

**UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**

**Colloquium / Research Seminar**

**Jonn Axsen**

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“Sustainable Lifestyles, Technology and Social Influence”



A societal transition to 'sustainable' consumption practices, say to achieve deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, will require substantial shifts in behaviour and technology. This presentation explores human dimensions of such a transition, moving beyond rational actor models and attitude-behaviour gaps. I draw from social theory, ethnographic interviews with consumers and their social networks, and quantitative survey data. I find that energy-related decisions are strongly related to the consumers' lifestyle -- a package of related activities that reflects and communicates some aspects of their self-identity to others in their social network. Consumers that don't already engage in 'sustainable' practices will only do so if they can somehow mesh the practice with their narrative of identity, and attain social reinforcement in the process. I illustrate with narratives of real households participating in an electric-drive vehicle study in California, and conclude with implications for behavioural models and the design of sustainability policy.

**Tuesday, 3 April  
Geography Room 200  
at 12:30 pm**