



## Energy Poverty, Practice, and Inequality

**Abstract** This chapter builds from the previous one to develop a focused analysis that explores the value of key ideas from practice theory-based energy research for analyses of energy poverty. The chapter uses examples from in-depth qualitative research to give attention to the *constitution of need* in terms of implications for energy deprivation, as well as examining the ways that power relations shape processes of recruitment and defecation from practices. In this, it offers distinctive research trajectories for energy poverty research by extending beyond concern with people’s abilities to *meet* needs or achieve capabilities. And it offers a basis for response to critiques of practice-informed analyses of energy demand that highlight the limited attention given to inequalities within such work.

**Keywords** Energy poverty · Practice theory · Inequality · Welfare policy · Capabilities

### INTRODUCTION

The previous empirical chapter drew on capabilities thinking to understand energy poverty and developed an analysis that explored how welfare policy—as an area of invisible energy policy—shapes experiences of energy deprivation. This current chapter retains the capabilities-based understanding and exploration of the invisible energy policy area of welfare

but brings focus onto the constitution of energy demand and the reproduction of social practice. Building on the previous chapter's analysis and formulated as an empirically informed discussion, the focus here is on how a concern with the constitution of need, on the one hand, and processes of enrolment in practices, on the other, can offer distinctive trajectories for energy poverty research. And conversely, how in working through such questions, it becomes possible to build insights important too for practice theory-based work on energy demand, centrally around the relevance of attentiveness to relations of power for analyses.

One of the key interventions of practice theory-based energy research has been to argue for focus on the ways that energy demand is constituted and specified (Shove, 2003) (see Chapter 2 for discussion). Much energy demand policy has tended to address ways of meeting existing levels of service using less energy (e.g. through efficiency or behavioural interventions), or changing technologies to reduce the environmental damage arising from energy use (e.g. renewable energy and electric cars). Shove (2003, p. 396), however, has argued for a focus on more 'penetrating questions' that concern the processes through which services are specified and constituted in the first place. In a global context where the energy intensity of daily life is ever increasing, she asserts that the core question should be: 'How do new conventions become normal, and with what consequence for sustainability?' (ibid.). Though this question has been of central significance for work on energy and sustainability, I argue here that it raises equally important questions for energy poverty research.

The previous chapter engaged with debates at the forefront of energy poverty that have brought focus on how energy is foundational for multiple capabilities. These debates have dramatically opened up the focus of research and practice to a wide range of energy services beyond the more conventional emphasis on heat (Bouzarovski & Petrova, 2015; Day et al., 2016; Middlemiss et al., 2019; Petrova, 2018; Simcock et al., 2016). Research in this space has also advanced to address the complex and multifaceted processes that shape experiences of energy deprivation, highlighting wider structural conditions and processes at play. However, the emphasis remains on the factors and processes that affect abilities to meet energy service needs, without delving more deeply into the relevance of ideas about how those needs are created and constituted.

Research focuses on the ways that people's abilities to meet energy service needs are reduced or affected by social, political, and economic processes, as well as through personal circumstances, and structurally

constituted material conditions (Bouzarvoski & Petrova, 2015; Day et al., 2016; Middlemiss & Gillard, 2015; Petrova, 2018). And research has examined the relations between energy deprivation and people's capabilities, showing the complex interconnections and deleterious effects (Middlemiss et al., 2019; Mould & Baker, 2017). Very little attention has been given, however, particularly in empirical research, to the processes through which energy service needs are *constituted* with consequences for energy poverty. While Day et al. (2016, p. 262) comment on the ways that the capabilities approach (see Chapter 2 for discussion) 'allows us to see the effect of evolving social norms in constituting energy demand and, therefore, relative energy deprivation', this has yet to be taken forward in any significant way within analyses.

At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 3, practice theory-based research has been focused on the constitution of energy demand but has tended to address the consequences for sustainability giving limited attention to poverty and inequality. Indeed, with two notable exceptions focused on conceptual contributions, namely a 2002 working paper by Shove and a 2013 book chapter by Walker, there has been very little reflection on inequality in energy research inspired by practice theory at all (see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion). The turn to invisible energy policy within practice theory-based work offers some important avenues for bringing focus on relations of power as it opens up to questions about the processes through which practices are shifted and shaped through governance. Through the discussion here I show how a focus on welfare policy gives a view of relations of power not only in the production of conditions of energy poverty but in the constitution of needs for energy and in abilities to be recruited to, or defect from, practices.

In the following discussion, I thus develop an analysis that raises and addresses several key concerns that emerge from bringing practice theory thinking (including that relating to invisible energy policy) to bear on issues of energy poverty and capabilities. The first relates to the specification of need and how practices-as-entities come to be constituted in ways that exclude people and create energy deprivation, emphasising the active role of policy in these processes. The second connects more directly with Walker (2013) to highlight how people have varying degrees of agency (as well as capability) as performers of practices and are thus differently placed to be recruited to or defect from practices. A key argument that is developed here concerns how this is related to the ways that practices are shaped or steered across distinct policy spaces through particular

formulations of power relations, some of which are more coercive than others. I argue that in the case of welfare policy, possibilities for defection from practices are severely constrained regardless of capability to engage in those practices. This analysis thus weaves a central concern with the role of governance and policy in constituting need and shaping practice into the interventions made within the previous empirical chapter. By working with the empirical data and combining conceptual traditions utilised across energy demand research, the analysis presents a unique contribution to debates about energy poverty, practice, and policy.

### EXPLORING POWER IN THE CONSTITUTION OF NEED

Where the previous chapter utilised examples from across the spectrum of energy services, this chapter focuses in further on two key examples—those of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and travel and mobilities. These examples are utilised to structure the discussion here because they speak most readily to the ideas this chapter explores relating to the constitution of needs and processes of recruitment and defection from practices. This is partly because they are identifiable as interrelated areas where welfare policy reforms have been important in constituting newly emerging and increasing needs. As discussed in the previous chapters, though such energy services are not typically the focus of energy poverty research, both have important relevance from an energy capabilities perspective. ICTs have been highlighted as an increasingly important energy service particularly for different groups outside of older people (see Petrova, 2018; Simcock et al., 2016). And although concern with mobilities has long been foreshadowed in the cognate but distinctive transport poverty literature, it has yet to be brought into analyses of energy capabilities in a prominent way (see Mattioli et al., 2017; Robinson & Mattioli, 2020). This makes these areas of energy service of additional interest and importance in many respects, providing further context and grounding for the analysis that follows.

#### *Constituting Digital Worlds*

The first examples I discuss relate to needs for information and communication technologies (ICTs) and people's inability to access these energy services with implications for capabilities. While ICTs have not been given a great deal of focus in energy poverty research or energy demand research

more widely, they are receiving increasing attention as understanding of their energy implications grows (Morley et al., 2018) and their importance to capabilities becomes ever greater (Simcock et al., 2016). Simcock et al. (2016) refer to new consumer electronics becoming ‘basic necessities’ for life in the UK. They emphasise how ICTs as a set of energy services are increasingly integral to daily life and capabilities underpinning wellbeing (Petrova, 2018; Simcock et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2016). Recent global events (including the COVID-19 pandemic) have seen even greater acceleration of trends towards ICT use adding to its importance in daily life and its relevance as a growing area of home electricity use (Morley et al., 2018). Even if digital services are not considered costly at point of energy use, such services require *continuity* of electricity supply for regularly charging devices, which becomes far more problematic in the context of self-disconnection, under-use, and enforced (if temporary) disconnections associated with prepayment meters.

These services are also bound up with requirements for hardware and data contracts that are more expensive and burdensome. Understanding energy deprivation in terms of energy services and the capabilities that they relate to, then, highlights not only the point of use energy expenditure but the equipment, service contracts, and other costs associated with the relevant services, such as computers, mobile phones, and WiFi connections (Bouzarovski & Petrova, 2015). This might be thought of as entirely out of kilter with current policy definitions of fuel poverty, but it is possible to argue that it simply addresses a similar aspect of service to that of boiler installation, grid connection, and electrical points and light fittings to which policy is already directly targeted. That is to say, the materials and services related to ICTs are arguably equally central to enabling energy services as these wider core forms of energy infrastructure.

Moreover, in highlighting how ICTs have come to be prioritised, Petrova (2018) shows that they increasingly figure in processes through which different needs are balanced, affecting under-use of other services such as heat. This both points to the growing importance of ICTs for contemporary life and shows how areas of new and/or increasing need interact with other energy services. There are good reasons, then, for considering them to be significant in terms of energy poverty concerns. The analysis that follows contributes to further understanding the relevance of ICTs to issues of energy poverty. However, the central focus is on using this example to cast light on the role of (invisible energy)

policy in *constituting needs* (cf. Morley et al., 2018) and, crucially, on the ways that people have differential abilities for resisting recruitment to, or defecting from, practices with important implications for experiences of energy poverty.

Amid wider policies of digitalisation (Morley et al., 2018), welfare policy has seen increasing emphasis on digitalisation with requirements for anyone in receipt of benefits to access everything online (Butler et al., 2018). This includes applications for benefits and any changes to circumstances, job applications, and other tasks related to finding work (which those in receipt of certain benefits are expected to complete as part of Claimant Commitments—Citizens Advice, 2020), as well as information about processes and procedures to which they must adhere. This has increasingly made ICTs essential as reflected in the accounts of the research participants: ‘...*everything’s now over the phone isn’t it, computers... I’ll wait until I’m on a good day and do it then*’ (Biographical Interviewee 7, York). While there are many areas of life that are difficult to negotiate without access to ICTs meaning that enrolment in digital worlds is a reality for most in the UK, I argue that the nature of ‘recruitment’ for those subject to welfare systems is deeper still. The welfare system has very explicitly and actively been digitalised through government policy, with an arm of the Department for Work and Pensions—DWP Digital—dedicated to overseeing and advancing these processes:

We have recently launched over a dozen digital services, including the Universal Credit, Carers, and Pensions services... which improve outcomes for 22 million people. (DWP Digital, 2016)

These processes are cast in terms of improvement but in the context of welfare reform, they have also been imposed on claimants with requirements to make and manage claims digitally; first by phone but over time this has shifted to online:

Instead of a 40-minute telephone call involving both a customer and an agent, online applications now take on average 18 minutes. (DWP Digital, 2021)

The language of efficiency and improvement, which colours much of the discourse around these processes, elides how expansion of digital has

happened while other ways of accessing services have been reduced or restricted. Since the early 2000s, jobcentres and places for in-person access have gradually been reduced and moved to central locations in cities. This is particularly restrictive as, in the UK, city centres are expensive places to live and most of those using the welfare system as a primary source of income are therefore unlikely to live close to service locations.

...services in York, everything was taken out of the community and put into one central place which is in the city centre which is great for saving money but if you've got a family that live out on the outskirts... and they need to get into York, well it's not easy to do that by bus. (Stakeholder Interviewee 10, York)

Processes of closing jobcentres and digitalisation have accelerated more recently with over 100 further closures of jobcentres between 2016 and 2018 (Finn, 2018). Such is the extent of closures that the aftermath of the global coronavirus pandemic has seen temporary jobcentres opened as an emergency measure to cope with the increased demand for welfare services. These processes of closure severely limit other ways of using welfare services reinforcing requirements for digital access.

*All their benefits they've got to apply online, jobs are all now online, everything's online.* So a working phone and a good one is becoming absolutely essential, almost as essential as food. And the poorer you are, the more essential it is. (Stakeholder Interviewee 13, Bristol)

Digital services are thus actively instituted through policy and governance processes as part of the requirements for engaging with welfare services. These governance processes are introduced in ways that highlight positives for access without consideration of the implications for energy services and needs. In this way, they can be considered part of the invisible energy policies that characterise wider shifts to digitalisation (see Morley et al., 2018). However, the above quote also highlights important issues in processes of 'recruitment' to digital practices for those implicated in the welfare system. Though by taking up and engaging with ICTs as part of daily life, people are active in constituting the related practices, there are differences evident here in the extent to which people can defect from such processes of enrolment. In the case of welfare policy, the requirements for digital access that are generative of new energy service needs

involve recruitment to practices with very limited opportunities for defection. It has become an essential means for accessing their only source of income.

Where the quote above highlights how ‘the poorer you are, the more essential it [access to ICTs] is’, crucial to this story is how such processes of constituting need combine with a lack of access to these energy services. The research highlights how people are often unable to meet these needs with knock-on consequences for multiple capabilities relating to securing their income, as well as other dimensions of wellbeing, such as social respect, social relations, and mental health. Many of the participants in the study discussed challenges that arise in gaining access to information and communication technologies required for engagement with the welfare system. This included challenges in securing or negotiating access, problems with continuity in electricity for charging devices related to prepayment meter use, and lack of wider service provision outside of the home.

*Interviewer:* So you haven’t got a computer or the internet at home?

*Interviewee:* No I have to go to the job centre to check on their computers and if it’s out of hours then I do try and ask a neighbour but they get a bit funny with me asking... (Biographical Interviewee 8, Bristol)

While the energy service needs related to ICTs are something that could be met communally, these increasing requirements are being constituted at the same time as access outside of individual homes has been eroded, particularly for those enrolled in the benefits system. As highlighted above, jobcentres have closed and been relocated but so too have other services that offer points of free access, such as libraries (Butler et al., 2018; Finn, 2018). This heightens requirements for in-home forms of access, then, that push costs and energy service needs onto individuals and households. The below quote from an interview with a couple in receipt of disability benefits articulates problems related to the limited access to ICTs people in the welfare system have.

*Interviewee 6b:* There’s not enough computers at the Job Centre and the council office combined because there’s so many people who cannot afford to have the internet connection, but then they kick you off them after a certain time anyway... The vast majority of their customers... don’t have any internet at all ...

*Interviewee 6a:* And don’t have a device to connect to the internet either.



*Interviewee 6b*: Some piggyback off neighbours... (Biographical Interviews 6a & 6b, York)

In this context, people are subject to specific requirements for this energy service without the requisite abilities to meet needs. Crucially, these requirements are not simply part of wider processes that are benignly unfolding, they are actively constituted and created through and within welfare policy with detrimental implications for capabilities. In terms of energy poverty research, this highlights the importance of giving focus to the processes through which energy service needs are constituted. Such a focus within analysis could bring to the fore multiple issues related to the ways energy poverty is understood and addressed. For example, the income thresholds that form part of current policy do not readily recognise the emergence of ‘new needs’ (Walker et al., 2016) or, more fundamentally, this could advance recognition of how reducing needs for energy can be as important for addressing energy poverty as it is for problems of environmental sustainability.

The role of policies (beyond energy policy) in constituting needs is frequently obscured in both policy and analysis, as are the ways that different vulnerabilities or forms of precarity are affected by such changes. This chimes with existing research that has argued for greater focus on intersectionality and the wider systemic structures and inequalities that underpin energy deprivation (Großmann & Kahlheber, 2017; Middlemiss & Gillard, 2015; Petrova, 2018), but goes further in bringing to the fore the relevance of the constitution of need within and through policy to the (re)production energy poverty. Importantly, the analysis here also gives focus to that ways that people have differential abilities to navigate, negotiate, or resist emerging trends and the policy interventions that underpin them.

Walker (2013) has suggested that in thinking about inequality, analysis might look at the ways that people are ‘unrecruitable’ to practices owing to their not having the requisite capabilities. For example, he suggests that a person may be ‘unrecruitable’ if they lack capabilities related to the physical, material, or skills elements required to engage in a practice. In the case here, however, people can be seen as both ‘unrecruitable’ as Walker (2013) has proposed, in lacking capabilities to engage in practices related to ICTs, and also subject to a form of *enforced recruitment* to those practices. This is indicative of limited agency in the potential people

have for defection or resistance in the processes through which practices become enshrined.

Practice perspectives have tended to emphasise processes through which practice-as-entities become established or diminish when cohorts of people take them up or abandon them. Bringing inequality more firmly into a practice theory perspective highlights how as new practices take hold, and are enacted by multiple people, some are increasingly marginalised owing to limitations in their capacities to engage in such practices. Moreover, evident here is that people are both differently placed to *enact practices* that have taken hold in the wider population and to *resist enrolment* in processes of uptake as some are forced to engage by virtue of their socio-economic position and the policy spheres to which they are subject. In Gormally et al.'s (2019) paper, they discuss the ways that education policy is actively negotiated in daily life and to some extent resisted by those working in higher education. Noticeable from the research here is that welfare policy exerts a far more coercive force upon its subjects, highlighting the differential ways that policy acts upon citizens. This adds a further layer to understanding of the processes by which practices take hold and brings inequality into view, not only in terms of how it affects abilities to engage in practices but how it shapes possibilities to subvert existing trends and/or constitute new ones.

### *Constituting Mobilities*

The second example I want to address in working through ideas about the constitution of need, recruitment, and defection relates to mobilities, travel, and transport. As discussed in Chapter 2, though energy poverty research has tended to be dominated by a focus on domestic energy use, there is a body of research focused on transport poverty (e.g. see Mattioli, 2017; Mattioli et al., 2017 for discussion). This research has developed important insights relevant to understanding processes of energy vulnerability but has not yet engaged with the capabilities-based thinking that informs key parts of the domestic energy poverty literature (Bouzarovski & Petrova, 2015; Day et al., 2016; Middlemiss et al., 2019; Simcock et al., 2016). With focus on the implications of (non-energy) policy for mobilities and energy poverty, this section builds on the analysis above and in the previous chapter to bring further attention to the ways that needs have been constituted though policy and governance. This goes beyond the existing transport poverty literature to draw out

questions about the ways that the creation of needs related to mobilities underpins experiences of energy poverty and relates to capabilities.

There are multiple interlinked ways in which welfare policies and reform can be seen to have created needs for travel. These concern, for example, policies discussed in the previous chapter such as requirements for claimants of unemployment benefits to demonstrate that they are actively seeking work. Part of this activity involves attending job interviews and keeping appointments at job centres. As highlighted previously, failure to attend on time results in sanctions, meaning deductions or even entire withdrawal of welfare benefits payments for a specified period. In the research, participants discussed these requirements for travel as often involving long distances with associated costs (e.g. for bus fare) being challenging to meet. While some travel costs can be reclaimed, often participants did not have the money to support the upfront payment on the day.

[For a job interview] I lived in [Place name] and I had to walk to [Place name]. In the car it's probably about, I think about 40 minutes maybe or something, and I walked it. So I was walking in the rain, so already you look a mess, and you haven't got credit to ring them, so they think you're not interested, and because you can't afford the bus fare there, it's just you're constantly going round in circles. It's really difficult and mentally it's very hard to keep pushing forward, and you can't go to the Job Centre and be like oh, I can't get to my interview this day....  
(Biographical Interviewee 6, Bristol)

The requirements to attend appointments and interviews highlighted here are one way in which welfare policy is constitutive of requirements for travel, but there are other policies that affect the places where people live and the locations of service infrastructure too. This means that the distances people must travel (as well as the necessity for travel at all) are also affected by specific welfare policy changes. These changes include things such as: limitations placed on choice of housing location within the allocation system; the bedroom tax (which has seen occupants forced to move home to be able to afford housing); and reforms to the ways housing benefit is delivered under universal credit that mean it goes directly to the recipient instead of the landlord, with implications for the willingness of some to accept those on welfare support (also see

Chapter 5). This combines with closures of job centres and centralisation of services (discussed above) bringing further implications for travel distances. In combination all this speaks to the ways that policy shapes both the location and availability of services, the places where people live, and the requirements for travel. In focus here, then, are not only the challenges people face in meeting needs but the ways that these needs (*and* the challenges) are constituted by intersections between different policies.

The previous chapter pointed to work on transport poverty, which has been attentive to how transport needs vary across different groups. For example, Mattioli (2017) discusses the factors that affect where people live, and highlights work on urban socio-spatial configurations that shows how lower-income groups tend to live in areas prone to higher car dependence. Though this recognises the inequalities that exist in needs for travel, the analysis here goes further speaking to the ways that policy is directly implicated in the underlying processes that shape the emergence of these trends and highlighting differential abilities to both constitute and negotiate such needs. As above, the policies shaping travel requirements for those subject to the welfare system are far more punitive and draconian than might be reflective of other policy areas. This analysis here, then, aims to highlight not only how policy constitutes needs but also how different policy areas are characterised by different power relations. While the language of ‘steering’ might be appropriate for analysis of some policy areas, others, like welfare, are characterised by something far closer to coercion.

As the next example highlights, these welfare policy reforms compound and intersect with wider areas of policy and commercial activities that further shape and create challenges related to mobilities and energy poverty.

There are pockets in Bristol of poverty and in those areas there aren't decent shops, you can't buy food unless you travel out... Bus routes don't go through there in the same way because it doesn't pay. And bus routes [that] were being subsidised [have] been withdrawn as well. So now travelling around is now becoming a big issue... they are employment blackspots... you're desperately trying to find a job and you go for an interview, get a job in [Place name]. But then you've got to get there somehow every day. And I've tried to do that as well. It took me two hours to get there and two hours back again and £5 a day as well. So people don't realise, it's not just food to eat, heat your home, travelling

around, everything is so much harder, becomes harder, if you're in one of these low income situations. (Stakeholder Interviewee 13, Bristol)

This attests to the complex intermingling of policies and processes that shape where people subject to welfare policy live and how their energy requirements and experiences of energy poverty are exacerbated and reproduced. This reflects arguments made in the previous chapter concerning the cyclical nature of the relations between energy poverty and wider poverty. I argue here, however, that such circumstances do not arise by chance or represent instances of individual misfortune but are fundamentally shaped by policies that are constitutive of both where people (can) live and the services and facilities available to them within their communities. This concerns the ways, then, that energy services are *actively constituted* as necessary to achieve a minimally decent standard of living, while simultaneously being made inaccessible. This speaks once again to the points raised above about the relative abilities people have for resisting, negotiating, and reducing their engagement in different practices. In the case of welfare policies, imperatives for travel are such that people must find a way to meet them even if outside of their means and capabilities. Such variation in abilities to decide and negotiate engagement in travel practices could be attended to as a way to bring inequality into analyses of the increasing energy intensity of mobilities more widely.

For the final point I return to issues discussed in Chapter 5 about the ways that welfare is problematised through individualised stigmatisation of its subjects (see also Middlemiss, 2016; Wright, 2016). Where the emphasis is on the individual and notions of personal deficits in skills, willingness, or ability (for example), the ways that policy itself can be constitutive of problems of mobility and energy poverty are likely to be obscured or pushed out of remit. Understanding the boundaries, problematisations, and framings of policies, then, is likely to be important in both questioning the processes that are generative of new needs and examining where the spaces for intervention may lay within this.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The energy demand literature discusses the constitution of needs, and concepts of recruitment and defection from practices, with primary focus on the implications for environmental sustainability. The discussion here has sought to bring emphasis onto the importance of these

ideas for examining energy poverty and, as part of this, develop insights relevant to areas of analysis that have been relatively neglected within existing work. The first area relates to the invisible energy policy literature and the point that in work addressing questions about the constitution of need, the specifics of policy have not been the focus (Royston et al., 2018). The second area concerns the contention that the relevance of inequality to the reproduction of practices has rarely been addressed (Walker, 2013). This chapter has sought to emphasise the ways that welfare policies, in particular, are constitutive of needs and in doing so, bring to light issues of inequality by emphasising how people's agency in negotiating the requirements for energy services can be highly restricted, as well as being entwined with a lack of possibilities to meet them.

In the examples discussed above, this is borne out through highlighting the ways that needs for energy services related to both information and communication technologies (ICTs) and mobilities have been constituted through welfare policy. At the same time, policies are also shown to shape the possibilities people have for meeting these energy service needs. For instance, by creating conditions whereby communal access to ICTs is limited or in shaping processes of housing provisioning in ways that mean people are more likely to live at distance from service centres. The examples here indicate how in contexts of welfare policy, the degrees of agency available to people both in determining the nature of needs and the possibilities for defecting from practices are extremely limited. They attest to a situation where people are recruited to practices but without the requisite abilities to fulfil them. This analysis suggests, then, an important variability in agency arising from inequality and our relations to policy as subjects of different policy fields. Turning to Bourdieu (1998), the analysis here captures something that speaks to his notion of symbolic violence, wherein the ways that shared meanings are constituted and articulated in societies are an expression of power relations, rather than something evenly produced. Overall, then, the discussion in this chapter aims to take thinking beyond a concern with people's abilities to meet energy needs, to reflect another important dimension of the challenges associated with energy poverty—namely, the processes of evolution, constitution, and enrolment of people in needs for energy services.

In this respect, the analysis can further benefit from looking across to the wellbeing and capabilities literature. This literature highlights how

unequal power relations in society mean that people are ‘differently able to conceive of, pursue and achieve wellbeing’ (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010, p. 513). The analysis here is revealing in that it suggests that people are also differently placed to shape what even becomes important or needed to achieve that wellbeing. That is to say, as new needs for energy take hold in wider society, people are subject to differing requirements to adopt the related practices, with some having little possibility for defection. In the case of welfare, an array of policies simultaneously constitute needs while also reducing abilities to meet them. Within energy poverty research, an important route for future research could be to consider how power relations, marginalisation, and oppression can operate to limit people’s ability to *shape needs* as much as it can to meet them once constituted.

The discussion here is further revealing for thinking about how the literature on energy poverty and capabilities opens up important questions for practice-inspired research on energy demand (see also Walker, 2013). Most notably, it foregrounds the importance of inequalities within energy consumption and reveals that processes of recruitment to and defection from practices are coloured by inequality and power relations in important ways. Thinking in these terms opens up a distinctive line of analysis that is engaged more readily with ideas about understanding the place of increasing energy use in creating or further entrenching wider inequalities, bringing to the fore questions about power that are rarely addressed within practice theory-based energy research. Particularly, those regarding who has the power to shape and constitute needs and how abilities to resist, be recruited, or defect from new norms of practice vary across people and across distinct policy areas. This concluding discussion has begun to draw together some of the threads of analysis and argument made through the book, as well as this chapter. The final chapter develops this bringing focus on the key arguments made throughout and offering further reflections on future directions and implications.

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