

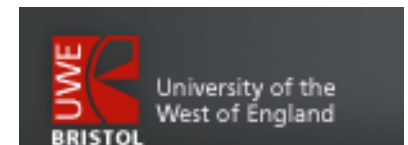
# Practice Theory and Household Energy Consumption

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# CHARM<sup>★</sup>



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Home Energy Study

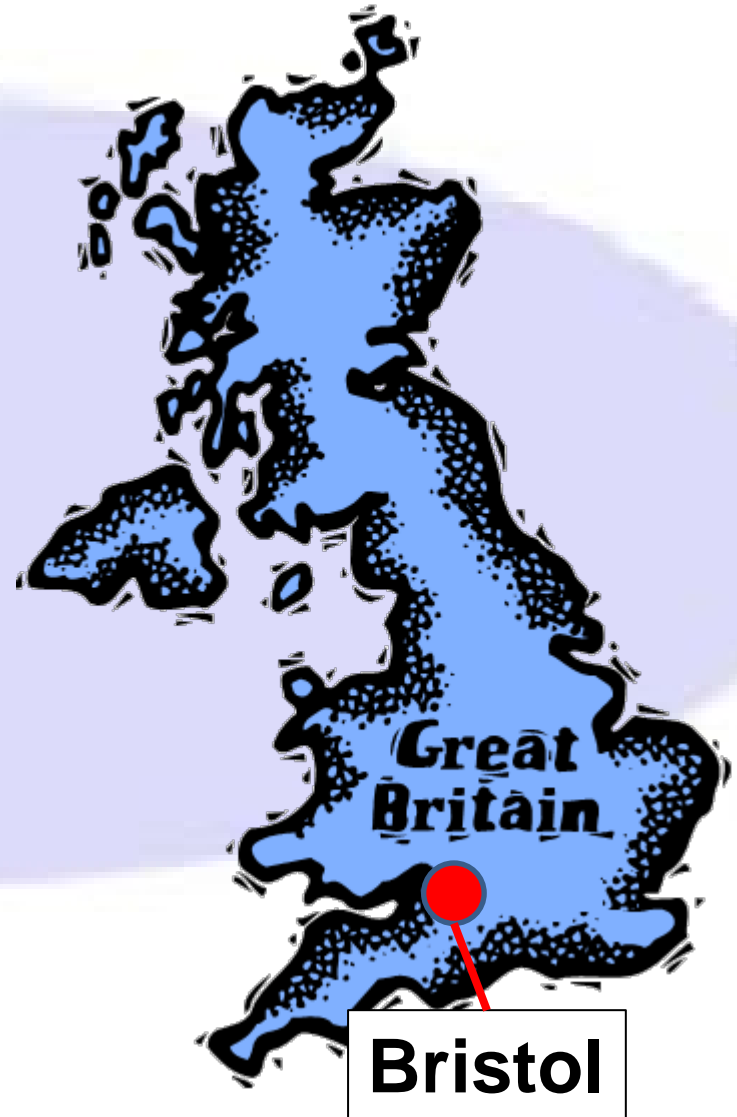
Understand household electricity-consuming practices

...their performance by individual households

...their response to an experimental intervention



- Collection of household electricity-use data over 18 weeks
- 370 households
- Two socio-economically diverse neighbourhoods in Bristol



# The Intervention

Feedback on own electricity use

Feedback on 'neighbourhood' average use

Energy-saving tips

Emails, website  
and texts

<http://www.homeenergystudy.org>



# weekly emails



## Home Energy Study

Dear John

**\* Tip of the week \*** Watch out for so-called 'vampire usage' – the electricity used by appliances when they're idle but switched on at the mains. According to some experts, this explains 10% of household electricity bills.

It can also explain why some people have puzzlingly high night-time usage. (Hence the term 'vampire', because it can feel as though something is sucking the energy away during the night!)



To see how much electricity you use in your home during the night, look at the graph below. For tips on how to reduce this amount, read the following notes on 'escaping the vampire'.



# fortnightly texts

“Are you suffering from the ‘vampire’ effect – electricity being used when little or nothing appears to be on? Check this week’s email to find out more”

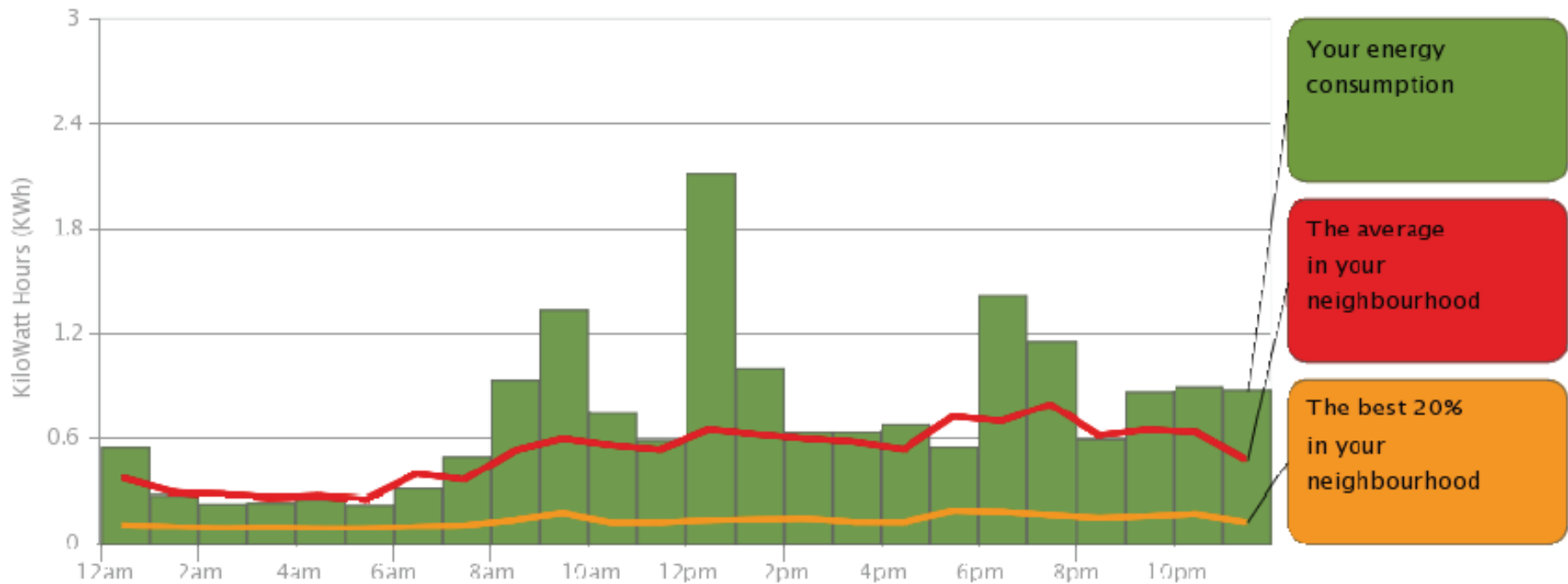
# Feedback for an above-average household



## Electricity Consumption

 Your energy consumption was above average

Yesterday



Your energy consumption

The average in your neighbourhood

The best 20% in your neighbourhood

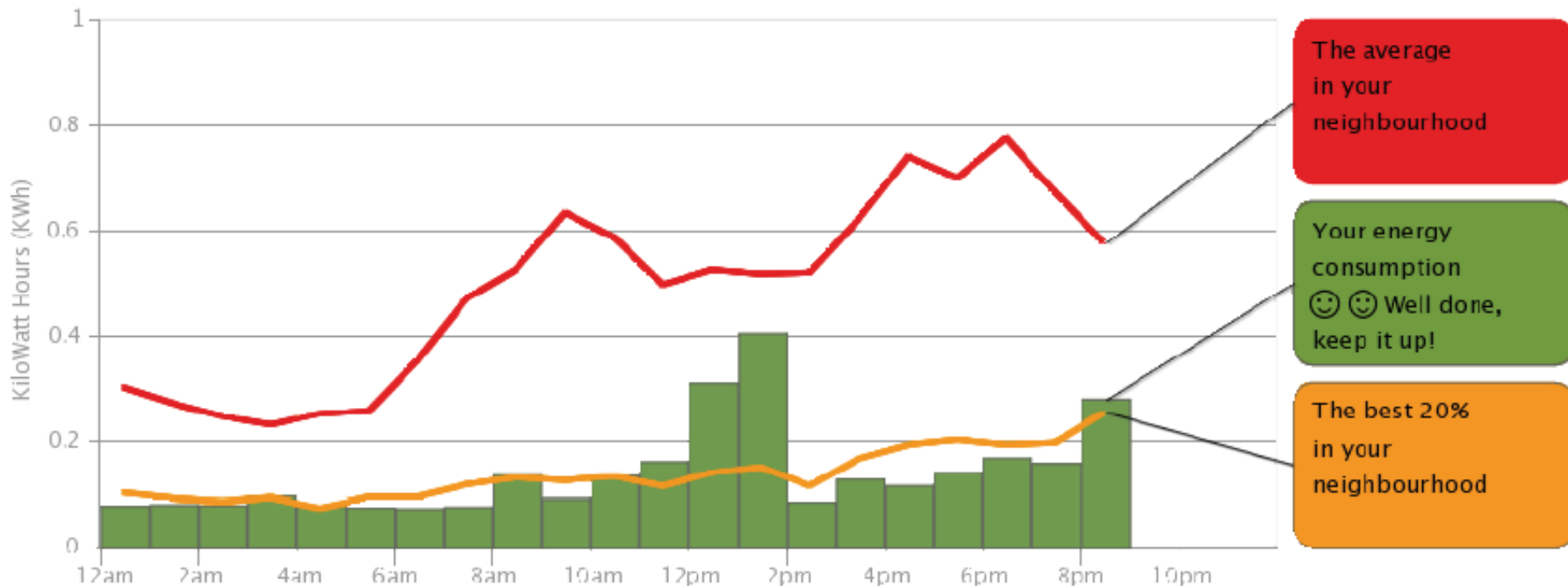


# Feedback for a below-average household

## Electricity Consumption

 Your energy consumption is well below average 😊😊 Well done, keep it up!

Today



# Empirical work

Measurement of electricity use

Surveys (pre- and post-intervention)

Focus groups

Interviews

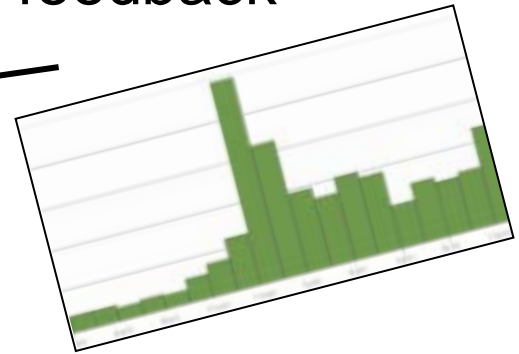


In-depth probing



Interviews

Viewing graphical feedback

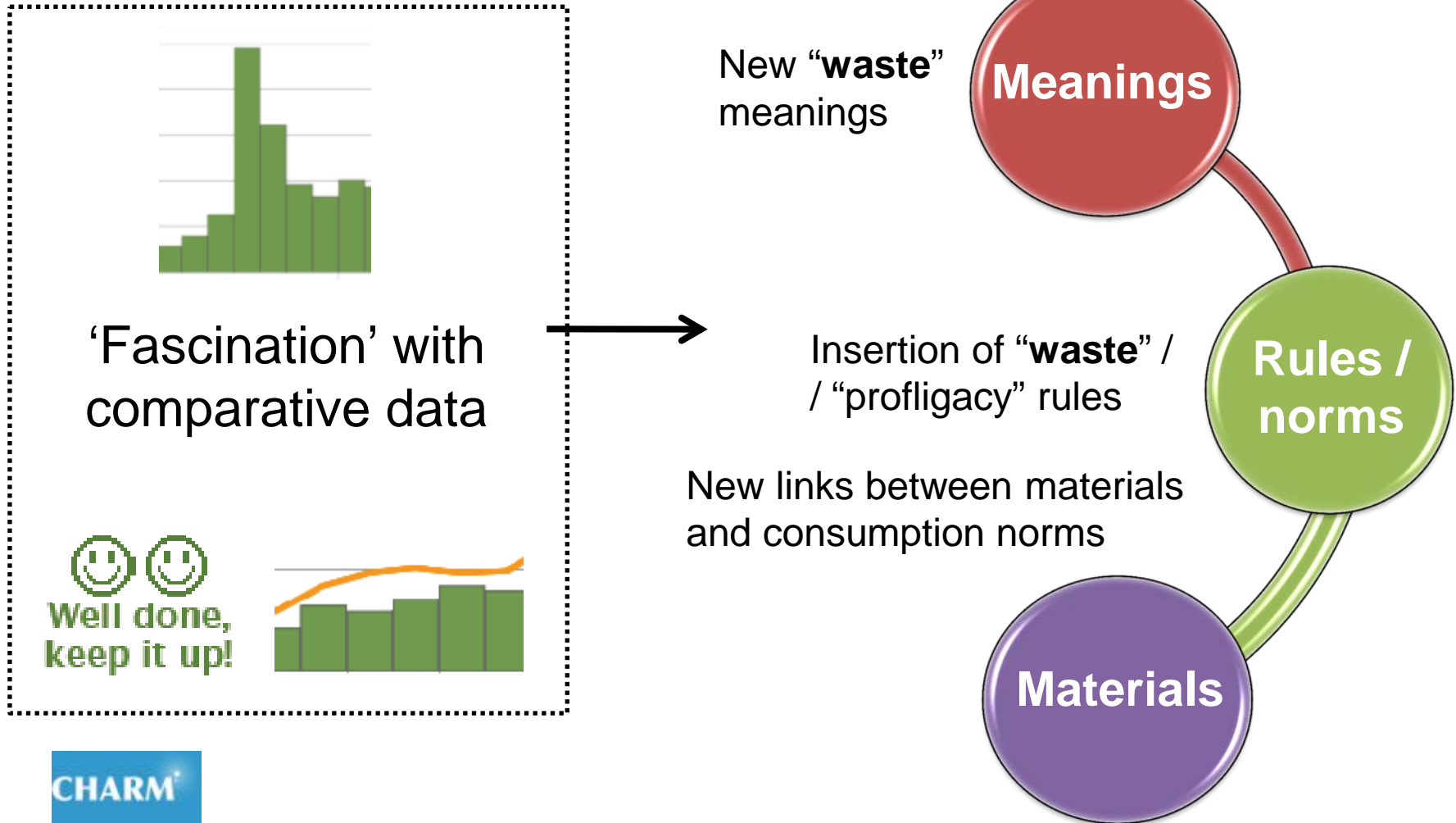


Tours



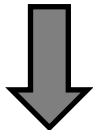
# Impact of the interventions

Insertion of discourse of 'waste'

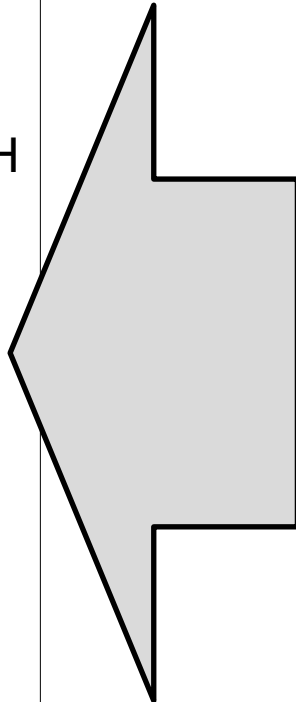


# Impact of the interventions

- Discourse of waste-reduction  
(IF NO CONFLICT WITH HIGHER ORDER RULES / MEANINGS)



- Changes in habits
- Changes in materials



New “waste” meanings

Meanings

Insertion of “waste” /  
/ “profligacy” rules

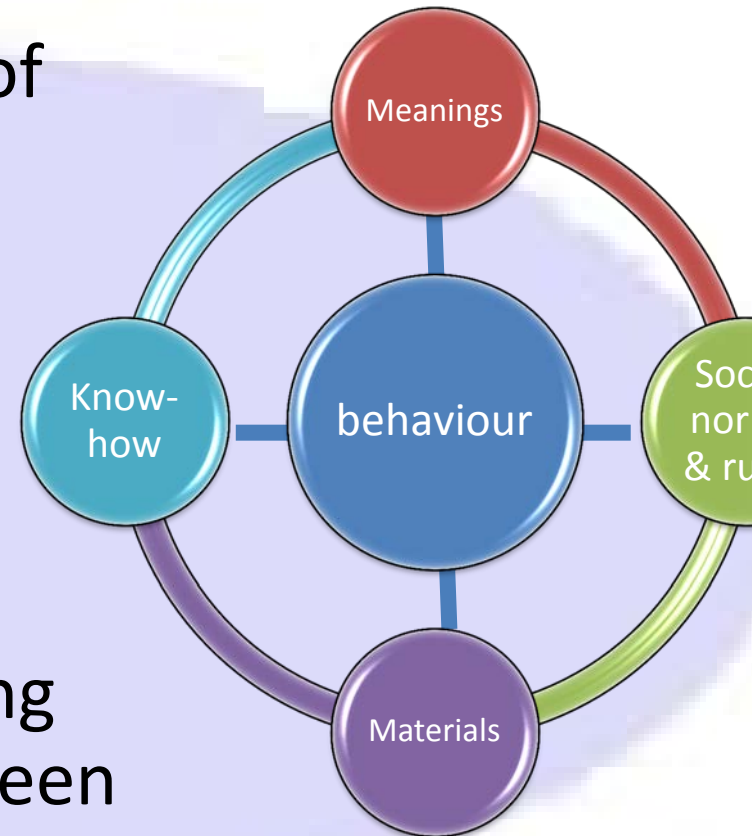
Rules /  
norms

New links between materials  
and consumption norms

Materials

# Benefits of practice theory in interviews?

1. prompts focus on broad range of influences on behaviour
2. helps reframe participant 'inconsistencies', giving them a less important empirical function
3. exploits the individualised format of the interview by directing attention at the intersection between social entity and individual performance

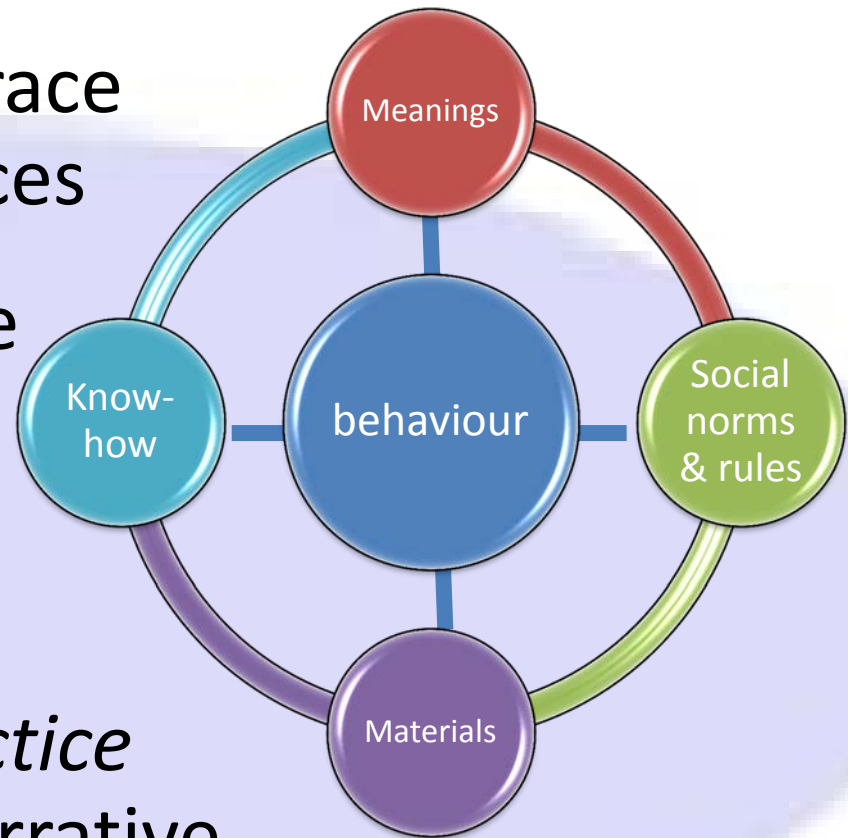


# But...

1. hard for interviewer to trace the links between practices
2. or to detect the influence of overlaps between practices

## Why?

- because the notion of *practice* fits poorly into Western narrative forms?
- linear thinking too deeply embedded within analytical practices?



# Conclusion

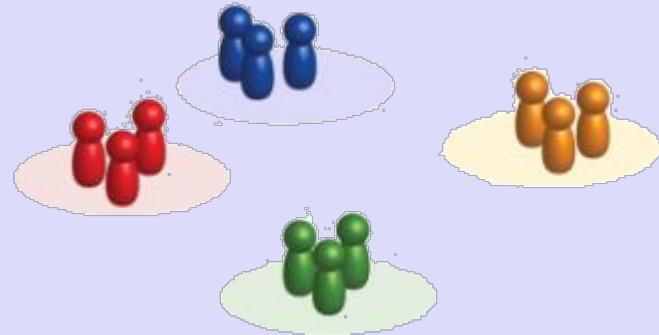
## Emerging themes

- Hierarchy of social norms / rules
- Absence / emergence of discourse of waste in some domestic practices
- Role of curiosity / fascination
- Challenges to interviewer theoretical predispositions
- ... and intuitive assumptions about linear causality



# Home Energy Study

**CHARM** 





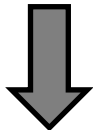




# Impact of the interventions

- Discourse of waste-reduction

(IF NO CONFLICT WITH HIGHER ORDER RULES / MEANINGS)



- Changes in habits
- Changes in materials

“That’s throwing money away!”

“We want to do our bit to save the environment”

“The kids always come first. They’ve gotta have what they need” (e.g. fresh-smelling pyjamas)

“My wife works hard, so deserves her relaxation” (re. tumble drying)

“It’s more important to have time to visit people.”

“We use the oven less now, cos we eat with the kids. That’s nice that is.”

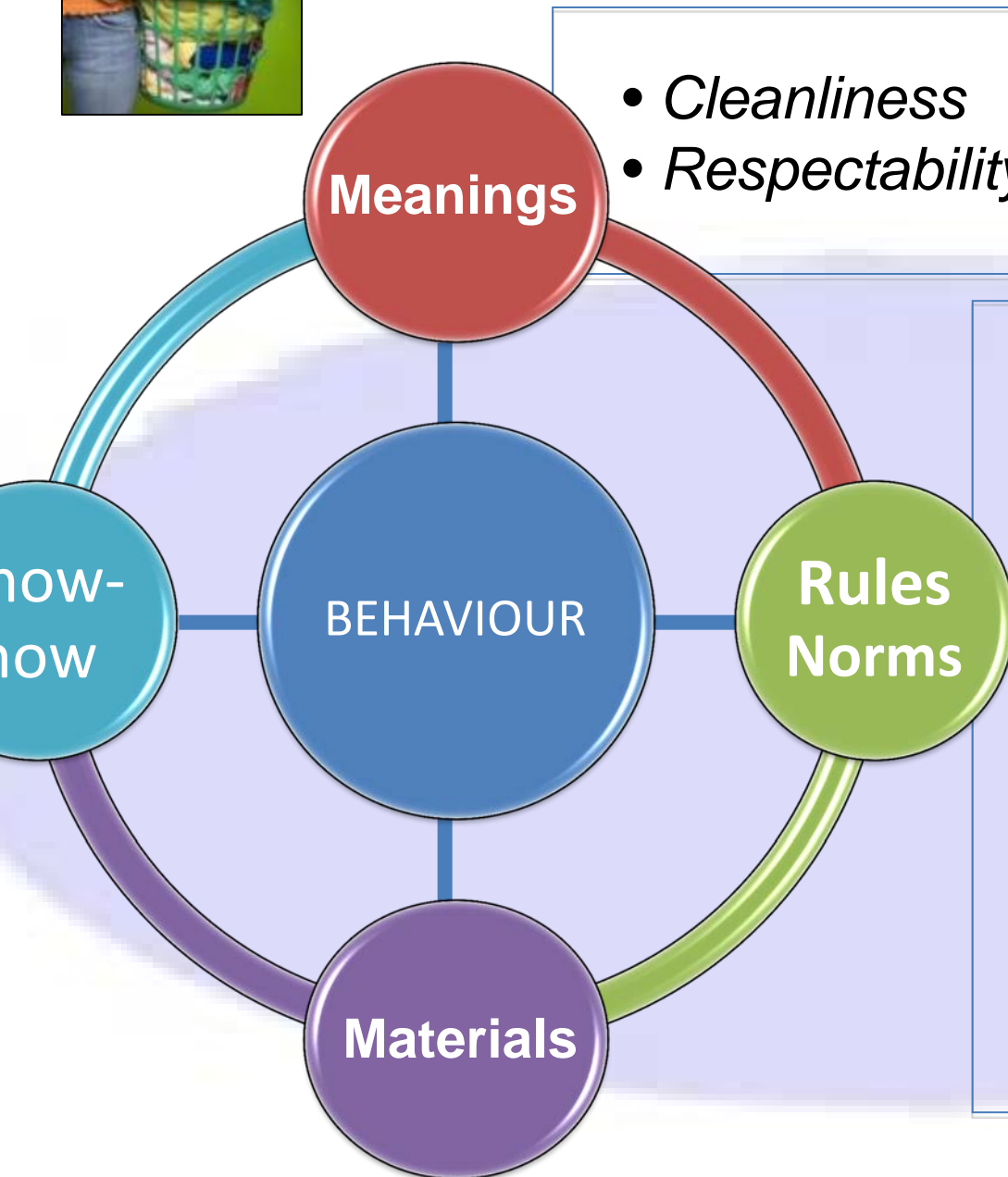
“We stopped leaving the TV on when we’re not watching it.”

“I never would of thought of buying a low-energy washing-machine, but that’s what I did.”





# Washing

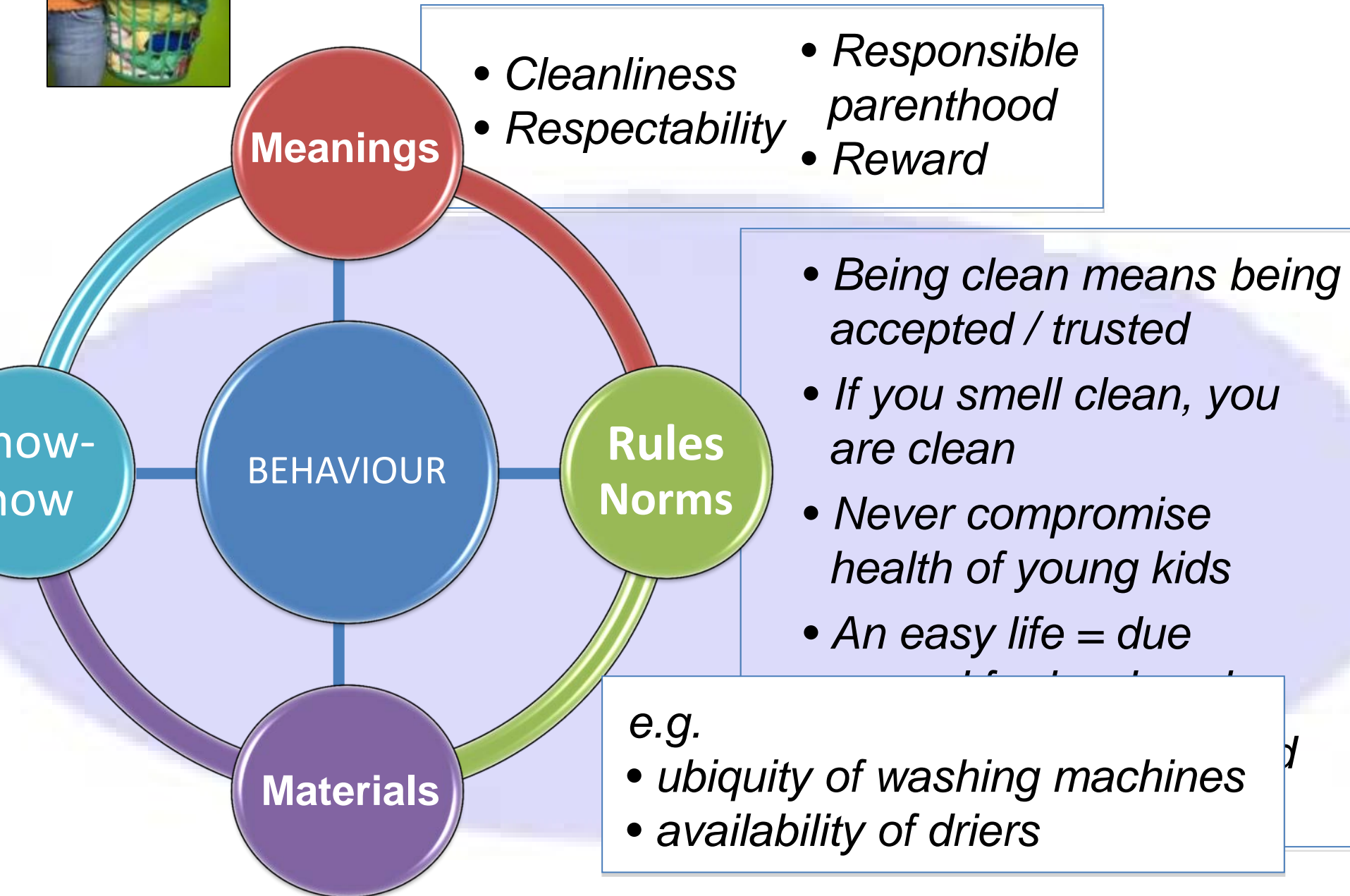


- *Cleanliness*
- *Respectability*
- *Responsible parenthood*
- *Reward*

- *Being clean means being accepted / trusted*
- *If you smell clean, you are clean*
- *Never compromise health of young kids*
- *An easy life = due reward for hard work*
- *We've always switched things off at night*



# Washing

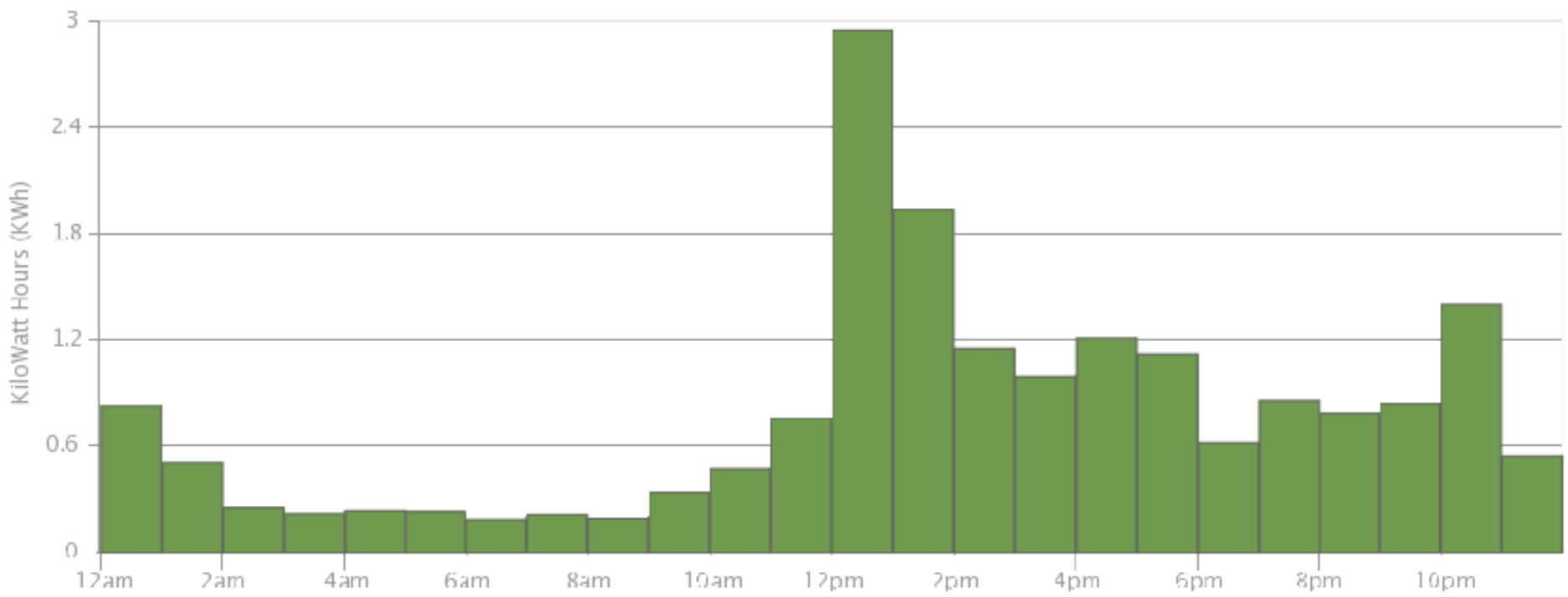


# Group1 feedback - email

## Electricity Consumption

■ Your energy consumption

Yesterday

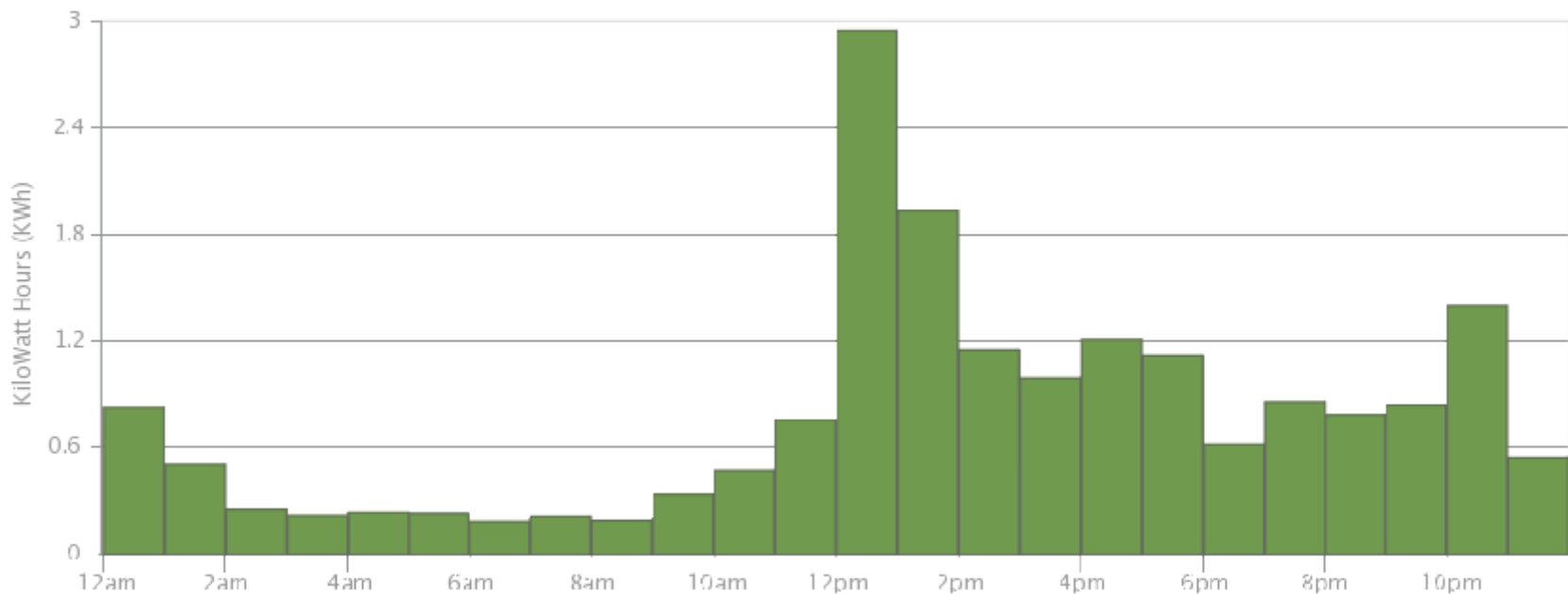


# Group1 feedback - website

## Electricity Consumption

 Your energy consumption

Yesterday



Today



Yesterday



Last week



History



Energy saving tips



Change password



Log off

# The Intervention

- Control Group No feedback or tips
- Group 1 Own energy consumption and energy-saving tips
- Group 2 Own energy consumption; neighbourhood average; tips

Emails, website and texts

<http://www.homeenergystudy.org>

