

Environmental Generativity: Exploring the Motivation to Leave a Social Legacy and Positive Guidance for Others Regarding Environmental Protection

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Introduction

Environmental issues entail not only a social conflict (private vs. public interests), but also a temporal conflict (short- vs. long-term interests). Supporting this, past research has shown that future-oriented individuals (those who are aware of, and concerned about, the future consequences of their actions) tend to care and act more to address environmental issues than present-oriented individuals.

Extending this line of research on the role that perceptions and cognitions about future time has in people's assessment of environmental issues, we recently showed that attitudes toward climate change responsibility predict differential support for political parties only for people who have children (Milfont, Harré, Sibley, & Duckitt, in press).

We proposed an 'environmental generativity' account to theoretically ground our findings that may also explain other findings on the association between parental status and environmental concern, in which people with children often show greater environmental concern than those without children.

Based on Erikson's (1950) theory of life-span development, we argued that 'environmental generativity' relies on intergenerational continuity and is expressed by a desire to leave a social legacy and positive guidance for others regarding environmental protection.

The Present Study

Instead of relying on parental status as a distal indicator of generativity, we used a

direct measure of generativity (Loyola Generativity Scale) to assess its relationship to environmental issues in the present study. Regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which generativity predicts preservation attitudes and self-reported ecological behaviour.

Results and Discussion

Generativity predicted significant unique variance in preservation attitudes ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.57$, $p < .05$) and ecological behavior ($\beta = .21$, $t = 2.89$, $p < .01$), over and above the effects of demographic variables, future orientation and humanitarian values. These findings support the empirical associations between a general disposition for generativity and concerns for environmental issues, and provide support for the concept of 'environmental generativity.' That generativity predicted environmental attitudes and self-reported ecological behaviour after controlling for long-term and selfless orientations, indicates that generativity is another important psychological variable that motivates people to show concern for, and take action on, environmental issues. Future research to further explore the 'environmental generativity' concept will be outlined.

References

- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *The life cycle completed*. New York: Norton.
- Milfont, T. L., Harré, N., Sibley, C. G., & Duckitt, J. (in press). The climate change dilemma: Examining the association between parental status and political party support. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*.