



The hierarchy enforcement hypothesis of environmental exploitation: A social dominance perspective[☆]



Taciano L. Milfont^a, Chris G. Sibley^{b,*}

^a Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

^b University of Auckland, New Zealand

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tested a hierarchy enforcement hypothesis of environmental exploitation
- Reports results from two experiments using Bayesian moderated regression
- Showed that Social Dominance Orientation predicts support for unsustainable environmental exploitation
- Identifies a dominance motive for why some people support environmental exploitation more than others

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 October 2013

Revised 17 June 2014

Available online 11 July 2014

Keywords:

Social Dominance Orientation

Environmental exploitation

Bayesian moderated regression

ABSTRACT

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) predicts support for unsustainable environmental exploitation, but the mechanism driving this effect remains unclear. Here we propose and test a novel *Hierarchy Enforcement Hypothesis of Environmental Exploitation*. Two experiments analysed using Bayesian moderated regression showed that SDO predicted support for a new mining operation expected to generate further profits to high-status groups in society, but not when profits were expected to equally benefit all members of the community. SDO predicts environmental exploitation to the extent that doing so helps sustain and widen the gap between dominant and disadvantaged groups through the disproportionate allocation of resources. This research identifies a dominance motive that may explain why some people support environmental exploitation more than others.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

There is a time to battle against Nature, and a time to obey her. True wisdom lies in making the right choice.

[Arthur C. Clarke, *The Fountains of Paradise* (1979)]

Social Dominance Theory is a prominent theory of intergroup relations that proposes measurable differences in the extent to which individuals tend to favour hierarchical social dominance over egalitarian relations (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Social Dominance Theory also operationalizes a core construct, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which is theorized to reflect individual differences in the motivation to maintain and enforce group-based hierarchical relations (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). There is substantial empirical evidence documenting the correlates of SDO and its important role in understanding human

sociality (e.g., Kteily, Ho, & Sidanius, 2012; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Although the focus of SDO is on a generalized orientation towards unequal relations between humans, past research has shown that high SDO is also related to endorsement of environmental exploitation (e.g., Altemeyer, 2003; Milfont & Duckitt, 2010; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Son Hing, Bobocel, Zanna, & McBride, 2007).

In an earlier publication we have expanded the theoretical scope of Social Dominance Theory by arguing that its dominance focus can also be useful in understanding hierarchical relations between humans and the natural environment (Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013). We contended that high-SDO individuals tend to be less concerned about environmental issues, and more willing to exploit the environment in unsustainable ways, because SDO expresses a standpoint supporting human hierarchical dominance over nature. Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, and Fischer (2013) reported that SDO was associated with lower levels of environmental concern in a nationally representative sample (Study 1) and in country-level data across 27 nations (Study 2), and that SDO was positively related to utilization attitudes towards nature (Study 3) and mediated the gender difference in environmentalism (Study 4). These results show that SDO is systematically and reliably linked to anti-environmentalism and a willingness to exploit the environment.

[☆] Both authors contributed equally to this manuscript. Preparation of this manuscript was partially supported by a Marsden Fast Start grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand (Te Putea Rangahau a Marsden) (11-VUW-049) awarded to Taciano L. Milfont. Datasets and Mplus syntax for the Bayesian regression models reported in this paper are available on the NZAVS website: www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/NZAVS.

* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology, University of Auckland, New Zealand. E-mail address: c.sibley@auckland.ac.nz (C.G. Sibley).

Support for the perspective that SDO predicts both ideologies promoting hierarchical intergroup relations and also ideologies promoting the exploitation of natural resources and human hierarchical dominance over nature is provided by recent research showing that SDO also predicts dominance views towards non-human animals (Dhont, Hodson, Costello, & MacInnis, *in press*). Having reliably documented the links between SDO and environmental exploitation, in the current paper we aim to determine the mechanism explaining why high-SDO individuals tend to support the exploitation of natural resources.

Why does SDO predict support for environmental exploitation?

A central premise of Social Dominance Theory is that high-SDO individuals should support initiatives and social policies that promote and enforce social hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). We argue that this should include policies related to environmental exploitation to the extent that such exploitation is congruent with the social dominance motive. Previous findings lend support to this general premise, as SDO has been reliably shown to predict a willingness to exploit the environment in unsustainable ways as well as a general lack of environmental concern (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010; Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013). We argue that high-SDO individuals should be motivated to endorse a broad range of ideologies that help to justify inequality and support a desire for dominance in its many forms, including those pertaining to human hierarchical dominance over nature (Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013).

Extending our earlier work, we posit a *Hierarchy Enforcement Hypothesis of Environmental Exploitation* to elucidate the mechanism for the effect. This hypothesis states that SDO should predict willingness to exploit the environment *to the extent that resources gained by doing so will help sustain and widen the gap in group-based status through the disproportionate allocation of resources gained from exploiting the environment to the dominant group*. A good example of this should be the differential allocation of resources gained through activities such as mining. High-SDO individuals should support new mining initiatives to the extent that such initiatives are expected to lead to the promotion and maintenance of hierarchy by disproportionality benefiting high-status groups. This might include groups such as mining companies, chief executives, investors, or possibly the dominant ethnic group over the rights of indigenous peoples dispossessed from their land, to name but a few.

According to this perspective, the positive association between SDO and support for the unsustainable exploitation of the environment observed in previous studies presumably occurred because people typically view environmental exploitation as a hierarchy enhancing endeavour in which the profits of such enterprise disproportionately benefit those already high in status. As counter to our hierarchy enforcement hypothesis, we argue that high-SDO individuals should be indifferent to environmental exploitation in (the arguably less likely) conditions where treatment of the environment was entirely unrelated to the maintenance or promotion of social hierarchy. To take a more extreme counter-example, we assert that high-SDO individuals should be among those most opposed to potentially environmentally damaging initiatives such as mining, if the profits from such operations were explicitly tied to reducing hierarchy and disproportionately benefiting poorer and lower status people in society in order to reduce inequality.

The present article reports two studies testing our novel *Hierarchy Enforcement Hypothesis of Environmental Exploitation*. In both experiments, participants first completed a measure of SDO, and then read one of two vignettes describing a potential mining initiative in which the profits would further benefit already high-status groups in society (*hierarchy-enhancing outcome* condition), or would be distributed equally among all members of the community (*hierarchy-attenuating outcome* condition). In the present studies, our hypothesis focuses on the interaction between SDO and experimental condition in predicting mining support.

We hypothesized that individual differences in SDO would be most predictive of support for mining when the expectation was of a hierarchy-enhancing outcome, but not when the expectation was of a hierarchy-attenuating outcome. We also note that a stronger version of this hypothesis would predict that SDO may negatively predict support for mining under strongly hierarchy-attenuating outcome expectations. In other words, a positive association between SDO and mining support will only be observed in the hierarchy-enhancing condition. A negative association between SDO and mining support is also possible in the hierarchy-attenuating condition.

We explicitly predicted that there would be an interaction, but left it an open question as to whether there would also be a main effect of experimental condition. There might be strong normative pressures or social desirability responding at play to influence participants to display stronger mining support in the hierarchy-attenuating condition relative to the hierarchy-enhancing condition. However, even if a main effect of condition is observed our predicted interaction should still be statistically significant and would then qualify the main effect.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed to test our hypothesis that high-SDO individuals would be more supportive of a new mining initiative when resulting profits would further benefit already high-status groups in society.

Method

Participants

The experiment was conducted as part of a larger and unrelated survey project. No conditions, measures or participants were dropped from the experiment. Sample size was determined in advance, aiming at a total of 150 participants equally distributed by experimental condition. In the end, a total of 144 first-year psychology students (102 females, 42 males; mean age = 19 years; 76% New Zealand-born) from Victoria University of Wellington completed the online survey in September 2012 for partial course credit.

Measures and procedure

The participants first completed the SDO scale and were then presented with one of two vignettes describing a situation where rare minerals have been found. The measures are detailed below.

We used the revised SDO scale developed by Ho et al. (2012) which measures the two dimensions of Dominance and Egalitarianism. Items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The dimensions were highly correlated ($r = .80$) and only the overall SDO score was considered in this study ($\alpha = .90$; $M = 3.10$, $SD = .91$).

The participants were then randomly assigned to one of the experimental vignettes that manipulated the expected outcomes of mining the resource. Condition A ($n = 69$) manipulated a hierarchy-enhancing outcome, while Condition B ($n = 75$) manipulated a hierarchy-attenuating outcome. The vignettes are presented below.

Hierarchy-enhancing condition. Rare minerals have been found on private land. The land is owned by a wealthy family, who have discovered the resources on their land. They want to set up a mining operation, and expect to make millions of dollars of profits each year. As they own the land, the profits will go directly to them, and will increase the wealth of the family, and the wealth of investors. They plan to set up a company, and other wealthy investors are eager to buy shares in the new mining company. The mining operation will set aside money to repair any environmental damages and return the area to a natural state once the resources have been mined, and the mining operation will have trickle down benefits for the local community as it will employ a large number of people. However, the profits will be exclusively to the mining company and its investors.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7324787>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7324787>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)