Overview Document

Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity

Tom Crompton and Tim Kasser

Praise for *Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity*, the book from which his overview is taken:

"Never have environmental problems appeared so insuperable. Whatever the past victories of the environment movement, we need a new and deeper approach – one that begins to engage the human values and identities that lie at the heart of environmental challenges. *Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity* does not flinch in insisting on both the possibility and the absolute necessity of working in this way. As such, it makes a clear and important contribution to a realistic response to today's environmental crisis."

James Gustave Speth
Carl W. Knobloch, Jr. Dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, and Sara Shallenberger Brown, Professor in the Practice of Environmental Policy at Yale University, and author of *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*.

"A huge shift in public attitudes to global warming is vital to secure our future. The new strategy put forward in this superb book is subtle, powerful and based on cutting edge psychological research. It's probably our last best shot."

Clive Hamilton
Author of *Growth Fetish* and *Scorcher: The dirty politics of climate change*.

"Tom Crompton and Tim Kasser's new study is a sorely-needed and hopeful resource in a time of environmental and climate dangers. *Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity* mines a rich vein of recent psychological and social research to address one of the core challenges of social change – how to mobilize private and unconcerned citizens to alter not only their own behaviors but those of businesses and governments as well."

Robert Cox
Board member and former president (2007-8) of the Sierra Club and professor of communication studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"It would be the easiest thing in the world to neglect the demons in the human soul and place all our faith in angels. But Pollyanna politics won't solve the enormous environmental and social challenges that face us. Tom Crompton and Tim Kasser have done a huge service to sustainability by shining a critical light on the unsustainable aspects of the human psyche and at the same time reminding us of our underlying humanity, and of the common values that seek to protect and preserve the common good."

Tim Jackson
Professor of Sustainable Development and Director of RESOLVE, University of Surrey, UK

About the authors

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WWF's Strategies for Change Project

This publication summarises a book produced as part of a series of publications for WWF-UK's Strategies for Change Project. This series seeks to examine the empirical basis for today's dominant approaches to environmental communications and campaigns, and to ask why these are failing to deliver the level of change that is needed.

Copies of the book (which includes detail about the empirical evidence supporting the case that is outlined here, full references to the literature, and further examination of the implications of this analysis for environmental communications and campaigns) can be freely downloaded at **www.wwf.org.uk/strategiesforchange**.

Join the debate!

We hope that this summary document, as well as the accompanying book, will stimulate wide and critical debate amongst both the environmental movement and the third sector more generally. To help support this debate, we have set up a website, **www.identitycampaigning.org**, which will be used to develop these ideas further, test them, and invite comments. Please visit the site and offer your perspective.

Introduction

The epochal scale of the environmental challenges that humans face is now beyond serious scientific dispute. The environmental movement has responded to these challenges in two main ways: *engaging organisations* and *engaging behaviours*.

Much of the environmental movement's current focus is on *engaging organisations*. This approach is typified by developing and refining policy prescriptions, coupled with political lobbying to encourage governmental adoption of such proposals. While this approach can point to important successes, it falls short of the level of intervention needed, both because the electorate does not demand new regulatory intervention and because policy-makers fail to provide the necessary leadership. As a result, the environmental movement often takes a more conciliatory approach to engaging organisations by attempting to demonstrate a convergence between commercial interest and environmental imperative – the 'business case for sustainable development'. Important as this approach may be, it also has profound weaknesses, as a narrow emphasis upon the economic prudence of certain environmental measures risks fuelling a reluctance to promote those interventions that do not lie so comfortably with the grain of current economic orthodoxy.

The second of today's dominant strategies, *engaging specific behaviours*, is typified by presenting individuals with checklists of 'things you can do to reduce your ecological footprint'. By focusing on behaviours, the political difficulties inherent in engaging organisations are avoided and the onus is shifted away from government and business. This strategy often relies on marketing techniques and correspondingly insists that environmental campaigners cannot afford to be precious about the *reasons* that motivate individuals to adopt behaviour changes. While this strategy can also no doubt point to certain successes, campaigns focused primarily on 'simple and painless' behaviour changes probably militate against the emergence of a set of goals and motivations that will lead to more systemic adoption of pro-environmental behavioural choices. What's more, there is little empirical support for the often-voiced assumption that, having changed one specific environmentally relevant behaviour, people will subsequently be more likely to engage in other, perhaps more difficult and significant pro-environmental behaviours.

Given the enormity of today's environmental challenges, and the fact that current strategies have yet to come close to meeting these challenges, we attempt in this publication to present a third approach for environmental campaigning. We call this approach *identity campaigning*, as it focuses on those aspects of a person's identity that frustrate the emergence of more positive pro-environmental responses. In this overview document (and the book from which it is drawn), we argue that certain aspects of the human psyche create proclivities for unsustainable behaviour, and that these proclivities are often reinforced, or enabled, by social norms and structures, and even sometimes by the actions of environmental organisations themselves.

It seems to us that today's environmentalism by and large either retreats from confronting these aspects of identity, or alternatively attempts to 'work with' them, trying to co-opt them to serve environmental purposes. As we shall see, however, this strategy risks making these environmentally problematic aspects of identity even more prevalent.

It is important to emphasise that we are not suggesting there is anything abnormal about these aspects of identity. Rather, these appear to be ubiquitous aspects of the human psyche – although it also seems that other, competing and more positive, aspects of identity can be brought to the fore. Our interest here is in the ways that the social context that we collectively create serves to accentuate those aspects of identity that, according to the research we present, tend to undermine attempts to meet environmental challenges. What's more, we will suggest ways that environment campaigns and the social context more broadly could be modified to promote those aspects of identity that are associated with more pro-environmental responses.

The mainstream environmental movement has rarely invested resources in examining these environmentally problematic aspects of human identity, identifying the social structures that enable and accentuate them, or working to change these structures and encourage more environmentally beneficial aspects of human identity. And yet we propose that a successful response to today's compound environmental problems must incorporate such considerations and strategies.

Indeed, we are convinced that identity campaigning holds substantial promise for enhancing the effectiveness of the environmental movement's current work, for developing strategies for new interventions, and for raising crucial questions about whether some current strategies might be undermining progress on creating the systemic changes that are needed.

Human identity and environmental challenges

Identity refers to people's sense of themselves, or who they think of themselves as being. In this publication, we highlight three aspects of human identity that empirical research has shown are associated with decisions that often serve to frustrate optimal responses to environmental challenges. These are: people's *values and life goals*; their differentiation of others into *in-groups and out-groups*; and the ways they *cope with fear and threats*. We do not claim that these three aspects of identity constitute a complete list, or that we have even succeeded in identifying the most important features of human identity involved in frustrating the emergence of proportional responses to environmental problems. Rather, we are seeking to stimulate further debate and to show the importance of considering identity in environmental campaigning.

Values and life goals

Values and life goals are the aspects of people's identities that reflect what they deem to be desirable and worth striving for in life. Substantial research demonstrates that values and life goals are higher-order motivations that organise the more specific attitudes and behaviours that constitute many aspects of people's day-to-day lives. Cross-cultural studies attempting to categorise the content of people's values and goals have identified around a dozen sets of values and goals that consistently emerge across nations.

Among these values and goals, one set of aims has been consistently associated with more negative attitudes and behaviour towards non-human nature: the relative importance individuals place on wealth, rewards, achievement and status. For example, studies show that to the extent people endorse these self-enhancing and materialistic values, they report engaging less often in positive environmental behaviours. Experiments using game theory simulations of natural-resource management further support these results: groups of experimental subjects who score relatively highly in materialistic goals are found to exploit simulated forest resources at intensive and ultimately unsustainable rates. Finally, data at the national level also demonstrates negative associations between environmental behaviour and these same values; even after controlling for gross national product (GNP), countries in which citizens placed a stronger priority on values such as wealth, achievement and status were found to have higher per capita CO_2 emissions.

In-groups and out-groups

Another defining feature of a person's identity is his or her *social identity*, or the groups to which that person feels he or she belongs. Classifying oneself as more similar to others on some dimension (e.g. race, sex) leads to the creation of both *in-groups* and *out-groups*. An extensive body of social psychological research demonstrates that people typically treat others in ways that enhance the standing of their in-group relative to the out-group, helping to explain the widespread phenomena of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. Some researchers, drawing on research concerning values and pro-environmental behaviour, have extended the concept of social identity to include a person's sense of belonging to nature.

Much as with aspects of social identity, an environmental identity offers a sense of association and belonging to a group. To the extent that people consider themselves part of nature, or see nature as part of their in-group, research shows that they also exhibit more positive environmental attitudes and behaviours. For example, one large cross-cultural study of residents in 14 countries found that connectedness to nature emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent motivational predictors of pro-environmental behaviour.

In contrast, the tendency to define humans as an in-group which excludes nature is a consequence of a perceived split between humans and non-human nature. It seems that it leads to a heightened indifference to the suffering of both individual non-human animals and the destruction of the non-human natural world (including other species and ecosystems). Human attitudes towards other animals offer a particularly clear example of the human tendency to display prejudice towards non-human nature as an out-group.

Evidence for prejudice towards non-human animals comes from a variety of sources. For example, following a long-established tradition for studying how people categorise human personality types, one study asked experimental subjects to rate themselves, someone they liked or someone they disliked on a series of English nouns that can be used to describe people. Analyses showed that underlying all of these ratings was a single dimension ranging from socially acceptable to socially unacceptable, and that a remarkable number of the nouns used to describe being socially unacceptable were animal words (for example, 'weasel', 'dog' or 'pest'). Other studies similarly show the tendency to associate out-groups with animals, documenting that experimental subjects reported that members of their in-group are more likely to experience uniquely human emotions (like remorse, affection, pride and conceit) than are members of the out-group; such findings suggest that people deny out-group members some level of humanness by presuming that they exhibit a lower level of emotional development, comparable to that of non-human animals.

It seems that that there is a continuum between indifference to the suffering of individual animals and indifference to the loss of entire species or destruction of ecosystems, and that both these attitudes are driven in part by a tendency to see non-human nature as the ultimate out-group. The tendency to define non-human nature as an out-group frustrates the emergence of a stronger connection to nature, which is known to be associated with more pro-environmental behaviour.

Coping with fear and threats

A third aspect of human identity concerns how humans attempt to manage threats to their existence, their self-esteem and the integrity of their identity. These threats often create emotions – such as anxiety, guilt and existential angst – which are not only unpleasant to experience in their own right, but can also interfere with people's psychological functioning. Thus, people use an extensive array of psychological strategies to help them remove thoughts and feelings about anxiety-producing situations from awareness and to protect their identity.

There seems little doubt that awareness of the scale of environmental problems that humans confront can lead people to experience a sense of threat. Anxiety, guilt (a kind of moral anxiety) and threats to self-esteem can also result when people recognise their own complicity in exacerbating environmental problems. The impossibility of physical escape from environmental problems certainly propels some people to change the way that they live (in order to minimise their own environmental impact) or to engage in direct political action. But at the same time, many others deal with awareness of environmental crises through psychological coping strategies that either fail to motivate pro-environmental behaviours, or that actually undermine such behaviours. The psychological research suggests five different categories of such strategy:

• ***Strategies for diversion***. When confronted with environmental problems people may attempt to supplant the anxiety-arousing information with other material. For example, research has found that individuals may seek to: (i) *limit their exposure* to potentially anxiety-producing information; (ii) *keep their thoughts in the present*; (iii) *do something* in order to temporarily displace their feelings of hopelessness by taking action – irrespective of how environmentally insignificant that action may be; or (iv) *seek pleasurable diversions*.

• ***Strategies for reinterpreting the threat***. A second common set of strategies seeks to diminish the unpleasant emotions arising from environmental damage by re-interpreting the situation so as to render it less threatening. This might be attempted through: (i) *relativisation*, which entails claiming that the ecological problems facing humanity really are not as pressing as often claimed; (ii) *denial of guilt*; and (iii) *projection*, which involves denying one's own complicity and apportioning blame on others.

• ***Strategies for indifference***. Another class of strategy for coping with the fears and anxieties brought about by environmental degradation is *apathy*. Psychotherapists have long recognised that if a person believes that there is no hope of overcoming a problem, a good way to protect oneself is to adopt an uncaring approach: if the problem is not felt to be personally important, it poses less of a threat. Unfortunately, of course, apathy tends to reinforce behavioural choices that exacerbate environmental problems.

• ***Orienting towards materialistic goals***. Many empirical studies show that, when briefly reminded of their own mortality, people strive to enhance their self-esteem. In a consumerist culture, this means that people will orient towards self-enhancing, materialistic values (which, as we've seen above, are environmentally destructive). Research studies confirm this tendency.

• ***Denigrating the out-group***. Threat is one of the key factors that promotes in-group bias and out-group prejudice. Research shows that people become especially negative towards animals and the natural world when reminded of their own death. Moreover, and consistent with our suggestion that antipathy to non-human animals is a particular instance of antipathy towards non-human nature, these effects of mortality awareness extend to attitudes towards nature and wilderness.

While each of these coping strategies seems to help lower levels of stress from threat and environmental problems, they also fail to encourage engagement in pro-environmental behaviours, and may often lead to an increase in environmental impact.

Identity campaigning: Strategies for addressing the environmentally problematic aspects of human identity

This section revisits each of the three aspects of identity that we highlighted in the foregoing sections and describes means of better managing them. Although the strategies we propose are specific to each aspect of identity, some elements of these strategies recur. We highlight three such elements at outset:

• ***Removing iatrogenic effects***. In medicine, iatrogenic effects are said to occur when a doctor inadvertently exacerbates a medical condition in the course of treating it. In a parallel fashion, some campaign tactics commonly deployed by the environmental movement may inadvertently serve to reinforce environmentally problematic aspects of identity and thus operate, overall, to exacerbate environmental problems.

• ***Disabling ways that society encourages problematic aspects of identity***. Human identity is formed in part through social and cultural context. Environmental organisations could therefore attempt to address and 'disable' those features of society that currently promote environmentally problematic aspects of identity.

• ***Activating healthier aspects of identity***. While thus far we have focused on those aspects of identity that contribute to environmental degradation, there are aspects of human identity that can promote environmental sustainability. Thus, environmental organisations might work to encourage those aspects of identity that can serve as 'antidotes' to the environmentally problematic aspects.

Shifting values and life goals

Messages from environmental organisations

Unfortunately, rather than working to decrease self-enhancing, materialistic values known to be associated with environmental degradation, some environmental campaigns probably serve to reinforce such values. Indeed, the modern environmental movement is dominated by the perception that the environment is an economic resource to be exploited. Consider, for example: *the business case for sustainable development, payment for environmental services, the three pillars of sustainable development* or *green consumption*. To the extent that each of these concepts – all mainstays of much environmental campaigning – are emphasised, the environmental movement serves to reinforce the self-enhancing, materialistic values that are associated with more environmentally destructive behaviours. Environmental organisations need to examine the values and goals reflected and encouraged by their communications and campaigns so as to diminish the extent to which they reinforce these values and goals. What's more, a growing body of research (from the perspective known as *self-determination theory*) suggests that appeals to such self-enhancing, materialistic values can actually undermine people's motivation for engaging in pro-environmental behaviour over the long term.

Policy approaches for reducing the social modelling of materialistic, self-enhancing values

There are ways in which environmental organisations, in concert with other groups, can decrease the extent to which society at large reinforces and encourages materialistic, self-enhancing values. A variety of options are available in this regard, but here we will briefly focus on two.

• ***Tackling advertising***. Advertisements and marketing are prominent means by which materialistic, self-enhancing values are encouraged: underlying most advertising is the implicit proposition that purchase of a product or service can confer happiness or self-esteem. Moreover, government policy on advertising often operates to extend the reach and dissemination of these implicit messages. Environmental organisations can begin to address these dynamics by developing and distributing educational materials that help individuals (in particular children) to 'deconstruct' advertisements and recognise the techniques of persuasion deployed. They could also campaign for restrictions on advertising in public spaces, outright bans on advertising to children (who are particularly susceptible to the persuasive techniques that advertisers use), and taxes on advertising.

• ***Redefining progress***. Environmental organisations could support the development and implementation of new measures of national progress. Current measures (such as gross domestic product) probably reinforce materialistic values – particularly given the prominence that they are currently accorded in political debate. Many alternative indicators (such as Redefining Progress' Genuine Progress Indicator and the New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index) have been proposed that introduce a wider range of values into public debate about national performance, and thus place less emphasis on environmentally problematic materialistic values.

Encouraging self-transcendent values and intrinsic goals

Another approach is for environmental organisations to encourage values that are psychologically opposed to self-enhancing, materialistic values. Cross-cultural research shows that the goals of financial success, image and popularity cluster together, implying that if one of these extrinsic or materialistic goals is prioritised, people also tend to prioritise the other extrinsic, materialistic goals. This same research also helps to identify a set of goals that are antagonistic to such materialistic goals. These goals, labelled *intrinsic*, include the pursuit of self-acceptance (trying to grow as a person), affiliation (having good interpersonal relationships) and community feeling (trying to make the broader world a better place). Because it is psychologically difficult for individuals to pursue both intrinsic and materialistic goals simultaneously, one approach to diminishing the power of self-enhancing and materialistic goals is to encourage people to place greater priority on goals such as self-acceptance, affiliation and community feeling. Interestingly, research shows that when people focus on such intrinsic goals, they also engage in more positive environmental behaviours.

Environmental organisations often retreat from highlighting intrinsic goals, but they could work to make them a legitimate part of public debate. To do so would serve to promote the positive environmental responses associated with such goals. At the same time, environmental organisations can also work to help strengthen the causal link between pursuing intrinsic goals and making behavioural choices consistent with these. We suggest two approaches that may help in this regard:

• ***Social support***. Social support groups have been used to help people live more in concert with intrinsic and *self-transcendent* values. For example, *simplicity circles* – groups of individuals who meet regularly to discuss the attractions and challenges of trying to reduce their consumption – provide a place to share information and to learn new skills that can help people enact their intrinsic, self-transcendent values.

• ***Implementation intentions***. Research shows that people are more likely to behave in ways consistent with their stated goals when they have previously developed a very concrete *if-then* statement that helps them both to identify situations where the goal is relevant, and to engage in an appropriate behavioural response. Implementation intentions seem to help people *automatise* their behaviour so that they do not have to exert extra cognitive effort in thinking about what to do when a crucial choice arises. Some researchers have begun to apply this method to environmentally relevant behaviours with good success.

Addressing in-groups and out-groups

A great deal is known about effective means of reducing prejudice and discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation. Because the literature tends to suggest that such interventions work for a variety of different types of out-groups, we have grounds for optimism that such interventions will also help to address prejudice towards non-human nature.

Messages from environmental organisations

The tendency of many environmental organisations to take a narrowly anthropocentric perspective (asking 'what can nature do for humans?') probably serves to strengthen conceptions of non-human nature as an out-group, and to frustrate the emergence of environmental identity. This anthropocentrism also gives rise to tension between the environmental movement and the animal-welfare movement. Many environmentalists dismiss animal-welfare organisations as 'sentimentalist' – precisely because they challenge the in-group/out-group distinctions between humans and other animals. This tension is particularly evident where an abundant species is culled for economic reasons.

As well as serving to strengthen in-group/out-group distinctions between humans and non-human nature, narrowly anthropocentric messages may also confuse those members of the public who are motivated on empathic grounds to engage with both animal welfare and environmental issues.

The activities of conservation organisations may also inadvertently serve to frustrate the emergence of environmental identity, through the 'objectification' of non-human nature. The perception that humans are separate from nature is likely to be heightened both by conservation activities that frame the natural world as something that does not include humans (or from which humans must be excluded) and by campaigns that serve to reinforce an instrumentalist view of nature (that is, a view which holds that nature exists solely as a source of raw materials for human activities). Unfortunately, current approaches to conservation may tend to lead to one or the other outcome: either through the development of protected areas that effectively exclude people, or through community-based conservation projects that, unless carefully developed, can lead to the commodification of nature.

Rather than emphasising the need for nature either to be 'left alone', or to be exploited commercially, environment and conservation organisations might place greater emphasis on the type of *relationship* that conservation programmes help to establish between local people and non-human nature. Such an alternative approach to conservation could embody an acknowledgement that biological diversity is linked with cultural diversity, and that sustaining both is necessary for both ecological and cultural well-being. This is a perspective that, in WWF-UK's experience, is often already expressed amongst communities in the field, although it rarely features in policy debate in national capitals.

Reducing prejudicial messages in the social context

While it appears that humans have a natural tendency to categorise individuals on the basis of their sex or race, it seems that the attitudes people form towards those in different categories are to a large extent learned. Among the messages people sometimes learn to support prejudice are *legitimising myths* that serve to justify attributing lower status to particular groups of people. It is important, therefore, that where they are based on factual misrepresentations, these legitimising stories are rebutted, particularly in the education of children. By analogy, environmental organisations could examine the legitimising myths that justify exploitation of non-human nature (such as the perceived necessity of animal-based protein in a healthy diet) and could stimulate debate about these stories, particularly amongst children. Environmental education programmes could also be designed to encourage children to explore and discuss instances where commercial messages, news reporting or government communications reinforce the objectification of nature.

Activating positive social values

Studies find that empathy and egalitarian values are consistently associated with lower levels of prejudice towards a number of different types of human out-groups. Humans can be encouraged to empathise with non-human nature. In one study, participants were shown pictures of wild animals suffering and asked to either remain objective or take the animal's perspective. Those induced to feel more empathy later expressed significantly higher levels of concern for all living things.

Although there would of course be both philosophical and practical difficulties in seeking to attribute equal rights to humans and non-human animals, much can be learnt from work on discrimination towards human out-groups. Recognition of the inherent value of nature is likely to generate environmental dividends analogous to those achieved through increasing the prevalence of egalitarian values amongst humans. This might be achieved through approaches such as *value confrontation* (making explicit the disparity between a person's values and his or her behaviour) – particularly, in working with groups who already have close contact with the non-human natural world in a non-exploitative way (for example, gardeners, ramblers or pet owners), but who do not consistently express an environmental identity in their behavioural choices.

Improving contact between species

Clearly the mere fact that two groups are in contact with each other will not be sufficient to reduce prejudice. However, under certain conditions of *optimal contact*, the evidence shows that it is possible to: (i) reduce the anxiety associated with meeting others different from oneself; (ii) create empathy for out-group members; and (iii) lead people to recategorise in-groups and out-groups into a *we* identity.

Substantial creativity and flexibility are probably required to adapt the principles known to promote optimal contact, so that these can be applied to human-nature interactions. At one level, there are opportunities for virtual contact, and well-produced films, books and video games could help promote a stronger sense of connection to nature. But these are unlikely to substitute for real-life contact.

In the longer term, childhood experience will be important. Unfortunately, at present 'environmental education' tends towards the quantification or objectification of nature. Instead, what is necessary are opportunities to *experience* nature so that adolescents leave formal education equipped with a conceptual framework that enables them to relate to their own experiences of nature, a vocabulary with which they feel comfortable in discussing their relationship with nature, and educational experiences that lead them to identify nature as something in which they are immersed even in an urban environment (for example, through the air they breathe, the water they drink and the people they encounter).

The strongest impacts of optimal contact are likely to be created through approaches to wilderness experience that build on the techniques of ecopsychology, though programmes that attempt to provide this have yet to become fully integrated into the strategies deployed by mainstream environment organisations. WWF-UK, however, has used such techniques in its Natural Change Project, a process of personal transformation and reflection through nature-based workshops that was conducted for participants in Scotland drawn from the business, education, arts and charitable sectors. The project adapted and incorporated techniques from Joanna Macy's *the work that reconnects*, a programme of group exercises that are designed to provide opportunities to share personal responses to the condition of the world, and to promote empathy with other living things.

Approaches to coping with fear and threats

As we've seen, when reminded of environmental threats and of their own death, people often respond in ways that are environmentally problematic. An understanding of how psychotherapists approach the treatment of their clients who experience threats to their identity could help to provide strategies for environmental organisations to respond to such challenges. Note, though, that in drawing attention to the value of understanding psychotherapeutic approaches, we do not intend to suggest that these responses to environmental threats are abnormal: they are probably deployed by everyone – environmentalists, of course, included. Drawing on the approach a psychotherapist might take in engaging with an individual client, we explore three steps that could be used to inform environmental communications and campaigns targeted at larger numbers of people.

First, environmental organisations should be alert to instances where people and organisations engage in coping and defence mechanisms that are known to diminish positive environmental behaviour. Environmental organisations can then *gently and empathically* draw attention to the existence of these strategies. An understanding of effective behaviour change strategies suggests that it will be ineffectual to bemoan public apathy or to admonish individuals for deploying particular coping mechanisms. A better approach would acknowledge the emotions underlying the coping strategy, and respond to these empathically. By intervening in these ways, environmental organisations can state truths that often remain unspoken – global warming *is* frightening, and people often do feel hopeless – and thus build rapport and trust with their audience.

After identifying a maladaptive coping strategy, the next task for a psychotherepist is to help clients express whatever feeling underlies the strategy, no matter how unpleasant it might be. Similarly, environmental organisations can help people to *express* the emotions that they feel about environmental destruction. Empirical studies, and decades of clinical practice, suggest that in order to help activate positive environmental behaviours, environmental organisations will ultimately need to develop approaches that help people express the fear, anger, sadness, angst or sense of threat that many are probably already experiencing (whether consciously or otherwise). Opportunities to deeply explore thoughts and feelings associated with death might help in this regard. Although, as we've seen, brief reminders of death can lead people to orient towards the materialistic values that promote environmental degradation, other studies have shown that a more sustained, reflective meditation on the feelings aroused by thoughts of death can actually *decrease* the materialistic strivings known to be associated with environmental degradation.

Third, environmental organisations can help people develop coping strategies that are less likely to lead to a worsening of an individual's environmental impact. For example, *problem-focused coping strategies* encourage individuals to actively work to change the situation that is giving rise to the source of stress. This will be difficult for global environmental challenges (like climate change), and it should be noted that whilst problem-solving strategies may promote pro-environmental behaviour, they have also been associated with increased levels of reported stress from an awareness of environmental challenges. Another approach is thus to promote *emotion-focused coping strategies* that aim to change a person's emotional reactions to a source of stress. One emotion-focused strategy that might be particularly useful for environmental organisations is the cultivation of *mindfulness*, or an acceptance of one's experience as it is in the moment. Not only has research shown that mindfulness is effective in reducing psychological distress, but evidence suggests that (even after controlling for the effects of subjects' values) adults who are more mindful engage in more positive environmental behaviours and have lower ecological footprints than individuals less attuned to, and accepting of, the present moment.

Environmental organisations need to be alert to instances where communications and campaigns encourage the adoption of environmentally problematic coping mechanisms. For example, highlighting the scale, irreparability and finality of an environmental threat may be counterproductive if it activates coping mechanisms that ultimately interfere with positive environmental behaviours. Whilst it is certainly important to fully and properly disseminate information about the impacts of climate change and species extinction, this information should not be presented in ways that promote destructive coping strategies.

Other problems may emerge with communications that exaggerate the environmental benefits of simple and painless pro-environmental behavioural changes. Such campaigns might actually serve to encourage individuals to adopt these behaviours as part of a strategy for diversion, thereby leaving them less inclined to adopt other, more difficult and perhaps environmentally significant, behavioural changes.

Another potentially counter-productive approach is to implicitly or explicitly blame other social groups or nationalities for environmental problems. Such campaigns are likely to: (i) increase the sense of threat experienced by those individuals who are highlighted as being primarily culpable for environmental problems, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will further deploy maladaptive coping strategies; and (ii) lead those who do not belong to the groups that are singled out to engage in projection and thus deny their own responsibility and feelings of guilt. Both effects are likely to lead to further environmentally problematic behaviour.

Beyond the environment: opportunities for new coalitions

The proposals that we have made for engaging dominant values and aspects of identity are ambitious. But, unless the environment movement engages at this level, we do not believe that it will be possible to meet today's profound environmental challenges. The environmental movement, working alone, will not be able to achieve the necessary shifts in dominant values and aspects of identity. But nor should it need to. Fortunately, in addition to helping reinforce identities and values that will provide a long-term benefit to the environmental movement, the approach we have proposed here provides multiple opportunities for building powerful new coalitions. To us, this is one of the most important aspects of identity campaigning.

There is a very high level of coincidence between the values and aspects of identity that currently frustrate systemic responses to environmental challenges, and the values and identities that frustrate delivery on a range of other challenges such as war, aggression, poverty, racism, homophobia, sexism, prejudice against the disabled, the abuse of human rights, and indifference to animal welfare. For example, the data clearly shows that self-enhancing, materialistic values are not only associated with worse environmental attitudes and behaviours, but also with less concern for social justice, equality and a world at peace, and less pro-social behaviour. Similar data exists for in-group/out-group dynamics and for coping strategies.

Of course, it is not unusual for environment and development organisations to collaborate on a range of issues. But these collaborations typically centre on a convergence of interest on particular policy demands like climate change policy or international trade rules. In contrast, we are not aware of campaigns that forge alliances across third sector organisations in order to focus on engaging the aspects of identity we have been describing here. We see two ways such coalitions might operate:

• ***Prominent coalitions on policy with identity impacts***. Third sector organisations can form prominent coalitions on policy in order to engage aspects of identity that lead to a wide array of problematic outcomes. For example, a broad coalition of third sector organisations might decide to collaborate on strengthening regulations governing advertising to children. Research has shown that young children are cognitively and psychologically susceptible to advertising – they typically do not understand the notion of intent to sell, and frequently accept advertising claims at face value. Studies also have found that exposure to commercial television increases children's scores on assessments of materialistic values, which, as we have seen, leaves them more antagonistic to a range of pro-social and pro-environmental concerns. A broad coalition could thus be built across a number of third sector organisations (e.g. organisations concerned with human development, human rights, animal welfare and the environment) to campaign for a ban on advertising to young children (something that some countries have already adopted).

• ***Establishing consistency in the values underpinning third sector campaigns***. A second approach to building new coalitions could focus on the impacts of campaigns in promoting particular values and aspects of identity, without attempting to pursue common policy outcomes. Towards this end, a range of different organisations might agree on a set of values that they want to promote, and then use their respective campaigns as vehicles to convey these. According to some political scientists, this is the approach that the political Right in the US took in recent decades, with great success. Such concerted *cognitive campaigning* could proceed without the development of any formal alliances between organisations on specific policy issues, but would require agreement on the values, or *deep frames*, that they jointly seek to activate. We hope that this publication has provided some insights about which deep frames it would be best to avoid and which it would be best to support.

Conclusion

This document has reviewed theoretical arguments and empirical data documenting that three aspects of human identity often contribute to environmentally problematic values and behaviours, and has presented a variety of strategies to address this problem. These strategies are summarised in Table 1 opposite.

We emphasise that we do not see the perspective we have presented in this summary document (or the book from which it is drawn) as a replacement for current campaigns that work on specific environmental policy changes or that attempt to motivate private-sphere behavioural change; there is no doubt that the environmental movement should continue to engage at both of these levels. But identity campaigning points to the importance of carefully reviewing current strategies if these are to contribute more effectively to creating the systemic changes that are needed, and if they are to avoid iatrogenic effects. Moreover, identity campaigning can lead to an appreciation of other new and important ways for the environmental movement to engage its key audiences.

All told, we believe that the environmental movement must begin to incorporate a fuller understanding of the problems and opportunities that values and identity pose. Only then can it begin to create the systemic changes needed in response to today's environmental challenges.

Table 1
Summary of identity-based campaign strategies for environmental challenges

• Avoid language and campaigns that reinforce materialistic, self-enhancing values.

• Frame environmental messages to connect with intrinsic values, rather than extrinsic or materialistic values.

• Address the societal influence of advertising, for example by supporting: (i) media literacy programmes; (ii) the removal of advertising from public spaces (especially natural settings); (iii) bans on marketing to children; and (iv) policies to tax advertising at higher rates.

• Promote the development and use of alternative indicators of national progress that include values other than materialism.

• Create community groups to support the adoption of materially simple and ecologically sustainable lifestyles. Creating a safe environment where participants are given permission to openly express their deepest fears about environmental issues will be important here.

• Help people create implementation intentions to increase the likelihood of behaving in ways that are consistent with intrinsic, self-transcendent values.

• Avoid messages suggesting that the lives of individual animals are of little significance.

• Build an awareness that humans are themselves part of nature, and confront society's stories that legitimise prejudice towards non-human nature.

• Develop programmes to activate an awareness of the inherent value of nature and empathy for non-human nature (perhaps initially addressing gardeners, ramblers or pet owners).

• Develop means of increasing optimal contact between humans and non-human nature, including indirect contact, environmental education programmes that promote an experiential sense of connection to nature, and by drawing on the techniques of ecopsychology.

• Gently point out when society and individual people use coping strategies to avoid confronting environmental concerns, and acknowledge the emotions that underlie these strategies.

• Help people *express* their fear, sadness, angst and anger about environmental destruction, rather than *provoking* such feelings. Group work will be important here.

• Help people activate intrinsic and self-transcendent values when they feel threatened by environmental challenges.

• Promote problem-focused coping strategies and the emotion-focused coping strategy of mindfulness to help people cope with environmental threats.

• Design environmental campaigns to minimise the risk that people will be led to deploy environmentally problematic coping strategies.

The mission of WWF is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- reducing pollution and wasteful consumption

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