

# Identities and Actions within Environmental Groups

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## *Abstract*

*Individuals' self-described identities were hypothesized to change as a result of participation in voluntary face-to-face groups engaged in environmental action. Semi-structured interviews and a standard interview test of identity were conducted with 159 members of 20 environmental groups and 2 non-group comparison samples from North Carolina and the Delmarva Peninsula. In agreement with the theoretical literature, interview text suggests that individual identity forms and changes over time — we refer to these transitions as “reformulations.” Definitions of self that prevent the further development of an identity as an environmentalist, or that lead to an unwillingness to perform a particular environmental action, are here called “barriers.” Interviews were coded for identities, reformulations, barriers, and actions taken, revealing significant differences across types of groups. Although some of the variation among groups may be explained by prior individual differences leading a person to join a compatible group, the qualitative interview data suggest that many of the differences come about in the processes of participating in the group and carrying out actions encouraged by the group. This perspective on action, that it leads to identity formation, is in contrast to a traditional view that environmental actions follow from attitudes, values, or knowledge of environmental damage.*

**Keywords:** *environmental groups, identity, new social movements, civic action, identity change*

## **Introduction**

In the years following the emergence of the contemporary environmental movement in the late 1960s, national opinion polls began to reveal strong public sentiment for the movement. By the 1990s, not only did poll respondents say they are in favor of environmental protection, but a majority

said they consider themselves “an environmentalist.”<sup>1</sup> This percentage is important as an index of the high degree of Americans' favorable relationship to the movement and, from the pragmatic viewpoint of an activist, suggests a potential for greater environmental activism by the public. However, it has been difficult to surmise just what people mean when they tell pollsters that they are environmentalists. Respondents could not mean, for example, that they are members of an environmental group, because only 15% of the US population say they belong to environmental groups,<sup>2</sup> a fraction of the 50-70% who say they are an “environmentalist.”

A recent theoretical approach joins the role-based theory of identity from G. H. Mead with the cultural-historical developmental approaches of L. S. Vygotsky and M. M. Bakhtin, to posit that people form identities over time as they interact with others in relation to a culturally defined sphere of action (Holland et al 1998; Holland 2000; Holland and Lave 2001). Identities are culturally influenced labels that have become personally important in the cognitive and affective organization of self. They are self-understandings that people rely upon to organize their thoughts and feelings about themselves in relation to activities and to the responses received from others. To the extent that the culturally defined sphere of action incorporates widespread cultural values, identities formed in those spheres are an avenue through which values are integrated into daily practice. An identity as a particular type of environmentalist — which may be called a conservationist, a person who cares about the earth, an Earth First!er, or other types — affects the actions that one undertakes and the values that one's actions manifest.<sup>3</sup>

From our research, we know that “environmentalist” is a personally important label, one that activists deliberate over in making self-labeling decisions. However, as we have studied environmental groups over the past several years, participated in their events, and interviewed their members and leaders, we have found that the label “environmentalist” is

too multiply defined to be treated as a descriptor of equivalent identities. Not surprisingly, given the dynamic development of the environmental movement over the past thirty or so years, there are a variety of discourses of human-environment relations.

Studies such as Brulle (1996) and McLaughlin and Khawaja (2000) distinguish discourses in the movement, but, unlike the current study, they are not based on observing and interviewing these groups directly. For example, Brulle (1996) examines the historical emergence of environmental discourses in philosophy and literature, and analyzes the writings of major environmental organizations. On the basis of these written materials, Brulle identifies six major discourses: conservationism, preservationism, ecocentrism, political ecology, deep ecology, and ecofeminism. The groups that we have studied incorporate and combine some of these discourses and also vary them in response to different contexts of action. Thus, the environmental identities fostered by the groups we study embody such discourses but also are strongly influenced by practice.

When we look at individual environmental groups, we find that members' definition of themselves is consistent with the group's identity, and with the environmental actions that the person does. For example, a member of a national environmental group who lacks experience in a local group may consider herself an environmentalist because she sends a check annually, and because she reads — and gets agitated about — a quarterly newsletter. By contrast, a member of a direct-action group may feel that one must participate in civil disobedience to be so considered, or they may even tell us that "environmentalist" is too ambiguous and they consider themselves "an activist."

Interpretations of human-environment relations are reflected in the groups' models of the sources of environmental damage. Groups "figure" the world of environmental action differently and subscribe to different narratives of blame and responsibility (Holland et al. 1998; Holland 2000). In our study, we have observed that groups out to stop chip mills and asphalt plants are active because their experiences with corporations and government have led them to civic actions — whereas, for a contrasting example, groups oriented to changing lifestyle think much more about millions of individual consumer purchases and disposal acts affecting the environment and are less likely to take civic actions. That is, we expect that concepts of self as an actor and actions taken vary according to the perceived world, which in turn corresponds to the group of participation.

The range of actions our informants consider environmental includes private consumption and disposal actions, passive reception of information, as well as public or civic actions — and our interviews cover all of these. This is in

contrast to most of the social movements literature which focuses on publicly visible political action, although some acknowledge that actors moving toward public actions are also worthy of study (McCarthy and Wolfson 1992).

These considerations have led us to study the link between environmental groups and identity. This paper analyzes identity, changes reported in identity over time, and reported "environmental" actions taken — comparing all of these across a range of environmental groups. In addition to individuals developing environmental identities participating in local environmental groups, environmental groups also develop group identities, reflected in the group's name and self-description, the issues members address, and the type of actions they encourage and endorse. These identity processes, observable through ethnographic study, lead to several questions. Do individuals' understandings of themselves — their self-descriptions — vary by the group to which they belong? How are individuals' environmental actions related to their identities? In terms of the level of activism taken by groups, there are two extremes. At one end of this theoretical continuum are members of direct action groups like Earth First!, at the other end are the public, non-environmental group members, and somewhere in between are the mail-in groups. When we consider other dimensions than just level of action, however, it is clearly not a scale but a branching tree, with groups focusing on actions within the home, protecting a particular resource for extractive use (hunters, fishers), and political action groups — which have different premises, problems, and self-definitions.<sup>4</sup> Do the types of action and levels of action that individuals engage in vary by the group in which they are involved?

## Groups Sampled

We studied in detail 20 groups that include local pro-environmental groups, a mail-in group, resource users, and a wise-use group to represent much of the diversity in a larger sample of 566 environmental groups (including 120 school groups) we have enumerated in North Carolina and the Delmarva Peninsula (Kempton et al. n.d.). We have also included two non-group comparison samples: environmental scientists (mostly from the NC Environmental Protection Agency), as well as a public sample drawn from both Delmarva and NC. We will refer to the 20 environmental groups, plus these two comparison groups as the "22 groups studied." We clustered these 22 groups into 11 type classifications, in order to increase sample sizes and facilitate group comparisons. The 11 group classifications are radical, civic, national, lifestyle, environmental justice, students, conservationists, wise use, fisheries groups, scientists, and the public (please see Figure 1). In this paper, we will refer to the 22

groups as just “groups,” and the 11 clusters of similar groups as “group types.”

We chose to include student environmental groups, resource user groups, and environmental scientists within our study not because we consider them to fit common images of “environmental” organizations, but because we are interested in identity development and its relationship to action among all participants in the environmental movement, not just those who might be considered typical pro-environmental activists. Relatively more civic groups are included in our sample, representing both their greater proportions in our complete enumeration and their diversity. Note that, unlike Brulle (1996)

and related work, we distinguish environmental groups not only on the basis of their discourses but also their members’ actions and identities — resulting in a rather different clustering of groups. For example, we cluster all national groups into one type because, regardless of the groups’ discourses, members take very restricted action (read newsletters and write checks) and members’ identities seem little different regardless of which group they belong to. On the other hand, we distinguish between conservationists, fisheries and wise use groups because, despite similarities in their discourses, members’ identities and actions are very different. We summarize our types briefly here, then give more complete descriptions below.

**Figure 1.** Organization of Environmental Groups by Group Types

1	Politically Active	Radical	Earth First!, Ruckus Society, Green Delaware
		Civic	DE Nature Society, DE Sierra Club, Nanticoke Watershed Preservation Cmte. HazTrak Coalition, Citizens Unite, Concerned Citizens of Rutherford Cnty
		Environmental Justice	Several NC groups
		Lifestyle	EcoTeam, Earthaven
		National	Environmental Defense (NC & Delmarva)
2	Resource Users	Students	Newark High School Nature Society, Student Environmental Action Coalition
		Conservationist	Ducks Unlimited
		Wise Use	Blue Ridge Gamelands Group
3		Fisheries	Tangier Sound Watermen’s Association, Pamlico Fisherman’s Auxiliary, New River Fishing Association
		Scientists	NC EPA and others
		Public	NC & Delmarva samples

Boxes indicate 11 group types discussed in this paper. All groups are local except for National group type. Radical, civic, and environmental justice group members are active in political sphere, and members of conservation, wise use, and fisheries groups are identified as natural resource users.

1. Traditionally included in literature on environmental organizations
2. Non-traditional environmental groups included within our study
3. Non-group comparison samples

*Radical*: local; direct action, confrontational; biocentric, sometimes anarchist ideology

*Civic*: local (sometimes around one community or environmental problem); political action and networking; very diverse issues

*National*: national; mail-in membership, advocacy by staff

*Lifestyle*: local; focus on improving members' sustainable living practices and consumer actions

*Environmental Justice*: collection of several local NC groups that oppose environmental threats to the quality of life of racial minorities or poor people

*Students*: local; high school and college environmental clubs

*Conservationists*: local; while allowing some human use, in this sample, a majority are hunters; focus on land conservation and habitat protection

*Wise Use*: local; resource users; focus on maintaining human use rights

*Fisheries Groups*: local; commercial fishermen organizations; work to preserve stock but with minimal regulations; equate healthy ecosystem with maintaining healthy fish harvests (this is a specific example of a more general type, a resource user group)

*Scientists*: EPA environmental professionals and a researcher from University of North Carolina; science training

*Public*: sample of local population of adults (NC and Delmarva)

The following provides a brief description of each of the individual groups within each classification. All individuals are given pseudonyms, but group names are the true names unless noted otherwise. This description will give the reader a sense of the diversity of environmental groups we have studied, and help in interpreting subsequent tables.

*Radical*. There were three groups interviewed that we considered "radical": Earth First!, Ruckus Society, and Green Delaware. We chose to include this group type in the study because these members represent the extreme of direct environmental action, and we expect to see major differences in the identity these groups project compared to some of the mainstream groups. Earth First!, nationally known for promoting civil disobedience, is a loosely organized direct action group with a biocentric ideology that seems to materialize in local areas where environmental conflicts are heated. We interviewed members of a particular Earth First! group focused on opposition to new chip mills proposed in western NC and carrying out direct action to block them. The Ruckus Society, formed in 1995, provides training in the skills of non-violent civil disobedience to help environmental and human rights organizations achieve their goals. Our field workers attended a training workshop in order to interview

participants who were members of various direct action groups. Less radical than Earth First! and Ruckus, Green Delaware (GD) is a group formed by several long-time activists, to cooperate on action towards their various personal causes. It organizes demonstrations but not direct action; by its rhetoric, it is considered extreme by some other groups and state government staff.

*Civic*. The civic environmental groups compose our largest classification and include a combination of local groups opposing a specific facility, an umbrella group, and more broad-based groups. These groups typify participation of the citizen activist at the local/grassroots level within the environmental movement. Members interviewed from these groups were on activist or planning committees and are representative of highly involved levels of participation (unlike those in our national group sample who may have also belonged to a local group, but were not so highly involved). Groups that oppose specific local development include Citizens Unite (CU — a group pseudonym) and Concerned Citizens of Rutherford County (CCRC). CU is a neighborhood group from NC that formed in response to concerns over construction of a nearby asphalt plant. Although CU actions centered on organizing a political campaign against the plant, they, over time, expanded their focus to encompass air and clean water issues within the county and surrounding jurisdictions. Also from the NC area, CCRC is an effort on the grassroots level to fight high-capacity remote wood chip mills. This community-based effort has been ongoing for four years, and the group sees the next several years as the turning point in putting the chip mill issue on the local, state, regional, and national agenda. The HazTrak Coalition is a local political action group in Delmarva that organizes people, individuals and groups to campaign on issues related to groundwater. As an alliance or umbrella group, HazTrak provides training for individuals or groups on how to successfully address environmental problems.

The more broadly based civic groups include the Delaware Nature Society (DNS), Delaware Sierra Club (DSC), and the Nanticoke Watershed Preservation Committee (NWPC). DNS was founded in 1964 as, in their words, a membership organization that "fosters understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the natural world through education, preserves ecologically sensitive areas, and advocates stewardship and conservation of natural resources" (DNS 2000). It is Delaware's largest statewide environmental activist and lobbying organization, working with other groups, government agencies and landowners to realize its mission. DSC is a local chapter of the national Sierra Club, a subset of members who meet locally and carry out both educational activities and lobbying. The NWPC is a citizen group that is part of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance in

Delaware. Their focus is the protection of the Nanticoke River and its associated watershed by petitioning local government, and by increasing awareness through organized activities on the river.

*National.* To capture mail-in group members, interviews were done with a random sampling of Environmental Defense (ED) — previously known as Environmental Defense Fund — members living in NC and Delmarva. ED is a national organization that combines legal and scientific expertise and works through the courts, legislators, or cooperatively with corporations to solve environmental problems (Brick 1995). Participation in ED activities by members interviewed, unlike involvement in local groups, is limited to financial contributions.

*Lifestyle.* Earthaven and Global Action Plan EcoTeam were included in this study to represent groups focused on reducing environmental impacts through change in personal consumption behavior, in contrast to political or civic actions. Earthaven, a live-in community based in NC, is a living demonstration of a “neo-tribal ecovillage” dedicated to caring for people and the earth by learning, living and demonstrating holistic, sustainable culture. The Household EcoTeam Program is a local program through Global Action Plan for the Earth. The EcoTeam program was formed in 1989 to promote environmentally sustainable lifestyles by encouraging changes in daily behavior that are environmentally friendly. EcoTeam members meet monthly over an six month period to evaluate prescribed methods to reduce waste, use less water and energy, buy “eco-wise” products and encourage others to get involved.

*Environmental Justice.* The informants in these interviews were members, mostly leaders, of several local environmental justice groups in NC. Groups vary in formal organization and include loosely organized community associations ranging in activity from protests and rallies, to workshop training and conference organizing, to provisioning of financial and human resources for other groups. They share a focus on environmental threats due to historical racial or economic discrimination. Environmental threats are conceptualized as affecting their quality of life, including the human-constructed and social environment as well as the natural environment.

*Student Groups.* Often neglected in the literature on environmental groups, students participating in high school and college campus environmental groups were included in this research. The two selected for closer study were Newark High School Nature Society (NHSNS) and the University of Delaware’s Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC). NHSNS states their goal as being to help students become involved in environmental activities and show that problems are based on science as well as political and social factors.

SEAC at the University of Delaware (now renamed Students for the Environment but referred to as SEAC in this paper) is affiliated with the national organization of the same name.

*Conservation.* We have divided resource user groups into conservation, wise use, and fisheries groups. The conservation group we sampled is a Maryland regional chapter of Ducks Unlimited (Ducks). Established in the 1960’s, the mission of Ducks is to raise money to preserve and protect waterfowl habitat and educate the public about wetland and waterfowl management. Most members contribute financially; many but not all are duck hunters. All Ducks Unlimited interviewees also participated in the chapter’s organizational committee.

*Wise Use.* Although not a self-described wise use group, we categorize the Blue Ridge Gamelands Group (BRGG—a pseudonym for the group) as such because their focus is more about opposing restrictions on hunting privileges rather than habitat protection. This group began as a loosely formed grassroots group of hunters and gameland advocates in western NC protesting the exclusion of hunting rights in their traditional hunting grounds as a result of state park designation. Members agree the property should be protected from development; however, they resist loss of their common and traditional use rights in exchange for increased forest/outdoor recreation tourism. A coalition developed which linked BRGG with other multiple-use advocates (e.g., forest products, rifle/gun clubs) “against environmental advocacy groups such as the Sierra Club.” The group’s enlarged agenda now may be advocacy of hunting rights on all NC State parks.

*Fisheries Groups.* Another resource user classification we separate from conservation and wise use groups are those that represent the interests of the commercial fishermen. Members of these groups are concerned about the ramifications of government regulations imposed on the fishing industry (Weeks and Packard 1992). Although environmentalists sometimes blame them for declining fish stocks and habitat destruction, members of fisheries groups often support environmental protections (especially restrictions on land-based activities that damage fisheries). Three fisheries groups are included in this study because they address environmental policy and because of their own assertions that they are stewards of the waterways. The New River Fisherman’s Association (NRFA) was established in NC to unite and organize fishermen against the numerous fishing regulations and laws, promote letter-writing campaigns, and unite with other fishermen’s associations. Tangier Sound Waterman’s Association (TSWA) is a social network of watermen from Smith Island, MD. They originally formed as a community trade or occupational association, but over the past few years, they have been forced into political action

after the Chesapeake Bay Society convinced local government that crabbing was the cause of the blue crab decline and had the fishing season stopped. Also included in the study is the Pamlico Fishing Auxiliary (PFA), a group founded by fishers' wives to insure husbands out at sea would have a voice at public hearings and regulatory meetings. The women describe their objective as ensuring that fishermen are treated equitably.

*Scientists.* This set does not represent an organized association of scientists, rather it is a compilation of interviews with a convenience sample of environmental professionals — mostly researchers working with the US Environmental Protection Agency offices in NC. We use “scientists” as a short label, but actually two informants specialize in administrative or educational functions within the agency. We include them because of their identification with an occupational or professional role in environmental action, and as a contrast to environmental groups *per se*. Although interview quotations will show that the scientists distinguish themselves from “advocates”, all but one reported being involved at some time with at least one local or national environmental group.

*Public.* To serve as our study’s control group, two public samples, one covering the northern part of the Delmarva Peninsula and the other, the Rutherford and Boone areas of NC, were randomly selected from phone books. This set of 16 interviews was not chosen on the basis of involvement with an environmental group; therefore, it does not represent a local group. Interestingly, 40% of the ten asked from our public sample in fact, had belonged to at least one local environmental group at some point, and 10% had been members of a national group. This level of involvement in local groups is substantially higher than the national average of 15% mentioned earlier. However, group membership within our public sample is still lower than for those selected from groups — the public sample averaged membership in 0.8 environmental groups, compared to 4.5-6.3 range for those selected for being in civic or national environmental groups respectively. As this paper will show, despite group involvement, we see significant differences between the public sample and those selected as group members.

Table 1 shows age, education, and gender characteristics of the 11 group types. Some differences are predictable, lower age for the student group members, higher education for the scientists, no women in the sampled conservation or wise use groups. However, our sample of national group members in NC was oddly high in age, possibly due to an idiosyncrasy of recruiting in this area or, perhaps just a fluke of small samples. Demographic variables have been examined in previous studies of environmental opinion (Mohai and

Twight 1987), and because of irrelevance to our hypotheses, they are not tested for here. Because various groups with similar, but not identical, characteristics were combined into a general group type for analysis, our discussion will note any significant differences among individual groups within a group type.

Table 1 also shows percentages answering affirmatively to the question asked in the Gallup poll, “Do you consider yourself to be an environmentalist, or not?” Although this question is not ideal for our research, it is useful as a comparison to prior national polling. In our study’s groups, we would expect the majority of individuals to respond in the affirmative because they are members of some environmental group. The exception is with the public sample, and here we would expect a similar percentage to respond in the affirmative as is seen in national surveys — about 50% in 1999 (Gallup 1999). What we found, as shown in Table 1, was that the majority of individuals within all group types said they considered themselves environmentalists, ranging between 100% (radical, lifestyle, environmental justice, and national) to 50% (wise use).

For consistency in the paper, we order groups in Table 1 and subsequent tables identically, the ordering based on a combination of group structure and salience of self-identified environmentalist labels.

## Methods

For each of the 22 groups described here, detailed semi-structured interviews were conducted with at least five members (plus one to two leaders), and participant observation

Table 1. Affirmative responses to Gallup question and demographics by group types.

Group type (n)	Considers Self an Environmentalist	Age (mean yrs.)	Education (mean yrs.)	Sex (%F)
Radical (16)	100%	41	16	44%
Civic (41)	93%	50	16	63%
National (12)	100%	62 <sup>b</sup>	18	42%
Lifestyle (12)	100%	51	17	83%
Environmental Justice (6)	100%	48	15	33%
Students (15)	87%	19	13	73%
Conservationists (8)	88%	42	15	0%
Wise Use (8)	50%	40	14	0%
Fisheries Groups (20)	75% <sup>a</sup>	47	11	45%
Scientists (5)	60%	48	18	40%
Public (16)	57%	57	15	38%

<sup>a</sup>100% of TSWA considered themselves “environmentalists” compared to 71% and 57% of NRFA and PFA members respectively.

<sup>b</sup>There is a distinct age difference between the Delmarva and NC national group sample; mean ages were 46 and 83 respectively.

was carried out with all the local groups (not scientists, public, or national group). The interviews provide insight into personal history and identity formation of individual group members; observations helped confirm reported behaviors.

In the interview, group members are asked to describe their identity, their relationship to the environmental movement, their life history of concern about the environment, group memberships and environmental actions taken in the present. In the first section of the interview, informants are asked to list up to twenty words or phrases answering the question, “Who am I?” — a standard instrument developed by Kuhn and McPartland (1954). The next question asks, duplicating a periodic Gallup Poll question, if they consider themselves “an environmentalist,” and if so, are they a “strong environmentalist?” Then, informants are prompted for a life history narrative describing how their awareness of environmental damage originated and how it developed through time. Next, informants fill in lists of who damages and who benefits the environment, and where they place themselves among those listed. The informant is also asked when and where they got the idea of what being an environmentalist actually means. They are asked to list environmental groups with which they are associated, to describe their image of a typical environmentalist, and to complete a worksheet listing the main actions they personally do to benefit the environment. Answers to these items help capture the intensity and type of the individual’s self-identity as an environmentalist, group member, or activist, and the resulting behavior. These are all self-reported, as with any interview data, but our participant observations with the same groups provides both some validation of the reported environmental behavior and a connection with independently observed group meetings and discourse.

To enable a systematic comparison of groups to supplement our observations and impressions from the qualitative data, we developed a coding scheme. The categories were based partly on the evolving theoretical underpinnings of the project, along with categories that emerged as significant (at least to informants), based on extensive reading of transcripts. A total of 71 variables were coded from the qualitative interview transcripts, but we report only those variables relevant to this paper. For the purpose of exposition in this paper, we divide the data into the following sections: *Who Am I?*, categorization of listed self-identification terms; *Reformulations*, transitions people go through in identifying themselves as part of the environmental movement — many of which enable or encourage their taking action; *Barriers*, concerns or identity issues that seem to limit an individual’s activism; and *Actions*, reported actions specifically for environmental benefits. *Reformulations*, *Barriers*, and *Actions* variables were coded as either present (meaning the interviewee

directly stated them in the text of the interview) or absent (meaning they were not mentioned), while counts were taken for the self-identification variables in the *Who Am I?* section. A count of past or present membership with local, national, and informal environmental groups was also obtained for each interview.

Although the majority of coding was straightforward (either they said it or they did not) categorization of some answers had to be judgment calls of the coders; when in doubt, our guideline was to code only if there was an explicit mention. Two individuals coded interviews by this method (co-authors Kitchell and Tesch). As a check, six interviews were coded by both and compared. Discrepancies were found in less than 7% of the codes — an intercoder reliability of 93% — with no particular variable having high discrepancies. This check also resulted in some clarifications of definitions, so intercoder reliability should be greater than 93% for the bulk of the data.

In interpreting our results, it is important to recall that most of the items coded were volunteered. For example, we would code whether the respondent mentioned they were a member of some local community in the “Who am I?” question, or whether they mentioned voting in the free listing of environmental actions. Thus, in interpreting the results we must keep in mind that absence of a reported item can mean either that is truly absent, or that it is present but the informant did not mention it. If not mentioned, there may be a reason for that as well. For example, we assume that a mem-

Table 2. Example data on self-defined identities given by three informants.

Public (“Bruce”)	Civic (HazTrak-“Linda”)	Radical (Earth First!-“Jim”)
American	wife	an environmentalist
logical	grandmother	a revolutionary
veteran	daughter	an activist
father	sister	direct actionist
fair	friend	radical
demanding	business woman	an EarthFirster
	environmentalist	anarchist
	politician	revolutionary ecologist
	volunteer	anti-capitalist
	writer/poet	enemy of the state
	gardener	hell-raiser
	honest	hippie, pinko, commie scum
	loyal	a human
	passionate	part of real counter-culture
	fighter	nature lover
	member of my church	tree hugger
	shopper	environmental wacko, (proud of it!)
	sensitive	a watermelon (green on outside, red and black on inside)
	angry	

ber of the Green Party would consider voting to be an environmental action. However, if they have lots of other actions to report (protests, lifestyle changes, etc), they may not ever explicitly mention “voting” as an environmental action. Had we asked the individual explicitly whether their Green Party voting was an environmental action, surely they would have replied “yes”. Absence of the report may indicate that voting has lower salience than noisy protests, but, absence of our code is definitely not an indicator that the trait is itself absent. This is of course part of the cost of this type of emergent analysis of qualitative data — we recognized many of the relevant variables only as a result of (and thus, after) the interviews.<sup>5</sup>

### Differences Found Among Types of Environmental Groups

Preliminary results are presented as mean summary measures, by group type. For each summary measure (each column) the ANOVA F statistic is computed. F is used here to determine whether the group types are statistically distinct, with the significance of F given on the following line. For example, in Table 3, we observe that environmental groups do not differ significantly in using consumer labels to identify themselves, whereas they differ very significantly in labeling themselves “activists.” We use F for variables that are counts.<sup>6</sup> For dichotomous variables (present-absent), the nor-

mality assumption of ANOVA is not met so the  $\chi^2$  test is used (ANOVA is also computed for dichotomous variables, to provide comparability across measures).

Analysis will be divided into four sections, each section beginning with expectations and theoretical predictions followed by a table and discussion of actual results. An additional section compares evidence that group membership causes identity development, versus resulting from it.

### Who Am I?

At the beginning of the ID interview, interviewees were provided a worksheet and asked to fill in twenty blanks to answer the question “Who am I?” — a standard test for salient self-defined identities (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). We hypothesized, based on Holland et al (1998) that identities would be related to participation in environmental groups and experience with environmental action. As an example of the type of data this question yields, Table 2 gives the answers in the order they were written, from one member of the public sample, one from a civic group, and one from a radical group.<sup>7</sup> These three individuals were selected as illustrative examples of differences in self-identification among these groups, but are not necessarily typical of their group. Bruce’s answers are influenced by his being a veteran and are not typical of others in our public sample, and Jim coded for six environmentalist labels — a statistical outlier for the radical group type, and Jim’s choice of terms suggests

Table 3. Self Identification: Answers to “Who Am I?,” count of times mentioned per individual, averaged per group.

Group type (n)	Kin	Place	National	Ecosystem	Consumer	Conservationist	Environmentalist labels	Other activist labels
Radical (16)	1.2	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.3	0	1.2	1.1
Civic (40)	2.4	0.9	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	1.1	0.5 <sup>d</sup>
National (12)	2.4	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.1	0	0.9	0.1
Lifestyle (12)	1.3	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.5	0	0.8	0.6 <sup>e</sup>
Environmental Justice (6)	0.8	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.8
Students (15)	1.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0	0	0.5 <sup>b</sup>	0.1
Conservationists (8)	1.9	0	0	0	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.1
Wise Use (8)	1.9	0.5	0.1	0	0.4	0.5	0.3	0
Fisheries Groups (18)	2.6	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.3	0	0.3 <sup>c</sup>	0.1
Scientists (5)	3.0	0.4	0	0.6	0	0.2	1.2	0.8
Public (16)	2.3	1.2 <sup>a</sup>	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	0.1	0.1
ANOVA F value	2.1	2.0	1.0	2.1	1.3	4.7	2.4	4.7
Significance	.03	.04	.42	.03	.25	≤ .0001	.01	≤ .0001

<sup>a</sup>The average number of place identifiers differs considerably between the Delmarva and NC public samples, 0.1 and 2.3 respectively.

<sup>b</sup>An interesting contrast can be seen between the salience or evolution of environmental identities within high school and college level student groups — SEAC, the college group, had a mean value of 0.9 environmentalist labels/person, the high school group averaged 0.1.

<sup>c</sup>NRFA was the only fisheries group listing environmental identities (0.8).

<sup>d</sup>Civic groups were highly variable in “activist” identities; HazTrak (0.7), DNS (0.8), CCRC (0.2), and NWPC (0.1)

<sup>e</sup>In activist labels, Earthaven (1.0) differs markedly from EcoTeam (0.1); perhaps Earthaven attracts or develops stronger activist identities, either philosophically or due to the live-in-community.



he may be “flaunting” his environmental identity. Nevertheless, a brief comparison of the lists illustrates the stark contrasts in reported self-identification. Note that terms relating to environmentalism, community and political activism come in soon after kinship identifications by the HazTrak member and note the lack of kin terms by the younger Earth First! member.

To systematically compare these diverse identifiers across 159 interviews, identity answers were tallied by counts into 13 categories including: place term (e.g. member of . . . , resident of . . . ), national identity (American), position in the ecosystem (human, top of food chain), consumer role (driver, shopper), conservationist (exact term), environmental label (environmentalist, nature lover), and non-specific or other activist label (organizer, activist, anarchist). As a comparison we also tallied kin relations (wife, father, grandmother).

If group membership does influence or reflect salient identity, a central prediction, we would expect distribution of these labels as follows. We expect the members of civic and environmental justice groups to more often self-identify themselves as members of the local community, and the national group members to identify themselves as citizens of the nation. We expect all groups except the public to have environmentalist labels. We would expect members of the radical, civic, and environmental justice group types to have more activist labels. Lifestyle groups are doing environmental action to reduce consumption and disposal, thus members might more often identify themselves as consumers. Students, who are generally younger, have had less time to develop identities as environmentalists and, thus, are expected to have low environmental identities. We expect scientists to have low levels of activist identities due to the ideology that scientists must be objective. Due to the lack of past research on resource user groups, we limit predictions on these groups to low environmental identities, as resource users often oppose environmental policies. Specific mention of “conservationist,” however, is expected due to the stewardship rhetoric and human use philosophy. We expect frequent local or place identifiers for the fisheries groups due to the connection of livelihood to the fishing community. Our comparison variable, family and kin identities, we would expect, because of the pervasive importance of family in US society, to be central identities, and be mentioned most frequently by everyone in the sample and prior to most of the terms we tallied. The number of answers within each category was totaled per individual and a mean of individual tallies was calculated for each group and group type. Thus, a mean value of 1.0 indicates that on average, each individual within that group listed one identity that fit into that category. Table 3 provides results from the *Who Am I?* section.

Place identity terms were statistically different across groups; they were frequent among the civic, fisheries groups, and the public samples, with HazTrak, Tangier Sound Watermen, and NC public especially high at 1.9, 1.7, and 2.3 respectively. As for national identity references, although they were not statistically different, consistent with our expectation the only ones above 0.1 were members of the national mail-in group. Low national identity references for the other groups does not necessarily mean that they do not identify themselves as “Americans,” for example, but that this identity is of lower salience than the up-to-20 terms they wrote down first. Radical group members — many of who have a biocentric philosophy, scientists, and the national groups reported ecosystem labels. We expected higher salience from the radical groups (EF! averaged at least one per member). Although we had no predictions for the scientists, they do see themselves as part of the ecosystem; unexpectedly, so do the national group members. The lifestyle groups reported the most consumer labels, as expected (EcoTeam averaged 0.8).

The term “conservationist” was predominately associated with respondents from the wise use and conservation groups, but absent from the fisheries groups. All group types had at least one member include an environmental label in their “Who Am I?” list; however, despite the majority claiming they were environmentalists in the prior Gallup question, it is apparent that not all groups found “environmentalist” to be a salient identity, especially the fisheries groups and public samples (this is the difference between answering a direct question as to whether you are an environmentalist, versus a free listing identifying important characteristics of yourself). The radical, civic, and scientists group types averaged at least 1.0 environmental label whereas some individual groups averaged over 2.0 (Earth First!, HazTrak). As Table 3 shows, differences in use of the labels conservationist, activist and environmentalist are significant. There was a wide range of values within the civic type (0.7-2.2), probably due to the mixed nature of “civic” groups within our somewhat arbitrary categorization scheme. Members of environmental justice groups reported few environmental identities. By contrast, race related identities, although not reported in Table 3, averaged 0.8 — comparable to kin and activist variables.

We quote from one informant to illustrate how “environmentalist” can become a salient component of one’s identity. In addition to listing both environmentalist and political activist on her “Who Am I?” list, a civic group member whose name is “Alexis,” states that environmental activism has become part of her identity:

*. . . now that my children are grown, that I am retired, that I have the time to get involved in the community, it*

*[environmental activism] is my vocation at this point. It is something that I do. It is something that I identify with very strongly, and that [not being able to do it] would be a terrible loss to me (Alexis, HazTrak).*

As expected, the radical groups reported strong activist identities, with the mean value for Earth First! (1.7) substantially higher than that of Green Delaware (0.8). The civic groups were anticipated to report “activist” labels because of the political activity of the groups. But the values were less than those for several other group types. Yet again, we see large variation within the civic groups ranging from an average 0.1 to 0.8 labels/person suggesting that our civic type clusters unlike groups. Members of environmental justice and the scientist groups reported activist labels followed by the lifestyle group type (0.1 for EcoTeam members to an average 1.0 labels/person for Earthaven). Differences among groups in activist labels and “conservationist” were the strongest of the identities analyzed ( $F = 4.8, p < .0001$ ).

### Reformulations

Identities as theorized above, are not static. Part of the interview asked about changes in the informant’s environmentalism through time, eliciting an environmental life history. As we have read through these interviews, we have come to recognize a number of transitions that many individuals make in their understanding of environmental action and/or in their own identity. For example, the following is a common reformulation on the way to becoming a local civic activist. Initially, one believes that government will take care of common problems, and one’s civic responsibility is to report problems to the proper authorities. Then, they take this action: They report an environmental atrocity to government, wait, and find that nothing is done; in some variants, later lobbying, agitating, or “fussing” achieves a result. This results in a reformulation that is reported in interviews as a fact about government or about the best strategy.

Examples of this type of government-related reformulation include the following statements from radical, civic, lifestyle, and environmental justice group members. In describing how his views on environmental damage have changed, a member from the radical group recalled taking public action after he realized that the government was not going to solve environmental problems,

*Any changes in how I viewed it? Yeah, I thought the government would do something, would be willing to do something, after it got its formal apparatus going. And I was disillusioned because the governor who had all the authority, and still does, appointed all the polluters to what was then called the Water and Air Resources*

*Commission . . . The big industry controls the government in Delaware. And I guess that was the first real super clear revelation. I felt these guys gotta go . . . I mean, this was a just a betrayal of public trust. The governor was, was not going to affect any change (Jimmy, Green Delaware).*

*. . . a lot of the agencies just don’t have the ability [to do anything on their own], that citizens can force enforcement by calling up their politicians, by agitating, by making people aware. That’s what we did with the hog farm. It [regulating hog farm] was only because we forced them into doing it (Alexis, HazTrak).*

*I already had the idea that the government could not be trusted to do the right thing. So you could already assume that if you found out what the right thing was, you would have a battle on your hands (Shalina, Earthaven).*

*Far from what has always maybe been assumed when we talk about local communities, there is a myth around — and this is what calls people to leave their lives in other folks hands — there is a belief somehow that if the communities had a problem, the EPA would just step in and deal with it. We know it won’t happen like just like that. Not just like that (Conrad, Environmental Justice).*

It is not until this transition in thought, this reformulation in the belief about the role that the government plays in environmental policies, that an individual may see themselves as an actor — beyond reporting to authorities — and identify themselves as a participant and initiator of political actions. Janice from a civic group, Citizens Unite, became involved once she realized government wouldn’t solve the problem, “my main concern is that there is not enough concern from our local government officials being placed on environmental issues. And that’s why I am involved in this [asphalt plant fight].”

We coded interviews for the presence or absence of 10 reformulations. Some occurred rarely, so we collapsed them into larger categories; we do not report all of the coded reformulations here. Of particular interest are the aforementioned transformations we call “civic reformulations” relating to understandings of government functioning (“I realized that government won’t solve problems,” “. . . is untrustworthy,” and “I can impact policy”) and changes in environmental identity over time (“then I considered myself an environmentalist” or “. . . an activist”). Marie, from the national group Environmental Defense describes a reformulation of her environmental identity that occurred once she began fighting issues “close to home,”

*I've always considered myself to be a promoter of caring about the environment, maybe to a lesser degree even back in college days, but when I had to help protect my local environment is when I felt I earned more that title. I think I understood that term back when I was even a young person, but having gone through the steps, I felt I actually had become one (Marie, ED).*

From the civic groups, one individual reports a reformulation while relating that he first considered himself an “environmentalist” when he began fighting construction of an asphalt plant; the other reports his transition to environmental activism in the context of joining a group:

*The latter part of February [that's when I accepted the environmentalist label]. That's what everything is going to focus on-on what has happened in the last six months, not what happened before because before I was just not that concerned about it. The fact of the matter is that I thought that people who were environmentalists were crazies because all they do is interrupt . . . So that was my thought process six months ago. Now, I'm educated, and now I know why environmentalists don't allow people to do certain things with their land. Six months ago, I became extremely aware of the environment, and have become more staunch as time goes on, and I'm probably going to become a left-wing radical myself (Ray, CU).*

*Actually, it was a decision about a year and a half ago that I myself have to do something and so I joined the Sierra Club. And it was the time of that decision that I considered myself to have begun to be an environmental activist (Joe, DNS).*

Because we expect active members of local environmental groups to report having gone through more reformulations than those not participating in face-to-face groups, we predict that radical, civic, and environmental justice groups would report more reformulations than the national and public samples. Additionally, we predict the political action groups would have mentioned more transitions relating to the government — civic reformulations — than lifestyle groups that do not partake in political action.

Results are tabulated in Table 4 and are reported by mean values of total reformulations and by combining all civic reformulations (as mentioned) per individual and calculating a group mean under the Civic Reformulations column. Many of these transitions were recorded during the narrative portion of the interview, however a subsequent series of questions about when the interviewee became an environmentalist elucidated some of these reformulations. Note that sample sizes for this particular analysis have changed from pre-

Table 4. Reformulations in identity or in understanding of environmental action

Group type (n)	Total Reformulations (mean)	Civic Reformulations (mean)	Transition to “Environmentalist”	Transition to “Activist”
Radical (16)	4.5	0.5	69%	63% <sup>c</sup>
Civic (41)	4.4	0.7	73% <sup>b</sup>	32% <sup>d</sup>
National (6) <sup>a</sup>	4.8	0.5	100%	33%
Lifestyle (12)	3.1	0.2	58%	17%
Environmental Justice (5)	2.8	0.4	60%	40%
Students (15)	3.9	0	53%	33%
Conservationists (8)	4.8	0.4	63%	0
Wise Use (6)	1.5	0	17%	0
Fisheries Groups (20)	2.6	0.3	35%	0
Scientists (4)	3.4	0	20%	20%
Public (14)	2.4	0.2	19%	6%
ANOVA F ( $\chi^2$ )	5.1	2.2	3.0 (27)	3.6 (31)
Significance of F ( $\chi^2$ )	< .0001	.02	.002 (.003)	.0003 (.0006)

<sup>a</sup>Only Delmarva sample was used for reformulation calculations because this particular NC sample was not asked a series of questions that typically elicited notable environmental transitions over time, so we only analyzed the six interviewees from Delmarva who were asked.

<sup>b</sup>HazTrak = 100%

<sup>c</sup>EF!= 86%

<sup>d</sup>HazTrak = 86%, DNS= 42%, DSC= 0

vious and subsequent data analysis due to variation in interview procedures (some questions were not asked by a few interviewers).

We found that the majority of individuals were coded on average for at least three reformulations — environmental justice, wise use, fisheries, and public being exceptions. The national, radical, civic, and conservation group types averaged greater than four; whereas individual groups within radical and civic, especially Earth First! and HazTrak, coding around six reformulations/person. A civic reformulation mean value of 1.0 would indicate that on average, each member reported at least one of the three civic reformulations. As shown in Table 4, the mean for the civic reformulations is highest in civic groups, followed by national and radical groups (0.5) and environmental justice and conservation groups (0.4). All reformulations shown in Table 4 are different across group types at highly significant levels. We note here that the spread within the civic groups, again, is quite high (HazTrak = 2, DNS = 0.1, CU = 1.1, CCRC = 0.4, NWPC = 0.1, DSC = 0.2) maybe due to single-issue groups being more politically active than multiple issue groups. Earth First! has a value of 1.0, Green Delaware 0.2 and Ruckus 0. With the exception of wise use, fisheries, scientists, and public, the majority of informants (100% of national) remembered the point in time when they became an environmentalist. Only the radical group (63%) had a majority

reporting their transition to becoming an “activist,” the next highest was environmental justice (40%).

### **Do Groups Cultivate Identity or Do Like-Minded Identities Join the Same Group?**

The above quotations suggest, and most of our discussion of the quantitative data focuses on, identity and reformulation occurring as a result of group membership and action. This is in opposition to the popular notion among casual observers as well as many social scientists, that pre-existing personal differences lead an individual to join a compatible group. Radicals join radical groups, bird-lovers join bird protection groups, and so on. Although the quantitative differences among groups do not allow us to distinguish between those alternative hypotheses, our qualitative interview data suggest that many of the differences are due to changes in individuals’ self-perceptions formed in the process of group participation and action. The following quotes from a student and civic group are explicit examples of group-mediated identity formation in response to questions about when they first considered themselves to be an “environmentalist”:

*I guess when I joined, when I joined SEAC, because we actually tried to do activities which are — you know, we have letter writing campaigns and petitions and things like that, and we’ve gone to protests, and stuff like that. So, that’s when I started thinking of myself as an actual activist (June, SEAC).*

*When I started meeting with members of my HazTrak Coalition. They explained to me that everything I was doing was basically what an environmentalist is because I care so much about the environment. . . I never put myself in a place as an environmentalist, because I always did care about the environment, but this is the first time I actually fought against something to protect my environment. And with the members of my HazTrak Coalition, they help me classify myself as an environmentalist (Linda, HazTrak).*

Other examples abound in the interviews. Timothy from Citizens Unite states that he became a political activist “when I joined CU — it wasn’t until then” and Tyler, from NHSNS, first thought of himself as a active environmentalist during participation with his high school’s club, “When I was in the Nature Society. I realized, you know, I’m going out there and I’m doing things — ‘Wow, I guess I’m an environmental activist!’ ”

It is clear that some individuals come to define their environmental identity based on the type of environmentalism projected by the group of membership. However, we do

not mean to suggest that all group members interviewed lack prior history within the movement, nor do we claim that prior individual identities play no role in initially choosing groups. In fact, we did have statements that environmental identity formed before group membership was established such as the case with Alexis from HazTrak who became an environmentalist “the day I was born,” or Kelly from the Nanticoke Watershed Preservation Committee, “when I first started teaching.” In the ethnographic research, we noted the effects on group characteristics as new members entered and old ones left. Some interviewees made similar observations, for example, a college student described the annual fluctuation of her group’s characteristics due to the type of personalities changing with the annual turnover of participating members,

*. . . I think what makes a group is the type of people that tend to get involved with it. And if you get the people that are more up in arms about things, and raring to do something, then yes, the group is going to tend to be more radical, if that’s where it’s carried to be. And if you get people that are more wanting to discuss and communicate, even though sometimes that may not be the best way to get action, then that’s the way the group is going to tend to go too (Ruby, SEAC).<sup>8</sup>*

Additionally, some individuals report seeking groups that matched their identities; two radical group members reported joining groups for the direct activist philosophy rather than for the group’s mission — either environmental or humanitarian goals — though assimilation of the group’s values eventually occurred. Osprey describes how he became involved with an Oregon-based Earth First! group without previous involvement in a group focused purely on environmental issues:

*. . . my level of activism then when we moved to Eugene, Oregon became more directly environmental because the heavy activism there was around forest issues. And so we became involved with forest activities there and with people who were involved in Earth First! and I became a lot more aware of forest issues through that time (Osprey, EF!).*

Another activist recalls why he joined a group after leaving Oregon. This quote describes group experience prior to his involvement with a radical environmental group. It is also an example of an individual explicitly joining a group based on a pre-existing self-identity as a radical, rather than an identity forming within the context of group membership,

*So I got out of jail there, went to San Francisco. Along the way, I asked who was the most radical group in San Francisco. Everybody from there to Eugene said,*

*“Food, Not Bombs” — they were giving away free food to people. You get the most hard-core radical and they’re giving away free food! Sure enough, I got down there and I had met people who had been arrested 30 times for the crime of giving away free food. So, I jumped on board . . . (Joshua, EF!)*

Our claim is that group participation interrelates with prior orientation to cultivate environmental identities, which may have been in formative stages already. For neophytes to the movement or to a new strand of the movement, the effects of the first group experience can be very powerful.

### Barriers

Why do some people who say they are concerned about the environment nevertheless take little action? Why do some environmental group members limit their actions to a particular type (i.e. check writing, consumer actions, or political actions)? Through the text of the interview, when the interviewee is narrating their environmental awareness history, they often mentioned issues or identities we felt would impair them from performing certain environmental actions. We refer to these as barriers. We recognize that there are various sorts of barriers to action, such as the physical constraint imposed on recycling by the absence of recycling bins (Guagnano et al. 1995) — we noted TSWA members reporting similar barriers to oil recycling. Although physical barriers may be important, we instead focus here on barriers related to identity and actions perceived to go with an identity. We expect members of the public, the national group, and the resource users to have more barriers to environmental action, and members of the radical and civic groups to have fewer. This is because the former are less involved with local environmental actions, or so we anticipated. (As it turned out, many of the members in our national group sample also belonged to local groups.)

We coded for eight variables; those of interest include believing some actions are too extreme, not wanting to be thought of as a radical, or not being the “type” who joins a group or performs certain actions. For example, a fisheries group member says below that although she is an environmentalist, she does not support fisheries regulations that could detract from the fishermen’s livelihood.

*Now, I believe in taking care of the environment, but I believe in taking care of man first. I think he is the most important thing on this planet. He has to have the environment to live so he should take care of it as best he can. But, if it got to push and shove, as far as I’m concerned, the man would be the last to go. And he has to make a living, and he has to have something to live with (Edna, PFA).*

Because they consider actions negatively affecting humans as “too extreme,” we consider this a barrier to performing certain civic or direct actions.

Some members may agree in principle with certain environmental actions, that is, they do not consider them “too extreme,” but they will not perform them for fear of being labeled a “radical” by others. For example, Claire, a college student involved with SEAC, says she does not fully participate because she doesn’t “want to be thought of as one of these people that is crazy or eccentric.” Molly, a scientist, describes why she does not display environmental pins or bumper stickers:

*I don’t advertise my political affiliations because then you set yourself up in one position . . . they’d say, “Oh, just another liberal. Oh, just a nuke freak, just another dumb crunching moron. Just another fashion monkey.” You know, particularly in Texas, it’s a very conservative place, so you don’t want to incite — you don’t want to put people off before you make your case. You want them to take you as a human, not as an advocate or symbol. And I don’t want to be a walking symbol (Molly, Scientist).*

Some individuals displayed a combination of both barriers. Celeste, another SEAC member, not only feels that other group members express more extreme beliefs, but she is also concerned about how association with them makes her look — “we have differences of opinion that makes me not want to have other people think of me as being like they are.” Some individuals were coded as being not the type to join a group or perform a particular type of action. Jimmy — who often “dips in and out” of involvement with the radical group Green Delaware — in response to whether he was a member of any other environmental group — replies, “No, no. No. I have no, I’m not much of a joiner.” Cole, a Tangier Sound Waterman who says he is an environmentalist, clarifies his level of participation, “As far as goin’ out there and being something that gonna, you know, patch up the [ozone] hole. You know, I’m not that type. I’ll tell ya I’m not capable of that . . . I can contribute in little ways.” Gloria, a self-identified non-environmentalist from the public says,

*I’m more of conservation[ist], you know, conserve water and just don’t be wasteful. I’m more of that type of attitude in my own personal life, rather than any of the big issues. I don’t get involved in those (Gloria, public).*

Each barrier was coded as either present or absent, so we report, in Table 5, percentages per group of those barriers that were mentioned more frequently, as well as the total number of barriers mentioned. The first column of Table 5 shows that conservation, fisheries groups, and the public sample report more barriers than the other group types; environmental jus-

Table 5. Barriers to taking environmental action.

Group (n)	Total barriers (mean)	Belief or action of others is too extreme	Do not	
			want self to be labeled "radical"	Not the type to join/participate
Radical (16)	0.5	19%	0	6%
Civic (41)	0.6	20%	10%	8%
National (12)	0.5	25%	8%	8%
Lifestyle (12)	0.7	33% <sup>a</sup>	8%	0
Environmental Justice (6)	0	0	0	0
Students (15)	0.6	13%	20%	27%
Conservationists (8)	0.9	13%	38%	0
Wise Use (8)	0.6	38%	13%	0
Fisheries Groups (20)	1.4	50% <sup>b</sup>	5%	30%
Scientists (5)	0.6	20%	20%	20%
Public (16)	1.0	19%	25%	25%
ANOVA F ( $\chi^2$ )	2.3	1.3 (13)	1.3 (14)	1.8 (17)
Significance of F ( $\chi^2$ )	.02	.21 (.21)	.21 (.21)	.06 (.07)

<sup>a</sup>EcoTeam (67%) differed from Earthaven.

<sup>b</sup>Fisheries groups were highly variable: New River Fishers Association = 14.3%, Pamlico Fishermen's Auxiliary = 57.1%, and Tangier Sound Watermen's Association = 83%.

tice members reported none. The total number of barriers is significantly different across groups.

Of all the barrier variables coded, only one showed a interesting pattern among groups, and that was of members showing resistance to actions that were thought to be extreme, "asshole stunts" according to one public member or because "man comes first no matter what." Although the differences are not statistically significant, they differ among groups in a predictable way. With the exception of the radical and environmental justice groups, not wanting to be labeled by others as a radical environmentalist was reported

across all group types; 20-38% of conservationists, student groups, scientists, and the public mentioned this concern. In particular, one of the lifestyle groups (EcoTeam) reported this barrier, which makes sense given their internal focus on sustainable living practices. Interestingly, an EarthFirst! member also mentioned this barrier in the context of explaining how she disagreed with some animal rights people that were going "too far out there." Individuals who said they were not the "type" to join groups or perform particular actions were mostly concentrated in the fisheries groups, students, and public sample.

Most individual barriers were infrequently mentioned (Table 5 shows the most frequent ones) and are not so different across groups. Because barriers were not explicitly elicited in the interview, but they seemed important for those interviewees who brought it up, we will elicit barriers with specific questions in subsequent research.

### Actions

Environmental actions were collected throughout the interview whenever reported by the interviewee, but most examples were given in response to our worksheet specifically asking the informant to list his or her actions. This was recorded in two ways. First, the total number of actions mentioned throughout the interview was recorded as a total count (column 1 in Table 6). Additionally, for 16 categories of specific actions (e.g. choosing a product for environmental reasons, writing a politician) a 1 was coded if one or more instances were reported, 0 if none. As a way of grouping different types of actions, the presence/absence variables were also added together, making a sum of civic versus lifestyle actions, as follows:

Table 6. Actions: mean totals per group and percent present per group

Group (n)	Count of Actions <sup>a</sup> (mean)	Civic Actions (mean)	Consumer Actions (mean)	Major Lifestyle Change			
				Consumer Choice	Organize	Financial Support	Organize
Radical (16)	11	1.6	1.6	75%	57%	75%	25%
Civic (41)	9.8	1.3	1.8	39%	34%	34%	29%
National (12)	9.4	0.5	2.3	83%	8%	17%	83%
Lifestyle (12)	9.5	0.5	1.8	92%	33%	8%	33%
Environmental Justice (6)	8.3	1.0	1.8	100%	0%	33%	0%
Students (15)	9.5	0.5	2.1	73%	53%	13%	7%
Conservationists (8)	9.3	0.3	2.3	50%	13%	13%	88%
Wise Use (8)	5.6	0.3	1.4	38%	0	0	25%
Fisheries Groups (20)	3.8	0.1	1.3	15%	0	10%	5%
Scientists (5)	11	0	1.8	100%	40%	20%	40%
Public (16)	4.5	0.1	1.8	50%	6%	0	13%
ANOVA F ( $\chi^2$ )	11	11	1.6	4.9 (38)	4.6 (34)	6.2 (39)	5.3 (35)
Significance of F (Significance of $\chi^2$ )	≤ .0001	≤ .0001	.10	≤ .0001 (≤ .0001)	≤ .0001 (.0002)	≤ .0001 (≤ .0001)	≤ .0001 (≤ .0001)

<sup>a</sup>Note this is an actual count, whereas civic and lifestyle actions are sums of presence/absence variables.

- Civic actions: voting, writing letters or visiting a politician, attending a public hearing
- Lifestyle actions: not littering, recycling, maintaining automobile properly, and consumer choice (efficient use of electricity/water/driving and conscious purchasing)

Additional environmental actions recorded for presence/absence were lifestyle changes, including major changes in lifestyle (become a vegetarian, change jobs), and changing habits at work (new fishing nets, farming practices); participatory actions, including organizing or leading an environmental group, joining or sending cash to environmental groups (if explicitly mentioned as an environmental action), attending environmental group meetings, and other actions including watching or reading environmental news, discussing environmental politics with friends, and teaching about the environment. Of this list, we report below on the presence/absence variables that show larger differences among groups.

It was expected that the radical, civic, lifestyle and student groups would have more actions than the national, resource users, and the public. Additionally, we predicted that civic-type actions would be seen predominantly in radical, civic, and environmental justice while mostly the lifestyle groups and public sample would report lifestyle and consumer choice actions. Also, we expected national group members who participate in those groups predominately through check writing to explicitly claim financial support as a significant environmental action.

Table 6 presents the mean environmental actions per group, the counts of civic and lifestyle actions (as detailed above), and percentage reporting four specific action variables: consumer choice, making major life style changes, organizing or leading an environmental activity, and cash contributions. Reported actions are dramatically different across group types with every action, save lifestyle actions, showing significance levels better than 0.0001 (Table 6). The radical groups and the scientists averaged 11 actions per person, both listing more than twice as many environmental actions as the public, wise use, and fisheries groups. Some of the marked difference in total number of activities between the public sample (our control sample), and the other group types, comes from the low level of civic actions reported by the public sample. Civic groups, in contrast, report some of the highest levels of civic actions, as do the radical and environmental justice groups, in our sample. The high prevalence of civic action among the radical groups might not be consistent with the public image of Earth First! (promoted by some of their own rhetoric) that they are operating outside the system — but it is consistent with our observations that the particular groups we followed are all trying to affect decisions in the public sector.<sup>9</sup> Lifestyle actions range from 1.3 (fish-

eries) to 2.3 (national and conservationists) and do not show significant differences between groups mainly due to the common practices of recycling and non-littering behavior. However, looking at consumer choice actions and major lifestyle changes specifically, we see highly significant differences across group types. Fifty percent or less of the civic groups, resource users, and the public report performing consumer choice activities compared to 100% of the environmental justice members and scientists reporting these activities. Lifestyle groups have the second highest consumer choice percentage (92%). Radical groups and students are making major lifestyle changes for the environment (Earth First!, 86%), yet, on average, only 33% of EcoTeam and Earthaven members are reporting major lifestyle changes. We found that members of student environmental groups are choosing colleges, degrees, and careers for environmental purposes — we considered this as “major lifestyle change.” Most radicals reported being leaders or organizers of environmental activities (likely an artifact of interviewee selection), followed by environmental justice and civic. As expected, the majority of members in the national and conservation group listed financial contributions as an environmental action they took.

## Conclusion

Starting in 1990, when the Gallup Poll first posed the question “Do you consider yourself an environmentalist, or not?” they have obtained the surprising result that 50% - 70% of the US public answers in the affirmative. In our study we have refined considerably what this (environmentalist) means. By asking informants to answer “Who am I?” and looking for answers of “environmentalist” or “activist” among other identity labels, we have a more sensitive and multi-dimensional measure of environmental (and other) identity.<sup>10</sup>

Any single question about whether one is “an environmentalist” glosses over the considerable variation in the qualities and textures of environmental identities. In particular, those claiming the identity “environmentalist” are differentially oriented to arenas of action (e.g., civic, consumer, or financial contribution), have undergone varying numbers and types of reformulations in their understandings of themselves and the world of environmental action, and have different sorts of barriers or limits on their own behavior when it comes to action.

We examined reformulations and barriers, seeing them as keys to development, or arresting of development, of identities and views of the world that lead to environmental actions. This is in contrast to a traditional view that environmental actions follow from attitudes, values, or knowledge of

environmental damage. Instead theories of identity lead us to expect that qualitative differences in identity result in different types and levels of action; these qualities can be related to the practices in which identities are formed.

In many ways, environmental action is the most important variable in relation to our hypothesis of the importance of identity development. Given the limits of self-reporting, we want to know whether identity is related to the environmental actions that people carry out. We expected those who were participating in local environmental groups, more so than those who were not, to have salient environmental identities. We expected non-members and especially those with little prior participation in local groups to report relatively few environmental actions.<sup>11</sup>

Despite reported involvement, environmental identities of the public sampled were least salient and their number of actions lowest of all the groups save for the fisheries and wise use groups whose environmentalism is partly in opposition to mainstream forms of environmentalism. In fact, fisheries and wise use groups were low like the public samples in environmental identities, barriers, and reformulations leading us to suggest that their environmental or stewardship rhetoric, an earnest response to criticism from other environmentalists, may not have translated into a salient part of their identity. Differences between conservation and wise use groups were seen in the Gallup question, environmental identities, actions, and reformulations, yet further research is needed to fully describe their role within the environmental movement. It is evident from the measures developed in this study that the environmental movement is broader than just the radical, civic, and national organizations traditionally conceived of as “environmental” groups.

The student groups, conservationists, and environmental scientists included in this study, often reported environmental identities, reformulations, and actions as much as the traditional environmental group members did. For example, more than half of the students reported making “environmentalist” transitions and they matched civic and national members in “activist” transitions. Along with the radicals, environmental scientists listed more environmental identities than any other group, and the college group SEAC reported these identities as often as national group members. In total actions, very little difference is seen between students, environmental scientists, and the traditional groups; the majority of conservationists reported making financial contributions, and most strikingly, students and scientists reported making more major lifestyle changes to benefit the environment than any other group except the radicals.

Considering the importance of social interaction to identity development we reasoned that local face-to-face environmental groups are an important source of environmental

action and thus an important place where people develop identities as environmentalists. Comparison across the types of environmental groups studied in our project has shown statistically significant differences in self-assigned identities, types of reported reformulations, number of barriers to action, and reported actions. Table 7 highlights major differences among the group types we have discussed. Reformulations that would lead to civic actions were common among radical groups, civic groups, and with particularly active groups — Earth First! and HazTrak having the highest. In identity, most of the environmental groups show reformulations to an environmental identity, with greater numbers among the more active groups. Activist transitions were again most frequent among Earth First! and HazTrak members. Barriers were reported less frequently, but they, too, showed a consistent pattern, with the most active groups reporting the fewest barriers, the moderate groups reporting not wanting to be “radical” or take extreme actions, and the less directly environmental groups saying they weren’t the type to join.

We had anticipated that our random samples of the public (drawn from phone books), scientists, and members of national groups would have relatively low participation in local groups yet this proved to be only partially accurate. Seventy per cent of national group members were involved in at least one local group either currently or in the past, which may help explain the high number of actions listed by what we expected to be “check writers” only. The expectation about national group members is that they are less active than members of local groups — Brick described them as “the checkbook activists who sent \$25 to \$35 to a national environmental organization every year” (1995:40). In our sample of ED national members, their participation in local groups seems to vitiate this image, although we do not know if they bring the same passive approach to local groups as they do to the national ones. Conversely, 46% of respondents from local groups (radical, civic, environmental justice, lifestyle, conservationists, fisheries, and students) reported membership in at least one national, mail in group — this ranged from 0% (environmental justice) to 100% (conservationists). Forty percent of the public sample, and all but one of the scientists, reported involvement with either local or national environmental groups.

It is clear that activism is multi-dimensional and people engage in more than one kind. Types of actions reported could be expected to fit with the group types we have clustered the groups into and, as discussed above, for the most part, they do. Except for some surprises (for example, EF! reporting more major lifestyle changes than lifestyle groups), the actions are structured according to group type, and the differences are highly significant.



Table 7. Summary of data by group types

(Group (n))	Self Identification	Reformulations in Beliefs	Barriers to Action	Reported Environmental Actions	Summary of Findings
<b>Radical (16)</b> Earth First! Ruckus Society Green Delaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong activist and environmental labels (equal to kin terms in frequency); substantially higher in EF!</li> <li>• EF! has strong ecosystem identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EF! strong civic reformulations</li> <li>• Majority reported “environmentalist” and “activist” reformulations</li> </ul>	No significant pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over twice as many as public</li> <li>• Strong influence of civic and consumer actions</li> <li>• Majority made major lifestyle changes</li> <li>• Majority organize groups or actions</li> </ul>	Members see themselves as part of the environment and have highly developed, self-reported environmental and activist identities. Stereotyped by others and self-reported to be extremists working outside the bounds of the political system; however, we find high levels of participation in and organizing of civic actions. Green Delaware is not of the same intensity as Earth First!
<b>Civic (41)</b> HazTrak, Delaware Nature Society, Delaware Sierra Club, Citizens Unite, Concerned Citizens of Rutherford County, Nanticoke Watershed Protection Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong place and environmental labels</li> <li>• Moderate citizen labels</li> <li>• HazTrak strong activist labels (CCRC and NWPC weak)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HazTrak strong civic and “activist” transitions</li> <li>• Majority reported environmentalist reformulations</li> </ul>	No significant pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twice as many as public</li> <li>• Strong civic component</li> <li>• Some organize groups or actions</li> </ul>	Though this type comprises a variety of organizations, members are typically politically involved. Single-issue group members may be more vocal about civil actions. HazTrak differs from the other groups, and it seems clear that participation in civic groups influences the environmental identities of members.
<b>National (12)</b> Environmental Defense (DE/MD & NC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate place and ecosystem roles</li> <li>• Strong environmental labels</li> <li>• Strong national roles (highest among groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate reporting of civic reformulations (same as radicals)</li> <li>• Majority reported “environmentalist” reformulations</li> </ul>	Few barriers, though 1/4 reported distaste for extreme environmental actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak in civic actions</li> <li>• One of the highest in reporting lifestyle, and consumer choice actions</li> <li>• Strong majority reported making financial contributions</li> </ul>	Stereotyped as check writers, these members had a strong sense of environmentalism, few barriers, and reported more activity than expected. 70% were involved in at least one local group at some point in time. Typically weak in civic actions and emphasized financial contributions. We found large differences between our DE and NC samples.
<b>Lifestyles (12)</b> Earthaven EcoTeam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate consumer label and environmental label (EcoTeam weak)</li> <li>• Earthaven strong activist labels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very weak civic reformulations</li> <li>• Moderate “environmentalist” reformulations</li> </ul>	EcoTeam majority reported distaste for extreme environmental actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not strongest on consumer actions among groups</li> <li>• Few making major lifestyle changes</li> <li>• Weak majority reporting civic actions</li> <li>• Almost no reporting of participatory actions</li> </ul>	It is not apparent that, EcoTeam especially, these groups promote strong activism outside of the home. This is not surprising, as goals are internally focused on self-improvement and incorporating sustainable living practices into daily routines.
<b>Environmental Justice (6)</b> NC groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate environmental label</li> <li>• Strong activist labels (equal to kin terms in frequency)</li> <li>• Weaker place terms than expected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority report transition to “environmentalist”</li> <li>• Second highest in reporting transition to “Activist”</li> </ul>	No barriers reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follows radical and civic in reporting of civic actions</li> <li>• All doing consumer choice activities</li> <li>• None making major lifestyle changes or cash contributions</li> </ul>	All say they are environmentalists, but self-described environmental identities not as salient as race, kin relations, and activist labels (all 0.8). Some report civic based reformulations, strong in civic actions. Definition of environment and involvement in movement diverges from other environmental organizations.
<b>Student (15)</b> Newark High School Nature Society, Students Environmental Action Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate environmental label (strong in SEAC, weak in NHSNS)</li> <li>• Almost no activist labels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no civic reformulations</li> <li>• Weak majority reporting “environmentalist” reformulations</li> <li>• Equivalent to civic and national groups in 1/3 reporting transition to “activist”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/4 reported not being type to join group or do particular actions</li> <li>• 20% did not want to be labeled a “radical” (mostly SEAC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak in civic actions</li> <li>• Strong lifestyle actions</li> <li>• Majority reported performing consumer choice actions, and second only to radicals in making major lifestyle changes</li> </ul>	Majority says they are environmentalists, though many recognize higher level of activism they need to reach as they mature. Evolution in salience of environmental identities, actions and reformulations from high school to college groups. Characterized by making major lifestyle changes such as choosing college programs, degree paths, and careers based on environmental values.

Table 7. Summary of data by group types

(Group (n))	Self Identification	Reformulations in Beliefs	Barriers to Action	Reported Environmental Actions	Summary of Findings
<b>Conservationists (8)</b> Ducks Unlimited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate consumer and environmental label</li> <li>No activist labels</li> <li>Weak conservation label</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most number of reformulations (with national)</li> <li>Weak civic reformulations</li> <li>Majority report transition to “environmentalist”</li> <li>No “activist” transitions reported</li> </ul>	Over 1/3 reported fear of being labeled as a “radical”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very weak reporting of civic actions; strongest of all group types in reported lifestyle actions</li> <li>Majority reported financial contributions</li> <li>1/2 doing consumer choice actions while very few making lifestyle changes</li> </ul>	Not always categorized as “environmental,” focus on conserving resources for human use. Most members feel they are environmentalists, but there is a strong undercurrent that humans come first. Participation comes in the form of financial support. Differs significantly from wise use in reformulations
<b>Wise Use (8)</b> Blue Ridge Gamelands Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Next to kin relations, place and “conservationists” terms are strongest</li> <li>Very weak environmental identities; similar to public and fisheries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No civic reformulations</li> <li>Less than 1/4 report “environmentalist” reformulation</li> <li>No activist transitions</li> </ul>	Over 1/3 report believing some actions or beliefs are too extreme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few actions reported similar to fisheries and public</li> <li>Almost no civic actions</li> <li>Over 1/3 reporting consumer choice, 1/4 send cash, none making lifestyle changes</li> </ul>	Despite environmental rhetoric and narrow focus on opposing restrictive regulations, only 50% claim to be environmentalists. Few political activist identities, reformulations, or reported actions emerge from the data. Participation in environmental arena differs from conservationists and other groups, and more closely resembles fisheries and general public.
<b>Fisheries Groups (20)</b> Pamlico Fishermens Auxiliary, New River Fishers Association, Tangier Sound Watermen Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong place terms</li> <li>Weak consumer, enviro. and activist labels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few reported reformulations (lowest among groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most barriers reported across group types</li> <li>Majority (PFA &amp; TSWA) reported distaste for extreme actions</li> <li>1/3 not type to join or participate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few actions reported (lowest among groups)</li> <li>Almost zero civic actions reported</li> <li>Mostly no littering and oil recycling</li> </ul>	These groups have taken on the environmental label as a defense against environmental attack. As fishermen, they connect the success of their lifestyle with a healthy environment, claim they are stewards of the resource, and should not be blamed for damage. They report few environmental actions other than recycling, not littering, and gear changes.
<b>Scientists (5)</b> EPA and others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong enviro. and activists labels</li> <li>Moderate ecosystem labels (highest among groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No civic reformulations</li> </ul>	No significant pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots of actions reported</li> <li>Zero civic actions reported</li> </ul>	Strong environmental identities, ecosystem perspectives, and focus on regulatory role in environmental protection; however no civic actions reported perhaps because of professional conflicts.
<b>Public (8)</b> DE/MD & NC components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong place identities (NC component)</li> <li>Almost zero environmentalist, consumer, and activist labels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewest reformulations, excepting wise use, among group types</li> <li>Almost zero civic reformulations</li> <li>Very few “environmentalist” or “activist” reforms reported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Second highest in reporting barriers (DE component average 1.0 per person)</li> <li>1/4 Not want to be seen as radical</li> <li>1/4 Not type to join a group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few actions reported</li> <li>Almost zero civic actions, major lifestyle changes, and organizing of environmental activities report consumer choice actions</li> <li>1/2 report consumer’s choice actions</li> </ul>	Despite 57% responding affirmatively to Gallup question and 40 % having been involved with at least one environmental group at some time, majority reported almost no environmental and activism identities. Second highest among group types in reporting barriers to environmental action.

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## Endnotes

1. In an April 1999 Gallup Poll, 50% of a national US sample answered “yes” to the question: “Do you consider yourself to be an environmentalist, or not?” This figure fluctuates and has been as high as 73% in 1990.
2. A 2000 national sample by Gallup asked four specific questions about movement participation. Gallup found that 16% called themselves “active participant(s) in the environmental movement,” and 15% said they had in the past year “been active in a group or organization that works to protect the environment.” Distinguishing national and local groups for the first time, the survey reports that 5% said they belonged to “large national or international environmental organizations,” and 9% said they belong to “environmental groups or organizations in your local community, region or state” (Gallup 2000). We summarize these four questions by saying that 15% of the US public are members of environmental groups.
3. See also Aronson’s 1993 study of career environmental activists, which uses a related approach.
4. Stern et al. (1999), differentiating core activists from supporters, present a “value-belief-norm” theory of the personal bases of action supportive to the environmental movement and survey data testing it. Although there are many points to be made in comparing the two models, a general difference is that Stern et al. consider participation in an environmental group to be an outcome of holding consistent beliefs, values and personal norms rather than participation shaping values and subsequent environmental actions. Kempton, Boster and Hartly (1996) similarly suggest values as a causal variable in environmental action. The extent to which these two conceptual models are alternative and competing versus complementary theories of the same phenomena requires additional research.
5. Fortunately, anticipating this, a subsequent fixed-question national survey is built into the research design and funding.
6. Technically, F assumes an underlying continuous distribution. But is fairly robust and often used for counts, as we use it here.

7. Responses to the question typically include a range of terms from might be considered names for institutional roles (e.g., writer, mother, politician) to personality types and personality descriptors (e.g., hell-raiser, passionate, sensitive, demanding). To the extent that these are labels for self-understandings that have become personally important in the cognitive and affective organization of behavior, they fit the definition of identity given above.
8. Arguably, SEAC could have been considered a radical group for this study. Their direct actions included dumping cans all over the University President's lawn to force campus recycling, supportive collaboration with Green Delaware, and administrative sit-ins. However, during our interview process, the group was in a transition away from the "radical" image and has since severed ties to the national SEAC organization and renamed itself Students for the Environment.
9. This variation across group types may have been even greater had we achieved a closer matching of groups within each type — for example, large differences between activist identities and actions between HazTrak and the Delaware Sierra Club resulted in mediocre type analysis of the civic group.
10. The "Who am I?" question generates at least one environmentalist label per person for 56% of members of conventional environmental groups (radical, civic, national, environmental justice, and lifestyle groups), 39% of the others, and only 6% of the public sample. This is a more sensitive instrument to having a salient environmental identity than the percentages of affirmative responses to the Gallup question, which for these three groupings are 96%, 75%, and 57%, respectively.
11. "Relatively few" because some actions such as recycling have become pervasive.