

Values and Ecological Sustainability:
Recent Research and Policy Possibilities

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At the same time that our species must confront the looming ecological crisis that threatens to render profound changes in our external habitat, we humans must also personally confront a deeply *internal* crisis. This internal crisis is not one that will be easily addressed by switching our lightbulbs from incandescents to compact fluorescents or by driving hybrid automobiles, for it is a crisis of *values*.

Values are the psychological representations of what we believe to be important in life (Rokeach, 1973), and a quick glance at the state of our contemporary world makes it clear that over the last couple of hundred years, the human species has not believed that it is all that important to nurture and sustain our external habitat. Rather, it seems that the priority we have given to “developing,” and thus damaging, our habitat is partly the result of a set of values highly focused on maximizing economic growth, pursuing our own self-interested desires, and obtaining remarkably high levels of personal consumption.

That such self-interested, materialistic values are indeed important to many people has been documented by substantial cross-cultural psychological research. In these studies, individuals around the world have been presented with a long list of different aims they might value or goals they might have. Researchers have then classified these aims into smaller subsets that cluster together as coherent sets of values and goals. For example, the seminal work of Shalom Schwartz and his colleagues, conducted in dozens of nations around the world, identifies ten types of basic priorities people typically hold in life (Schwartz, 1992, 2006). Two of these types of priorities cluster together as what Schwartz calls the “self-enhancement” values, for they concern the attempt to stand out from others through the acquisition of money, status, and the like.

Specifically, the first self-enhancement value, *Power*, concerns the desire to obtain resources and wealth, whereas the second, *Achievement*, concerns the desire to stand out as particularly excellent and successful by the definitions of one’s society. The cross-cultural research my colleagues and I have conducted similarly yields an “extrinsic” or “materialistic” cluster consisting of three types of goals: *Financial success*, which concerns the desire for money and possessions, *Image*, which concerns the desire to have an appealing appearance, and *Status*, which concerns the desire to be popular and admired by others (Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan et al., 1999; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000).

In addition to documenting the existence of these self-enhancing, materialistic values, studies show that people who care more about these types of values and goals have less positive attitudes about the environment. Studies in Australia (Saunders and Munro, 2000) and the U.S. (Good, 2007) document that materialistic values and a strong consumer orientation are associated with lower biophilia (Kellert & Wilson, 1993) and worse environmental attitudes. The cross-cultural research of Schwartz (1992, 2006) similarly reveals that the self-enhancing values of Power and Achievement are associated with caring less about values such as “protecting the environment,” “attaining unity with nature,” and having “a world of beauty.”

Additionally, a study of almost 1000 undergraduates from Brazil, the Czech Republic, Germany, India, New Zealand, and Russia showed that worse environmental attitudes were associated with high Power values in five nations and with high Achievement values in two nations (Schultz, Gouveia, Cameron, Tankha, Schmuck, & Franek, 2005).

Not only are self-enhancing, materialistic values associated with less beneficent environmental attitudes, but some research shows that they are associated with behaving in less ecologically sustainable ways. In samples of American adults, both Richins & Dawson (1992) and Brown and Kasser (2005) have found that materialistic values are negatively correlated with how much people engage in ecologically-friendly behaviors such as riding one’s bike, reusing paper, buying second-hand, recycling, etc. Other work has replicated these findings in samples of U.S. and U.K. adolescents, as middle and high school students with a stronger materialistic orientation report that they are less likely to turn off lights in unused rooms, recycle, reuse paper, etc. (Gatersleben, Meadows, Abrahamse,

& Jackson, 2008; Kasser, 2005). Further, Brown & Kasser (2005) examined the ecological footprints of 400 North American adults, finding that those who cared more about extrinsic, materialistic values used significantly more of the Earth's resources in order to support their lifestyle choices around transportation, housing, and food.

Research using resource dilemma games adds another layer of support for the claim that materialistic values play a role in ecological destruction. In the first study of its type, Sheldon & McGregor (2000) assessed college students' values and then, on the basis of the students' materialism scores, assigned them to play a "forest-management game" in one of three kinds of groups: a group with four subjects who all scored high in materialism, a group with four subjects who all scored low in materialism, or a group with two members who scored high and two who scored low in materialism. Once in their groups, subjects were asked to imagine that they were in charge of a company that would be bidding against three other companies to harvest timber from a state forest. Each of the subjects in a group then made an initial bid for how much they wanted to harvest; the total amount of the four bids was then subtracted from the existing forest acreage, another 10% was added back (to represent re-growth in the forest), and then a 2nd year of bidding commenced. This process continued either until 25 "years" of bidding had passed or until no forest remained. As predicted, the groups composed of four materialistic individuals were significantly less likely to have a forest remaining at the 25th year of bidding. It is also worth noting that materialistic individuals reported being more motivated by "greed," or the desire to profit more than other companies. Such findings, which have been replicated in part by Kasser & Sheldon (2000) and Dechesne et al., (2003), provide clear evidence for how materialistic values may contribute to ecological destruction.

Recent research suggests similar dynamics may be playing out on a national scale. Kasser (2008) obtained measures of the ecological footprints and carbon emissions of 20 wealthy, capitalistic nations and correlated these with measures of how much the citizens in those nations cared about self-enhancing values. As predicted, the more Achievement was valued by citizens of a nation, the more CO₂ that nation emitted and the higher that nation's ecological footprint.

Two approaches to abate self-enhancing, materialistic values

The body of literature just reviewed suggests that to the extent individuals value self-enhancing, materialistic goals, they are more likely to have negative attitudes about the environment, are less likely to engage in relatively simple behaviors that benefit the environment, and are more likely to make behavioral choices that contribute to environmental degradation. Further, preliminary evidence suggests that when nations strongly value self-enhancing, materialistic values, they emit more greenhouse gases and have higher ecological footprints. Of course, the bulk of this research is based on correlational studies, making it very difficult to confidently conclude that self-enhancing, materialistic values cause these problematic ecological outcomes. But the consistency with which these results occur across different samples and different operationalizations of ecological problems suggests that it nonetheless may be helpful to consider ways of decreasing how much people care about self-enhancing, materialistic values and goals if we hope to increase humanity's chances of creating an ecologically sustainable world.

The research literature points towards two broad types of approaches that might guide efforts toward this end. The first approach would work to address and remedy the root causes of self-enhancing, materialistic values in order to decrease the likelihood that people take on and act out of such ecologically-damaging values. The second approach would attempt to encourage an alternative set of values that not only opposes the self-enhancing, materialistic values, but that also promotes ecological sustainability. Below I present a brief overview of each of these two approaches before I ultimately show how they might be applied in three different ways.

Addressing the causes of self-enhancing, materialistic values.

Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon (2004) integrated the literature on the causes of materialistic values by suggesting that there are two primary pathways by which such values are acquired. The first pathway is through the rather obvious influence of social modeling and the second is through the subtler, and perhaps more insidious, route of insecurity.

Social modeling involves the extent to which individuals are exposed to people or messages in their environment suggesting that money, power, achievement, image, and status are important aims to strive for in life. The empirical evidence clearly documents that people have higher levels of materialism to the extent that their parents, friends, and peers also espouse such values (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008; Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995). Television, that font of advertising messages proclaiming the worth of “the goods life,” also plays a strong role in encouraging materialistic values, as documented by numerous studies (Cheung & Chan, 1996; Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Rahtz, Sirgy, & Meadow, 1989; Schor, 2004). Exposure to advertising in school has also been documented as promoting stronger materialistic concerns (Brand & Greenberg, 1994).

The second pathway towards materialism is through feelings of insecurity. That is, the empirical literature suggests that people tend to orient towards materialistic aims when they experience threats to their survival, their safety and security, and their perceived likelihood of getting their psychological needs met. For example, children are more likely to be materialistic when they grow up in a family with a cold, controlling mother, when their parents divorce, and/or when they experience poverty (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997; Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995; Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000). Some experiments even support a causal role of insecurity in creating materialistic concerns, as making people consider economic hardship, poor interpersonal relationships, and even their own death leads individuals to care more about materialistic aims and to act in more ecologically destructive ways (Dechesne et al., 2003; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Sheldon & Kasser, in press). Thus, it seems that a typical human tendency is to become self-interested and concerned about acquisition in the face of situations that promote insecurity.

To summarize, then, this literature suggests that a first approach to decreasing ecological degradation is to address the features of our world that promote materialistic values. Substantial data suggest that to be effective, strategies must be developed to: a) decrease the extent to which such self-enhancing,

materialistic values are modeled in society; and b) increase feelings of personal security among members of society.

Promoting an alternative set of values.

As noted earlier in this chapter, self-enhancing, materialistic values and goals exist within broader systems of personal goals and values. That is, most people have a variety of aims for which they are striving in life, some of which are materialistic and self-enhancing, and some of which concern other values and goals. A second promising approach is therefore to identify the types of values and goals that lie in opposition to the self-enhancing, materialistic values and goals, and then to develop strategies that increase the likelihood that people will internalize and act upon these alternative aims in life. By doing so, the power that self-enhancing, materialistic goals and values have over a person's motivational system is likely to be diminished.

Cross-cultural research has provided a fairly consistent picture of how people's goals and values are organized in their minds. Specifically, this body of literature demonstrates that some values and goals are experienced by most people as psychologically consistent with each other, whereas other goals and values are experienced by most people as in opposition to each other. The extent of consistency or conflict among goal types can be statistically represented by a "circumplex" structure, in which psychologically consistent goals are placed next to each other in a circular arrangement, while psychologically conflictual goals are placed on opposite sides of the circumplex. Figures 1 and 2 present two well-validated circumplex models of values and goals. Schwartz's (1992, 2006) model, presented in Figure 1, shows that the self-enhancing values of Achievement and Power lie next to each other, representing their psychological compatibility; similarly Fred Grouzet and I have shown that the materialistic aims of money, image, and status cluster together as a consistent set of goals (Grouzet et al., 2005); see Figure 2.

Importantly, these circumplex models also reveal the values and goals that lie in opposition to the self-enhancing, materialistic values. Figure 1 shows that the self-enhancing values are opposed by two "self-transcendent" values, *Benevolence*, which concerns acting in ways that benefit the people with whom one is especially close, and *Universalism*, which concerns acting in ways that benefit the broader world. Figure 2 similarly shows that materialistic goals are opposed by a set of three "intrinsic" goals: *Self-acceptance* (or understanding one's self and striving for freedom), *Affiliation* (or having good relationships with family and friends) and *Community Feeling* (or trying to make the wider world a better place). These models, based on data from thousands of individuals across dozens of nations, thus suggest that another strategy for abating self-enhancing, materialistic values is to promote the self-transcendent, intrinsic aims in life.

The potential benefits of this approach are further bolstered by the fact that empirical research demonstrates that the self-transcendent, intrinsic values are associated with more positive ecological outcomes. For example, Schultz et al.'s (2005) cross-cultural study documented that in each of the six nations studied, self-transcendent values were significant positive predictors of having engaged in a set

of twelve environmentally-helpful behaviors (ranging from recycling to picking up litter to environmental political actions). Generosity (which is akin to Universalism and Community Feeling values) also predicts more positive environmental attitudes and behaviors in UK and US adolescents (Gatersleben et al., 2008; Kasser, 2005). Further, the more people focus on intrinsic (relative to materialistic values), the more sustainable and less greedy their behaviors are in both resource dilemma games (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000) and in their own lives (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Finally, nations in which citizens strongly value the self-transcendent aim of Universalism have significantly lower carbon emissions and marginally lower ecological footprints (Kasser, 2008).

Two additional benefits of intrinsic goals are worth mentioning. First, as opposed to materialistic values, people who value intrinsic goals consistently report higher personal well-being (e.g., more self-actualization and vitality) and lower personal distress (e.g., less depression and anxiety; see Kasser, 2002 for a review). Second, as opposed to materialistic values, people who value intrinsic goals consistently behave in more cooperative, pro-social ways, sharing more and being more empathic and less manipulative (see Kasser et al., 2004). Thus, not only do the self-transcendent, intrinsic values oppose self-enhancing, materialistic values, and not only do they support more positive ecological behaviors, but they also seem to provide greater personal well-being and to promote the kinds of cooperative, pro-social behaviors that will be necessary to solve the ecological crises we will face.

To summarize, then, a second fundamental approach to decrease self-enhancing, materialistic values is to promote the kinds of values that oppose these ecologically-degrading values. Substantial data suggests that encouraging self-transcendent, intrinsic values would: a) undermine how much people care about the self-enhancing, materialistic values that damage the environment; and b) promote a set of values that supports more positive ecological behaviors, as well as greater personal well-being and more pro-social behavior.

Three exemplary pathways to effecting change.

The values-based perspective on the ecological crisis that I have been describing in this chapter suggests that some significant portion of our present difficulties comes from the fact that many people have internalized a set of self-enhancing, materialistic values that are associated with ecologically-destructive attitudes and behaviors. Given this diagnosis, and given past research and theorizing, I have suggested two basic approaches to abating self-enhancing, materialistic values. First, I have suggested that it would be useful to remove the social models and diminish the feelings of insecurity that create and maintain self-enhancing, materialistic values. Second, I have suggested that it would be useful to promote the self-transcendent, intrinsic values that research shows both oppose self-enhancing, materialistic values and support ecologically-beneficial behaviors. In an attempt to demonstrate the applicability of these two basic approaches, I next discuss their relevance to three promising avenues for societal change.

Voluntary Simplicity.

While American history has been dominated by movements to “tame” (i.e., economically develop) a vast continent and by the American dream of material prosperity, Shi (1985) documented a countervailing trend in which some Americans have questioned the nation’s focus on economic growth, consumption, and material acquisition, and instead have tried to live a “simpler” life. Shi traces this simple living movement from the early Puritans and Quakers, through the American Revolutionaries, into Transcendentalism, and eventually to the hippie, counter-cultural movement of the 1960s. Today, those who strive for simplicity are known under various labels, including “downshifTERS,” “cultural creatives,” and, probably most widely, “Voluntary Simplifiers.” Common across these labels is the decision to reject a life based on the cycle of work-spend-work-some-more and instead focus on “inner riches.” The qualitative interviews conducted by Elgin (1993) and Pierce (2000), for example, suggest that many who identify as VSrs choose to disengage from a life based around long work hours and high levels of consumption so that they may instead focus on their own personal growth, family, volunteer activity, and spirituality; many VSrs say that ecological concerns highly motivate them as well.

Brown & Kasser (2005) conducted one of the first quantitative scientific studies on VS by obtaining a sample of 200 self-identified Voluntary Simplifiers (through a variety of list-serves and publications) as well as a group of 200 mainstream Americans matched to the VSrs on gender, age, and zip code. Several interesting differences between the groups emerged. First, the VS group was much more likely than the mainstream group to report engaging in positive environmental behaviors and to be living in ways that decreased their ecological footprints. Second, compared to the mainstream group, the VS group reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and a greater balance of pleasant than unpleasant emotion in their daily lives; this finding is especially noteworthy given that the annual income of the VS group was about 2/3 that of the mainstream group. Third, using a statistical technique called Structural Equation Modeling, Brown and Kasser demonstrated that the facts that the VS group was happier and was living more sustainably than mainstream Americans could be largely explained by the value orientation of the VSrs. Specifically, the VS groups was more strongly oriented towards intrinsic goals and much less oriented towards materialistic goals than were the mainstream Americans.

These results suggest that VS practitioners have been able to put into practice the second of the two basic approaches described above as abating materialistic values. That is, the evidence from Brown & Kasser (2005) strongly suggests that people who pursue a VS lifestyle are highly oriented toward the intrinsic goals known to both oppose materialistic values and to promote ecologically-responsible behavior. Thus, something about the VS lifestyle, or about the people who ultimately adopt a VS lifestyle, seems to encourage the kinds of values associated with ecological sustainability and with the rejection of materialism.

The broader literature on VS also suggests that some features of this lifestyle may help work against those factors known to promote materialistic values. For example, interviews by Elgin (1993) and by Pierce (2000), as well as first-person accounts related in Holst (2007), reveal that many VSrs attempt to limit their exposure to the social messages that model materialistic values by eliminating television and other sources of advertising from their families lives, by choosing friends who support their values, and by working with organizations that do not pressure them to prioritize financial profit and work excessively long hours. Other anecdotal data suggest that VSrs try to enhance their sense of personal

security by learning how to be more self-sufficient, i.e., by making their own clothes, growing their own food, building their own homes, and repairing and re-using items in creative ways. What's more, some evidence suggests that VSrs are especially likely to engage in meditative and spiritual practices, to use journals to reflect on their lives, and to pursue personal growth through psychotherapy, all of which are effective ways of addressing one's own personal insecurities. The fact that Brown and Kasser (2005) found that the VS group was significantly happier than mainstream Americans suggests that such efforts may have met with some success. Future research might follow up on these qualitative, anecdotal findings to more systematically determine the role of these factors both in sustaining the VS lifestyle and in promoting ecologically-responsible behavior.

Given the promise that VS might hold for promoting intrinsic values, happiness, and ecologically sustainable behavior, how might we increase the percentage of Americans practicing this lifestyle beyond the current estimates of 10-15% of the American population (Elgin, 1993; Ray, 1997)? Some of what I'll say in the next two sections of this chapter is relevant here, but let me share two additional thoughts.

First, my conversations with people about VS suggest that one major roadblock some people have about adopting a VS lifestyle is their fear of living without health insurance if they only have a part-time job; interestingly, such anecdotes are consistent with the studies reviewed above showing that death anxiety shifts people away from intrinsic values and towards materialistic values. It would be worth more formally studying whether concerns about access to health care are indeed a major reason some people do not pursue a more materially simple lifestyle. If so, this would be yet another argument for fundamentally reforming the U.S. health care system so that health insurance is not provided mainly through one's full-time employer.

A second issue that seems to stand in the way of widespread adoption of a VS lifestyle concerns current American social norms, which suggest that a happy, successful, meaningful, and even patriotic life entails working long hours and consuming at high levels. Not surprisingly, some VSrs report feeling ostracized by friends and families who do not understand their choices, and others even report having been called "subversive" for refusing to follow the standard American work-hard-and-consume lifestyle (Elgin, 1993; Pierce, 2000). I've also met people who say that while a simpler life appeals to them, they can't imagine becoming Amish or living like the Unabomber. If these are their only conceptions of what it means to live more simply, and if they are viewed as "odd" by their neighbors and friends for thinking about such a lifestyle, it is no wonder that many people interested in VS end up following the culturally-sanctioned path of satisfying their desires through consumption, and decide to subscribe to *Simple Living* magazine so they may thumb through advertisements and articles about products aimed at this "market segment." Ultimately, and unfortunately, such a choice means that some who desire to live a simpler life end up channeled right back into the mainstream norms and do not make the kinds of fundamental lifestyle changes necessary to reach ecological sustainability.

In order to address these norms, a concerted public education effort designed to change social perceptions about what "the good life" is and what "simplicity" means may help encourage more people to pursue this lifestyle. If educational materials could be developed and distributed about the VS

lifestyle, it seems likely that some reasonable percentage of individuals might be interested to know that VS is associated with greater ecological sustainability, higher levels of happiness and greater opportunities to pursue intrinsic values, (all of which research shows are highly desired by most people). Another educational approach might be to create large numbers of community-sponsored Simplicity Circles (Andrews, 1998), which are small groups that meet frequently to provide members with information about and support for living in more materially-simple ways.

Restrictions on Advertising.

Of course, a major limitation of such a proposal to educate the public about the personal and ecological benefits of living a simpler life is that, even if funding for it could be obtained, such educational messages would be only a drop of water amidst an ocean of messages that encourage materialistic values. We live in a culture dominated by commercial advertising, which should be understood as the best-funded, most sophisticated propaganda campaign ever employed in human history, with millions of dollars spent yearly to pay researchers to investigate how to “press the buy button” and billions of dollars more spent to pay for-profit media corporations to deliver these messages to children, adolescents, and adults. Advertising messages that inculcate the belief that people’s worth is dependent on what they own now appear in almost every possible media venue, and, through developments in stealth marketing, are even covertly placed in songs, books, and conversations people have with friends and strangers (Schor, 2004; Walker, 2004).

I have already reviewed evidence that exposure to commercial media is associated with stronger materialistic values, and it seems likely that both known causes of materialistic values are relevant to explaining this association. That is, as Kasser et al. (2004) argued, advertisements are obviously social messages that model the importance of materialism and consumerism, but they also create the feelings of insecurity that are known to promote materialism. Consider, for example, the typical advertisement narratives in which a person without the advertised product is presented as socially-outcast, unhappy, unsuccessful, or otherwise an insufficient human, whereas a person with the product is loved, happy, beautiful, and successful. Such advertisements play on humans’ tendency to compare themselves to others (Richins, 1991, 1995), leading many viewers to wonder “Am I insufficient too?” Of course, the advertisement provides a ready solution to assuage such feelings: Imitate the successful model and purchase the product or service advertised.

But this is only part of advertising’s power, for its infiltration into more and more aspects of our world creates a set of social norms that make it acceptable and, indeed admirable, to pursue materialistic aims in life and to believe that “high levels of consumption are normal,” that “everyone purchases a lot,” and that “good people buy stuff.” Further, advertisements probably contribute to what Miller (1999) calls “the norm of self-interest,” or the belief that because everyone else is likely to act in a self-interested way, I should too. As such, advertisements create and frequently activate the self-enhancing values and extrinsic, materialistic goals reflected in the circumplex models presented in Figures 1 & 2. By doing so, advertisements not only increase the likelihood that people care about self-enhancing, materialistic aims in life and act in value-relevant ways (i.e., by consuming and working long hours), but they weaken the self-transcendent and intrinsic portions of one’s motivational system.

For these reasons, I propose that the most effective way to quickly decrease the extent to which people internalize and act out of materialistic values would be to pass five federal laws. The first law would remove all outdoor advertisements (including billboards on highways and business signs over a certain size) and all advertising in public spaces (including subways, buses, and schools); by doing so, people would no longer be forced to view advertising as they went about their daily lives. The second law would require that all forms of advertising messages be acknowledged as such; doing so would remove the power of marketing via stealth advertising and product placement, and would protect consumers from manipulation. The third law would ban all forms of marketing to children under the age of 12; doing so would end the practice of preying on youth whose cognitive development makes it difficult for them to understand persuasive intent and whose identities are still in the process of formation. The fourth law would repeal the current tax policies that allow businesses to deduct expenses for marketing and advertising, and would instead create a tax (perhaps 25%) on such business expenses; by doing so, businesses would have less incentive and more of a disincentive to advertise, which likely would decrease how much advertising people are exposed to. The fifth law would use the proceeds from this tax to fund non-commercial media and educational projects that promote self-transcendent, intrinsically oriented-values, ecologically-sustainable activities, and a more materially simple lifestyle.

This package of five laws would thus attempt to reduce how likely people are to be exposed to advertising, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will take on and act out of self-enhancing, materialistic values. These laws would also ultimately promote the self-transcendent, intrinsic values that support ecologically-sustainable behavior and attitudes. Finally, these laws would help weaken the cultural norms that encourage high levels of consumption and would instead promote a set of norms likely to lead to more ecologically-sustainable behavior.

Changing the Economic System.

Of course, a major limitation of the proposals to encourage a VS lifestyle and to restrict and/or heavily tax advertising is that many governmental officials and corporations (and perhaps a good number of citizens) would argue that such policies and laws might dampen corporate profits and economic growth. Because the majority of the United States' Gross National Product depends on consumer behavior, and because consumption creates jobs for workers here and abroad, critics would worry that economic growth would falter if consumers were encouraged to consume less and if the presence of advertising in our world was decreased.

Perhaps such criticisms are correct, but even so, let us recognize these criticisms for what they are: The reflections of a high importance placed on self-enhancing, materialistic values. Any time that a proposal to help the environment is met with criticisms that "it might interfere with economic growth" or "it might diminish corporate profits" or "it might create higher prices for consumers," these counter-arguments must be seen as based in a set of values designed to maintain an economic system that strives to maximize corporate profit, economic growth, and high levels of consumption.

This economic system, of course, is capitalism. Like any system in any society, the smooth and efficient functioning of the capitalistic economic system requires that the people living under it hold certain beliefs, act in certain ways, and support certain institutions that maintain the economic system (Kasser et al., 2007). For example, just as a religion needs its followers to believe in its tenets, to engage in the practices it prescribes, to attend its places of worship, and to listen to its ministers and priests, a capitalistic economic system also requires its followers to believe its tenets (i.e., economic growth, free market competition, and high levels of consumption are important), to engage in its practices (i.e., work long hours and consume a lot), to attend its places of worship (i.e., the mall and the couch in front of the television), and to listen to its leaders (i.e., the WTO, and the CEOs and politicians whose job it is to create economic growth and things to buy). As is hopefully obvious to readers at this point in the chapter, the beliefs, practices, and institutions of capitalism are based in the self-enhancing, materialistic values in Figures 1 and 2 that promote self-interested behavior, competitive striving for status, and the acquisition of money and possessions (Kasser et al., 2007).

From my perspective, the particular form of liberal market corporate capitalism that has taken hold in the United States has succeeded in dominating our culture in part via the very pathways that research shows promote materialism. First, the worth of self-interested, materialistic values is propounded through multiple social models, including, for example, tax laws that create incentives to advertise, policies that allow for-profit companies to own most of the media airways (McChesney, 1997), laws that have given corporations rights associated with personhood (Kelly, 2003; Korten, 1995), international laws that elevate a corporation's right to make a profit over the laws of a particular nation (Cavanagh, Welch, & Retallack; 2001; Mander, Barker, & Korten, 2001), and government policies that emphasize economic growth at most every turn. American corporate capitalism also has features likely to engender the feelings of insecurity known to create materialistic values. For example, liberal market capitalism often undermines the extended family networks from which many people derive support, has increased levels of inequality around the world, and has created a competitive, winner-take-all mentality in which a few "winners" typically profit at the expense of a much larger group of "losers" (Kanner & Soule, 2004; Kasser et al., 2004). Add to these the fears that can come from worrying about losing one's job and health insurance in a corporate takeover, losing one's retirement fund in a stock-market downturn, or losing one's habitat to global climate change, and we can see that the capitalistic economic system is a model for promoting materialism.

One consequence of privileging the self-enhancing, materialistic values in liberal market capitalistic economic systems is that aims associated with the self-transcendent, intrinsic values are likely to be undermined. Following on Kasser et al.'s (2007) review of theoretical, empirical, historical, and anecdotal evidence consistent with this claim, Schwartz (2007) examined how the values of citizens in 20 wealthy capitalistic nations were associated with a measure of the extent to which the institutions in those nations were oriented in a more liberal market fashion (e.g., the U.S. and the U.K.) or in a more cooperative, strategic fashion (e.g., Germany and Austria; Hall & Gingerich, 2004). As predicted, citizens living under more liberal market economic organizations placed a higher value on self-enhancing aims (particularly Achievement) and cared less about self-transcendent aims (particularly Universalism). Such evidence powerfully suggests that the way a nation organizes its economic system associations bears important relations to the kinds of values its citizens hold.

Although it is no doubt daunting to confront the juggernaut of capitalism, these data and reflections suggest that doing so is ultimately necessary if we are to promote ecological sustainability (see also Speth, 2008). Although there are many directions and points of approach that could be discussed, here I would like to discuss two that fall out of the ideas that I've been developing in this chapter.

The first concerns what some call the "re-localization" movement. Amongst environmentalists, local purchasing and local foods are often discussed as useful ways to reverse ecologically-damaging trends towards globalization (Cavanagh & Mander, 2004; Helleiner, 2002), in part by reducing the distance products travel and therefore the amount of greenhouse gases emitted. Localization can also reduce the experience of "distancing" (Princen, 2002). Distancing occurs when people fail to see the environmentally degrading ways in which products are produced or thrown away because these acts occur outside of their community; the result, according to Princen, is that they often engage in unknowingly in ecologically-degrading consumption. I certainly agree that re-localization is useful for these reasons, but would like to suggest that re-localization also might have benefits in terms of affecting people's values. First, localization is likely to promote feelings of security, for communities with more localized economies are less beholden to the dictates of corporate offices hundreds or thousands of miles away; as such, localized communities are better placed to have a bigger say in the economic decisions that affect them. Relatedly, when goods, particularly foodstuffs, are produced locally, communities and nations would seem to be less susceptible to the kinds of food shortages and price rises that caused food riots in the spring of 2008. Second, re-localization naturally promotes the self-transcendent value of Universalism and the intrinsic goal of Community feeling. Myers (2007), for example, provides compelling case studies of businessmen who were able to avoid the pressures and temptations to place profit at the forefront of their concerns, and who instead cared greatly about community concerns. All of these businessmen had grown up and lived their lives in the community where they now worked and employed others, and the fact of having "rubbed elbows" all their lives with members of the community must have encouraged the activation of these self-transcendent, intrinsic values (see also Whybrow, 2007). Although more empirical work is necessary to test these ideas, it seems that localization might build the "moral virtues" of community and neighborliness that Smith (1776/1976) believed were necessary to balance and contain the self-interested desires (for self-enhancing, materialistic values) that he feared would otherwise run amok in highly competitive marketplaces.

A second approach worth pursuing involves the revision of national indicators of progress. Currently, the dominant indicators used to demonstrate the success of a nation is how its stock market is doing, where consumer confidence is this month, and, primarily, the Gross National Product of a nation. The problems with this definition of progress are many. First, they are primarily about materialistic values, and thus reinforce social norms that "what matters most is the economy." Second, increases in GNP often translate into less social equality, as seen in the U.S., China, and elsewhere over the last decades; inequality, in turn, breeds the kinds of feelings of insecurity and invidious social comparison that research shows increase self-interested, materialistic values. Third, as is well-known, measures of GNP are calculations of all the economic activities that take place in a nation, including those directly in conflict with many self-transcendent, intrinsic values. To take an environmental example, a company may find that its profits are higher if it manufactures a product in a way that pollutes a nearby river than if it uses cleaner methods. If the pollution poisons the fish in the river, further increases in overall GNP may result when people get sick from eating fish in the river (i.e., hospital costs) and even if they die (i.e., funeral costs); the costs from needing to bring fish in from afar also could benefit GNP. If the

company is eventually forced by the community to clean up the river and an environmental engineering firm is paid to do so, the GNP goes up further still.

In the recognition that GNP is a flawed measure of progress that is based solely on self-interested, materialistic values, a variety of alternative indicators have been proposed. These include Redefining Progress' Genuine Progress Indicator, the country of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness measures, and the new economic foundation's Happy Planet Index. Others, like Diener & Seligman (2004) and Layard (2005) have suggested direct measurements of citizens' subjective well-being. While each of these indicators has its own particular computational formulas and assumptions, common to them all is that materialistic aims are no longer privileged and other values (typically self-transcendent, intrinsic ones) are injected into the calculations. If nations were to adopt such measures alongside, or instead of GNP, and if such measures were then publicized with as much fervor as the Dow Jones Index and the GNP currently are, citizens and politicians alike might come to place less importance on self-enhancing, materialistic pursuits and instead care more about self-transcendent, intrinsic values. Further, citizens might begin to insist that government officials begin developing policies and laws that maximize these alternative indicators. Ecological sustainability would likely improve with the adoption of such indicators because most of these alternative indicators shift damaging environmental behavior from the plus side to the minus side of national accounts, and because they also promote other aspects of self-transcendent, intrinsic values.

Conclusion

I have suggested in this chapter that if we are to promote ecological sustainability, we must not focus solely on technological shifts and "buying green," but instead must consider the kinds of values that people hold, for these values can either lead individuals and nations to act in ecologically-destructive or ecologically-sustainable ways. By approaching the ecological problem as a values problem, solid empirical research and psychological theorizing can be utilized in order to develop educational programs and policies that undermine the causes of the self-interested, materialistic values associated with ecological destruction. Further, a values-based approach can help in the formulation of programs and policies that promote the self-transcendent, intrinsic values and goals known to support ecologically-sustainable attitudes and behavior.

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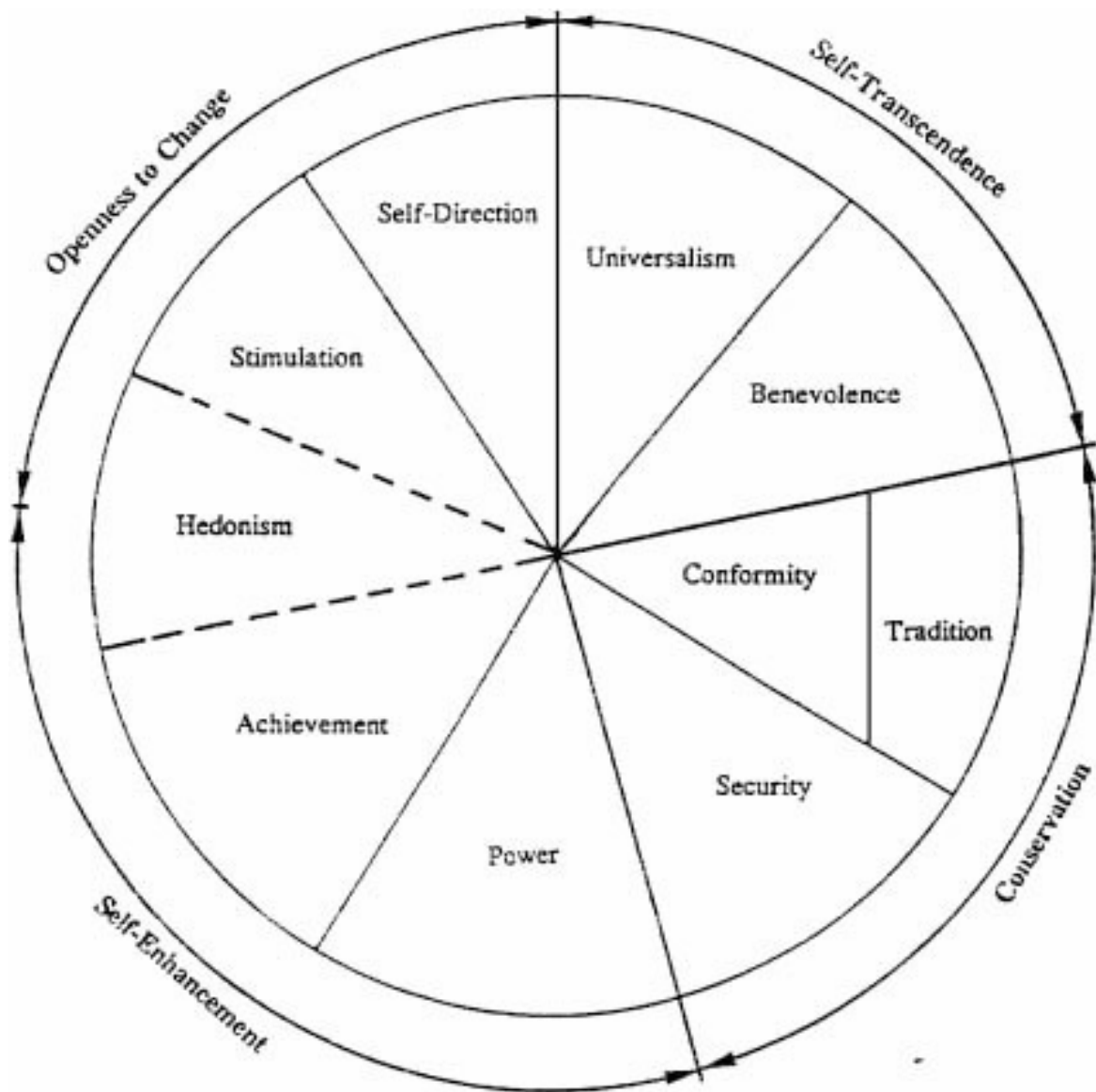
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Figure Captions

Figure 1 – Circumplex model of values, Schwartz (1992).

Figure 2 – Circumplex model of aspirations, Grouzet et al., (2005).



SELF-MANAGEMENT

