

Specific Aims

In social psychology, social identity framing refers to a communication strategy where behaviors are expressed as reflective of a self-identity which people value and therefore which people want to align their behaviors with. For my honors project, I am testing whether social identity framing can effectively promote sustainable behavior. This project will use the methods of psychological research to explore this strategy and any factors, such as political orientation, which may moderate its effects. I hypothesize that participants in the social identity framing condition will experience the greatest increase in connection with the pro-environmental identity “Green Gaucho”. Secondly, I hypothesize that participants who experience this boost in pro-environmental self-identity will engage in significantly more pro-environmental behaviors than other participants.

At completion, I would like to share my results through several means, including presenting at research colloquiums and submitting my final paper for publication. Katie Maynard, the sustainability coordinator for the Chancellor's Sustainability Research Program, and I have also talked about presenting this research to on-campus organizations which are interested in promoting pro-environmental behavior. Ultimately, this research project will help us understand people's motivations to engage in pro-environmental behavior and how psychological appeals that use social identity can potentially promote pro-environmental behavior.

Research Design and Methods

Participants

Participants will consist of 100 undergraduate students from the University of California in Santa Barbara, and they will receive \$10 gift-cards to Amazon for their participation.

Ethical Considerations

I have completed the human subjects training module through the Office of Research. My research project is also overseen by Dr. David Sherman, a faculty member and professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, and advised by Phil Ehret, a 4th year doctoral candidate in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. All participants will be supplied with informed consent forms and with debriefing after the study. All identifying information is kept on a secure database hosted by Qualtrics survey software and will be deleted after the study is completed.

Design

This study will use a longitudinal between-subjects design in order to compare participants between two different treatment groups: a control condition and a social identity framing condition. I will manipulate sense of connection with the valued pro-environmental identity “Green Gaucho”. Participants will keep a “daily diary” for a week after the manipulation, measuring pro-environmental behaviors like length of shower, weight of recycle, or consumer choices. The daily diary method, which asks participants to record certain experiences each day for a select period of time, provides measurements of behaviors and attitudes from participants as they go about about their daily experiences – not post-hoc or hypothetically. This approach is necessary to look at the interplay between behaviors and identities in the real world, and I can only use this more complicated study design by incentivizing participation with gift-cards or similar compensation.

This study design is informed by a study I ran this past fall, which was also overseen by Dr. Sherman and Phil Ehret. The first study had three different treatment groups. Participants took a questionnaire on their environmental attitudes and behaviors. In the experimental conditions, participants received false, positive feedback that they scored in the 90th percentile on the test. Half of these participants receiving positive feedback were also told that they are “Green Gaucho”s and what being a Green Gaucho means to our community. This manipulation intended to boost participants' connection with an environmental self-identity which in turn is expected to bolster pro-environmental behavior. The control condition received no such feedback. I am able to use the findings of the first study to improve my social identity framing strategy and thus to create a more effective design for my honors project. Lastly, I will use SPSS statistical analysis software to analyze my results.

Time-line

Month	Task
November	Complete analysis of the first study
December & January	Conduct literature review; complete design of the proposed study; submit IRB proposal
February	Create materials; figure out participant recruiting scheme
March	Run the participants
April	Complete statistical analysis of the second study; write research paper
May	Finish writing the research paper; present research; submit research for review and publication

Background and Significance

Last spring I began planning a research project in environmental psychology for my honors thesis. This past September, I also accepted an internship for the Chancellor's Sustainability Research Program with a promise to complete a research project that could aid UCSB's sustainability efforts. These two research experiences have become part of one comprehensive project. This fall quarter, I began the first study and the first test of strategies to promote pro-environmental behavior. I am still in the midst of analysis, but one concern has always been present: the first study was unable to measure behavior in the real world. Limitations in methodology and participants only allowed us to gather participants' delayed and inexact perceptions of their behavior; however, we need to know whether the social identity framing strategy works outside of the lab. Using what I learn from the pilot study, this honors project will 1) improve upon the strategies presented in the first study and 2) use an innovative research design that allows us to quantitatively measure changes in actual behavior.

To accomplish these goals, I need to be able to pay participants with gift-cards. For the first study, I was able to use the SONA research pool and class credit system run by the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. However, I cannot continue to draw on the credit resources of my advisers. Secondly, this system limits my participants and my methodology. The SONA system gave me access to mostly freshmen in introductory psychology classes. Not only do I require a wider range of participants, but the daily diary study design is more taxing on participants and requires a greater incentive for completion. The URCA grant would allow me to work with a wider range of subjects and to use an advanced research design in a study unconstrained by reliance on the credit system.

My extensive research experience, unique academic background, and dedicated work ethic qualify me for the URCA grant. I came to UCSB as a Psychology major and eventually committed to minors in Statistical Science and Professional Writing in order to broaden my research skillset. I have taken many classes in research design (PSY 7, PSY 120L, PSY 196, next quarter PSTAT 122), data analysis (PSY 5, PSY 120L, PSTAT 120A-B, PSTAT 130, PSTAT 126) and in writing research papers and presentations (WRIT 109SS, PSY 196, PSY 120L, WRIT 105PS). With graduate school in mind, I have worked to achieve a 3.93 GPA. During spring of my sophomore year, I conducted my own research for the first time and wrote a 41-page paper examining the relationship between childhood bullying and adult morality. During the first half of my junior year, I spent six months working in a psychology lab running participants, including taking saliva samples for hormonal assays. In December 2014, I began working at the Center for Nanotechnology in Society, joining a small research team looking at public risk and benefit perception of hydraulic fracturing. All of these opportunities have prepared me to finally take on a research project of this scale. With support from the URCA grant, I can test the generalizability of these strategies to promote pro-environmental behavior, and I can complete a project which will be the capstone to my experiences here at UCSB.