“Green” Doesn’t Always Make Good Impressions: Evaluations of Different Types of Environmentalists

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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2010

Abstract

In the present research, I examined individuals’ evaluative responses toward traditional representations of environmentalists (e.g., tree-huggers and radical activists) as well as less typical but more mainstream environmentalists. Undergraduate students read about one of three types of environmentalists (i.e., radical activist, tree-hugger, or mainstream environmentalist). Participants then rated the extent to which they liked the individual they read about. Results revealed that participants evaluated the tree-hugger and radical activist less favourably than a typical student. In contrast, participants responded as favourably toward the mainstream environmentalist as they did toward a typical student. These findings indicate that individuals have distinct impressions of different types of environmentalists: Whereas mainstream environmentalists may receive favourable evaluations from individuals, stereotypical environmentalists may elicit negative reactions and even alienate members of the public.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors, Penelope Lockwood and Alison Chasteen, for their guidance and support throughout the completion of this research. I am also grateful to Robin Burns, Jenny Kang, Rebecca Brenner, Shannon O’Neill, and Rasan Boksh for their assistance with data collection.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Despite increasingly unequivocal evidence that climate change is occurring at a rapid rate (Pachauri & Reisinger, 2007) and may result in catastrophic geographic, social, and economic consequences (Metz, Davidson, Bosch, Dave, & Meyer, 2007), individuals worldwide have been slow to adopt pro-environmental behaviours. Indeed, a recent report on past environmental performance and future-oriented policies of G8 nations indicates that even those countries that are performing well relative to others are still far from achieving environmental standards that are necessary to mitigate the consequences of climate change (Höhne, Eisbrenner, Hagemann, & Moltmann, 2009). Environmentalists, individuals strongly committed to protecting the environment, may be instrumental in achieving such environmental goals and ensuring a sustainable future by promoting pro-environmental values among others. Given that environmentalists often act as ambassadors of the pro-environmental movement by conducting local workshops, leading community sustainability projects, and organizing public demonstrations to voice concerns about the environment (e.g., Hopper & Nielsen, 1991), they may play a key role in enhancing global pro-environmental efforts not only by leading sustainable lifestyles but also by encouraging others to adopt similar environmentally responsible behaviours.

It may be the case, however, that members of the public are receptive to the efforts of environmentalists only to the extent that they have favourable impressions of these individuals. Although perceivers may respond positively toward environmentalists who adopt a mainstream approach to environmental responsibility and offer practical advice for leading sustainable lifestyles, they may be resistant to environmentalists who exhibit eccentric qualities or impose their own pro-environmental values on others. In the present research, I examined individuals’ evaluations of different types of environmentalists.

Researchers have not previously assessed individuals’ impressions of environmentalists systematically. A handful of studies examining the life experiences of pro-environmentalists provide indirect evidence that individuals view environmentalists positively (e.g., Chawla, 1998, 1999; Palmer, 1993; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Tanner, 1980, 1998). In one set of studies, for example, participants described factors that cultivated their interest in protecting the
environment, including their relationships with pro-environmental family members, teachers, and friends (e.g., Corcoran, 1999). In general, responses conveyed that participants greatly respected and admired the pro-environmental individuals named, suggesting that participants evaluated these environmentalists favourably. Because participants were asked to describe factors that fostered their interest in protecting the environment (e.g., Chawla, 1998, 1999; Palmer, 1993; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Tanner, 1980, 1998), however, it seems likely that participants may have selectively recalled only those environmentalists of whom they had favourable impressions. Moreover, samples of participants in past studies generally included only those individuals who identified themselves as environmentalists and those employed in such environmental industries as wildlife preservation, land use planning, and environmental education (e.g., Chawla, 1999; Corcoran, 1999; Palmer, 1993). Given that individuals tend to have particularly positive impressions of members of their own social groups (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals who have dedicated their lives to protecting the environment likely evaluate other environmentalists more favourably than do non-environmentalists.

In sum, it remains unclear how individuals in general evaluate environmentalists. Specifically, it may be the case that individuals’ impressions of environmentalists are not uniformly positive. Variation in the valence of individuals’ responses may be likely if perceivers distinguish between different types of environmentalists and have distinct evaluative responses toward them. Researchers have suggested that ambivalence in individuals’ impressions of older adults can be attributed to the presence of multiple subgroups that are perceived to comprise this social category (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Cuddy & Fiske, 2002; Hummert, 1990). Thus, similar to the way in which such subgroups of older adults as perfect grandparents and shrews/curmudgeons elicit positive and negative evaluations, respectively (Schmidt & Boland, 1986), individuals’ impressions of environmentalists may vary depending on the type of environmentalist under consideration.

Indeed, portrayals of environmentalists in the media and popular culture lend support to this possibility that individuals distinguish between different types of environmentalists and express distinct evaluative responses toward them. Perhaps the most common of these representations is that of the tree-hugger. In fact, this stereotype of environmentalists has permeated Western culture to such a degree that the Oxford English Dictionary (2003) defines a tree-hugger as “an
environmentalist.” Tree-huggers are most commonly characterized by their extreme love for nature, strong commitment to leading pro-environmental lifestyles, and peaceful attempts to encourage other individuals to engage in sustainable behaviours. Although tree-huggers may earn respect from members of the public for their dedication to environmental protection, their enthusiasm for endorsing notions of sacrifice that characterize the traditional discourse on environmentalism (e.g., DeYoung, 2000; Kaplan, 2000) may be unappealing to others. Indeed, an environmentalist who eagerly embraces such lifestyle sacrifices as avoiding vacations, foregoing luxuries, and wearing environmentally friendly but not necessarily fashionable clothing may seem highly eccentric. Thus, despite their unwavering commitment to protecting the environment, tree-huggers may still be subject to negative evaluations from perceivers.

Although the tree-hugger may be the most stereotypical representation of environmentalists, an increasingly common characterization is that of the radical activist. Similar to tree-huggers, radical activists are known for their strong commitment to leading sustainable lifestyles and determination to motivate members of the public to take action against environmental issues. Despite their good intentions, however, their dedication is often manifested in behaviours that appear militant, hostile, and even dangerous. In fact, radical forms of environmental activism are recognized by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as a form of terrorism, namely ecoterrorism. In the past, members of radical environmental organizations have engaged in behaviours as extreme as committing arson, issuing death threats, and producing up to one million dollars in property damage (FBI, 2001). To the extent that individuals associate environmental activists with a willingness to endanger the lives of ordinary citizens and inflict extensive damage upon social institutions, solely for the purpose of promoting environmental awareness, this type of environmentalist may evoke particularly unfavourable reactions from others.

In the present research, I examined individuals’ evaluations of tree-huggers and radical activists, assessing whether or not these traditional environmentalist subgroups are indeed perceived to be less likeable than the average individual. In addition, I examined the possibility that an environmentalist who represents concern for the environment without the eccentricity of a tree-hugger or the militancy of an activist might be perceived to be more likeable. For example, an environmentalist who organizes social events to raise funds for environmental initiatives and uses local and organic ingredients to make popular food environmentally friendly may be
evaluated positively for engaging in pro-environmental behaviours while still possessing several attractive qualities. In the present studies, I examined these possibilities experimentally. In a pilot study, I first confirmed that tree-huggers and radical activists are indeed perceived to be typical representations of environmentalists. Subsequently, I examined whether these stereotypical types of environmentalists are evaluated unfavourably relative to a less typical but more mainstream environmentalist.

Given that radical activists and tree-huggers possess relatively unattractive qualities, I predicted that participants would perceive these environmentalists to be less likeable than a typical student. Mainstream environmentalists, in contrast, represent a more positive image of pro-environmentalism. Thus, I predicted that participants would not subject the mainstream environmentalist to the negative evaluations generally associated with environmentalism and instead perceive this type of environmentalist to be as likeable as a typical student.
Chapter 2
Pilot Study

I have argued that environmentalists are often characterized as either gentle, tree-hugging nature-lovers or militant, tree-spiking activists. Accordingly, I first conducted a pilot study to confirm that such characterizations are indeed perceived to be “typical” environmentalists.

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

Participants were 7 male and 22 female introductory psychology students at the University of Toronto ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.59$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.64$) who took part in the study as part of a larger questionnaire about personality traits. Participants received course credit or $10 for their participation.

2.1.2 Procedure

Participants read descriptions of three types of environmentalists: a tree-hugger (“He (or she) loves nature, and is often described as a tree-hugger. He is rather odd-looking in how he dresses, and often seems scruffy. He is sometimes perceived to be rather eccentric, but generally peaceful and unpretentious. He is a simple and down-to-earth person who loves to be outdoors, and cares deeply about nature.”), an activist (“He (or she) is an activist, who attends political demonstrations protesting anti-environmental policies. He actively campaigns to try to convince people to change their behaviours and become more pro-environmental. He can be confrontational and opinionated at times when expressing his strong concerns regarding environmental issues. His views are sometimes perceived to be relatively extreme or even radical by mainstream society.”), and a mainstream environmentalist (“He (or she) is a smart, savvy and socially-skilled person who likes to come up with fun and creative ways to promote pro-environmentalism. He dresses well, and is perceived to be cool, hip, and attractive by others. He is intelligent, and is always up-to-date on the latest environmental news. He is very popular with others”). Participants then rated the extent to which each description represented a “typical” environmentalist on a 7-point Likert-type scale with endpoints labelled 1(not at all representative of a typical environmentalist) and 7(very representative of a typical
environmentalist). The order in which the three descriptions were presented was counterbalanced across participants.

2.2 Results and Discussion

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant difference in typicality across environmentalists, $F(2,56) = 5.78, p = .005, \eta^2_p = .17$. Paired t-tests revealed that, as predicted, both the tree-hugger ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.54$) and the activist ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.23$) were perceived to be more typical of environmentalists than was the mainstream environmentalist ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.44$), $p_s < .02$. Ratings of the tree-hugger and activist did not differ, $t(28) = .36, p = .72$. In addition, comparisons relative to the scale midpoint indicated that participants perceived the tree-hugger and activist to be highly typical environmentalists, $p_s < .001$, whereas this was not true of the mainstream environmentalist, $p = .53$.

In sum, my pilot study confirms that tree-huggers and activists are perceived to be typical environmentalists, whereas mainstream environmentalists are viewed as relatively atypical. Next, I examined whether these typical environmentalists are disliked relative to the less typical but more mainstream environmentalist.
Chapter 3
Main Study

Given the eccentric and militant natures of tree-huggers and radical activists, respectively, I have argued that individuals may dislike these traditional types of environmentalists but respond more favourably toward an environmentalist who adopts a mainstream approach to sustainability. In the following study, I examined this possibility directly.

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Participants were 67 male and 76 female introductory psychology students at the University of Toronto \( (M_{\text{age}} = 18.87 \text{ years}, SD_{\text{age}} = 2.48) \) who participated in the study for course credit or $10.

3.1.2 Procedure

Participants were recruited to participate in a study about perceptions of adjustment to university life. This cover story was used to minimize suspicion regarding the true purpose of the study. Upon arrival at the lab, participants were randomly assigned to read one of four self-descriptions ostensibly written by students who had participated in a previous study. Each gender-neutral self-description portrayed one of the three types of environmentalists (radical activist, tree-hugger, or mainstream environmentalist), or a typical student (control condition). The self-description contained information about the student’s life as a university student, including descriptions of extra-curricular activities, community involvement, diet, lifestyle, and plans for the future that are considered to be typical of the type of environmentalist that the student was intended to represent, or of a typical student.

For example, the radical activist described engaging in abrasive behaviours (e.g., “I also organize rallies outside chemical research labs both on campus and within the community to protest the production of harmful chemical substances and the release of toxins into the environment”) and attempting to impose his or her values on others (e.g., “For the past few months I’ve been trying to convince my cousin to give up his car for a bike. It really frustrates me that he keeps driving everywhere when he could easily bike or walk”).
Whereas the radical activist advocated a militant approach to pro-environmentalism, the tree-hugger described engaging in more peaceful behaviours (e.g., “As a member of the Environmental Students’ Union I help to clean up conservation areas and rivers in Toronto every week”) and gently encouraging others to make environmentally responsible lifestyle choices (e.g., For the past few months, I’ve been encouraging my cousin to give up his car for a bike. I’ve even offered to visit some used bike shops with him so that he can learn more about different types of bikes”).

The mainstream environmentalist, in comparison, described engaging in appealing pro-environmental activities (e.g., “I’m involved in organizing social events at clubs and lounges to raise money for grassroots-level environmental organizations in Toronto”) and proposing practical solutions to motivate others to become more environmentally conscious (e.g., “I’ve been encouraging my cousin to consider eco-friendly alternatives to driving. I know that public transit isn’t practical for everyone’s lifestyle, so I’ve suggested that he think about making his next car a good-quality hybrid”).

To serve as a control target, the typical student discussed involvement in activities that were not related to environmental issues (e.g., “Along with other members of Students Against Drunk Driving at UofT, I also participate in presentations delivered to Toronto high school students that are aimed at reducing drunk driving among teens”). In addition, this target did not describe his or her lifestyle as pro-environmental (e.g., I live in the same building as my older cousin who owns his own car, so I get rides from him whenever I can. It’s pretty convenient to live close to someone with a car”). See Appendix A for full-text versions of all four self-descriptions.

After reading the self-description, participants rated 10 items concerning the extent to which they liked the student they read about (e.g., “It would be fun to hang out with this student,” “I can see myself being friends with this student”). Ratings were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale with endpoints labelled 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). Next, in order to verify that participants perceived the activist to represent an abrasive environmentalist, participants were asked to rate two adjectives assessing the extent to which the student was militant (e.g., “aggressive” and “forceful”). To confirm that participants viewed the tree-hugger to be eccentric (i.e., socially unattractive) and the mainstream environmentalist to be socially attractive, participants then rated the student on eight items concerning social attractiveness (e.g., “cool,”
“interesting,” “approachable”). In addition, to ensure that the radical activist, tree hugger, and mainstream environmentalist self-descriptions were, in fact, perceived to portray environmentalists, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the student was environmentally friendly. Participants also rated the student on several additional traits that were not the focus of the present analyses. Ratings of adjectives were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale with endpoints labelled 1 (not at all characteristic of the student) and 7 (very characteristic of the student). See Appendices B and C for complete versions of each measure. Lastly, participants completed a demographics questionnaire before being debriefed and thanked for their participation.

3.2 Results and Discussion

3.2.1 Liking

In order to assess individuals’ overall impressions of different types of environmentalists, I averaged the 10 items used to assess liking into a single index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$). Results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant effect of target on liking, $F(3,139) = 5.33, p = .002, \eta^2_p = .10$. As predicted, simple contrasts revealed that participants liked the tree-hugger ($M = 4.40, SD = 1.08$) and radical activist ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.15$) significantly less than they liked the typical student ($M = 4.92, SD = .87$), $ps \leq .05$. Ratings of the mainstream environmentalist ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.25$) and typical student did not differ, $t(139) = -.40; p = .69$.

3.2.2 Militant

To verify that the radical activist was perceived to be militant, I averaged the two items used to assess militancy (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference across targets on this evaluative response, $F(3, 139) = 9.03, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .16$. Simple contrasts indicated that participants did indeed perceive the radical activist ($M = 4.05, SD = 1.62$) to be significantly more militant than the tree-hugger ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.51$), mainstream environmentalist ($M = 2.74, SD = 1.55$), and typical student ($M = 2.37, SD = 1.13$), $ps < .006$.

3.2.3 Socially Attractive

In order to confirm that participants viewed the mainstream environmentalist to be relatively socially attractive and the tree-hugger to be relatively eccentric or socially unattractive, I averaged the eight items used to assess social attractiveness into a single index (Cronbach’s $\alpha =$
Results of a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of target on this trait, $F(3,139) = 3.26, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .07$. Simple contrasts indicated that participants perceived both the radical activist ($M = 4.93, SD = .72$) and the tree-hugger ($M = 4.94, SD = .68$) to be significantly less socially attractive than the typical student ($M = 5.47, SD = .87$), $ps < .02$, whereas evaluations of the mainstream environmentalist ($M = 5.19, SD = 1.08$) did not differ from those of the typical student on this dimension, $p = .17$.

### 3.2.4 Environmentally Friendly

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant overall difference between the targets in terms of the extent to which participants viewed them to be environmentally friendly, $F(3,139) = 166.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .78$. Simple contrasts indicated that the radical activist ($M = 6.98, SD = .16$), tree-hugger ($M = 6.97, SD = .17$), and mainstream environmentalist ($M = 7.00, SD = .00$) were all rated as significantly more environmentally friendly than the typical student ($M = 4.35, SD = 1.20$), $ps < .001$.

The results of this research indicate that individuals have distinct evaluative responses toward different types of environmentalists. Despite the fact that participants perceived all three environmentalists to be equally environmentally friendly, participants disliked the radical activist and tree-hugger relative to the typical student but liked the mainstream environmentalist as much as they liked the typical student. These findings suggest that individuals’ impressions of environmentalists are not uniformly positive or negative. Whereas mainstream environmentalists, who possess appealing characteristics (e.g., socially attractive), may elicit favourable reactions, radical activists and tree-huggers, who are defined primarily by undesirable traits (e.g., militant and socially unattractive), may receive negative evaluations.

This heterogeneity in individuals’ impressions provides evidence for the existence of perceptually meaningful and distinct types of environmentalists. In the case that individuals truly distinguish among different types of environmentalists, it is expected that perceivers would have distinct impressions of them. Just as previous research demonstrates that variation in evaluative responses toward older adults and women can be attributed to the existence of age (Schmidt & Boland, 1986) and gender (Haddock & Zanna, 1994) subgroups, respectively, variation in individuals’ impressions of environmentalists may verify the presence of distinct types of environmentalists.
Chapter 4
General Discussion

In the present research, I examined individuals’ impressions of both stereotypical representations of environmentalists (e.g., tree-huggers and radical activists) and less typical but more mainstream environmentalists. Results indicate that individuals’ impressions of environmentalists are not uniformly positive or negative. Indeed, whereas the more traditional types of environmentalists elicit relatively unfavourable reactions from individuals, mainstream environmentalists receive more favourable evaluations.

These findings differ from the results of previous studies, which suggest that evaluations of environmentalists are relatively positive (e.g., Chawla, 1998, 1999; Palmer, 1993; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Tanner, 1980, 1998). In past research, however, participants were individuals who indicated that they were strongly committed to protecting the environment. In addition, participants were essentially instructed to consider only those environmentalists of whom they had favourable impressions. The present research addressed these methodological limitations by including a more diverse sample of participants and examining a broader range of environmentalists. Thus, by assessing individuals’ evaluations of environmentalists more generally, it is possible to demonstrate that impressions of some environmentalists are negative. Furthermore, given that participants perceived the radical activist and tree-hugger to be highly typical environmentalists and generally evaluated them less favourably than a more atypical mainstream environmentalist, the results of this research indicate that individuals’ overall impressions of environmentalists as a group may be relatively negative.

In the case that perceivers have distinct impressions of different types of environmentalists, individuals may be more likely to interact with some types of environmentalists than with others. Research indicates that individuals are more likely to pursue social interactions with those of whom they have positive impressions than with those of whom they have negative impressions, because they expect interactions with the former to be more pleasant (Denrell, 2005; Montoya & Horton, 2004; Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2003). In the present study, individuals evaluated the mainstream environmentalist relatively favourably whereas the radical activist and the tree-hugger received less favourable evaluations. Most importantly, many items used to assess target likeability focused on participants’ desire to engage in future social interactions with the student
they read about (e.g., “It would be fun to hang out with this student,” “I would enjoy having this student as a roommate”). The results of this research suggest, therefore, that individuals may be more willing to interact with a mainstream environmentalist than with those environmentalists who represent more traditional notions of sustainability (i.e., radical activists and tree-huggers).

Individuals’ initial evaluations of environmentalists may also have implications for the stability of their impressions. Past research indicates that individuals are more likely to interpret information about socially undesirable traits and behaviours as diagnostic of an individual’s disposition, relative to information about positive characteristics. For this reason, when perceivers initially have negative impressions of an individual, they are less likely to seek further evidence of the individual’s disposition by engaging in additional interactions, which renders negative impressions more stable than positive impressions (Ybarra, 2002; Ybarra, Schaberg, & Keiper, 1999). Such previous findings suggest that the stability of individuals’ impressions of environmentalists may vary across different types of environmentalists: Whereas positive impressions of mainstream environmentalists may enhance the likelihood that individuals will interact extensively with such environmentalists, affording malleability in individuals’ evaluations, negative initial impressions of tree-huggers and radical activists may reduce motivation to interact with these environmentalists, thereby decreasing the likelihood that individuals’ negative evaluations will change. In this case, members of the public may be especially likely to maintain negative impressions of tree-huggers and radical activists. As a result, individuals may avoid interacting with environmentalists who, despite engaging in eccentric and militant behaviours, still possess positive qualities, exhibit strong pro-environmental values, and model sustainable behaviour quite well. Ultimately, therefore, differences in the nature and stability of individuals’ evaluations of distinct types of environmentalists may perpetuate differences in the extent to which individuals interact with these types of environmentalists on a regular basis.

Such potential variation in the degree to which individuals are exposed to different types of environmentalists may have implications for the likelihood that each type of environmentalist will serve as a model of sustainable behaviour for others. Past research indicates that knowledge of methods for performing pro-environmental behaviours predicts the likelihood that individuals will, in fact, make environmentally responsible lifestyle choices (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). By engaging in pro-environmental behaviours on a regular basis, therefore, environmentalists
may boost environmental responsibility among others by demonstrating various ways of incorporating sustainability into one’s lifestyle. Indeed, researchers have previously found that individuals who excel in a given domain can boost others’ performance in that same domain by modelling specific behaviours that promote successful outcomes (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Lockwood, McShane, Wong, & Dolderman, 2004).

It may be the case, however, that individuals do not have an equal opportunity to learn from all types of environmentalists. The results of the present research indicate that individuals respond more favourably toward mainstream environmentalists than toward tree-huggers and radical activists, which suggests that individuals may be more willing to interact with a mainstream environmentalist than with those who personify more traditional representations of environmentalism. In the case that individuals have greater exposure to a mainstream environmentalist, they may have more opportunities to acquire strategies for engaging in pro-environmental behaviours from this type of environmentalist than from a tree-hugger or radical activist. As mentioned above, tree-huggers and radical activists, though seemingly eccentric and abrasive, may still model sustainable behaviours appropriately. The negative evaluations that these environmentalists elicit, however, may substantially reduce the opportunity for individuals to learn from these environmental role models. Ultimately, therefore, individuals’ impressions of environmentalists may have implications for the likelihood that various types of environmentalists will be effective in boosting others’ commitment to environmental responsibility. Ironically, the very behaviours that tree-huggers and radical activists engage in to motivate others to address environmental issues may only alienate members of the public and reduce the likelihood that other individuals will adopt sustainable lifestyles.

Examining such implications of individuals’ impressions of environmentalists is critical given the potential practical applications of this research for initiatives aimed at promoting environmental responsibility among individuals. Environmentalists are often active in their communities as leaders of environmental awareness campaigns and sustainability projects (Hopper & Nielsen, 1991). In the case that individuals evaluate some types of environmentalists (e.g., mainstream environmentalists) more favourably than others (e.g., radical activists and tree-huggers), individuals may be more receptive to pro-environmental initiatives spearheaded by the former rather than the latter. Identifying the types of environmentalists with whom individuals
are most willing to interact could play a critical role in developing strategies that are effective in overcoming resistance to sustainability campaigns and initiatives.

Gaining insight into individuals’ impressions of environmentalists may also help to identify the types of environmentalists who can deliver pro-environmental messages most effectively. Past research on persuasion indicates that the source of a persuasive appeal can influence the impact of the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). In particular, researchers have previously found that messages elicit greater attitude and behaviour change to the extent that they are delivered by a likeable source (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Bichsel, & Hoffman, 2002; Roskos-Ewoldsen & Fazio, 1992). The impact of a pro-environmental message, therefore, may be determined in part by the type of environmentalist who delivers the appeal: Although individuals may respond favourably to a message delivered by a mainstream environmentalist, they may disregard an appeal delivered by a more traditional type of environmentalist. Given the extensive use of persuasive communication in initiatives aimed at promoting environmental responsibility (Bator & Cialdini, 2000; Nisbet, 2009; Pelletier & Sharp, 2008; Schultz & Zelezny, 2003), research that provides insight into individuals’ impressions of various types of environmentalists may elucidate methods for improving pro-environmental campaigns.

Although the present research examined individuals’ evaluative responses toward general types of environmentalists, rather than toward specific environmentalists, participants were provided with rich descriptions of the student they read about. These extensive self-descriptions may not be characteristic of the degree of information individuals typically possess about environmentalists. Indeed, rather than engaging in extensive interactions with environmentalists that would provide an opportunity for disclosure of substantial personal information, members of the public may typically receive only that information pertaining to an environmentalist’s physical appearance and membership in environmental organizations. Research indicates that, when provided with detailed information about a target, individuals base their evaluations more extensively on individuating information about the target than on the target’s group membership (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Gordon & Arvey, 2004; Hilton & Fein, 1989; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005). It remains possible, therefore, that individuals’ evaluations in the present study reflected responses toward specific, idiosyncratic details about the student, rather than toward defining traits of the type of environmentalist that the student was intended to represent. For example, participants may have derogated the tree-
hugger and radical activist only because the profiles depicting these environmentalists contained negative information about the targets that clearly emphasized their eccentric and militant natures, respectively.

Results of a separate study (Bashir, Lockwood, Chasteen, & Boksh, unpublished data), however, provide evidence against these alternative explanations and concerns. In the study, I examined individuals’ evaluative responses toward environmentalists when participants were provided with only a photo and brief description of a target. Importantly, the target descriptions did not contain any negative information about the environmentalists. Nonetheless, similar to the results concerning the tree-hugger and radical activist in the present research, participants perceived a stereotypical environmentalist to be less likeable than a typical student. These findings suggest that the results of the current study are not an artifact of the extensive information provided about the environmentalists or of the specific characteristics and behaviours described.

I also note that the present research did not examine individuals’ evaluative responses during actual interactions with environmentalists. Given, however, that individuals typically decide whether or not to engage in an interaction based on how they imagine they will feel during the social exchange (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2003), researchers have suggested that methods used to assess evaluations outside the context of live interactions are ecologically valid. In the case that individuals perceive tree-huggers to be socially unattractive and strongly dislike the militant nature of radical activists, members of the public may anticipate that interactions with these types of environmentalists will be unpleasant and avoid interacting with them altogether. The method used in the present research, therefore, can provide insight into the evaluative responses toward environmentalists that may influence decisions regarding potential future interactions with these individuals.

Although the present research describes the way in which individuals’ impressions of distinct types of environmentalists differ, it does not provide an explanation for such observed variation in evaluative responses. Given that similarity predicts liking (Byrne, 1971; Jones, Pelham, Carvallo, & Mirenberg, 2004), it may be the case that individuals evaluate a mainstream environmentalist more favourably than a traditional environmentalist because individuals can more easily relate to a mainstream environmentalist. Perceived similarity between the self and different types of environmentalists, therefore, may at least partially account for the variation in
evaluative responses toward distinct environmentalist subgroups. In the present research, however, participants were not asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived themselves to be similar to the environmentalist they read about. Future research that examines this potential mediator of evaluative responses toward environmentalists may identify factors that can account for observed differences in individuals’ impressions.

In addition to examining perceived similarity, future research must also rule out the possibility that differences among distinct types of environmentalists in terms of their perceived commitment to sustainability may in part account for the variation in individuals’ evaluations of environmentalists. Despite the fact that participants in this research viewed all three types of environmentalists to be equally environmentally friendly, mean ratings of this trait were close or equivalent in value to the upper endpoint of the rating scale for all three environmentalists, indicating that results may reflect a ceiling effect. It may be the case that individuals view tree-huggers and activists to be more pro-environmental than mainstream environmentalists, but the measure used in this study was unable to capture relative differences among individuals who are all perceived to be highly pro-environmental. Indeed, the results of the pilot study indicate that individuals perceive tree-huggers and activists to be more typical of environmentalists in general than mainstream environmentalists. Research indicates that stereotypes associated with a social category are more easily activated following exposure to a typical exemplar of the category rather than to an atypical exemplar (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Castelli, 1999). Thus, one may expect ratings of traits closely associated with the environmentalist social category (e.g., environmentally friendly) to be higher or less variable for the more typical tree-hugger and activist subgroups than for the less typical mainstream environmentalist subgroup. In future research, therefore, it will be important to include more sensitive measures of commitment to environmental responsibility and examine whether differences across environmentalists on this dimension may in part mediate individuals’ evaluative responses toward different types of environmentalists.

Understanding factors that influence individuals’ receptivity to environmentalists also requires further exploration of the complexity characterizing individuals’ impressions of environmentalists. Researchers who previously examined individuals’ experiences with environmentalists did not distinguish among different types of environmentalists. In the present study, I aimed to overcome this limitation by examining individuals’ evaluative responses
toward multiple types of environmentalists. It remains possible, however, that not all types of environmentalists were represented in the present research. For example, such environmentally responsible individuals as Al Gore and Prince Charles do not seem to closely resemble radical activists, tree-huggers, or mainstream environmentalists. Given that these environmentalists may elicit distinct evaluative responses, in future research, it will be important to identify additional types of environmentalists and assess the reactions they elicit from others.

Such efforts to explore the complexity characterizing individuals’ impressions of environmentalists may be especially important when considering the way in which a perceiver’s own identity may influence his or her evaluations. In the present study, I examined individuals’ evaluative responses toward environmentalists without regard to perceivers’ identities as environmentalists or non-environmentalists. Individuals generally evaluate members of their own social groups more favourably than members of other groups (Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). On the one hand, therefore, environmentalists may evaluate tree-huggers and radical activists more favourably than do non-environmentalists. Conversely, however, environmentalists, particularly those who are fairly mainstream, may react less favourably toward these eccentric and abrasive environmentalists than do non-environmentalists. Indeed, individuals tend to have especially unfavourable impressions of ingroup members who engage in undesirable behaviours (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). To the extent that tree-huggers and radical activists seem to compromise the image of the pro-environmental movement and alienate members of the public by engaging in socially unattractive and militant behaviours, other types of environmentalists may evaluate them particularly negatively. Future research that explores the complexity of individuals’ impressions of environmentalists will provide a more nuanced understanding of the way in which individuals respond to environmentalists. Ultimately, such insight may not only clarify the nature of evaluations associated with the environmentalist social category, but it may also inform efforts to promote environmental responsibility among members of the public.
References


Interpersonal Panel on Climate Change. Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.


Appendices

Appendix A: Target Self-Descriptions

Radical Activist

1. **What was it like to start university at UofT this year?**

   Starting university in September was pretty scary at first, but now that I’ve had the chance to get used to my classes, adjust to living on my own, and make new friends, I actually really like being at UofT. Classes are more interesting now that I get to take whichever courses I want and it’s pretty cool to take courses that weren’t available at my high school, such as psychology, environmental studies, and anthropology. I also like that things are more relaxed at university. I can plan my schedule so that I don’t have to take too many morning classes and I can even have Fridays off if I want to.

2. **How do you spend your time when you’re not in class?**

   Protecting the environment is really important to me, so I decided to join some clubs on campus that promote environmental protection. As a member of the Environmental Students' Union, I go to weekly protests at Queen’s Park to pressure the Ontario government into reducing CO₂ emissions from vehicles by 50% over the next decade. Along with other members of Students Against Climate Change, I also organize rallies outside chemical research labs both on campus and within the community to protest the production of harmful chemical substances and the release of toxins into the environment. I even joined this small group of students who work at an organic farm on weekends. Watching TV and hanging out at coffee shops just aren’t as important as digging trenches for crops, planting trees, and harvesting vegetables to support sustainable agriculture. I really like these activities because I get to meet a lot of new people while convincing students and the members of the general public that they need to be more environmentally friendly so that we don’t end up completely destroying our planet.

3. **Describe something new that you’ve been doing since you started university.**

   Now that I’m old enough to vote, I’m trying to be more involved in political issues. For example, last month my friends and I dressed up as slaughtered seals and blocked all of the entrances to the Toronto Convention Centre where T&K Furs International, a major corporation that’s known to support seal hunting in Canada, was scheduled to hold a large conference.

4. **Describe your involvement in the community.**

   Although it’s still several months away, I’m really excited about Earth Day this year. Even though I participated in Earth Day activities at my high school, now that I’m in university, I’m hoping to be involved in events that have a larger impact within the community. This year I’ll be
wading through polluted rivers and ponds as part of a clean-up program to improve Toronto’s water quality. Public awareness campaigns are okay, but I wouldn’t feel that I was really making a difference unless I was getting my hands dirty. We can’t expect to save the planet if we’re not willing to give up some comfort and convenience.

5. How is being in university different from being in high school?

Now that I have more responsibilities, I have to do my own grocery shopping and cook my own meals. Before I started university, I was pretty worried about this, but it’s actually not that hard at all, and it means that I get to eat the foods that I like. Eating foods that have a small impact on the environment is really important to me, so I’ve learned easy ways to prepare some of my favourite eco-friendly foods, such as tofu, lentils and brown rice, and granola. Sometimes it’s tiring to have to cook my own meals every day, especially when I have lots of homework, but once a week, my friends and I get together and cook a meal, such as vegetarian chili, which gives us a chance to live together as a community, and also gives us a break from cooking on our own.

6. How easy is it to get around the city?

I’m really glad that I decided to come to UofT because there’s always so much to do in Toronto, and it’s really easy to get around the city. I live in the same building as my older cousin who owns his own car, but even though he offers me rides a lot of the time, I always ride my bike to get around the city, even when it’s really cold outside. For the past few months I’ve been trying to convince my cousin to give up his car for a bike. It really frustrates me that he keeps driving everywhere when he could easily bike or walk. I just can’t understand why he isn’t willing to do more to protect the environment.

7. What are your plans for the rest of the school year?

I’m really excited about reading week in February. Some of the people in my program are going to Mexico or Cuba for reading week, but that’s not an option for me, not only because it would cost a lot of money, but also because I would be producing a lot of harmful CO₂. Instead, I’ve decided to spend reading week getting back to nature by going on a winter camping retreat with members of Students Against Climate Change. We have tons of cool activities planned, such as planning our spring protest schedule and therapeutic tree-hugging. We’re even going to sleep outside in shelters made from snow so that we don’t have to waste energy on heating and lighting!

8. What do you plan to do after you graduate from UofT?

Because I care a lot about the environment, after I finish school I really want to work for a non-profit organization that promotes environmental protection and sustainability. I won’t care that I’m not making very much money because protecting the environment is much more important than being financially successful. It’s our responsibility to take care of the environment; we shouldn’t have to be bribed with money in order to protect it.
Tree-Hugger

1. **What was it like to start university at UofT this year?**

   Starting university in September was pretty scary at first, but now that I’ve had the chance to get used to my classes, adjust to living on my own, and make new friends, I actually really like being at UofT. Classes are more interesting now that I get to take whichever courses I want and it’s pretty cool to take courses that weren’t available at my high school, such as psychology, environmental studies, and anthropology. I also like that things are more relaxed at university. I can plan my schedule so that I don’t have to take too many morning classes and I can even have Fridays off if I want to.

2. **How do you spend your time when you’re not in class?**

   Protecting the environment is really important to me, so I decided to join some clubs on campus that promote environmental protection. As a member of the Environmental Students’ Union I help to clean up conservation areas and rivers in Toronto every week. Also, on behalf of Students Against Climate Change, I work with other students to give suggestions to academic departments, colleges, and libraries on campus about how they can help to reduce UofT’s carbon footprint. Our club wants the UofT community to be more pro-environmental when it comes to issues like renovating buildings and packaging food. I also joined this small group of students who work at an organic farm on weekends. If I chose to watch TV or hang out at coffee shops, I wouldn’t be doing as much for the environment as I am by digging trenches for crops, planting trees, and harvesting vegetables to support sustainable agriculture. I really enjoy these activities because I get to meet a lot of new people while encouraging students and the members of the general public to make more environmentally-friendly choices so that we can all work together to save our planet.

3. **Describe something new that you’ve been doing since you started university.**

   Now that I’m old enough to vote, I’m trying to be more involved in political issues. For example, my friends and I have been lobbying the government to provide more funding for environmental education programs in Ontario elementary schools. By writing letters to politicians, circulating petitions, and speaking to MPPs, we hope to make sure that children growing up in Ontario learn how to be environmentally-friendly.

4. **Describe your involvement in the community.**

   Although it’s still several months away, I’m really excited about Earth Day this year. Even though I participated in Earth Day activities at my high school, now that I’m in university, I’m hoping to be involved in events that have a larger impact within the community. This year I’ll be creating gardens and planting trees at shelters, nursing homes, and rehab centres in Toronto with a group of students from UofT. It’ll be a great way to benefit the community by developing green spaces for current resident to enjoy and helping to protect the environment for future generations. Public awareness campaigns are a good start, but I’m determined to do as much as I
can to make sure that Earth survives. It may not be easy work, but, in my opinion, it’s a small price to pay to ensure that all plants and animals have a healthy environment to live in.

5. **How is being in university different from being in high school?**

   Now that I have more responsibilities, I have to do my own grocery shopping and cook my own meals. Before I started university, I was pretty worried about this, but it’s actually not that hard at all, and it means that I get to eat the foods that I like. Eating foods that have a small impact on the environment is really important to me, so I’ve learned easy ways to prepare some of my favourite eco-friendly foods, such as tofu, lentils and brown rice, and granola. Sometimes it’s tiring to have to cook my own meals every day, especially when I have lots of homework to do, but once a week, my friends and I get together and cook a meal, such as vegetarian chili, which gives us a chance to live together as a community, and also gives us a break from cooking on our own.

6. **How easy is it to get around the city?**

   I’m really glad that I decided to come to UofT because there’s always so much to do in Toronto, and it’s really easy to get around the city. I live in the same building as my older cousin who owns his own car, but even though he offers me rides a lot of the time, I usually ride my bike to get around the city, even when it’s really cold outside. For the past few months, I’ve been encouraging my cousin to give up his car for a bike. I’ve even offered to visit some used bike shops with him so that he can learn more about different types of bikes. It’s really important to me that I do whatever I can to help other people make choices that are more environmentally-friendly.

7. **What are your plans for the rest of the school year?**

   I’m really excited about reading week in February. Some of the people in my program are going to Mexico or Cuba for reading week, but that would make my carbon footprint pretty big. Instead, I’ve decided to spend reading week working as a guide for winter bird watching hikes. It’ll be a cool opportunity to spend time outdoors while helping others learn more about Canadian wildlife and experience the beauty of nature during the winter.

8. **What do you plan to do after you graduate from UofT?**

   Because I care a lot about the environment, after I finish school I really want to get a job as a conservation biologist. Even though I won’t make as much money as a lawyer or a CEO, it’ll be very rewarding to know that I’m helping to protect the valuable supply of natural resources and all of the really cool organisms that we have here in Canada.
Mainstream Environmentalist

1. **What was it like to start university at UofT this year?**

   Starting university in September was pretty scary at first, but now that I’ve had the chance to get used to my classes, adjust to living on my own, and make new friends, I actually really like being at UofT. Classes are more interesting now that I get to take whichever courses I want and it’s pretty cool to take courses that weren’t available at my high school, such as psychology, environmental studies, and anthropology. I also like that things are more relaxed at university. I can plan my schedule so that I don’t have to take too many morning classes and I can even have Fridays off if I want to.

2. **How do you spend your time when you’re not in class?**

   Protecting the environment is important to me, so I decided to join some clubs on campus that promote environmental protection. I’m involved in the Environmental Students’ Union where I work with other members to make it easier for UofT students to access environmentally responsible products and services. Right now we’re creating Facebook, iPhone and Blackberry applications that list eco-friendly products and services that students actually want and need (e.g., clothes, laptops, restaurants), and the best places to find them based on the user’s current location. In addition, as a member of the Students Against Climate Change fundraising committee, I’m involved in organizing social events at clubs and lounges to raise money for grassroots-level environmental organizations in Toronto. A lot of people think that they have to make sacrifices in order to protect the environment, so at our events we try to show students that they can support the environment while having fun and getting something in return. I also joined this small group of students that tries to make environmental issues part of mainstream student culture. One of the things that we do is raise awareness about environmental issues by creating and displaying environment-related photography and films around campus. I really enjoy these activities because I get to meet a lot of new people while learning more about the environment and encouraging others to make environmentally-friendly decisions.

3. **Describe something new that you’ve been doing since you started university.**

   Now that I’m old enough to vote, I’m trying to be more involved in political issues. For example, my friends and I recently set up a Twitter account that we use to send updates on environmental news involving politicians, major corporations, and other public figures in order to help students make more eco-friendly decisions when they vote, buy products, and pay for services.

4. **Describe your involvement in the community.**

   Although it’s still several months away, I already have plans for Earth Day this year. Even though I participated in Earth Day activities at my high school, now that I’m in university, I’m hoping to be involved in events that have a larger impact within the community. This year I’m helping to organize a green BBQ on campus. For a pretty low cost, students will be able to
choose from burgers made from organic, grass-fed meat or a variety of vegetarian dishes. Money that we raise will support environmental education programs in Toronto elementary schools. I think it’ll be a pretty cool event because students will get to see how easily they can make their own cooking more eco-friendly while getting to eat some really good food. It’ll also be a good way to show students that they can get involved in environmental initiatives without having to wade through polluted rivers or hug a tree.

5. **How is being in university different from being in high school?**

    Now that I have more responsibilities, I have to do my own grocery shopping and cook my own meals. Before I started university, I was pretty worried about this, but it’s actually not that hard at all, and it means that I get to eat the foods that I like. Eating foods that have a small impact on the environment is really important to me, so I’ve learned easy ways to prepare some great smoothies, wraps, and pizzas using local produce and organic ingredients. My friends are pretty impressed that it’s possible to make more environmentally-friendly food choices without giving up the foods that I love. Sometimes it’s tiring to have to cook my own meals every day, especially when I have lots of homework to do, but once a week, my friends and I get together and go out for dinner at one of the really cool eco-friendly restaurants near campus, which gives us a chance to hang out and also gives us a break from cooking on our own.

6. **How easy is it to get around the city?**

    I’m really glad that I decided to come to UofT because there’s always so much to do in Toronto, and it’s really easy to get around the city. I live in the same building as my older cousin who owns his own car, but even though he offers me rides a lot of the time, I usually take the subway, even when it’s really cold outside. For the past few months I’ve been encouraging my cousin to consider eco-friendly alternatives to driving. I know that public transit isn’t practical for everyone’s lifestyle, so I’ve suggested that he think about making his next car a good-quality hybrid. This way he’ll save money on gas while protecting the environment!

7. **What are your plans for the rest of the school year?**

    I’m really excited about reading week in February. I know that tropical vacations aren’t very good for the environment, but I really want to spend reading week on a beach with my friends. As a compromise, I’ve decided to go to Costa Rica because there are tons are eco-friendly hotels there. Also, because our flights will probably be the most environmentally harmful part of our trip, I encouraged my friends to book our flights on one of the more eco-friendly airlines. We’re also going to stay at a resort that’s walking distance to the shops, restaurants and clubs.

8. **What do you plan to do after you graduate from UofT?**

    Because I care a lot about the environment, after I finish school I really want to get a job in law, education, or politics where I could promote environmental responsibility. These days, not only is it possible to pursue a career related to environmental protection without sacrificing a
Typical Student

1. **What was it like to start university at UofT this year?**

   Starting university in September was pretty scary at first, but now that I’ve had the chance to get settled in my classes, adjust to living on my own, and make new friends, I actually really like being at UofT. Classes are more interesting now that I get to take whichever courses I want and it’s pretty cool to take courses that weren’t available at my high school, such as psychology, astronomy, and anthropology. I also like that things are more relaxed at university. I can plan my schedule so that I don’t have to take too many morning classes and I can even have Fridays off if I want to.

2. **How do you spend your time when you’re not in class?**

   I was involved in lots of extra-curricular activities at my high school, so I decided to join some clubs on campus. As a member of Party for a Cause, I help to organize social events at clubs and lounges to raise money for charities that try to improve conditions in developing countries. Along with other members of Students Against Drunk Driving at UofT, I also participate in presentations delivered to Toronto high school students that are aimed at reducing drunk driving among teens. I really enjoy these activities, because I get to meet a lot of new people while giving back to the community. When my weekends aren’t packed with homework and volunteer activities, I usually spend the day watching TV or hanging out at coffee shops with my friends.

3. **Describe something new that you’ve been doing since you started university.**

   Now that I’m old enough to vote, I’m trying to be more involved in political issues. For example, I’ve been making an effort to learn more about Canada’s political leaders and parties so that I can make an informed decision about who I want to vote for during the next election.

4. **Describe your involvement in the community.**

   Although it’s still several months away, I’m really excited about a charity concert for stroke research that I’m helping to organize this year. My job is to help the committee recruit some more sponsors to support the event. I’m really passionate about music and it’s for a good cause, so it’ll be good to help out while planning a fun night for other students. Plus, the steering committee just booked this really cool local band that I like, so it should be pretty awesome.

5. **How is being in university different from being in high school?**
Now that I have more responsibilities, I have to do my own grocery shopping and cook my own meals. Before I started uniwersity, I was pretty worried about this, but it’s actually not that hard at all, and it means that I get to eat the foods that I like. I didn’t cook very often before I started university but I’ve learned easy ways to prepare some of my favourite foods, such as pizza, pasta, and grilled cheese sandwiches. Sometimes it’s tiring to have to cook my own meals every day, especially when I have lots of homework to do, but once a week, my friends and I get together and go out for dinner at a restaurant, which gives us a chance to hang out, and also gives us a break from cooking on our own.

6. **How easy is it to get around the city?**

   I’m really glad that I decided to come to UofT because there’s always so much to do in Toronto, and it’s really easy to get around the city. I usually take the subway, but I live in the same building as my older cousin who owns his own car, so I get rides from him whenever I can. It’s pretty convenient to live close to someone with a car, especially when it’s really cold outside, or when I have to be at school really early.

7. **What are your plans for the rest of the school year?**

   I’m really excited about reading week in February. My friends and I want to spend the week on a beach somewhere warm, so we’re planning a trip to Cuba. It’ll be great to go on vacation with friends, rather than my parents, and I’m sure that I’ll be more than happy to get away from the cold weather here once February comes around. We booked our flights and hotels pretty late compared to other students, so we had to settle for a connecting flight and a hotel that isn’t very close to the most of the restaurants and clubs. It’ll take longer to get to Cuba and we’ll have to rely on cabs to get around most of the time, but we’re so excited about the trip that it really isn’t a big deal.

8. **What do you plan to do after you graduate from UofT?**

   I’m not too sure about the type of job I want when I finish school. I like helping other people, so I think it could be cool to be a doctor or a teacher. I’ve been starting to research different options and talk to people I know who work in these fields, but I’m only in first year, so I’m keeping my options open.
Appendix B: Liking Measure

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, using the scale below.

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<th>4</th>
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1. I can see myself being friends with this student
2. I think I would enjoy having this student as a roommate
3. It would be fun to join a club that is led by this student
4. I would like to get to know this student
5. I think that I could learn something from this student
6. It would be fun to hang out with this student
7. I wouldn’t mind working with this student on a group project
8. I would like to meet this student
9. I think I would like this student
10. I can identify with this student
Appendix C: Trait Ratings

Using the scale below, please rate the student on the following traits.

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</tbody>
</table>