

The Effects of Future Priming on Resource Concern

Authors : Calvin Rong, Regina Agassian, Mindy Engle-Friedman

Abstract : Climate changes, including rising sea levels and increases in global temperature, can have major effects on resource availability, leading to increased competition for resources and rising food prices. The abstract nature and often delayed consequences of many ecological problems cause people focus on immediate, specific, and personal events and circumstances that compel immediate and emotional involvement. This finding may be explained by the challenges humans have in imagining themselves in the future, a shortcoming that interferes with decision-making involving far-off rewards, and leads people to indicate a lower concern toward the future than to present circumstances. The present study sought to assess whether priming people to think of themselves in the future might strengthen the connection to their future selves and stimulate environmentally-protective behavior. We hypothesize that priming participants to think about themselves in the future would increase concern for the future environment. 45 control participants were primed to think about themselves in the present, and 42 participants were primed to think about themselves in the futures. After priming, the participants rated their concern over access to clean water, food, and energy on a scale of 1 to 10. They also rated their predicted care levels for the environment at age points 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90 on a scale of 1(not at all) to 10 (very much). Predicted care levels at age 90 for the experimental group was significantly higher than for the control group. Overall the experimental group rated their concern for resources higher than the control. In comparison to the control group (M=7.60, SD=2.104) participants in the experimental group had greater concern for clean water (M=8.56, SD=1.534). In comparison to the control group (M=7.49, SD=2.041) participants in the experimental group were more concerned about food resources (M=8.41, SD=1.830). In comparison to the control group (M=7.22, SD=1.999) participants in the experimental group were more concerned about energy resources (M=8.07, SD=1.967). This study assessed whether a priming strategy could be used to encourage pro-environmental practices that protect limited resources. Future-self priming helped participants see past short term issues and focus on concern for the future environment.

Keywords : climate change, future, priming, global warming

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