



# Collective efficacy increases pro-environmental intentions through increasing self-efficacy<sup>☆, ☆ ☆</sup>



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 21 September 2015

Received in revised form

20 August 2016

Accepted 23 August 2016

Available online 24 August 2016

### Keywords:

Collective efficacy

Self-efficacy

Climate change

Pro-environmental behavior

Social identity

## ABSTRACT

We discuss prior findings that enhancing perceptions of collective efficacy encourages pro-environmental behavior. We suggest that collective efficacy manipulations affect pro-environmental intentions through increasing both collective and self-efficacy. Four experiments conducted in Germany and Australia demonstrated that collective efficacy manipulations can increase pro-environmental intentions by increasing the perception that one's group—and, through this, the self—is capable of effecting change. We also provide evidence that collective efficacy manipulations only work when they simultaneously raise self-efficacy. Our findings contribute to the environmental literature by showing the mechanisms through which group efficacy appeals work. Our findings also support theorizing on group-based control by showing that personal control can be derived from group sources.

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## 1. Introduction

Climate change poses one of the greatest current threats to humankind (IPCC, 2014). Yet, ironically, knowledge of this threat may make people less likely to act adaptively in order to avoid it. Sizeable portions of the public in Western countries simply deny the existence of climate change (Lewandowsky, Oberauer, & Gignac, 2013; Tranter, 2011). Even people who do accept the reality of climate change tend to believe that it is more likely to affect other countries or regions than one's own (Schultz et al., 2014; Spence & Pidgeon, 2010). To cope with this threatening reality, people who are made aware of climate change threat often become more authoritarian and less accepting of socially deviant groups (Fritsche, Cohrs, Kessler, & Bauer, 2012). The question therefore remains how to confront people with the reality of climate change

and encourage pro-environmental engagement without activating countervailing defensive psychological processes. One defining factor that may be crucial in tipping the balance from defensive denial to active engagement is whether individuals perceive themselves—and the groups to which they belong—as capable of coping with this threat.

Climate change and related global environmental issues are examples of common good dilemmas (Hardin, 1968). This means that these large-scale global problems are only solvable by collective efforts and not by individuals. As a result, considerations of *collective efficacy* (i.e., are we as a group capable of dealing with this problem?) should play a prominent role in motivating individuals to engage in pro-environmental action. Collective efficacy refers to people's shared beliefs in their group's ability to produce desired results through collective action (Bandura, 2000). Previous studies suggest that collective efficacy beliefs are a stronger predictor of pro-environmental behavior than self-efficacy beliefs (Chen, 2015; Homburg & Stolberg, 2006), although this previous work has not always assessed the constructs simultaneously (Homburg & Stolberg, 2006). In the present research, we argue that rather than focusing on the relative predictive power of self- and collective efficacy, it may be fruitful to examine how they are connected to arrive at a better understanding of the mechanism that links

\* This research was supported in parts by a grant from the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology [16SBS002A].

\*\* This research is based in parts on the fifth author's Master thesis.

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efficacy perceptions and pro-environmental behavior.

We propose that it is through raising perceptions of *self-efficacy* that collective efficacy exerts its positive effects on pro-environmental behavior. Our reasoning is based on the idea that individuals can derive personal benefits from social groups because groups can make them feel personally capable and in control (Fritzsche et al., 2013; Greenaway et al., 2014). Specifically, the model of group-based control (GBC; Fritzsche, Jonas, & Kessler, 2011) assumes that when people are deprived of personal control, they turn to powerful ingroups and act in group terms (e.g., by supporting the ingroup or conforming to group norms) to demonstrate collective agency and thus regain a sense of control. Evidence by Greenaway et al. (2014) in the domain of health shows that personal control mediates positive effects of ingroup identity on wellbeing. In addition, threats to personal control have been found to increase people's identification with and approval of agentic ingroups (Stollberg, Fritzsche, & Bäcker, 2015). Other research shows that group identity and collective efficacy, too are closely related, such that collective efficacy raises group identity (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2010) and that increased ingroup identification as a response to personal threat to control elevates perceptions of collective efficacy (Stollberg et al., 2015; Study 1).

The GBC further assumes that group agency and categorization on the group level are important moderators for group-based control restoration (see Fritzsche et al., 2013 for supporting evidence). Thus, from a GBC perspective, collective efficacy beliefs should exert a particular influence on pro-environmental intentions when people categorize themselves on the group level. This perspective is compatible with the perspective on collective empowerment of crowds (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2005, 2009), which assumes that individuals develop strong group identities in face of antagonistic outgroups (e.g., the police). These strong group identities then enable group members to act collectively but also lead to feelings of psychological empowerment. Thus, they feel increased support from other group members and a greater belief in the group's ability to achieve social change. A practical implication of these perspectives is that in order to mobilize on the group level, people must first feel part of a group (i.e., increased identity salience) and second that the group is capable of achieving its goals (i.e., increased collective efficacy).

In contrast to previous work that has focused on explaining *public-sphere* pro-environmental collective action behaviors (e.g., van Zomeren, Spears, & Leach, 2010) we focus on explaining *private-sphere* pro-environmental intentions that have rarely been studied from a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; for recent exemptions see Barth, Jugert, & Fritzsche, 2016; Ferguson, Branscombe, & Reynolds, 2011; Rabinovich, Morton, Postmes, & Verplanken, 2012). While social identities have been central to research on public-sphere collective action behavior (cf. van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), private-sphere pro-environmentalism has mainly been explained in terms of rational choice models (cf. Ajzen, 1991) or interindividual differences in values and attitudes (Crompton & Kasser, 2010; Otto, Kaiser, & Arnold, 2014). We suggest that a social identity perspective can help to explain private-sphere pro-environmental behaviors as these, too, can be considered collective action behaviors that contribute to the common good, insofar as many individuals acting separately can effect change in collective conduct and outcomes. Effective action on climate change requires coordinated group acts (public-sphere behavior), but also requires many individuals to act alone over an extended period (private-sphere behavior). We contend that the social identity perspective can also be fruitfully applied to understanding these more individual pro-environmental behaviors.

According to the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), groups

shape individual psychology through their capacity to define a person's self. If an individual self-categorizes and identifies as a member of a group (e.g., an environmentalist, a cyclist), she or he comes to interpret the world through this group lens and to act in line with salient group norms. This means that individual behavior can be examined as the outcome of group processes. Thus, if other group members are seen to be acting in pro-environmental ways, the individual is likely to adopt those same patterns of behavior. This tendency may be particularly likely if one's group is shown to be capable of acting on this issue, that is, shows high collective efficacy. We further assumed that reminders of collective efficacy might help to overcome subjective barriers by elevating individual self-efficacy perceptions. For this to occur, there must exist a mechanism by which group processes affect individual behavior through transferring group agency beliefs into beliefs about agency through individual action. We explored these hypotheses in the present research.

### 1.1. Hypotheses and overview

In four experiments, we tested how manipulations of (collective) efficacy influence individual pro-environmental intentions. In particular, we tested whether efficacy manipulations operate through perceptions of collective efficacy and self-efficacy to influence pro-environmental intentions. This is a novel question in a literature that has considered self-efficacy to be a poor substitute for collective efficacy (Chen, 2015; Homburg & Stolberg, 2006). Here, we propose it is not in a separate contribution to explanatory variance that their power lies, but in their ability to influence one another and *together* motivate pro-environmental behavior.

The main contribution of this paper is therefore to clarify the role of collective and self-efficacy beliefs in motivating pro-environmental intentions. Specifically, we propose that perceptions of collective efficacy operate *through* perceptions of self-efficacy in an indirect effect to increase private-sphere pro-environmental intentions. This logic is derived from the social identity approach, which demonstrates that group-based variables (e.g., collective efficacy) impact on self-conceptions (e.g., self-efficacy). It also accords with recent experimental work showing that group identification (which is promoted by feelings of collective efficacy, van Zomeren, Leach et al., 2010) increases feelings of personal control (Greenaway et al., 2014).

It is not self-evident that manipulations of collective efficacy should affect perceptions of self-efficacy. For one, the effect could be non-existent and for another the effect could be negative, if people assume that because their group can act, their individual contribution is not required or may be reduced. For this reason, it is important to test experimentally whether manipulations of collective efficacy enhance, reduce, or are unrelated to perceptions of self-efficacy. This was the main aim of our four experiments.

We report the results of experiments conducted in two different countries in which we manipulated collective efficacy and measured perceived collective and self-efficacy, and pro-environmental intentions. Experiments 2 and 3 served to replicate the results of Experiment 1 and test their generalizability across different group identities and different cultural contexts. We hypothesized that our manipulation of collective efficacy would increase perceptions of collective and self-efficacy as well as pro-environmental intentions (Hypothesis 1). Moreover, we hypothesized that manipulations of collective efficacy would increase pro-environmental behavioural intentions by increasing first perceived collective efficacy and then self-efficacy (i.e., via serial mediation; Hypothesis 2). As categorization on the group-level has been shown to be an important pre-requisite for group-based control restoration effects to occur (Fritzsche et al., 2013) we made social

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