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Abstract Text:

Historically, the energy efficiency field's perspective on the role of behavior in energy savings potential has focused on aligning what people do with pre-conceived standards of energy service needs, wants, and rationalities. Considering current aggressive goals for reducing GHG emissions, this view is tremendously constrained. At every step, it misses the fact that what people have, do, and want is highly variable and that it has evolved in historically specific ways. This presentation draws on the AREBA project (recently completed for the California Energy Commission), which focused on developing new approaches to representing behavior in residential energy research and policy. Results are demonstrated by contrasting conventional and new perspectives in several examples: (a) Asset versus operational views on home energy efficiency: why it matters if behavior isn't integrated into energy audits (b) Technological ideals versus empirical views on energy use: acknowledging the multitude of ways that things change and plans may misfire (c) Static versus dynamic views on interventions: how technologies and policy instruments shape energy use, and using dynamism to advantage (d) Energy-only versus rounded view: what to look for in ZNE and low-energy homes. These examples show the value of employing a conventional, static, "averages"-based view on energy and emissions versus one that accommodates variation, diversity, and dynamism. The retold stories can lead to much different visions of what is possible, how it might be pursued and evaluated, and how to capture people as a profound rather than superficial component of the energy use landscape.