

Schmitt, M. T., Droogendyk, L. M., Payne, D. (2014, June). Identification with the natural world and pro-environmental behavior. Paper presented to the 10th Biennial Meeting of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Portland, Oregon.

Prior research and theorizing suggest that identification with the natural world ("biospheric identification") fosters the motivation to engage in pro-environmental behavior (PEB). We add to prior work by testing hypotheses regarding the process by which biospheric identification might encourage PEB. In two studies, participants completed measures of biospheric identification ("I am part of a larger ecosystem") and self-reports of PEBs. Results replicated across the two studies. Biospheric identification did predict PEB in both the private sphere (lower consumption) and public sphere (activism and political activity). In addition, we tested plausible mediators of this relationship: identification as an environmental activist, moral obligation to protect the environment, and the perception of threats to the environment. Identification with activists was the strongest mediator—biospheric identification predicted more identification with activists, which in turn predicted more private and public PEB. In addition, the relationship between biospheric identification and activist identification was partially mediated by both perceived threats to the environment and moral obligation. Thus results support the conclusion that all three mediators—perceptions of threat, moral obligation, and activist identification—have a role in the link between identification with the natural world and taking action to protect the natural world.