


Book Review: Putting Sustainability into Practice: Applications and Advances in Research on Sustainable Consumption by Emily Huddart Kennedy, Maurice J. Cohen, & Naomi T. Krogman

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Kennedy, Emily Huddart, Maurie J. Cohen, and Naomi T. Krogman, eds. *Putting Sustainability into Practice: Applications and Advances in Research on Sustainable Consumption*. Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2015. xviii + 244 pages. Hardcover, \$125.00.

For several years I have taught Environment Sociology as part of our Environmental Studies program. This is done within the context of a university—Huston-Tillotson—that has dedicated itself to expanding institutional sustainability practices. As part of my university service I also sit on our Green Board which shares oversight of our Environmental Studies major and sustainability campus initiatives. I hoped that reading *Putting Sustainability into Practice: Applications and Advances in Research on Sustainable Consumption* would provide me with pedagogical material for the classroom as well as best practices for my campus.

Putting Sustainability into Practice: Applications and Advances in Research on Sustainable Consumption is an eleven-part anthology which combines the work of nineteen authors from a wide array of fields of study and practice including: Anthropology, Business, Change, Economics, Environmental Psychology, Geography, Investment, Labor, Sustainability, and Sociology. The book focuses on social practice theory “to efficaciously enable transitions toward a more sustainable society” (p. xv) and as a means of gaining insight into the way in which “meaningful change is cultivated and constrained” (p. xvi). It challenges readers to look beyond the widely accepted belief that engendering change among individuals will lead to the transformation of collective engagement thereby saving the Earth.

The book begins with an extensive review of the roots and current articulations of social practice theory before moving through a series of empirically based studies which highlight the contributions social practice theory can make to our understanding of and ability to engender sustainable practices. We learn how individuals rally to support activities associated with positive emotions and associations when they are threatened by institutional forces. We see the challenges involved in expanding sustainable practices beyond college-educated professionals. We achieve clarity on the role emotional energy plays in sustainability and the importance of experimental space in facilitating change. We gain insight into the process through which social practices evolve and the role social policy plays as a constraining or facilitating factor in change. We also envision a role for social practice theorists in evaluating social policy vis-à-vis the creation of a sustainable future.

As I had hoped, the book has provided me with much instructional material. Social practice theory’s critique of the ‘dominant individual as change-agent’ paradigm, including its reliance on the ‘nudge,’ is easily incorporated into course discussion as are such terms as ‘choice architecture,’ ‘upscaling,’ and ‘phantom loads.’ Chelsea Schelly’s discussion of policy frameworks in Colorado and Wisconsin, and their influence on the adoption and use of solar technology provides an excellent example of the manifest and latent functions of policy. Other

pedagogical nuggets include my introduction to Solidarity Purchase Groups, Earthships, and innovations in Peer-to-Peer Lending. Regrettably, I found little in the book to assist with on-campus sustainability efforts.

In general, the book is well-written and the theoretical discussions and empirical analyses are strong. The authors provide excellent models to assist the reader and the text is rich with supporting materials such as summary tables, bar graphs, and flow charts. A limitation of the anthology structure is the level of repetitiveness of social practice theory from one chapter to the next. This is often the nature of anthologies when all of the readings are informed by the same theoretical frame; however, the repetitiveness almost reaches the edge of irritable droning.

The book stands as an appropriate supplemental text for advanced undergraduate and graduate sustainability seminars. It would be an appropriate addition to college, university, and personal libraries as it provides the basis of continuing research for those working in the areas of social practice theory and sustainability.

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