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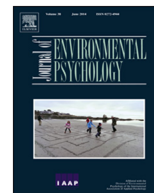

Environmentalist identity and environmental striving

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ABSTRACT

Environmental identity has emerged as a motivator of a wide range of environmentally significant behaviours. Despite its promise, environmental identity is a complex concept that includes multiple facets and needs further explication. One facet is *environmentalist identity*, or what it means to be an environmentally friendly person as defined by *mundane environmentalism* in a given cultural milieu. Another facet is *environmental striving*, a more personal aspect of environmental identity which may motivate behaviours that go beyond mundane environmentalism. Studies with students and general public suggest that environmentalist identity and striving constitute overlapping, and yet complementary aspects of environmental identity. Environmentalist identity is a motivator of multiple domains of environmental behaviours and embedded in people's worldviews about the natural and social worlds; however, environmental striving is an additional motivator of potentially more costly environmental behaviours, and even more intricately embedded in the views about the natural and social worlds.

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1. Introduction

The sustenance of the natural environment is a significant issue. Despite the cumulative knowledge about specific environmentally significant behaviours such as recycling (e.g.,Castro, Garrido, Reis, & Menezes, 2009; Schultz, Oskamp, & Mainieri, 1995), alternative transport use (e.g., Chatterton, Coulter, Musselwhite, Lyons, & Clegg, 2009), green consumer behaviours (e.g., Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; see Peattie, 2010, for a review), and environmental activism (e.g., Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008), there is a widespread recognition that a broad spectrum of environmental behaviours, or environmental lifestyles (e.g., Barr, Shaw, & Gilg, 2011) needs to be adopted to enable a transition to a sustainable future (e.g., Bratanova, Loughnan, & Gatersleben, 2012; Stern, 2000; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010). One factor that gives some hope for this possibility is the interdependence among environmental behaviours. For instance, in Denmark, if someone recycles, he or she is also likely to purchase organic food; if they purchase organic food, they may also use transport other than driving (e.g., Thøgersen & Ölander, 2006). A similar clustering of environmental behaviours has been observed in the United Kingdom as well (e.g., Barr & Gilg, 2006; Whitmarsh, 2009; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010). If there are some underlying mechanisms that drive a number of environmental behaviours, it may be possible to facilitate a transition into pro-environmental lifestyles by constructing a sociocultural context, so that these mechanisms encourage citizens to move in the pro-environmental direction.

One such mechanism is environmental identity as a motivational basis for a broad spectrum of environmental behaviours (e.g., Clayton, 2003, 2012). Whitmarsh and O'Neill's (2010) recent work illustrates this point. They found that those who identify themselves as an environmentally friendly person perform environmentally beneficial behaviours generally, including such a broad set of actions as waste reduction, eco-shopping, as well as domestic water and energy conservation. Furthermore, this study showed that environmental identity predicted environmental behaviours better than a widely used measure of environmental worldviews, New Ecological Paradigm (Dunlap, van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000). In addition, this and other studies (e.g., Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; Sparks, Shepherd, & Frewer, 1995; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999) have found that environmental identity contributes to the prediction of environmental intentions and behaviours over and beyond the attitudes, subjective norms, or behavioural control that are included in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; also see Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Although the prospect of environmental identity is promising, as Clayton (2012) noted, it is a "diverse and evolving topic (p. 164)." Under the broad definition of environmental identity as a psychological connection between oneself and the nonhuman natural environment (e.g., Clayton, 2003; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Schultz,

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2002; Stets & Biga, 2003), its conceptualizations and operationalizations vary a great deal. In particular, as noted by Clayton and Opotow (2003; also Clayton, 2012), it seems to include diverse aspects, from those which are under greater socio-cultural influences to others that are likely more personal. This presents a potential for further refinement of the construct of environmental identity.

1.1. Mundane environmentalism, environmentalist identity, and environmental striving

An example of environmental identity that is likely shaped by socio-cultural forces comes from Whitmarsh and O'Neill's (2010) research, which provided strong evidence for environmental identity's ability to predict a wide range of pro-environmental behaviours. In their instrument called pro-environmental self-identity scale, their respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree to statements like "I think of myself as an environmentally-friendly consumer" or "being embarrassed to be seen as having an environmentally-friendly lifestyle." Here, they were asked whether they think of themselves as having an "environmentally-friendly lifestyle (reverse coded)." This operationalization of environmental identity asks respondents to compare the cultural conception of a person with an "environmentally-friendly lifestyle" and one's own self, and if they are sufficiently similar, one would respond in the affirmative (or vice versa). It taps a psychological link between oneself and a culturally defined notion of "environmentally-friendly" person. In the terms of Turner's (1987) self-categorization theory, those who affirm that they are an "environmentally-friendly person" is categorizing themselves into the social category of "environmentally-friendly person," whose content is largely determined by the cultural understanding about what it means to be "environmentally friendly."

We call such everyday cultural understandings of "environmental friendliness" mundane environmentalism. As a social theorist, Bruno Latour (1998) commented, pro-environmental ideas and practices have been absorbed into the mainstream, and a "green" or pro-environmental lifestyle has come to be endorsed by a large segment of society (e.g., de Groot, Drenthen, & de Groot, 2011; Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013), so much so that he called it *banalisation*. Mundane environmentalism differs from environmentalism in the sense of environmental activism (e.g., Fielding et al., 2008). Whereas environmental activism sits outside the mainstream and seeks to change the status quo, mundane environmentalism is a more everyday notion of living a pro-environmental lifestyle that goes well with the middle class culture of most industrialized countries (e.g., Skogen, 1996). Mundane environmentalism is exhibited by people that Kaiser and Byrka (2011) called environmentalists, which they defined as "persons high in environmental engagement (p. 73)." In this paper, we call the type of environmental identity exhibited by mundane environmentalists *environmentalist identity*.[1]

To be sure, environmentalist identity can provide guidance for social behaviour by encouraging people to act in line with mundane environmentalism. Those who are identified with this social category of environmentalists in the mundane sense should be motivated to perform those behaviours that are part of the prototypical mundane environmentalist (Turner, 1987). However, the down side of this mechanism is that mundane environmentalist identity may not motivate people to perform a behaviour that goes beyond the cultural conception of environmentalism. In fact, Whitmarsh and O'Neill's (2010) findings hint at this possibility. Although they found that environmentalist identity predicted such private sphere actions as waste reduction and water/energy use, its effects did not extend beyond them to other environmentally significant actions (Stern, 2000) such as reducing car use or engaging in political actions. Arguably, mundane environmentalism may include domestic private sphere actions, but does not extend to other actions that are seen to be more environmental activism (e.g., writing to MP, participating in a protest) or more embedded in infrastructure (e.g., not driving is very difficult if one lives far away from public transport).

In this paper, we explore the possibility of another aspect of environmental identity, which may be constrained less by the cultural understanding of mundane environmentalism and which may move people beyond it. We call it *environmental striving*. It is an aspect of environmental identity broadly conceived, but is aligned with what Emmons (Emmons, 1986, 1989; Emmons & King, 1988) called personal strivings. He defined personal strivings as "what individuals are characteristically aiming to accomplish through their behaviour or the purpose or purposes that a person is trying to carry out. More crisply, a personal striving is what a person is characteristically trying to do (Emmons, 1986; p. 1059)." It is an individual's important personal goals, which Allport (1937) called "teleonomic description" of one's personality. As such, it is akin to Little's (e.g., 1983, 2007) personal projects, Cantor's (e.g., Cantor & Langston, 1989; Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987) life tasks, and the like. It is that part of an individual which is likely to be based on his or her personal conviction, to be embedded in his or her views of the world, and to drive his or her action regardless of (or even despite) what his or her cultural milieu may permit. Environmental strivings may be conceptually closely related to the intrinsic motivation to act pro-environmentally as measured by Pelletier, Tuson, Green-Demers, Noels, and Beaton's (1998) Motivation toward the Environment Scale.[2] Although these constructs pertain to a person's holistic profile of personal goals, we borrow their concepts to describe a specific domain, namely, environmental protection. Thus, environmental strivings are defined as the extent to which the maintenance and improvement of the natural environment is a person's important personal goal in life.

According to the accepted view of goals, wherever those personal goals come from, they would drive behaviours that are seen to facilitate the goal attainment (e.g., Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007; Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996; Locke & Latham, 1990; Pervin, 1989). Likewise, environmental strivings are expected to motivate behaviours that are seen to be instrumental for attaining the goal to maintain or improve the natural environment. What is critical with regard to the current discussion of environmental identity is the following. Even if a given behaviour is seen to be outside the cultural conception of environmentalism, people with strong environmental strivings would be motivated to perform that behaviour to the extent that they see it as instrumental for attaining their goal of environmental protection. In other words, environmental strivings may act as a motivational basis of a spectrum of environmental behaviours that is broader than mundane environmentalism to the extent that they are seen to be conducive to the personal striving for sustainability.

1.2. Contrasting environmentalist identity and environmental striving

Both environmentalist identity and environmental striving are part of one's environmental identity. As Whitmarsh and O'Neill

[1] We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the term, "environmentalist identity," to capture our point.

[2] We thank the same anonymous reviewer for making this point as well.

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