



The Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Environmental Orientation on Pro-Environmental Behaviors

Veronica Champine, Mackenzie Hart, Wen Ying Liu, Pia De Los Reyes
University of California, Santa Barbara

Introduction

In order to fight climate change, it is important to understand what drives people to participate in pro-environmental activity. Previous research has concluded that people of lower socioeconomic status (SES) tend to have less environmental concern, while people of higher SES tend to have more. These studies have used financially biased environmental measures, and in order to investigate this positive correlation, we opted to include measures of pro-environmental behavior that do not necessitate spending money.

We predicted that there would be an interaction between SES and pro-environmental orientation, which would predict frequencies of pro-environmental behaviors. In other words, high SES participants will show no preference between money-independent and money-dependent environmental behaviors, while low SES participants would prefer money-independent actions. We also predicted that when money is taken out of the equation, SES would have no effect on product preferences.

Method

Participants. 178 participants (57.3% female, 1.7% others) volunteered to partake in our survey. Our sample was mostly Caucasian (37.6%), the mean age was about 21 (SD = 2.89), and the majority family income was \$100,000 to \$149,999 (17.4%).

Procedure. Participants took a survey powered by Qualtrics in which they were asked about their demographics and environmental behaviors. They also chose between two free products: one pro-environmental and one generic.

Measures.

Perceived socioeconomic status (SES). Using the Socioeconomic Status Ladder, participants placed their families on an illustrated ladder which represented where people stand in society (Adler, N. E., Boyce, T., Chesney, M.A., Cohen, S., Folkman, S., Kahn, R. L., & Syme, S. L., 1994).

Environmental orientation. Using the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP), participants responded on a Likert scale that measured beliefs about humans' ability to influence the state of the environment (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000).

Money-independent environmental behaviors. Select questions from the Recurring Pro-environmental Behavior Scale (REBS) along with two original questions were used to measure frequency of environmental behaviors that do not require spending money (Brick, Sherman, & Kim, 2017).

Method (cont.)

Measures, cont.

Money-dependent environmental behaviors. Select questions from the REBS, along with one original question were used to measure how frequently participants engage in pro-environmental actions that require spending money.

Pro-environmental product choice. Participants were asked to choose between the pro-environmental or conventional form of five free products.

Results & Discussion

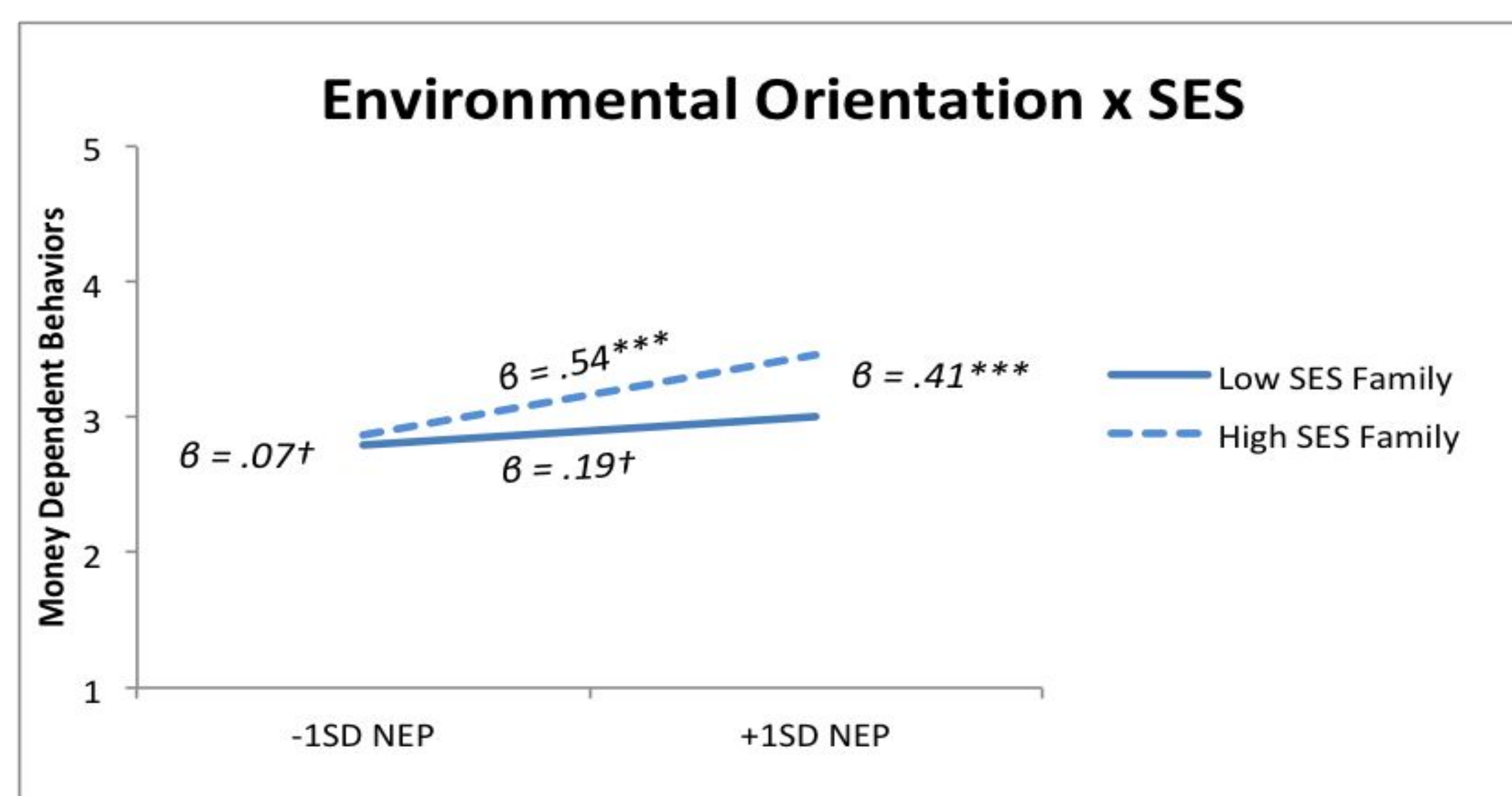


Figure 1. A line graph demonstrating the interaction between Environmental Orientation and Family SES in predicting Money-Dependent behaviors.

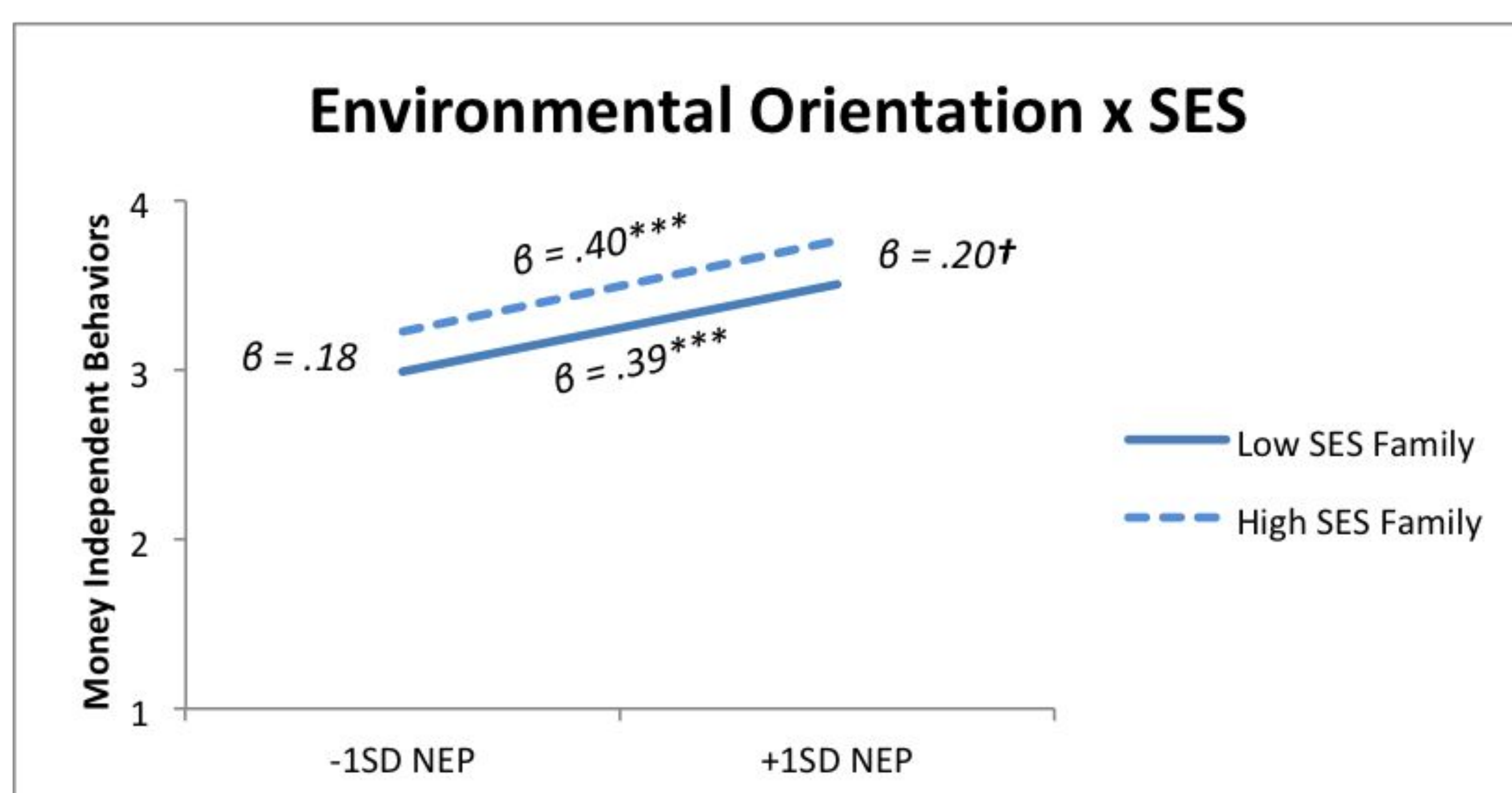


Figure 2. A line graph demonstrating the significant main effect of Environmental Orientation (NEP) on Money-Independent behaviors.

Results & Discussion (cont.)

We ran a hierarchical regression on money dependent and money independent behaviors. Main effects were found for family socioeconomic status (SES) and environmental orientation (NEP) on money dependent behaviors. An interaction between SES and NEP shows that these factors predict money-dependent behaviors (Fig. 1). Main effects of NEP and SES were also found for money independent behaviors. There was no interaction between the participants' SES and NEP in predicting money independent behaviors (Fig. 2). A main effect of NEP was found to predict product preference. However, no interaction was present and no main effect of SES was found to predict product preference, thus demonstrating that without monetary factors, environmental orientation is a strong predictor of product preference.

Conclusions & Future Directions

Our study contributes to literature on understanding how socioeconomic status and environmental orientation affect participation in pro-environmental behaviors. Prior studies have measured pro-environmental behaviors in a way that was financially biased, which has resulted in a positive correlation between individual socioeconomic status (SES) and environmental behaviors (Dunlap & York, 2008).

By utilizing measures that do not necessitate financial expenditure, our study suggests that individuals from low SES backgrounds are just as likely as those from high SES backgrounds to engage in pro-environmental actions.

In addition, our measure of perceived SES specifically emphasized family background over individual SES. Compared to perceived individual SES, perceived family SES produced significant main effects of SES and NEP that critique previous literature. We suggest that future research explore this relationship using varied measures of SES in order to prove that environmentalism is not exclusive to one social class.

References

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