Environmentalists often respond to these concerns by proposing policy interventions that are tailored to current political constraints and by highlighting the business case for investment in green technologies. Unfortunately, these approaches often make for policy changes that fall far short of the interventions that are required on environmental grounds and for changes in business practice that are limited to those instances where commercial interests and environmental imperatives happen to converge. While we don’t doubt that such appeals have led to some important policy achievements and have often created significant leverage with business constituencies, it seems clear that more ambitious interventions are needed.

In recognition of these limitations, environmental campaigners have also focused on encouraging citizens’ adoption of simple “private-sphere” behaviors such as installing low-energy light bulbs, switching the tap off while brushing one’s teeth, or avoiding the use of disposable plastic grocery bags. For example, the Energy Savings Trust, which is funded by the UK government to promote action that leads to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, suggests turning down the thermostat by 1°C, closing the curtains at dusk, and switching appliances off stand-by. The U.S. Environment Protection Agency urges citizens to use energy-efficient lights, switch to green power, and push a manual lawnmower.

It is undoubtedly important that such behaviors are more widely adopted, and there is clear value in people undertaking small behavioral changes. But it is nonetheless understandable that criticism has been leveled at this approach, particularly where the private-sphere behavioral changes advocated in some campaigns appear trivial in comparison to the larger environmental challenges that humans confront. As David MacKay, Chief Scientific Advisor at the UK Department of Energy and Climate Change, said: “Don’t be distracted by the myth that ‘every little bit helps.’ If everyone does a little, we’ll achieve only a little.”

Unfortunately, the empirical literature does not lend clear support to the
argument that simple pro-environmental behavioral changes “spill over” into more difficult and significant changes—particularly in cases where campaigns appeal to the financial savings associated with domestic energy efficiency measures, rather than social and environmental imperatives. To say the least, it seems risky to base a strategy for building public acceptance of—or active demand for—ambitious regulatory intervention primarily upon campaigns that encourage people to adopt small changes to their private-sphere behaviors.

Thus, while we recognize that there have been many successes, it nonetheless seems to us that there are important limitations to the two dominant approaches to environmental campaigning. On the one hand, attempts to implement proportional responses to environmental challenges through policy intervention seem fundamentally constrained by electoral resistance and by the many instances in which environmental imperatives do not converge with the interests of business. On the other hand, widespread adoption of simple private-sphere behavioral changes seems unlikely to lead to significant lifestyle changes or to inspire people to begin demanding more ambitious political interventions.

Another Approach: Engaging Identity

Because of these limitations with the two dominant approaches, we advocate their augmentation with a third approach that we believe holds substantial promise for environmental campaigning. This approach draws upon a large body of empirical studies on people’s identities, or their sense of who they are as a person. The box on page 25 briefly describes three of the aspects of a person’s identity that the social scientific research literature suggests may serve to frustrate the emergence of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. They are (i) people’s self-enhancing, materialistic values and life goals; (ii) people’s tendency to distinguish between the human “in-group” and other-than-human nature as an “out-group”; and (iii) the problematic ways in which people cope with fears and threats brought on by environmental challenges.

Viewing environmental challenges through the lens of identity shifts the focus beyond a set of policy interventions targeted at specific “environmental” problems, beyond “the business case for sustainability,” and beyond approaches that attempt to change particular behaviors on a piecemeal basis. Instead, an identity-based approach suggests that those who are motivated to help build public concern about environmental issues and stronger public engagement with corresponding political processes must also consider the social forces that encourage or discourage a broader array of aspects of human identity that are relevant to environmental outcomes. In particular, this shift in perspective implies the need to give careful thought to three practical aspects of environmental communications and campaigns: (i) the kinds of campaigns that environmentalists undertake, (ii) the way in which these campaigns are conducted, and (iii) the groups with whom environmentalists collaborate in working on these campaigns.

New Campaigning Approaches

Any attempt to work at the level of people’s identities must start with an understanding of how identity is forged. Most identity theorists recognize that people’s sense of self is shaped crucially through social influences: our perception of what is socially “normal,” the language and concepts used in public discussions, and the ways in which we organize ourselves socially (through our institutions and policies). Social norms and social organizations provide the context in which individuals’ identities develop—a context sometimes all the more important because it usually remains “unseen” and is therefore taken for granted.

This analysis suggests two important strategies for addressing the environmentally problematic aspects of human identity that are summarized on page 25. The first is to work to disable the means through which society currently serves to encourage these aspects of identity. The second is to work to activate and encourage other aspects of identity that stand in opposition to the environmentally problematic aspects and that promote positive environmental attitudes and behaviors in and of themselves. Page 26 reviews three environmentally beneficial aspects of identity that the research shows are associated with more sustainable environmental attitudes and behaviors, and that are also known to counteract the problematic aspects of identity reviewed on page 25.
Three Environmentally Damaging Aspects of Human Identity

Psychological research shows that the following three aspects of human identity are negatively associated with people’s concern about environmental issues and with their motivation to adopt pro-environmental behaviors (including political activism in line with environmental concerns). Of course, other aspects of identity are important to consider as well, but these three factors provide a good starting point for exploring the importance of human identity in responding to environmental problems.

1. Values and Life Goals

Values and life goals are the aspects of people’s identities that reflect what they deem to be worth striving for in life. An extensive body of cross-cultural research on values and life goals has identified around a dozen sets of aims in life that consistently emerge across nations. Among those values and goals are self-enhancing, materialistic aims for wealth, possessions, achievement, and status. Using a range of different investigative approaches, psychologists have found that the more individuals endorse these self-enhancing, materialistic values, the more they also express negative attitudes and behaviors towards other-than-human nature (e.g., caring less about environmental damage or the value of other species; engaging in fewer behaviors like recycling and using public transport; and using more resources to support their lifestyles). This basic finding has been corroborated through studies on self-reported attitudes and behaviors, with game simulations of natural resource management dilemmas, and using nation-level archival data.

2. In-Groups and Out-Groups

People’s social identity is defined in part by the groups to which people feel that they belong—other people who share their race, sex, or nationality, or who are members of their family, choir, or football team. Considering oneself to be part of one group (the in-group) creates, by default, an out-group. Hundreds of studies show that people typically treat out-group members in more denigrating ways, which helps to explain the widespread phenomena of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Some studies have extended the concept of social identity to environmental identity, finding that humans—at least those in the industrialized societies where the studies have been conducted—have a tendency to define their species as an in-group that excludes other-than-human nature. Categorizing other-than-human nature as an out-group seems to lead to a heightened indifference to the suffering of both individual other-than-human animals and the destruction of the other-than-human natural world. Human attitudes towards other animals (e.g., animals they eat) frequently offer clear examples of how other-than-human nature is seen and treated as part of the out-group.

3. Coping with Fear and Threats

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 identity and self-esteem can also result when people recognize their own complicity in exacerbating environmental problems. People use an extensive array of “emotional management strategies” to help them remove from their awareness thoughts and feelings about anxiety- or guilt-producing situations. While these strategies are often effective in helping lower levels of stress associated with an awareness of the threats posed by environmental problems, many of them also encourage responses that serve to exacerbate these very problems. For example, in their attempts to cope with the threat and anxiety they experience about environmental problems, the literature shows that people sometimes become apathetic about those problems (refusing to care, and therefore removing any possible source of guilt), try to seek pleasurable diversions (living for today, and putting thoughts of tomorrow out of mind), or deny their own complicity in exacerbating a problem and project their guilt onto others (perhaps SUV drivers, the government, or another nation).
Three Environmentally Helpful Aspects of Human Identity

This box discusses three aspects of people’s identity that stand in opposition to those features of identity (reviewed on page 25) which are associated with worse environmental attitudes and behaviors. Each of the three aspects of identity highlighted here has also been empirically associated with more positive ecological attitudes and behaviors.

1. Values and Life Goals
   Cross-cultural research shows that while certain values and goals tend to be psychologically compatible (e.g., money and status), others tend to be in psychological conflict and difficult to simultaneously pursue. In particular, the self-enhancing, materialistic goals known to be associated with greater environmental damage are opposed by “self-transcendent” and “intrinsic” values, which include prioritizing one’s family and friends as well as showing a greater concern for the broader community and world. What’s more, research shows that the more people prioritize self-transcendent and intrinsic values, the more concern they express about environmental issues, and the more highly motivated they are to adopt behavior consistent with such concerns. 34

2. In-Groups and Out-Groups
   The tendency to categorize other-than-human nature as part of an “out-group,” thus encouraging indifference to the suffering of animals and the loss of their habitats, can be countered in a number of ways. One obvious approach is to promote a stronger environmental identity, i.e., to help people develop a feeling of connectedness to the other-than-human natural world. Research on prejudice towards human out-groups also shows the benefits of activating egalitarian values and feelings of empathy. When people are reminded of the priority they put on treating other humans equally, research shows they tend to treat out-group members more positively. In the context of human relationships with the other-than-human natural world, this probably points to the importance of according inherent value to other-than-human nature (that is, value that extends beyond the usefulness of nature to humans). Furthermore, studies show that when people are asked to consider the perspective of out-group members (including other-than-human animals), this experience of empathy leads them to become more likely to incorporate them into the in-group and less likely to engage in behaviors that might be damaging to them.35

3. Coping with Fear and Threats
   As described on page 25, awareness of environmental threats can sometimes lead people to use emotional management strategies that ultimately contribute to perpetuating environmental problems. Research on coping suggests that healthier, more adaptive ways to manage feelings of fear or threat do exist, and that these also can promote more positive environmental outcomes. For example, rather than becoming apathetic, pursuing hedonistic pleasures, or projecting one’s guilt onto others, the literature demonstrates the effectiveness of “problem-solving” strategies that entail active engagement in behaviors that help to reduce environmental challenges.36 Of course, such problem-solving initiatives must be perceived as offering a realistic response to the environmental challenge; for example, meaningful participation in political decision-making processes is more likely to meet this criterion than is the installation of energy-efficient light-bulbs. It is also clear that social networks play an important role in supporting individuals in such problem-solving initiatives by helping both to motivate and sustain such behaviors.37 Another healthy set of emotional management strategies is based on “emotion-focused coping.” For example, research shows that the practice of “mindfulness,” or a nonjudgmental awareness of one’s experience, both improves mental health and is associated with more positive environmental behaviors.38
This two-tiered strategy points to opportunities for a wide range of new types of campaigns to help motivate public engagement on environmental challenges. Space limitations in this article do not allow us to elaborate on all of the possibilities. Here we will describe just one strategy relevant to each of the three aspects of identity reviewed on pages 25 and 26.

With regard to values, numerous studies find that greater exposure to commercial marketing is associated with a stronger priority placed on materialistic values. It is of course difficult to establish the nature of the causal links underlying such correlations, but some evidence does suggest that increased exposure to commercial advertising leads to greater prevalence of materialistic values (irrespective of whether or not the reverse is also true). This is perhaps to be expected—many advertisements convey the expectation that the acquisition of a particular product will confer greater social acceptance or happiness. Further, the prevalence of advertising on television, radio, magazines, the Internet, and almost every other conceivable outlet has increased dramatically in the last 40 years, helping to establish social norms promoting consumerist and materialist values (which, incidentally, have also increased over the last 40 years). Given the negative associations of materialistic values with environmental attitudes and behaviors, it seems important for environmental communicators and campaigners to examine the environmental impacts of commercial advertising. Such impacts include both the immediate material effects that advertising has by increasing consumption of the products that are being marketed, and, perhaps more importantly, the influence that advertising has in promoting societal values that are antagonistic to the emergence of pro-environmental concern. Environmental organizations can approach campaigns around advertisements in a variety of ways. For instance, they might join with media literacy groups to teach individuals how to decode and deconstruct advertisements so that their messages are less likely to further embed materialistic values. At a broader level, environmental organizations can support efforts to ban advertising to children and to rework the tax subsidy that corporations and media organizations receive through current policies that consider money spent on advertising to be tax-deductible. Such efforts would help to constrain the further expansion of advertising into contemporary culture, and could help to diminish the prevalence of environmentally destructive, materialistic values.

Regarding in-groups and out-groups, research finds that expression of empathy and egalitarian values are both consistently associated with lower levels of prejudice toward a variety of human “out-group” members. These results suggest the importance of developing approaches to campaigning that deepen empathy with other-than-human nature. And while it would be ethically and practically problematic to seek equality between humans and other animals, the important role that egalitarian values are known to play in reducing prejudice between humans points to the importance of acknowledging that other-than-human nature has an inherent value that extends beyond its usefulness to humans. Perspective-taking has been found to be important in reducing prejudice, and there is evidence that it can also help to motivate environmental concern. For example, experimental subjects who are shown pictures of animals in distress and encouraged “to take the perspective of the subjects” subsequently report a higher level of concern for all living things than do individuals asked to “take a neutral perspective” and be “as objective as possible about the subjects.” Despite such evidence, much environmental education, through its insistence on the quantification and objectification of nature, continues to require students to take a “neutral perspective” and to be as “objective as possible.” Such approaches are likely to harden the in-group/out-group distinctions known to promote problematic environmental outcomes. An identity approach suggests instead that experiencing nature should become a core element of children’s education.
they are immersed even in an urban environment (for example, through the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the people they encounter). Such educational approaches will require careful planning as well as attention to the decades of social psychological research that suggests that merely bringing people in contact with out-group members (in this case, other-than-human nature) is usually insufficient to reduce prejudice. Ultimately, it will be necessary to understand the research literature on the optimal conditions under which people reclassify in-groups and out-groups into a “we” identity, and to carefully apply such understanding to tackling prejudice towards other-than-human nature.

We turn now to our third example of an environmentally damaging aspect of human identity: the deployment of unhelpful emotional management strategies. We will discuss here two classes of such strategies: those that seek to deny the threat, and those that, while accepting the threat, nonetheless lead to behaviors and attitudes that continue to promote ecological degradation.

Despite the overwhelming weight of empirical evidence, many individuals continue to dispute the case for anthropogenic global warming. A recent survey in the United States found that only 47 percent of Americans think that global warming is caused mainly by human activity, and another survey in the UK found that of those who believe climate change is happening, only 34 percent accepted that “[i]t is now an established fact that climate change is largely man-made.” Our identity-based approach suggests that the impassioned nature of much climate change “denial” showcases another type of emotional management strategy designed to protect people’s identities. That is, the research literature on the defense mechanism of denial demonstrates that when people are provided with information that threatens their identities, they have a tendency to dismiss that information, to conclude that the individual providing that information is biased in some way, and to question the veracity of the means by which that information has been obtained. These are the very responses that many climatologists are used to hearing from those who dispute the accumulating scientific information regarding climate disruption. While it is crucially important to give full consideration to evidence-based critiques of climate science, it is equally important that ways are found to respond to attacks on the legitimacy of the climatology where these are unwarranted. Our identity-based perspective suggests, then, that it is necessary to understand which aspects of a person’s identity are threatened by climate science. For example, a person’s awareness of his or her own contribution to greenhouse gas emissions may conflict with the importance he or she places upon the acquisition of material things, or with his or her desire to believe that he or she is basically a “good person” who wouldn’t willingly choose to engage in behavior that is socially and environmentally damaging. An acceptance of anthropogenic climate change could also conflict with a person’s religious convictions.

Once environmental campaigns understand which aspects of identity lead to difficulties in accepting the scientific evidence for anthropocentric climate change, they can then develop appropriate response strategies. Such strategies may be designed, for example, to diminish unhelpful aspects of identity (as might be attempted to respond to the problems arising from consumerist or materialistic values); to help people realize that there are more adaptive and helpful ways to enact their identity than to seek to undermine climate science (as might be attempted in the case of unwarranted skepticism arising as a result of a desire to be a “good person”); or to help people achieve a reconciliation between the scientific evidence and their beliefs (as might be attempted in the case of a conflict between climate science and a person’s religious beliefs).

Our approach suggests the need to deploy a different set of strategies for individuals who, at least at some level, accept the scale of the environmental problems that humans confront, but who nonetheless sometimes use (consciously or otherwise) emotional management strategies that have the effect of exacerbating these problems. In such cases, we believe that environmentalists can learn much from the decades of clinical and psychotherapeutic practice that shows the importance of empathizing with people about the feelings of fear or threat that drive such responses. So it becomes important to consider ways to help people express the fear, anger, or sadness that they are probably already experiencing (whether consciously or not) about climate change. Indeed, research shows that individuals who report unpleasant emotions such as anger and sadness in response to environmental stresses are more likely to engage in positive environmental behaviors.

We do not advocate the provocation of such unpleasant emotions through confrontational campaigns or communications; rather, we want to highlight the need to build an empathic rapport with key constituencies so that people feel supported in expressing their unpleasant emotions. Group work and the emerging discipline of eco-psychology include a range of tools to help in this regard. For example, Joanna Macy’s “The Work that Reconnects” offers a well-developed approach to helping people work through their despair about environmental problems in ways that often leave participants feeling more motivated and empowered to help address these problems. Similarly, the
Transition Movement institutes local “heart and soul groups” to help in this process, and the Altars to Extinction project provides a physical space for individuals to reflect on, and grieve for, species that have gone extinct.19 This section has highlighted the necessity for environmental campaigns and communications to incorporate an understanding of the way in which key aspects of people’s identity are shaped and operate. Such understanding can help environmental campaigners both to diminish the frequency with which environmentally problematic aspects of identity are encouraged and to bring to the forefront more environmentally helpful aspects of identity. Unfortunately, some environmental communications and campaigns may currently serve to accentuate unhelpful aspects of identity—and so may contribute to frustrating the emergence of systemic responses to environmental challenges. It is to this problem that we turn in the next section.

Re-Examining Current Environmental Communication Strategies

Our observations suggest that some of today’s environmental communications and campaigns (whether developed by government, business, or nongovernmental organizations) retreat from confronting unhelpful aspects of identity. Instead, they sometimes attempt to “work with” them. An identity-based approach to campaigning suggests that such attempts may backfire because they are likely to activate and reinforce those very aspects of identity known to be associated with environmental problems. This can be true both of campaigns focused on motivating lifestyle changes among individuals and of initiatives that attempt to engage at a governmental level.

Campaigns seeking to promote changes in individuals’ lifestyles often appeal to financial incentives (reducing the fuel costs of running a vehicle by regularly checking its tire pressure, for example) or the social status conferred by the acquisition of a particular product (the desirability of owning the latest hybrid car, for example). Such campaigns may well represent sensible approaches to motivating specific behavioral changes. As we noted above, however, it is far from clear that such behaviors will “spill over” into public demand for government intervention to enforce more difficult changes—for example, increased taxation of air-travel or public demand for new wind-farms.20 What’s more, campaigns that focus on financial self-interest or social status as reasons for engaging in pro-environmental behavior are likely to subtly privilege self-enhancing, materialistic values, suggesting to citizens that such values properly represent a primary motivation for behaving in more sustainable ways. In fact, as discussed on page 25, such values are likely, overall, to promote worse environmental attitudes and behaviors. Finally, attempts to motivate environmentally positive behaviors through appeal to financial self-interest, or the social status conferred through acquisition of a particular product, are likely to diminish motivation to engage in other pro-environmental behaviors that do not also confer these secondary benefits.

Campaigns that appeal primarily to financial interest or social status often arise from audience “segmentation” models, which draw on the techniques of the marketing industry. Such models are frequently applied by environmental communicators and campaigners to categorize sectors of the public according to their predominant concerns or values.21 Accordingly, it is often argued that more materialistic people must be engaged through materialistic values—deflecting their urge to acquire material possessions into a drive to “buy green,” for example. But if, as the research literature suggests, materialistic values are ultimately antagonistic to the emergence and expression of environmental concern, then alternative approaches should be considered.

The approach that we advocate here is to identify—and redress—some of those factors that drive the cultural dominance of materialistic values. This means that the environment movement, instead of attempting to co-opt such values, must rather strive for consistency in reflecting intrinsic and self-transcendent values (see page 26). Doing so will help to counter society’s dominant materialistic values and to promote instead values associated with positive environmental attitudes and behaviors. What’s more, while it is often asserted that it is only through appeal to self-interest and financial incentive that people are likely to change their behavior, research actually suggests that

By vilifying SUV drivers, non-SUV drivers may avoid the guilt they could otherwise feel by projecting this guilt onto SUV drivers.
messages framed as connecting with intrinsic values are often more effective in motivating deeper and longer-term behavioral changes.\textsuperscript{22}

Some campaigns risk promoting other unhelpful aspects of identity, such as environmentally problematic emotional management strategies. Consider, for example, a UK direct action campaign against urban 4×4s (also called SUVs). This campaign aims “to make driving a big 4×4 in town as socially unacceptable as [drunk-driving].” The campaign provides reasons not to drive an urban SUV:

Our descendants will be left to deal with the effects of climate change caused by our profligate use of fossil fuels. Drivers of 4×4s should start editing their photo albums now … The aggressive look of a big 4×4 means other people on the road may make assumptions about the person behind the wheel. In an ordinary car, you won’t get dirty looks from all and sundry when you drive around town, won’t have to avoid eye contact with bus passengers, and cyclists won’t mouth obscenities as they squeeze past you in a queue of traffic.\textsuperscript{23}

The campaign also encourages direct action against owners of SUVs, such as issuing spoof parking tickets that “contain lots of information for urban 4×4 drivers about the effects of their choice of vehicle on the rest of us”.\textsuperscript{24}

We are without doubt supportive of reducing how many people drive SUVs, and we recognize the success of this campaign in terms of the media coverage and public debate that it generated. It may also have contributed to building the support of non-SUV drivers for punitive government measures against SUV owners (increases in road tax, for example). But from the perspective of an understanding of identity, we are driven to ask whether it may also have had some unforeseen negative effects.

First, it seems possible that the campaign will harden the resolve of some SUV drivers to continue to use their vehicles: recall from above that when people are presented with information that conflicts with their identity, they often deny the veracity of that information. As such, it seems likely that SUV drivers whose identities were threatened by this campaign may have deployed coping strategies other than changing the kind of car they drive. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it seems possible that this campaign could actually discourage non-SUV drivers (of whom there are far more) from taking steps to minimize their own contribution to traffic-related pollution (perhaps by driving less or by parting with their car completely). By vilifying SUV drivers, non-SUV drivers may avoid the guilt that they could otherwise feel by projecting this guilt onto SUV drivers.

Of course, it is far from clear that the possible negative secondary effects of a campaign such as this will necessarily outweigh the environmental benefits. That is not why we raise these possibilities. Rather, we believe that the foregoing discussion points to the need for organizers of environmental campaigns to give due consideration of possible secondary effects and to explore ways in which these might be minimized. For example, the organizers of this campaign could have chosen to focus not only on the environmentally
problematic behaviors of SUV drivers, but also on the behaviors of the activists who participated in the campaign, visibly working to ensure that they used their involvement in the campaign to help drive further positive changes in their own behaviors.

The possibility of inadvertently activating unhelpful aspects of identity is not unique to campaigns focused on promoting behavior change among individuals—it also arises in some governmental attempts to increase the political priority that is accorded to environmental challenges. For example, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and the European Commission, under the leadership of Pavan Sukhdev, a senior banker at Deutsche Bank, recently initiated a study entitled “The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity.” This study, the final phase of which is due to report this year, aims to “evaluate the costs of the loss of biodiversity and the associated decline in ecosystem services worldwide, and to compare them with the costs of effective conservation and sustainable use.”

While we are of course convinced that those individuals involved in preparing the report are committed to supporting conservation, their emphasis risks collateral damage in further eroding public acceptance of the inherent value of the natural world. We recognize that many campaigns focus on the economic rationale for more careful use of natural resources, and that such campaigns may well generate political engagement where a compelling economic case for conservation can be built. We also recognize the critical importance of establishing mechanisms for industrialized nations to repay developing nations for the natural resources that have contributed to the developed nations’ wealth; indeed, this is an imperative that often increases enthusiasm for economic evaluations of biodiversity. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that attempts to place an economic value on biodiversity also risk deepening the priority accorded to financial imperatives, diminishing humans’ sense that they are a part of nature, and increasing the perception that other-than-human nature exists primarily as a resource to be used for financial gain. Douglas McCauley has stated this case unequivocally:

[Conservationists] may believe that the best way to meaningfully engage policy-makers ... is to translate the intrinsic worth of nature into the language of economics. But this is patently untrue—akin to saying that civil rights advocates would have been more effective if they provided economic justifications for racial integration.

It seems that some advocates of the economic evaluation of ecosystem services share the ultimate objective of building public appreciation of the inherent value of nature, but see a role for economic arguments in the development of such sensibilities. For example, Gretchen Daily, a prominent advocate of an ecosystem-services approach to biodiversity conservation, recently argued that “ecosystem services is a strategy to buy time as well as getting buy-in.” This has led one commentator to argue that advocates of an ecosystem-services approach “…believe that nature is intrinsically valuable, and they hope to preserve nature by appealing to this belief in others or, where it is absent, by creating it. The difference is that … [they work] to convince others by showing them the profitable side of nature first.”

Our concern is that showing the “profitable side of nature first” may actually serve to undermine the emergence of an appreciation of nature’s inherent value because, as discussed on page 25 (“Values and life goals”), the pursuit of extrinsic goals (such as financial interest) act antagonistically to the pursuit of intrinsic goals (such as developing an appreciation of the inherent value of nature).

In this section we have argued that environmental communicators and campaigners should identify and deepen their understanding of the ways in which some campaigns might inadvertently be promoting unhelpful aspects of identity. We recognize that there may well be cases in which appeals to unhelpful aspects of identity are of benefit, even in the long-term, despite the potential costs of such campaigns. But it also seems very likely that there will be other instances where, although perhaps successful in terms of their specific objectives, campaigns that appeal to environmentally-damaging aspects of identity ultimately serve to reinforce those problematic aspects of identity in the longer term. At present, we do not find many environmental communicators and campaigners who are giving careful consideration to such possibilities.

**Building New Coalitions**

There is a very high level of coincidence between, on the one hand, the values and aspects of identity that currently frustrate systemic responses to environmental challenges, and, on the other, those values and identities that frustrate 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 show that self-enhancing, materialistic values are not only associated with worse environmental attitudes and behaviors, but also with less concern for social justice, equality, and a world at peace, and with less pro-social behavior. Similar data exist for the other aspects of identity discussed on page 25.

Our identity-based approach therefore suggests that it is a mistake to segregate “environmental” issues and hope to address these in isolation from a range of other challenges. Dominant social values, ideas of group membership, and the emotional management strategies people use to deal with fear and threat are clearly relevant to a broad range of problems, extending far beyond those usually considered “environmental.” Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that those aspects of identity that must underpin systemic public concern about environmental issues can be reinforced through campaigns and communications focused on a range of other issues.

Clearly, then, the opportunity exists for the emergence of new and powerful coalitions working across groups
concerned with a range of social and environmental issues. At present, organizations frequently do work collaboratively when they share concerns about a specific policy outcome (the impacts of an international trade agreement or climate treaty, for example). But potentially far wider opportunities for collaboration emerge when focus is shifted onto addressing aspects of identity that frustrate delivery on a range of agendas. For instance, WWF-UK is collaborating with organizations from other sectors (including the development sector) to work on the problems presented by commercial marketing campaigns that serve to promote the pursuit of material success. Such an approach seems promising because the promulgation of self-enhancing, materialistic values, inherent to much of commercial advertising, is associated with diminished concern about both environment and development concerns. Our identity-based perspective suggests that this type of collaboration could potentially extend far more widely and include organizations that represent a range of other sectors.

Promoting a New Way Forward

The gap between our scientific understanding of the scale of global environmental challenges and the social and political responses that are actually embraced in response to this understanding seems to grow ever wider. In this essay we have presented evidence that some current approaches to addressing this gap may actually do little to help close it, and that some approaches may in fact serve to widen it further by strengthening aspects of identity that are antagonistic to pro-environmental concerns and behaviors.

Given these problems, environmental organizations will be better equipped to close this gap if they incorporate into their communications and campaigns an understanding of the way in which people’s identities are shaped—in particular, the values and goals that dominate in society, the way people treat out-groups, and people’s responses to sources of fear and threat.

We are not suggesting that engagement at this “deeper” level should supplant more tactical campaigns focused on achieving specific policy outcomes or campaigns to motivate people to adopt particular pro-environmental behaviors. Clearly, such campaigns are important and necessary. But it seems to us that the profound environmental challenges that confront humanity will only be successfully met if more environmentally-helpful aspects of identity are encouraged and promoted in society. Moreover, those who create tactical campaigns focused on delivering specific policy outcomes or shifts in consumer behavior must begin to examine the effects that they have in reinforcing particular aspects of identity. Changes to campaign and communication strategies may help to avoid inadvertent promotion of environmentally-unhelpful aspects of identity, and careful thought must be given to these—even if such changes may at times serve to compromise the effectiveness of a campaign in delivering its short-term, specific objectives.

Campaigning in this way will also engage aspects of policy and business practice that have an impact on people’s identity, and that go far beyond a usual understanding of “environmental” concerns. Environmental organizations will benefit from building new coalitions with other organizations that, although perhaps focused on a very different set of issues, nonetheless share common interests in engaging with the ways in which certain aspects of identity currently come to predominate. Ultimately, there may need to be an inversion of the raison d’être of many environmental groups. That is, rather than asking: “How can we marshal the widest range of interest groups to support the environmental cause?”, they might come to ask, “How can we best build on our natural support base, and our natural areas of political influence, to support campaigns that promote socially and environmentally helpful aspects of identity, and to change institutions and policies that promote problematic aspects of identity?” And in embracing this new agenda, they may also need to ask: “How, in the course of launching new campaigns designed to engage aspects of identity, can we achieve greater influence through coalition with a wide range of organizations in other sectors?”

NOTES

1. For example, a recent UK public opinion survey found that only 13 percent of respondents thought that it was reasonable to expect people to “make significant and radical changes to their lifestyle in terms of the products they buy, how much they pay for things and how much they drive and fly” in order to tackle climate change. See IPSOS-MORI, Public Attitudes to Climate Change, 2008: Concerned but Still Unconvinced (London, UK: IPSOS-MORI, 2008), http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/xti-environment-public-attitudes-to-climate-change-2008-concerned-but-still-unconvinced.pdf (accessed 20 November 2009).

2. Attention was drawn to the problems facing governments by the former UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Ed Miliband, who was quoted as saying: “There will be some people saying ‘we can’t go ahead with an agreement on climate change, it’s not the biggest priority.’ And, therefore, what you need are countervailing forces. Some of those countervailing forces come from popular mobilisation.” Quoted in: D. Adam and J. Jowit, “People Power Vital to Climate Deal—Minister,” The Guardian, 8 December 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/dec/08/environment-climate-change-2008-concerned-but-still-unconvinced.pdf (accessed 21 May 2010). Similarly, Jules Peck, formerly Director of the UK Conservative Party’s Quality of Life Policy Group (which played a key role in proposing environmental policy for the UK Conservative Party) writes: “Time and again I have seen policy proposals watered-down in order to stand some chance of being tolerated by an electorate who are expected to resist any interventions that entail personal economic costs” (Jules Peck, Director, Quality of Life Policy Group, in correspondence with the authors, 19 August 2009). Nonetheless, it seems clear that bold government leadership is both urgent and possible: By highlighting the problem of a lack of electoral pressure, we are not seeking to detract attention from the urgent need for political leadership.


20. Thøgersen and Crompton, note 6 above.


28. Ibid., page 271.


31. Kasser, note 11, above.

32. As an example, we draw attention to the work of Rosemary Randall at Cambridge Carbon Footprint. Randall applies her background as a psychotherapist to the facilitation of “Carbon Conversations.” Led by trained volunteer facilitators, groups of six to eight members meet in homes, community centers, workplaces, or other venues. Over the course of several meetings, participants are engaged both emotionally and practically, helping them overcome the barriers often associated with making large carbon reductions. See: http://cambridgecarbonfootprint.org/action/carbon- conversations (accessed 8 February 2010).