform idealised versions of themselves to others, emphasising how they meet or surpass social expectations. Crucially, the kinds of impressions people wish to create vary according to the situations they find themselves in. As Goffman points out: “what is proper in one situation may certainly not be proper in another” (1963a, p.12). Goffman thus presents individuals as “changeable formulae” (1974, p.573) constantly adapting and adjusting their outward presentations to meet the precise demands of different situations. Thus, by observing how people manage the impressions they give off in different situations, it is possible to understand the specific social norms and expectations that hold in particular contexts.

The complementary concept of *frames* (Goffman 1974) provides a device in which the “norms concerning involvement” for different situations are effectively stored. Essentially, a frame is the particular definition of the situation an individual is abiding by at any one time. “When individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: ‘what is it that’s going on here?’” (Goffman 1974, p.8). The answer they arrive at represents the frame they have identified for that particular situation, and directs how they should interpret events and how they should behave accordingly. In *Frame Analysis* (1974) Goffman makes clear that any single strip of activity can potentially support multiple meanings. A wave of the hand, for example, might be interpreted as a hello or goodbye, an instruction to stop, an attempt to draw someone’s attention to something, or even a manifestation of a nervous tick. As such, potentially awkward encounters might rapidly result from a simple misreading of the frame. Frames are thus powerful mechanisms of social control and correct alignment with them is crucial to the ongoing accomplishment of everyday life.

The relevance of these concepts for understanding pro-environmental behaviour or practice lies in the fact that in most contemporary social situations, individuals are not routinely expected to give-off pro-environmental

impressions. This suggests that if such a thing as a pro-environmental frame exists, it is only very rarely in play (e.g. Horton 2003). Indeed, as Moisander and Pesonen (2002) show, in many instances giving off too strong a pro-environmental impression is itself a source of *stigma* (Goffman 1963a) and thus seen as something to be avoided. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for attempts to understand and encourage pro-environmental action. On the one hand, the challenge is to examine how the dynamics of social interactions serve to promote or inhibit pro-environmental acts in different situations. On the other hand, there is the possibility that such social dynamics might in fact be used as powerful mechanisms through which pro-environmental action might be brought about.

4. PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTION AT BURNETTS

This section examines the potential of Goffman's concepts in relation to a single ethnographic case study of a pro-environmental behaviour change initiative - called Environment Champions (EC) - that was undertaken in the head offices of a British construction company named Burnetts². The EC programme is run by the environmental charity Global Action Plan (www.globalactionplan.org.uk) and involves a group of employees getting together to try and reduce their own and their colleagues' environmental impacts through a behaviour change campaign. At Burnetts, a team of 16 volunteer Champions was recruited, and over the course of 11 months, between January and November 2007, they focussed on reducing and recycling waste and saving energy around their offices. Practically, this involved a series of events being held, emails being sent, posters being put up, and audits and surveys being conducted, all of which were designed to encourage pro-environmental action in the workplace. Details of the initiative have been discussed at length elsewhere (see Hargreaves 2008).

In light of the theoretical blind spots outlined in section 2, an ethnographic approach was specifically employed to understand the processes through which pro-environmental changes unfold in specific contexts. The aim was to go beyond the abstract models and frameworks of attitude-behaviour connection produced by environmental psychologists and to examine how they do (or do not) function on the ground. Similarly, in relation to social practice based studies, the aim was to explore in greater detail how practices are performed and negotiated *in situ*, and whether or not they are influenced by pro-environmental change initiatives. Specifically, 9 months of participant observation was conducted during the EC initiative that involved attending all Champions team meetings, conducting a series of voluntary internships in different departments around the offices, and interviewing 38 employees including all 16 Champions, other figures who were identified as important to the initiative as it developed, as well as several employees whom the initiative sought to influence.

² To preserve the anonymity of participants, Burnetts and all participants names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

In terms of environmental impacts, the EC initiative at Burnetts ultimately led to a 29% reduction (3.4 tonne) reduction in waste sent to landfill, and a 5.6% (6 tonnes CO₂) reduction in electricity usage. These environmental impacts are relatively modest, even by comparison with EC initiatives run elsewhere (see Global Action Plan 2006). Perhaps the most significant impact that the initiative had, however, was observed in changes to how employees around the offices interacted with one another and in how they approached previously routine and unremarkable tasks. It was these observations that initially inspired this paper, and it is to them that I now turn.

4.1 Conspicuous Environmentalism: Responses to a changed situation

During the initiative there were numerous occasions on which I observed employees at the offices make a conspicuous show of their pro-environmental thoughts or actions. This *conspicuous environmentalism* took many forms, as outlined below, but in each case it represented the bringing of environmental issues to the surface of daily interaction and practices where they had previously been ignored. Many of these occurrences were incidental and short-lived, but their prevalence and frequency at the site suggests they were also significant.

The most obvious form of conspicuous environmentalism was seen in countless tiny performances which indicated to others present that what was occurring could and should be seen in a pro-environmental light. On several occasions whilst walking around the offices, I witnessed employees make gestures that they were about to switch off a light in a room, or about to recycle a drinks can or plastic cup (Field Diary [FD], p.93, p.150, p.169). For example, during my interview with David, which occurred in the staff room, we were interrupted by a passer-by who said:

Passer-by: “I couldn’t understand why the lights weren’t on, then I saw you’re here David and I thought ‘oh right’ (laughs).” (David interview, p.37³)

In this instance, the passer-by did not feel the need to explain his confusion. Instead, a simple “oh right” sufficed to say words to the effect of “you’re trying to save energy” which explained why the lights were switched off.

Further, on several occasions, people who were aware of my interest in the EC initiative, made similar displays of conspicuous environmentalism towards me. For instance, Sam made a point of saying “I’ll turn the lights off in there then” (FD, p.157) when leaving a room with me, and Paul commented “I didn’t just drive to the coffee shop, I’d been somewhere else too” (FD, p.169), when I saw him drive into the car park moments after having seen him at the coffee shop which is just a two minute walk.

³ All quotations are drawn from interviews with members of the Champions team unless otherwise stated.

Such occurrences did not only involve the Champions or those directly involved in the initiative however. In interviews, several Champions described the emergence of “mini-Champions” (David interview, p.39) around the offices. For example, Craig discussed one woman, Elly, who would regularly remind her colleagues to recycle cans or switch off lights, describing her as “quite an activist really within her department” (Craig interview, p.19). Similarly, during participant observation in one office, Karen and Joanna took action against people who were failing to use the new recycling bins for plastic bottles:

“At about 16:00 Karen came into the office and said: ‘it does apply to milk bottles, I’m going to send an email out.’ [she had just checked if you could recycle plastic milk bottles] The dialogue followed thus:

Joanna: ‘Who was it who last made tea? Was it Rob? Rob when you made tea did you finish off a milk bottle?’

Rob: No.

Joanna: Good because if it’d been you you’d have been in big trouble.

Rob: No, I’ve been waiting to finish a milk bottle just so I can feel good about myself for using the new bin.

Nicola: Blimey, you’re like the recycling police you lot.

Joanna: Well someone’s got to do it. We’ve got these new facilities so we may as well use them. We’re probably paying for them.” (FD, p.183)

Partly prompted by this dialogue, I arranged an interview with Karen and when I asked about this incident, she gave a good example of what a mini-Champion does:

“I think you heard me moaning about the plastic bottles, which is a permanent frustration of mine, because we use milk bottles in the kitchen and I must remove four milk bottles a week from the [recycling] bin still. Even though people have been told about it...That’s something I’m continually complaining about...There’s a bin, it’s next to the main bin, so it’s ridiculous really that they don’t [use it].” (Karen interview, non-Champion, p.7)

The presence of these mini-Champions around the site further emphasised the Champions’ messages and created a new situation around everyday interaction and practice in which acting in pro-environmental ways came to be expected, and anti-environmental behaviour became “ridiculous.” In short, actions which would previously have been ignored quite suddenly became environmental flashpoints around the office. Both Champions and non-Champions could be “picked up” (David interview, p.23) in this way and asked to justify their actions.

Goffman uses the concept of *civil inattention* (1963b) to describe a key aspect of social order. Civil inattention is a learned performance found, for example, in the brief glances given to strangers in order to avoid walking into them but also to indicate there is no threat and that they may carry on as normal. In the course of

the EC initiative, the opposite seemed to be occurring. Acts which would previously have been accorded civil inattention such as walking past the person at the photocopier, suddenly became grounds for *civil attention*. Goffman has often been criticised for lacking an adequate conception of social change (Maines 1977), but the EC initiative suggests that by reversing some of his observations change might indeed be explained. Where civil inattention engenders stability and order, civil attention brings about changes to the social situation. Following the initiative, a glance or a throwaway comment served effectively to emphasise that “things have changed and we should all fall into line with the new situation.”

It is also worth observing, however, that such attempted pro-environmental performances did not always succeed. Some lapses in behaviour might well be expected, but on several occasions during participant observation, people’s claims to be behaving in line with the EC initiative’s aims were let down by their observed actions. For example:

“During my interview with Paul he tried to show me that all his documents were now double-sided, but the three or four examples he had on his desk were all single-sided.” (FD, p.150)

Paul had been trying to perform a degree of conspicuous environmentalism towards me during his interview, but the props of his practices told a different story. These observations confirm the suggestion made above that the social situation at the offices appeared to have been changed by the EC initiative. Whilst Paul attempted to fall into line with the new social situation, his *alignment display* (Goffman 1963b) was unsuccessful. The crucial point here, however, is not that Paul simply got away with it, or ignored the dissonance between his intentions and actions as may have happened previously, but that in the newly environmentally charged atmosphere of the offices, such failures posed potential social risks. Being caught leaving monitors on, or printing single-sided, was now something to be embarrassed or even feel guilty about, just as switching them off and printing double-sided had become a source of pride. The EC initiative thus appeared to have introduced a new social pressure to behave in a pro-environmental fashion that was exercised repeatedly through everyday interaction.

The final aspect of this conspicuous environmentalism that I will mention relates to the tenor or *style* in which pro-environmental acts were carried out. In the vast majority of cases, interactions around the environment and environmental behaviour at the offices were accompanied with either laughter and joking around or with a mild form of teasing. More often than not, when putting on a pro-environmental performance, employees would gesture that they were printing double-sided, recycling something, or switching something off with a broad smile on their face or whilst uttering a cheeky quip to whomever was watching. On some occasions this general joviality would involve mild forms of teasing as Champions and mini-Champions were called the “Environment Police” (Craig, p.30), the “Recycling Police” (FD, p.183) or, and as Beth recounted, colleagues would share banter about being naughty and breaking the new pro-environmental “rules” (Sally, FD, p.26):

“You know ‘don’t forget to turn the light off’ and, you know, if you’re about to leave a room ‘no, put that in the box’, you know, in the recycling box and stuff. So, people do kind of, they’ll joke and say ‘oh, you’ve forgotten, oh I’m going to tell Clare [one of the Champions] you’ve forgotten’, you know just messing about, but in a way that’s kind of good because that’s making everyone aware.” (Beth interview, non-Champion, p.6)

The use of humour and laughter has been recognised as defensive mechanism to distance oneself from particular acts, and also as a means of coping with potentially stressful situations (Billig 2005). I would argue that, in the EC initiative, both of these processes were occurring as humour helped employees to deal with the uncertainty surrounding the new social rules or “norms concerning involvement” (Goffman 1963a, p.193) that the EC initiative had introduced. By mildly teasing the Champions, employees could challenge their apparent authority and lessen the seriousness of the new norms and, similarly, by laughing at their own uncertainty and doubt, especially in the presence and with the tacit support of others, employees could distance themselves from any accidental “bad” behaviour. This issue is a relatively small aside, but the use of such environmental humour and teasing was so common during the EC initiative that it perhaps merits further study. In particular, whilst some attention has been paid to the tone of environmental communications – suggesting that positive reinforcement is superior to doom-laden sacrificial messages or guilt-trips (e.g. Futerra 2005; Hounsham 2006) – I am not aware of any research that has explored the style with which pro-environmental behavioural changes are negotiated and made.

In summary, this section has focussed on the ways in which the EC initiative brought about conspicuous changes to everyday social interactions around the offices. The core argument here is, first, that the EC initiative had brought about a change in the shared “definition of the situation” around the offices that demanded an amended “presentation of self” (Goffman 1959) from employees, and second, that the new forms of interaction this engendered served as a crucial mechanism through which pro-environmental messages were spread and regularly reinforced.

4.2 Inconspicuous and Banal Environmentalism: Re-framing the offices

Section 4.1 showed that many of the effects of the EC initiative were conspicuous, occurring as noticeable pro-environmental interruptions to normal social interaction. In addition to these conspicuous acts, however, the Champions initiative also influenced the ways employees thought about and approached their own and others’ practice in less visible ways. This section highlights the key forms of this *inconspicuous environmentalism*, and begins to consider the extent to which the EC initiative brought about what Billig (1995) might call a *banal environmentalism*, that is, one which is so embedded within the local surroundings as to go unnoticed, and indeed one which does not need to be noticed.

For many employees at Burnetts, much of the day was spent alone in an office individually getting on with work. Whilst the previous section suggested that the presence of others was crucial to help promote reflection on, social negotiation about, and performances of, pro-environmental behaviour, these processes also occurred in the absence of others. Goffman's concept of *frames* (1974) is helpful in understanding these moments. Goffman is clear that frames are not created through interaction but are in fact extra-situational, being manufactured and sustained in the wider social-cultural context (Goffman 1974, p.1-2). Nonetheless, it is frames which help people to make sense of particular situations and to behave appropriately therein. Throughout the EC initiative, there were many examples, often recounted in interviews, of how the EC initiative had apparently influenced the dominant frame of everyday work around the offices, causing employees to see and understand things differently, and thus to approach tasks in new ways. For example, as the following quotations illustrate, many employees explained how the EC initiative had made them stop, think and re-think particular aspects of their daily routines.

"I can't think exactly what it was now but, sort of made me stop and think of, you know, things that I could do to try and help....just re-thinking things that you wouldn't necessarily think of doing otherwise, I mean I thought I was quite careful but just the silly things like turning my monitor off, I never thought of before." (Steph interview, non-Champion, p.5)

"Obviously I've seen a lot of the posters that go round and...I think that's quite good, because that makes me, because I admit that I never used to recycle as much as what I do now because that's made me sort of stop and think about, like putting bottles in my bin." (Vicky interview, non-Champion, p.5)

These quotes imply that the EC initiative had not only prompted employees to question their previously unquestioned habits, but also to arrive at new and environmentally-relevant answers to the question "what is it that's going on here?" (Goffman 1974, p.8). In short, a new pro-environmental frame appeared to be emerging, at least in relation to certain tasks.

For members of the Champions team, this re-framing process appeared to have been more thoroughgoing, causing them not only to understand specific tasks in new ways, but to see the whole office through a new, pro-environmental lens. Melissa explained this as a general process of seeing things differently:

"I must admit I'm, it's changed the way I see things, I mean I notice things more...If I see something in a bin, that shouldn't be in there, then I'll say 'That shouldn't be in there'. But before I wouldn't even look in, near the bin...The bin's a bin, you know, and I'd stay away from it." (Melissa interview, p.14)

David further elaborates on this concept, suggesting that the EC initiative had led to a process of *attunement* to pro-environmental practice around the offices:

“I worked in [a different office] for a couple of weeks, which is a quite a big office, and there’s, there’s certainly huge scope there for a similar scheme with, you know, and having sort of become attuned to the best practice here it was very noticeable working there.” (David interview, p.8)

Both Melissa and David thus reflect on how, although the office did not undergo any physical changes, things began to appear differently such that lights left on or waste in the wrong bin began to appear like warning beacons (Jelsma 2003) demanding their attention. The interaction process, here, is not between two humans but instead between humans and surrounding non-human artefacts (e.g. bins, lights, computer monitors etc. – *cf.* Latour 1992). Beyond suggesting that they form recognisable ‘fronts’ (Goffman 1959), serving as stages on which human-human interactions occur, Goffman does not actively consider the roles that non-humans may play in interaction processes. These observations suggest, however, that physical artefacts may play a crucial role in calling pro-environmental frames to mind in specific situations and thus prompting pro-environmental acts (see e.g. Hobson 2006). In a sense, for members of the Champions team at least, a pro-environmental frame appears to have become almost embedded in the physical surroundings of the offices, being carried in the very “stuff” of their everyday practices (Reckwitz 2002; Shove *et al* 2007).

The final form of this inconspicuous environmentalism that I will highlight relates to the regular admission in interviews with employees around the site that they would now switch their colleagues’ monitors or lights off behind their backs. In other words, they would behave pro-environmentally on behalf of their colleagues. Several of the non-Champions I spoke to mentioned having acted in this way, effectively helping their colleagues to overcome lapses in pro-environmental behaviour, but at the same time in an indirect attempt to send a message to their colleagues that equipment should be turned off when it isn’t being used. For example:

“I’ve been in someone’s office today and switched off two lights and their screen, because I knew they were out all morning and they hadn’t done it. I would never have done that before. So, so erm but hopefully when they come back to their office, they’ve realised that someone’s done that and they didn’t do it themselves.” (Steven interview, non-Champion, p.5-6)

What these acts suggest is not only that people were coming to relate to the office environment differently and see it in new ways, but also that they were beginning to feel able to impose their new ways of seeing things onto their colleagues. Crucially, they felt they could assume that their colleagues would automatically understand the environmental justifications for their actions and might even agree with them. In short, through the EC initiative, “the environment” appeared to have become a near constant issue around the offices, sufficient to make people stop and change what they were doing, and to intervene in and cast moral judgements on their colleagues’ behaviour.

This section has argued that as well as generating conspicuous forms of environmentalism, the EC initiative also had several inconspicuous impacts causing employees to see things differently and approach tasks in new, pro-environmental ways. In Goffman’s terms, such changes can be seen as the

emergence of a new pro-environmental frame around the offices. At the same time, however, the crucial role played by physical artefacts in activating this frame at particular moments, suggests there may be a need to extend Goffman's ideas. In particular, there is a need to understand how frames may become embedded within particular physical settings. Here, albeit developed in an altogether different context, I have found Billig's work on *Banal Nationalism* (1995) especially insightful.

Billig argues that arguments about nationalism and national identity surround all aspects of daily life. Where most theories of nationalism focus on what he calls *hot* nationalism, such as flag waving parades, Billig suggests that *cold* or *banal nationalism* is in fact more pervasive and important. Such banal nationalism is found in the constant *flaggings* of national identity that are embedded in people's surroundings or in the ways they think and talk. Billig argues that the pervasiveness of these reminders is what prevents people forgetting their national identity, and ultimately serves to make it feel somehow essential and natural.

In the EC initiative, the presence of what Billig might call *hot environmentalism* is immediately apparent in the various conspicuous performances and communal negotiations outlined above. Such events infrequently reminded employees to consider their environmental performance whilst at work. Following Billig though, if this were the only effect of the initiative, such environmentalism might be forgotten once these events became fewer and further between. To some extent, the presence of the Champions team is designed to stop these events from disappearing, but, even so, the Champions themselves have limited energy and multiple additional responsibilities, so it is likely that that such hot environmentalism will eventually dwindle. In order for the EC initiative to generate durable change therefore, the Champions needed to translate such hot environmentalism into *banal environmentalism*, and embed *forgotten reminders* and *flaggings* into the office environment. I would argue that the inconspicuous acts of environmentalism outlined above represent the beginning of this process.

For the Champions, this began in processes of attunement and seeing things differently around the site. For these individuals, the office appeared to have taken on a new layer of meaning as *flaggings* of environmental issues began to appear in many aspects of everyday life, such as lights left on or waste in the wrong bin. A similar process occurred amongst the mini-Champions and those who were actively performing in pro-environmental ways by going round switching off their colleagues' electrical equipment for example. Again, for these employees the office environment came to appear differently as environmental meanings were now embedded within it. For others, however, this process had barely begun and regular *hot* reminders in the form of emails, posters, and reminders from colleagues appear still to be required to assimilate environmental understandings into the office surroundings.

On the whole, however, the preceding sections have shown that a crucial change brought about by the EC initiative was not necessarily one of changing individual's attitudes, values or beliefs, but of beginning to change the frame or definition of the situation that underpinned much of everyday working life

around the offices to one in which for most employees, in most situations and practices, “the environment” could no longer be ignored.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper began by observing that despite the increasing interest in the collective, contextual and social dimensions of pro-environmental actions, the concept of social interaction has been regularly overlooked and, as such, remains under-theorised. Taking Erving Goffman’s “mini-concepts” (Williams 1986) of impression management and frames as starting points, the paper then examined empirical evidence from an ethnographic case study of a pro-environmental behaviour change initiative called Environment Champions. Here, it was seen that a crucial aspect of the initiative was that it introduced new forms of interaction – either as a form of *conspicuous environmentalism* as two employees would perform to one another and jointly negotiate their environmental acts, or as a more *inconspicuous* or even *banal environmentalism* in which individual employees were seen to change the way they interacted with particular tasks and their surrounding physical environment. Crucially, the empirical evidence suggested that changes to such interaction processes were not only an outcome of the initiative, but also an important mechanism through which it was spread throughout the workplace from employee-to-employee, and through which it might be more regularly reinforced and thus rendered more durable. These findings are drawn from only a single case study and thus similar studies are required, and in many more settings, before firm conclusions can be reached. Nonetheless, it is clear that social interaction processes can play an important part in pro-environmental change processes and, as such, that they deserve further research attention. Accordingly, this short concluding section outlines some of the promising practical and theoretical developments that might be pursued.

In practical terms, the crucial insight here is that in specific contexts social interaction can either help or hinder the performance and spread of pro-environmental acts. The resulting challenge, then, is one of generating more situations in which pro-environmental interactions come to be encountered by and expected from all of those participating. Such a focus on the situation, rather than the individuals within them, is certainly nothing new (e.g. Burgess *et al* 2003), and is indeed receiving increasing amounts of attention. Shove’s recent call for more research on the development of “envirogenic environments” (2010, p.1282) for example, echoes Horton’s earlier focus on a “new, green architecture....[which] would be assembled from multiple materialities, times and spaces which call forth green practices” (2003, p.75), both of which precede an interest in forms of banal environmentalism. The crucial difference, however, is the recognition that forms of interaction would not merely be components of envirogenic environments, but would also act as a key mechanism through which they might be constructed and through which they may actively shape and be shaped by those who pass through them. Building on these ideas, further research might therefore begin by systematically examining the core components of particular situations and how these relate to the forms and styles

of pro- or anti-environmental interactions that occur within them. This process, it is hoped, may generate a number of tools and mechanisms through which forms of conspicuous and banal environmentalism might be encouraged as a means of constructing and maintaining envirogenic environments.

In the process, and in conclusion, such research might also help to provide something of a bridge between the two currently opposed approaches to pro-environmental action outlined earlier. Social interaction offers a means of seeing how individuals actively influence their surrounding contexts and situations and the performance of practices that occur within them. At the same time, a focus on social interaction also illustrates very clearly how broader social structures – such as frames and the “norms concerning involvement” they contain – actively shape individuals’ practical performances from one moment to the next. In short, focussing on interaction processes helps to blur the boundary between individuals and their surroundings, forcing one to concentrate on “social individuals” that are both the product and producers of their socio-material context. Such a development, if it is more generally accepted, may open the door to more nuanced and interdisciplinary conversations capable of responding to the pressing need for more pro-environmental action.

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