

How to Motivate People: The Relation between Nature Relatedness, Self-determined Motivation, and Pro-environmental Behaviours

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Environmental problems are partially a function of human behaviours. Thus, psychologists are exploring predictors of increased participation in pro-environmental behaviours (PEB). Two known sources of influence on PEB are self-determined motivation toward the environment and having a connection to nature.

As predicted by self-determination theory, people with higher levels of self-determined motivation (i.e., autonomous motivation) participate in greater numbers of PEB. People with lower levels of self-determined motivation (i.e., controlled motivation) participate in PEB less frequently. As PEB become more difficult, the relationship between self-determination and frequency of PEB strengthens. Exploring avenues to increase self-determined motivation for PEB could influence people's environmental impact.

People's perceived connection to the natural environment ('nature relatedness') is a type of relatedness that influences PEB. Higher nature relatedness is associated with greater pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. It is theorized that people who are more connected to nature will be more motivated toward the environment, due to the increased fulfillment of the need for relatedness.

Objectives

The goal of this study was to explore the potential pathways to link people's nature relatedness, to easy and difficult PEB through autonomous motivation and controlled motivation toward the environment.

H1: When PEB are perceived to be easy, an increase in nature relatedness is associated

with an increase in the frequency of behaviours mediated by a person's autonomous and controlled motivation.

H2: When PEB are perceived to be difficult, an increase in nature relatedness is associated with an increase in the frequency of behaviours mediated by a person's autonomous motivation only.

Results

Participants (n=275) completed online measures of their nature relatedness, motivation toward the environment, and the frequency and difficulty of various PEB. The hypotheses were tested using multiple mediation analysis.

H1: There was a significant indirect effect through both autonomous and controlled motivation when PEB were perceived to be easy. Increases in connection to nature were related to increases in autonomous motivation, which in turn were related to increased participation in easy PEB. Increases in connection to nature were also related to increases in controlled motivation, which in turn were related to decreased participation in easy PEB.

H2: There was a significant indirect effect through autonomous motivation when PEB were perceived to be difficult. Increases in connection to nature were related to increases in autonomous motivation, which in turn were related to increased participation in difficult PEB. Controlled motivation was not a significant mediator.

This study suggests that increasing people's autonomous motivation supports participation in difficult environmental behaviours, potentially leading to a larger environmental impact.