



Social dominance orientation and climate change denial: The role of dominance and system justification☆



Kirsti M. Jylhä*, Nazar Akrami

Department of Psychology, Uppsala University, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 March 2015

Received in revised form 28 May 2015

Accepted 30 May 2015

Available online 18 June 2015

Keywords:

Climate change denial

Nature dominance

Social dominance orientation

System justification

Domineering

Empathy

ABSTRACT

Extending previous research, we examined whether the relation between social dominance orientation (SDO) and climate change denial reflects group-based dominance (SDO and nature dominance) or general system justification. Moreover, we examined whether the relation between personality (domineering and empathy) and denial is mediated by group-based dominance variables. The results showed that the group-based dominance variables reduce the effect of system justification on denial to nonsignificant. Also, social dominance and nature dominance explain unique parts of the variance in denial. Moreover, path analyses showed that the relations between empathy and system justification with denial are mediated by both of the group-based dominance variables, while the relation between domineering and denial is mediated only by SDO. Together, these results suggest that denial is driven partly by dominant personality and low empathy, and partly by motivation to justify and promote existing social and human-nature hierarchies. We conclude by suggesting that climate change mitigation efforts could be more successful if framed as being clearly beneficial for everybody and nonthreatening to existing social order.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

It is today considered to be certain that human-produced greenhouse gases are causing changes in the climate system (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] et al., 2014). According to climate scientists, the progression of climate change cannot be stopped any more at this point but it can be mitigated. Mitigation efforts are argued to be crucial if we are to prevent the most severe, widespread and irreversible impacts on people and ecosystems (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] et al., 2014). Thus far, efforts to reduce greenhouse gases have been inadequate (Burck, Marten, & Bals, 2014). One reason for this inadequacy is that evidence regarding climate change is still disputed or denied by many (O'Connor, Bord, & Fisher, 1999; Sibley & Kurz, 2013). Recent research has found a relation between climate change denial and social dominance orientation (SDO, Häkkinen & Akrami, 2014; Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013). The aim of the present paper is to illuminate the character of this relation.

SDO is an individual difference variable measuring preference for group-based social hierarchies (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Specifically, SDO has been suggested to measure passive justification as well as aggressive promotion of social inequalities and

hierarchies (Jost & Thompson, 2000). High SDO individuals tend to find hierarchies to be inevitable and legitimate because of their predisposition to perceive the world as a “competitive jungle” (Duckitt, 2001). It should be noted that, as a measure, SDO does not include direct reference to nature or environmental issues. Thus, the relation between SDO and environmentalism could reflect acceptance of anti-environmental actions that maintain or enhance social hierarchies. Supporting this proposal, Milfont and Sibley (2014) showed that SDO predicts supportive attitudes towards environmental utilization when the outcome of utilization is framed as hierarchy-enhancing (i.e., generating further benefits for the high-status groups) but not when the outcome is framed as hierarchy-attenuating (i.e., benefiting the whole community). Correspondingly, it is possible that the SDO-denial relation reflects a motivation to maintain prevailing hierarchical social structures, which could change if more focus is placed on climate change mitigation. Importantly, however, recent research suggests that individuals expressing high SDO also tend to support group-based dominance in human-nature relations (Dhont, Hodson, Costello, & MacInnis, 2014; Milfont et al., 2013). This suggests that these individuals consider humans to be a superior group holding a legitimate right to dominate the rest of the ecosystem. Such a view could explain why SDO is related to denial. Specifically, individuals who consider human dominance over nature to be natural could be unwilling to admit human-induced climate change. However, from the current state of knowledge it is unclear whether the relation between SDO and denial reflects motivation to defend the social status quo (including hierarchies), acceptance of nature dominance, or dominance per se.

☆ The Swedish Research Council supported this research by grant (2011–1891) to Nazar Akrami. The authors thank an anonymous reviewer, Jana Grina, and Jarkko Rautiainen for their valuable comments on previous draft of this paper.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Uppsala University, P.O. Box 1225, SE-751 42 Uppsala, Sweden.

E-mail address: kirsti.jylha@psyk.uu.se (K.M. Jylhä).

Previous research has shown that endorsement of status quo predicts anti-environmentalism. For example, Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith (2010) found denial of environmental problems to be correlated with system justification – a motivational tendency to accept and protect the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994). That is, viewing current societal practices as legitimate also implies denying negative impact that our lifestyle has on the environment. Moreover, Feygina et al. (2010) demonstrated that system justification partly mediates the relation between political conservative ideology and environmental denial which has been found in previous studies (e.g., McCright & Dunlap, 2011). It should be noted that Feygina et al. (2010) used selected facets of a widely used measure for environmental attitudes (the New Environmental Paradigm scale; Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000) to operationalize environmental denial. These selected facets can be considered as measures of denial of environmental problems in general, but not denial of climate change in particular. However, these two forms of denial share similarities, as they both refer to dismissive attitudes when it comes to negative impacts that humans have on environment. Thus, system justification can be expected to correlate also with climate change denial.

Existing group-based hierarchies are a part of status quo and, not surprisingly, system justification and conservative ideology correlate with SDO (Wilson & Sibley, 2013; Jost & Thompson, 2000). In fact, SDO has even been used as a measure of system justification in some previous research (Jost & Burgess, 2000). However, SDO specifically represents views concerning hierarchies, being conceptually and empirically distinct from system justification which represents acceptance of the system in general. Therefore, these two constructs provide a possibility to study which component of status quo acceptance explains denial better. Perhaps the relation between system justification and denial does not reflect acceptance of the contemporary system in general, but acceptance of group-based hierarchies in particular. This possibility has not been investigated in previous research. However, it is supported by findings showing SDO to be a better predictor of denial compared to ideologies related to general resistance to change, such as right-wing authoritarianism and left-right political orientation (Häkkinen & Akrami, 2014; Milfont et al., 2013).

There are some personality traits that predispose for an inclination to accept hierarchical group relations. For example, previous research has found that SDO is predicted by (low) empathy (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Pratto et al., 1994), and there is also evidence for reciprocal relation between these two variables (Sidanius et al., 2013). Importantly, empathy has also been shown to be related with environmental behavior and attitudes (see Tam, 2013). While the relation of empathy with denial has not been examined in previous research, it is reasonable to expect such a relation, at least when people are not seriously affected by climate change themselves. That is, individuals with low levels of empathy could score higher on denial because they are not concerned for those affected by possible negative consequences of climate change. Another personality trait that should be studied in relation to SDO is domineering (Grina, Akrami, & Bergh, in preparation). Domineering reflects a general need for power and the tendency to be controlling, dominant, and forceful in interpersonal relationships (Goldberg, 1999). Domineering was recently found to be related to SDO (Grina et al., in preparation) and it is reasonable to assume some link to denial. Dominant individuals may actively deny climate change because they do not want to risk their power position in relation to other people and nature.

2. Aim and rationale

The first aim of this research is to illuminate the relation between SDO and climate change denial by investigating whether it reflects acceptance of status quo in general (i.e., system justification), or of group-based dominance in particular (i.e., SDO and nature dominance). Here, we expect that including SDO and nature dominance in the equation would significantly reduce the effect of system justification

on denial (cf. Häkkinen & Akrami, 2014; Milfont et al., 2013). Following this line of reasoning, we thus expect SDO and nature dominance to mediate the relation between system justification and denial. Also, aiming to understand the role of group-based dominance variables (SDO and nature dominance), we test their unique contributions in predicting denial. This would enable us to estimate the impact of social versus nature attitudes on denial. Moreover, persisting to maintain status quo (as expressed in SDO and system justification), in spite of anticipated severe consequences of climate change, could reflect domineering personality and low empathy – traits that are strong predictors of SDO. Thus, as the second aim, we test the predication of group-based dominance variables mediating the effect of these traits on denial. Based on the predictions above, we propose a path model where empathy, domineering, and system justification affect SDO and nature dominance which in turn affect climate change denial (see Fig. 1). To deal with the mediations predicted above, we also test models with direct paths from system justification, domineering, and empathy to denial.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 221 participants (aged between 18 and 72 years, $M = 28.45$, $SD = 10.78$, 66% women) who were recruited by announcements on a webpage, notice boards and face-to-face.

3.2. Materials and procedure

Climate change denial was measured by a sixteen-item scale (Häkkinen & Akrami, 2014; see Appendix A). The scale captures different forms of denial, such as denial of human impact and denial of seriousness of climate change. *Social dominance orientation* was measured by the SDO₇ scale comprising sixteen items (Ho et al., 2012; item example: It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom). *Nature dominance* was operationalized by a three-item anti-anthropocentrism subscale of the new environmental paradigm (Dunlap et al., 2000; item example: Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature) and three items from the human supremacy beliefs-scale (Items 1, 2, 4, Dhont & Hodson, 2014; item example: Animals are inferior to humans). These items were combined into one scale to measure dominance over environment and animals. *System justification* was assessed by an eight-item general system justification scale adopted from Kay and Jost (2003). Factor analysis of this scale revealed two factors; one reflecting endorsement of the Swedish society per se (item example: Sweden is the best country in the world to live in) and another reflecting endorsement of the system/society in general (item example: In general, I find society to be fair). The four items loading on the latter mentioned factor were adopted for further analyses. Also, one reversed scored item from the other factor was included in order to balance the scale. *Domineering* was assessed by a six-item scale (<http://ipip.ori.org/ipip/>; Goldberg, 1999; item example: I insist that others do things my way), and *empathy* was measured by a seven-item empathic concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980; item example: I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person). The items of empathic concern were responded to on a Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (*absolutely not true*) to 5 (*absolutely true*) while other items were responded to on a scale ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 5 (*agree fully*).

The study was completed online in approximately 40 min. The questionnaire included other scales which are not related to the present study (to be reported elsewhere). Participants were explicitly informed that data was collected anonymously and that they were free to discontinue the study at any time without giving any reason. Participants received a cinema voucher as reward (approximately 12 €).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889963>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889963>

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