

Views of the Self and Environmental Attitudes: An Experimental Examination

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Introduction

Scholars have speculated that concern for environmental issues and inclusion of nature in self are more compatible with interdependent views of the self (interdependent self-construal) than independent views of the self (independent self-construal). Following from this, conceptions of self can extend beyond self–other interactions to also include self–nature interactions, or an “ecological self” (e.g., Bragg, 1996; Schultz, 2002).

Supporting this argument, past research has shown that individuals holding an interdependent view of the self tend to express higher environmental concern and environmental engagement than those holding an independent view of the self (e.g., Arnocky, Stroink, & DeCicco, 2007; Milfont, 2010).

The Present Study

Drawing from research that has used priming to manipulate the salience of independent–interdependent self-construals, we seek to experimentally establish the relatedness of self and nature. If differences in self-construal shape connectedness with nature and concerns of environmental issues, then priming independent or interdependent views of self should create differences in relatedness of self and nature. We hypothesised that priming interdependent views of self would increase connectedness with nature, while priming independent views of self would decrease connectedness with nature. The reverse pattern of relationship could also be expected. If concern for environmental issues is an extension of the interconnectedness with others, then priming environmental issues should create differences in relatedness of self and others. We thus hypothesized that priming environmental issues would increase

interdependent views of self but decrease independent views of self.

Overview of the Experiments and Results

We conducted two experiments to test our predictions. In Experiment 1 ($N = 90$) we manipulated the salience of interdependent or independent self-construals before asking participants to answer a measure of connectedness with nature. As predicted, connectedness with nature increased after the interdependence prime and decreased after the independence prime (compared to the control group). Experiment 2 extended the findings ($N = 85$); here we manipulated the salience of environmental issues and examined the effect on interdependent–independent orientations. Supporting predictions, interdependence orientations increased after making environmental issues salient. These experimental studies suggest that connectedness with others and connectedness with nature are closely related. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings will be discussed, and proposed future cross-cultural studies outlined.

References

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