The Dept. of Human Ecology Presents:

Eco-Types: Five Ways of Caring about the Environment

BIO:
Emily Huddart Kennedy is associate professor and associate head of the Department of Sociology at The University of British Columbia. The aim of her research is to understand civic engagement in environmentalism, as well as the relationship between everyday environmentalism and social inequality and divisiveness. The talk is based on her recently-published book, Eco-Types: Five Ways of Caring about the Environment (published by Princeton University Press).

ABSTRACT:
Across dozens of countries, civil society is increasingly polarized over environmental protection, particularly over efforts to reduce greenhouse gasses to mitigate climate change. Study after study shows us that liberals tend to be more committed to and supportive of efforts to protect the environment and that a growing proportion of conservatives is opposed to such efforts. Existing explanations point to the politics and economics of environmental protection: organizations funded by the oil & gas industry lobby governments to delay and reject proposals for climate action and foment uncertainty and distrust among the public through messaging targeted particularly to conservatives. Drawing on two years of interview data collection with a politically and socio-economically diverse sample (n=63) of Washington state residents, and a survey of US households (n=2619), I enrich our existing understanding of political polarization over environmental protection by drawing attention to the cultural dynamics between liberals' and conservatives' relationships with the environment. By asking people who they see as caring about the environment and about their own environmental concerns and commitments, I identified a cultural archetype of the ideal environmentalist and five distinct ways of caring about the environment (“eco-types”). These include the Eco-Engaged, the Self-Effacing, the Optimists, the Fatalists, and the Indifferent. This talk introduces each type and shows how they are engaged in struggles for respect and recognition that drive political polarization.

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