



Green Hypocrisy: Disparities between Attitudes and Actions

Joseph Cagley, Soby Haarman
Anu Kovilam, Jamie Hoffman,
Dania Holmberg, Yvonne Miao
Thomas Carpenter

Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA

Theory and Background

The purpose of this study is to determine the degree to which people's attitudes toward the environment change to avoid follow-through. This pattern of behavior would be consistent with research on *moral hypocrisy* (Batson, 2008), the belief that if attitudes are genuinely held then they should motivate action rather than being denied in order to avoid it.

We specifically wanted to test this phenomenon with people's attitudes towards the environment, as current research has shown that people will often show their support for the environment in a survey format but not in their own actions (Nguyen & Nguyen et al., 2018).

This disparity between someone's beliefs and their behaviors is known as the attitude-intention gap (Kolmuss & Agyeman, 2002). This suggests that if people support the environment only when there is no follow-through required, then their support for the environment is not genuine.

We not only wanted to determine whether individuals would change their behaviors to avoid follow-through, but we also wanted to determine *who* this would impact the strongest. In short, who will maintain their attitudes when follow-through is required. Generally, guilt-prone individuals are more honest (Cohen, Kim, Jordan, & Panter, 2016; Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011).

Research also suggests that guilt-prone individuals tend to feel worse when behaving inconsistently with their beliefs, and therefore may be more likely to follow through.

Hypotheses

1. Individuals will be supportive of the environment generally, yet support will be reduced if follow-through is required.
2. Those who are dispositionally prone to guilt may be more likely to hold on to their beliefs when follow-through is required.

Method

Participants: We conducted analyses on a sample of 46 undergraduates at SPU, participants were given credits in exchange after completing.

- 15.9% Male, 81.8% Female, 2.27% Other
- 50% White, 10.4% African American, 8.3% Hispanic, 20.8% Asian, 8.3% Native American, 2% Pacific Islander, 0% Other

Measures:

TOSCA-3: Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 2000

Guilt-Proneness: The disposition to feel negative affect towards one's behavior and a desire to repair the relationship or situation after committing a transgression.

Shame-Proneness: The disposition to feel negative affect towards one's self and a desire to avoid the victim or situation after committing a transgression.

Method Continued

GASP: Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011

Guilt-Proneness: Repair Action Tendencies and Negative Behavior-Evaluations (NBEs)

Shame-Proneness: Withdraw Action Tendencies and Negative Self-Evaluations (NSEs)

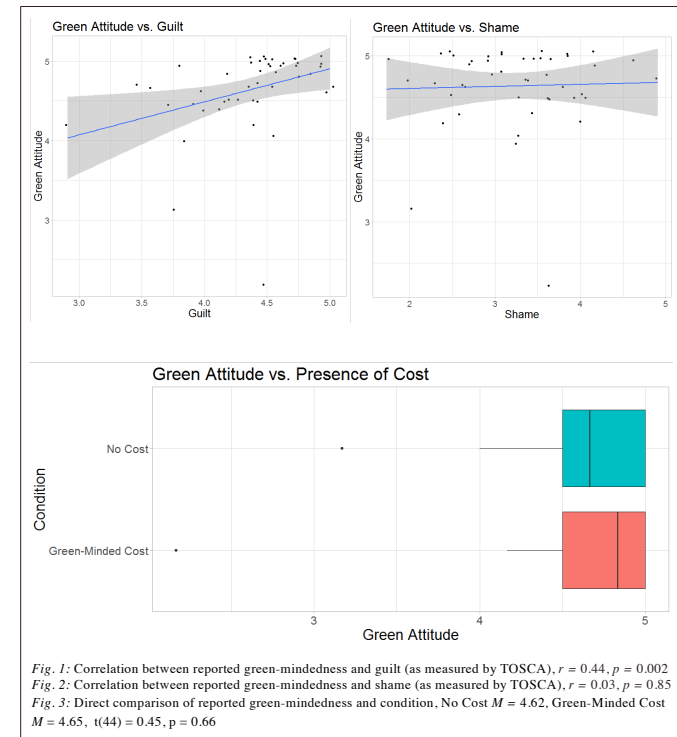
Environmental Attitude Questions: Participants were asked to answer questions regarding their attitudes after being introduced to a current event.

Key Findings

- Within a population of SPU undergraduate students, requiring follow-through if a participant "sounded green" did not reduce support for green behavior, $t(44) = 0.45, p = 0.66$. Our first hypothesis is unsupported as surveyed individuals do not express different pro-environmental attitudes when follow-through is required.
- Guilt-proneness was significantly correlated with higher green attitude scores, $r = 0.44, p = 0.002$. This supports our second hypothesis that guilt prone individuals are more likely to show support for the environment.
- Shame is not significantly correlated with green attitude scores, $r = 0.03, p = 0.85$.

Discussion

- Requiring behavior follow-through for "sounding green" did not reduce expression of green attitudes. This suggests that participants are not lying about their green beliefs to avoid follow through.
- Guilt-proneness was correlated with increased support for green behavior. This suggests a potential explanation for why individuals may engage in green behavior.
- Shame had no significant relationship with support for the environment.
- Participants tended to give the maximum possible answer on the attitudes measure. One possibility is that the measure had a ceiling effect.



- Our study suggests that participants may not *underreport* attitudes when there is a cost. However, we have not yet tested whether they *overreport* green attitudes when there is no cost.
- Other possible extensions of this study could include:
 - Seeking a more diverse pool of participants to observe if race, gender, or culture plays a role in these findings.
 - Having more costly required follow-through the study will have a stronger effect.
 - Offering more 'difficult to support' green attitude statements to eliminate the ceiling effect on the attitude measure.

For more information, contact tcarpenter@spu.edu.