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Introduction

Who cares about the environment? What images come to mind when you try to answer that question? Who do you think cares about the environment, and how can you tell?

For now, don't worry about the person's gender, age, or any other demographic characteristic, but think about the sorts of things you imagine them doing. Perhaps you imagine someone who rides a bike or drives a hybrid car, who doesn't eat meat and may buy their food at a farmers' market. You might picture them attending climate protests. But maybe you don't picture any of these things. Maybe you imagine an outdoors enthusiast—someone who demonstrates deep knowledge of their local environment, who lives in a rural area, and who may enjoy hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, or gardening. What I will argue in this book is that both of these examples can reflect caring about the environment. The term "eco-type" in evolutionary biology refers to variation within a species of plant or animal that is shaped by that species' environment. I invite you to look at your own and others' orientation toward the planet in the same way: different eco-types exist. We all care about the environment in ways that are shaped by our upbringing and the context in which we live our lives. And so, while this imagination exercise may feel like a simple and relatively unimportant matter of personal preference, these two imagined eco-types reflect the chasm that divides American civil society's orientation to the environment.

This seemingly benign exercise is deeply implicated in current patterns of political polarization over environmental protection. This is, in part, because

it is not just that some people picture a bike-riding vegetarian while others picture a conservation enthusiast, but that the people who picture one eco-type are so often antagonistic toward those who feel more closely connected to the other eco-type. In other words, the sort of person who admires the bike-riding vegetarian may not extend the virtue of caring for the environment to some outdoors enthusiasts. Similarly, the person who hunts and fishes, or values those who do, may argue that the vegetarian who goes to climate protests does not really understand the environment. This is also because there is a pattern in who associates caring about the environment with sustainable consumption and who associates it with nature-based recreation. These examples have become cultural ideals that alternatively attract or repel us in ways that are tied particularly to our political beliefs. As a general rule, if you are politically liberal, you will be more likely to associate efforts to reduce individual environmental impacts with caring about the environment.[1] If you are politically conservative, you are more likely to feel that someone who cares about the environment is intimately familiar with the land, whether that's a family farm or a national park.[2]

In this introductory chapter, I invite you to join me in rethinking, and understanding more deeply, the story of who cares about the environment. Current trends measuring public opinion suggest a widening gulf between liberals' and conservatives' views on environmental protection, as well as a growing tendency to misjudge how (and how much) people different from us care about the environment.[3] Political liberals think other liberals care most deeply, and political conservatives challenge that assertion, claiming that other conservatives are most likely to care for the planet. A democratic state cannot meaningfully confront catastrophic ecological decline with a divided public. It is essential to cultivate curiosity about others' relationships with the environment in order to overcome political polarization.

Political Differences in Human-Environment Relationships

How do people experience ecological decline? Why is it that some people seem to care more about the environment than others? One of the earliest attempts to address these questions is by environmental sociologists Riley Dunlap and William Catton Jr. in their conceptualization of the Human Exceptionalist Paradigm and the New Environmental Paradigm.[4] Dunlap and Catton suggested that a Human Exceptionalist Paradigm (HEP) underpins humanity's destruction of the environment. Endorsing the HEP

is expressed through beliefs such as the notion that humans have a right to exploit nature, the view that we will develop technological solutions to address environmental issues, and a sense that claims of an ecological crisis are exaggerated. Dunlap and various coauthors describe the HEP as a dominant and "anti-ecological" worldview.[5] This characterization is important to notice because, as I will discuss in greater detail further on, it captures a dynamic that has come to play a role in political polarization. In contrast to the HEP, early environmental sociologists characterized a New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) as a cultural foundation for restoring ecological health.[6] People endorsing a NEP believe there are natural limits to growth, that is, the earth cannot sustain human growth and development indefinitely, human and nonhuman species must live in harmony to survive, and nonhuman species do not exist in order to be used by humans.[7] Early environmental sociologists characterized the NEP as pro-ecological.[8]

There is a strong and enduring connection between political ideology and the paradigm a person endorses with respect to the environment and humanity's impacts on ecological systems. Over dozens of surveys conducted during and since the 1970s, environmental social scientists have found that political liberals are far more likely to hold a NEP and conservatives more likely to endorse a HEP.[9] This pattern is not unique to studies of the HEP and NEP: research into environmental values, environmental concerns, and multiple domains of environmental behaviors illustrate a similar pattern of liberals self-reporting more strongly pro-environmental orientations. For instance, recent work shows that liberals are more likely to endorse biospheric values than conservatives.[10] Biospheric values prioritize benefits to the environment, even if this means a cost to oneself.[11] Survey research also indicates that liberals tend to be more concerned about the environment than conservatives.[12] These contrasts have only become greater in the context of climate change—evidence shows not only political variation in what individuals in the private sphere believe about climate change, but also in how elected representatives from across the political spectrum act on climate change in their leadership roles.[13]

Political conservatives in the US—in particular, white, male conservatives—are most likely to question climate science and oppose efforts to mitigate climate change.[14] In the context of what many describe as a climate emergency, published research suggests that one is far more likely to encounter a conservative climate denier than a liberal one, and a liberal voter is far more likely to support environmental protection legislation than a conservative voter.[15] Analyses of concern over global warming, conducted by the

academic group Climate Change in the American Mind, show that since at least 2008 when they began polling, political party and political ideology have been key factors explaining why some people are more concerned about climate change than others. The same poll also notes important age-related shifts, with younger Republicans more likely than older Republicans to accept that climate change is happening.[16]

Social scientists offer several explanations of why liberals and conservatives might feel so differently about addressing environmental issues. Sociologists Aaron McCright and Riley Dunlap argue that conservative individuals are more likely to challenge evidence of environmental decline and solutions to address it because they tend to have a positive view of capitalism and industrialization.[17] Their theory involves three related claims. First, that people who embrace industrial capitalism are less likely to support environmental protection policies. This gives rise to the second and third claims: that skepticism about environmental issues such as climate change results from a lack of critical reflexivity about industrial capitalism, and that this skepticism is reinforced by messages calling attention to the ways industrial capitalism supports human flourishing. In later research, McCright tested and confirmed these claims with survey evidence indicating that conservatives are less likely to engage in critical reflection on industrialization and more likely than liberals to doubt evidence that capitalism creates problems for people and the environment.[18]

If conservatives are not often critically reflecting on the impacts of industrialization, it must be partly due to a long-standing, corporate investment in disseminating pro-industry, climate-skeptic messages, particularly to those on the political right. Pro-industrialization, climate-skeptic messages are fed into public discourse by prominent, wealthy conservatives like the Koch brothers and fossil-fuel companies like ExxonMobil. For decades, these powerful actors have invested vast sums of money into think tanks and lobby groups whose purpose is to undermine climate science and promote the social value of industrialization in order to ensure future profits. The historian Naomi Oreskes has identified advertising campaigns that, for decades, deliberately tried to cultivate climate skepticism by misleading audiences about climate change. For example, in 1991, the Edison Electric Institute (an association representing investor-owned electric companies) ran an advertisement reading, "If the Earth is getting warmer, why is Kentucky getting colder?"[19] That claim was unsubstantiated and contradicted evidence from the American Meteorological Society showing

a 1.0–1.5 degrees Fahrenheit warming in the Minneapolis area over the twentieth century.

In a more recent example of climate misinformation, ExxonMobil spent nearly $5 million on Facebook ads targeted to political conservatives. One example is a photograph of an oil worker behind text that reads, "Unnecessary regulations slow our economy down."[20] In a clear illustration of corporate investment in political polarization, Exxon simultaneously ran an ad targeted to liberal Facebook users highlighting the company's investments in clean energy. US senators have called this fossil-fuel financed network of funding for climate skepticism "the web of denial."[21] In short, prevailing wisdom holds that conservatives are less likely to value environmental protection and more likely to value industrialization, a pattern exacerbated by messages challenging (or questioning) climate science and lauding the gifts of industrial activity.

The web of denial also impacts the voting practices of elected representatives from the two major US political parties. Among elected representatives who set the course of the government's mandate, conservative, Republican representatives are less likely to propose environmental protection legislation and more likely to try to block efforts from their liberal, Democrat counterparts to enact environmental protection policies.[22] In one analysis of the political gap in support for clean energy laws at the state level, sociologists Jonathan Coley and David Hess show that Republicans are less likely to support bills seeking to generate more energy from renewable sources. But they also offer two important insights into the contextual factors that shape this political divide. First, Coley and Hess find that in states with a weak fossil-fuel industry, Republicans are more likely to support renewable energy laws. This pattern substantiates arguments that the web of denial thwarts efforts to diversify energy production.[23] Their second insight is not generally recognized by social scientists studying political polarization in civil society. They found that the political divide in support for environmental protection policies was also smaller where environmental advocacy groups were weaker, labor-environmental coalitions absent, and where there were fewer Democrats in the legislature. Coley and Hess suggest it is possible that conservative opposition to environmental protection is, in part, a "*reactive effect* against green energy policies in more progressive settings."[24] A key argument I make in this book is that reactive effects are an overlooked cultural driver of political polarization—and one that we each have the power to disrupt.

This summary of research on political differences in views on environmental protection is bookended by points that are important to note as you read this book: first, for decades, environmental sociologists have characterized views on the environment that tend to be held by conservatives as "anti-ecological"; and second that reactive effects are one of the factors shaping how elected representatives vote on pro-environmental legislation. These points are important because, as I will demonstrate, these reactive effects take place within civil society as well as in state legislatures. My explanation of the cultural dynamics that exacerbate political polarization is a key contribution of this book. Another contribution is the way in which I reconsider the importance of values for understanding human-environment relationships. Much of the research I just summarized focuses on individuals' views on the environment by scrutinizing values. Values, as a concept, represent a strong theme in literature on human-environment relationships and in research on political polarization over environmental protection. But the task of disrupting the reactive effects that drive political polarization will be easier if we have a language that decenters values and focuses instead on relationships.

Studying Eco-Social Relationships, Not Values

Environmental social scientists have a long-standing interest in understanding human-environment interactions.[25] This book builds on that tradition by seeking to understand the place of the environment in people's lives or, more succinctly, eco-social relationships. The idea of an eco-social relationship is central to this book. With this term, I refer to the intensity and direction of a person's orientation toward the planet. In the same way that a long-term relationship with another person can take on many forms, so too can our relationships to the planet. Some people relate to their backyard. Others relate to the image of the planet from space. Others relate to a web of human and nonhuman interactions. Some exercise their relationship to the environment by trying to protect it. Others by celebrating and enjoying the outdoors. Others by gazing at our world, and beyond, through cameras, or telescopes, or televisions. We don't all have the same relationship to the planet, and an eco-social relationship is not static—it will shift along with other changes in our social context and personal history. Regardless of what our eco-social relationship looks and feels like, one thing remains constant: the eco-social relationship we have is one that makes sense for us, given our biography and the parameters of our lives.

THE STANDARD FRAMEWORK OF HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIPS

In order to explain why I chose to study eco-social relationships it is first important to clarify the framework of human-environment interactions that I am not using in this book. What I call the "standard framework" of human-environment relationships makes people's values a central focus. Let me be clear about what values are and how some scholars see them working. Values are defined as goals that feel desirable to the people who hold them—they generally act as guiding principles for us, shaping our decision making.[26] For example, if we value benevolence and helping people more vulnerable than us, then when faced with an invitation from friends to enjoy a night out on an evening that we dedicate to volunteer work, we would (theoretically) turn down the invitation. Environmental social scientists who study values share a belief that values influence behavior by directing our attention when we make decisions.[27]

The psychologist Shalom Schwartz proposed two broad axes of values: self-enhancement and self-transcendence.[28] Self-enhancement values represent a broad category encompassing two types of values orientations: hedonistic values that motivate people to do what feels good and requires minimal effort, and egoistic values (like achievement) that steer people toward opportunities to increase their wealth and status. Self-enhancement values are goals that drive people to better their individual outcomes. Environmental social scientists applying this framework in survey research have found that people who are strongly oriented toward self-enhancement values (hedonistic or egoistic) seem neither to care about the environment nor to do much to protect it.[29]

In contrast to self-enhancement values, self-transcendence values set the individual aside in order to focus on other-oriented goals. Specific orientations within this broad category include altruistic and biospheric values. Altruistic values motivate people to make choices that benefit others, while biospheric values direct our attention toward choices that benefit nonhuman species. There is no shortage of research from environmental social scientists demonstrating that people who endorse biospheric values adopt behaviors that are intended to be good for the environment—I have published this research myself. These studies find that people who espouse self-transcendence values (altruistic or biospheric) are concerned about the environment and frequently engage in pro-environmental behaviors.[30] One of the major contributions of this book is to update this way of thinking

in order to more fully account for how the social and environmental context of our lives shapes our relationship with the environment.

Critiquing the Standard Values Framework

The framework I just described assumes our values drive our behaviors. Yet, anecdotally, many of us can likely recognize there is a difference between what causes us to act and what we may later justify as causing us to act. The sociologist C. Wright Mills long ago addressed this phenomenon with the phrase, "vocabulary of motives," pointing at the way in which people reframe actions in order to make them appear to act consistently with their values and with values that they perceive to be well-regarded by their audience.[31] For example, the fictitious volunteer from the previous section might choose to cancel their volunteering plans to spend time with their friends. They might stress to others, who they sense share a value for benevolence, that this is because their volunteer commitments are a long-term project and they need to sustain their energy. To the friends they join for an evening out, the same person may report that going out to socialize felt more appealing than volunteer work. In another example, imagine someone telling others about donating generously to a nonprofit organization, emphasizing a motivation to do good in the world, and downplaying the motivation to receive a tax credit. There are many ways that most of us use a vocabulary of motives to showcase our more public-spirited side and withhold interests we think others may deem selfish.

If we apply this notion of a vocabulary of motives to the relationship between holding biospheric values and adopting pro-environmental behaviors, we can generate new insights. It may be just as likely that the relationship between biospheric values and pro-environmental behaviors is bidirectional and strongly influenced by context. In other words, the people for whom being good to the environment and demonstrating that goodness through participating in a climate march, carrying a reusable mug, and buying food at a farmers' market are important, are likely the same people who will tell survey researchers they value the natural environment. It is entirely possible that contextual factors, such as where we live and whom we spend time with, shape our behaviors. In this line of thinking, we articulate values statements post hoc, as a way of justifying an alignment between our goals and our actions.[32]

A more political critique of the scholarship on values is that as scholars design tools to measure how much people care about the environment, they inadvertently make and reproduce moral judgments.[33] These tools include

measures of environmental values, environmental attitudes, and environmental behaviors. When researchers develop survey questions to measure these concepts, they use examples that are familiar to them, and that resonate with their own eco-social relationship. With this in mind, perhaps it is not surprising that so many studies implicitly asking "Who cares about the environment?" ultimately find that those who care are educated, politically liberal, and professional in their fields of employment. To put this more directly, perhaps researchers find that the people who care about the environment share their beliefs, practices, and sociodemographic traits because they design and use measurement tools that assume their own orientation to the environment is the correct one.

A New Approach: Interests, Not Values

Critiques of the conventional, or standard, values framework have given rise to alternative approaches to understanding human-environment relationships. One project that aimed to address the political critique of how environmental social scientists study values is Willett Kempton, James Boster, and Jennifer Hartley's book, *Environmental Values in American Culture*, published in 1995. Impelled by their concern that most scholarship on environmentalism is based on "methods that assume that the investigator knows in advance which values and beliefs comprise environmentalism," the authors instead listened to Americans in order to describe their environmental values.[34] To do so, they interviewed people from organizations that are often opposed to one another on environmental issues, such as coal miners, environmental activists, and policy makers. Even though their research was published more than two decades before I started this study, in a different part of the country, I come to the same general conclusion: people from all walks of life value the environment, but they don't value it in the same way.[35]

My book refines, updates, and builds on this earlier work in a few ways. First, by focusing on relationships instead of values, I can more directly bring the biophysical and social worlds into my explanation of why people feel about the environment the way they do. Second, political polarization over environmentalism is a more prominent theme in the public realm now and I examine the connections between eco-social relationships and political divisiveness. And third, the survey sample I draw on more accurately reflects the US adult population—at least on political ideology, education, and income.[36]

In an effort to disrupt the standard framework of values and behaviors, some cultural sociologists argue for replacing values with the concept of

"interests."[37] Interests don't assume directionality between, for instance, the acting subject and an acted-upon object, but simply a relationship. When we consider interests, we are focused on connections between subjects (people) and objects (which is a broad term encompassing other people, consumer goods, ideas, the natural environment, and so on). Qualities of the object and the subject determine the connection between them. In abstract terms, people perceive objects as having qualities that make them more or less appealing.[38] In terms of understanding eco-social relationships, this reframing has the advantage of giving the environment a more prominent and tangible role than exists when we look solely at values.

Consider an environmentally relevant example of how we can study topics related to human-environment reactions using a model emphasizing interests instead of values. In their book *Beyond Politics*, Michael Vandenbergh and Jonathan Gilligan demonstrate that many households have invested time and money in technologies like rooftop solar panels and electric vehicles. They do not explain these investments as an extension of individuals' altruistic or biospheric values, but argue that people who adopt these renewable energy technologies perceive objects like solar panels as offering cost-savings and as conveying a symbolic commitment to supporting climate mitigation. In this example, solar panels are the objects in relationship with people. Solar panels have qualities that make them appealing to some people and unappealing to others. People's perception of these qualities also depends on the context within which solar panels play a role: whether there are rebate policies, whether other people in one's neighborhood have solar panels, and a range of other factors. Vandenbergh and Gilligan draw readers' attention to the qualities of eco-friendly technologies that make people more or less interested in adopting them, not on the motivating values people identify as shaping their decisions. In my book, rather than study people's interests in objects like eco-friendly technologies, I focus on eco-social relationships in order to understand people's interests in the environment itself.

Focusing on eco-social relationships allows me to shed light on two things that are missing from the standard framework linking values and environmental behaviors. I illuminate the importance of the environment itself and the qualities of the environment that make it of interest to people. And I describe a cultural schema of what it looks like to care about the environment among the people I interviewed. I label this cultural schema "the ideal environmentalist" and demonstrate how this schema shapes the ways in which people evaluate their own and others' eco-social relationships. The way I conceptualize eco-social relationships focuses on qualities of people

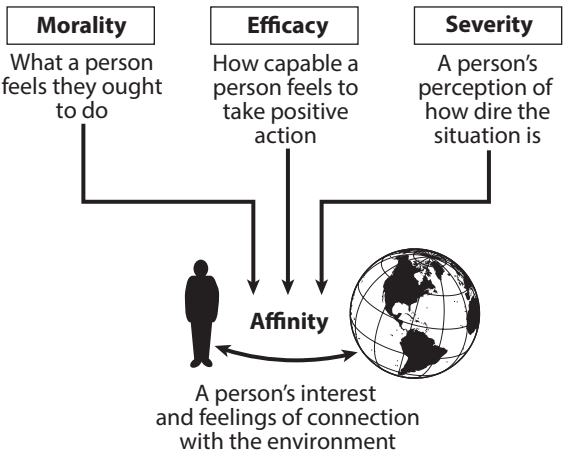

FIGURE I.1. Conceptual model of eco-social relationships

and the environment that influence the affinity people feel for the natural world (see figure I.1).

It is timely and important that we take a closer look at eco-social relationships, since the political polarization that is evident in the American landscape today is a significant barrier to enacting the sorts of environmental protection measures needed to confront ecological decline. Solutions to ecological crises must resonate with, or at least make sense to, a wide array of people if they are to be sustainable in the long term. Part of this strategy must be to recognize the diverse qualities of the environment that appeal to others and the many ways people put their affinity for the environment into action. In this way, it should be more inviting to build common ground on shared interests or at least to feel respect for or curiosity about relationships to the environment that look different from our own.

Conceptual Framework of Eco-Social Relationships

The conceptual framework of eco-social relationships moves away from a focus on individual values toward a focus on the *relationship* between people and whatever they conceive of as "the environment." The heart of an eco-social relationship is this sense of affinity for the environment (figure I.1). Although cultural sociologists use the term "interest" to capture this phenomenon, I prefer the word "affinity." To have an affinity for something is to feel an emotional connection, a pull toward it. When I interviewed people, I sensed variation in this affinity. While some people cried when I asked,

"What comes to mind when I say 'environment'?" and went on to describe specific details about places that they love, others were nonplussed and noncommittal. They might answer, "I don't know, trees and stuff," or simply look at the buildings and landscape around them and say, "all of this," with little emotional valence. An affinity for the environment is a way of characterizing the intensity of the relationship between a person and whatever they define as the environment. In keeping with cultural sociological research arguing that our interests or affinities are shaped by perceived qualities of the object and by qualities of ourselves, I identified characteristics of people and the environment that affected affinity. Although affinity captures the intensity of the relationship between a person and the environment, people do not all envision the same things when they think about the environment.

Perception of the severity of ecological decline was the most prominent quality of the environment that my participants described.[39] "Severity" captures people's sense of the urgency and intensity of ecological deterioration. Although very few people argued that the environment is healthy, and most perceived the planet to be under threat, people varied in terms of how severe they felt that threat to be. At one extreme, you can imagine a person who sees the environment as extremely vulnerable, sees humans as a violent species, and worries a great deal about the fate of the earth. At the other extreme, picture someone who sees the planet as highly resilient and who believes that while humans can be destructive, our species is not powerful enough to disrupt and destroy ecological vitality. For example, someone who sees the planet as vulnerable might look at a clear-cut forest and see it as an assault on the natural world, while someone who sees the environment as resilient might focus on how quickly new plants begin to grow on the site.[40] There are many gradations between these poles that I will describe in later chapters, but for now, understand that this is a perceived quality of the environment that affects people's affinity for nature.[41]

In the relationship between a person and the environment, the person also has qualities that matter. The two qualities I focus on are morality and efficacy. Morality, or personal moral responsibility, describes what a person feels they ought to do (not whether or not they actually do so) vis-à-vis their relationship with the environment. You might be passionate about the environment and perceive ecological decline to be more akin to ecological catastrophe, but these reactions may not exist alongside a feeling that you are personally responsible for doing something to protect the environment.[42] A person's perception of their moral responsibilities to protect the environment is partly shaped by their sense of what causes environmental issues. Some of my participants believed that our actions as individual consumers

create environmental problems. Many of the participants I interviewed who felt this way also communicated a strong personal moral responsibility to protect the environment. But other participants scoffed at the idea that individual consumers are responsible. They perceived ecological decline to be a result of corporations' capacious drive for power and profits and governments' acquiescence to corporate power. These participants felt very little personal moral responsibility.

The second quality of individuals and the final element of my framework of eco-social relationships is efficacy. Efficacy refers to the extent to which people feel capable of actualizing their ideal relationship with the environment. In trying to understand the place of the environment in people's lives, I noticed that some people I spoke with exuded a sense of control and confidence when discussing their environmental beliefs, actions, and impacts; others conveyed a deep sense of powerlessness.[43] I interviewed people who proudly told me that they oriented their entire lives around their passion for protecting the environment—where they worked, where they lived, how they got around, what they ate. But I also interviewed people who told me they felt guilty every day for not doing enough to protect the environment. Although this sense of how effectively we are protecting the environment might seem tangential to human-environment relationships, instead, I found this to be a surprisingly salient theme throughout my interviews.[44]

Our relationship with the environment is made and remade in a social, cultural, and physical context. Because of this, eco-social relationships are dynamic and relational: our upbringing matters, as does the culture of our current social context, including the friends we associate with and the neighborhoods in which we live, the physical parameters of the communities we inhabit, and the information we take in about ecological issues in our communities and beyond. The politics of our context matters as well—What sort of people are given the most authority and respect? Whose experiences are marginalized or overlooked? These themes shape our relationship with the environment and one another. The way each of us interprets, experiences, and responds to ecological decline is also shaped by our own life history: by our connections to the people with whom we spend our time and the places where we live and work. Since all of these components can change, so too can our eco-social relationships—people who hold one relationship for a period of time can shift into another. But a person's eco-social relationship always makes sense for them, in the context of their life.

In this book, I use the four elements of an eco-social relationship to delineate five eco-social relationship archetypes, or, put concisely, eco-types. In

Washington, where I conducted my interviews, the four elements—affinity, severity, morality, efficacy—gave rise to five eco-types, but the nature and key characteristics of these eco-types will likely vary across time and geography. If you are interested in identifying your own eco-type, see the questions listed in box I.1.

BOX I.1 Identify Your Own Eco-Type

Like any framework, this one does not pretend to describe everyone (or anyone) all the time. Eco-social relationships are dynamic, and you may be able to see yourself in more than one eco-type. To identify where you best fit, answer the questions below and see the instructions in the right-hand column (see figure I.2). Once you've identified your eco-type, you can read more about it in Overview of the Book, below.

Questions	Eco-type
Affinity	
Do you think about the environment often? Is the environment extremely important to you? Do you value keeping up with news or information about the environment?	If you mostly answered yes, you would score high on the affinity measure. If you mostly answered no, you would score low on the affinity measure and may reflect the **Indifferent** eco-type.
Severity	
Would you characterize the state of the environment as worse than it used to be? Do you think humans are using up the earth's resources? Do you feel that protecting the environment should be the country's top priority?	If you mostly answered yes, you would score high on the severity measure. If you mostly answered no, you would score low on the severity measure and may fit the **Optimist** eco-type.
Morality	
Do you feel a moral responsibility to reduce your own impact on the environment? Do you worry about your impact on the environment? Do you try to consume less to protect the environment?	If you mostly answered yes, you would score high on the morality measure. If you mostly answered no, you would score low on the morality measure and may reflect a **Fatalist** eco-type.
Efficacy	
When you evaluate your own efforts to protect the environment, do you feel as though you're living up to your ideals? Have you made choices in your life motivated by a desire to reduce your environmental impact? Do you generally feel capable of reducing your environmental impact?	If you lean toward yes, you would score high on the efficacy measure and may fall under the **Eco-Engaged** eco-type. If you lean toward no, you would score low on the efficacy measure and may fit the **Self-Effacing** eco-type.

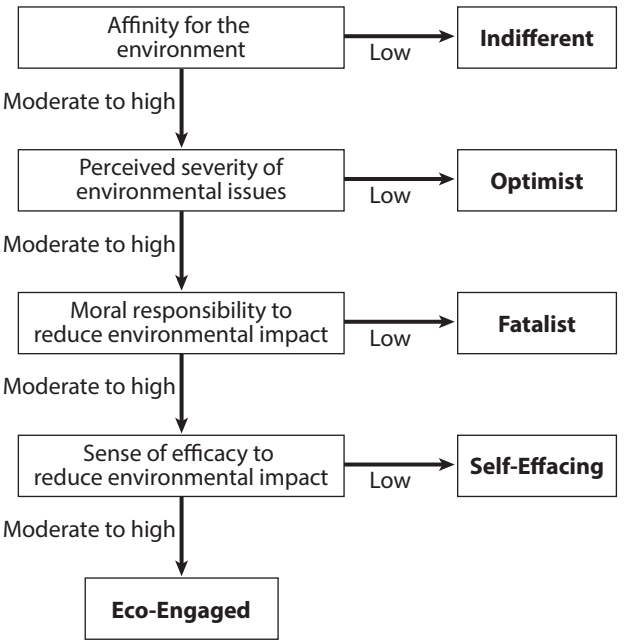

FIGURE I.2. Estimate your eco-type

Data and Methods: Learning More About People's Relationships with the Environment

Because I wanted to identify the place of the environment in people's everyday lives, rather than test a framework of environmental values, I needed to speak with a wide array of people, not just committed eco-enthusiasts. This is what led me to embark on a three-year research project interviewing and surveying American households about their relationships to the environment. Because past research showed that support for environmental protection and engagement in eco-friendly activities varies most by political ideology, education, and place of residence, the approach I took to recruiting a sample of interview participants was aimed at capturing heterogeneity on these sociodemographic characteristics.[45] That is, while others have studied those at the vanguard of environmentalism, my focus was on everyday routines and beliefs and I interviewed many people who would not identify as environmental activists or dedicated sustainable consumers.[46]

Starting in Washington State, where I lived and worked, I recruited 63 politically and socioeconomically diverse households across various types of communities to participate in an interview about the environment.[47]

I interviewed people in Pacifica, an amenity-rich rural area where nature-based tourism is the mainstay of a healthy economy; and people in Olympia, Washington State's uber-progressive capitol whose unofficial slogan is, "Stay weird, Oly."[48] I interviewed people in Pullman, the small college town where I lived, and in Whitman, a rural farming community.[49] The first two sites are predominantly liberal. Pullman has a relatively even mixture of Democrat and Republican voters, and Whitman is a Republican voting base.[50]

In the first section of the interviews, I asked people to tell me what they pictured when I said "environment," to tell me what emotions that image evoked, and then to tell me how concerned they were (on a scale from 1 to 10) about the environment and how important they thought it was that we protect the environment. I asked participants to qualify their answers, explaining how they came up with the numbers they did. Our conversations also touched on the phenomenon of voting with your dollars (or political consumerism), people's senses of their moral responsibilities to protect the planet, their ability to fulfill those responsibilities, and their judgments of who cares—and who doesn't care—about the fate of the planet. I analyzed the interviews with an eye to understanding the place of the environment in people's lives.

The data analysis began with a structured analytic memo that my research assistants and I would write immediately after the interview. The purpose of this memo was to create a bridge between the interview and the work of answering research questions through line-by-line qualitative data coding. I built the analytic memo template around a series of questions, such as "How would you describe this person's relationship with the environment, noting their emotions, opinions, etc.?" and "How does this participant understand their environmental impacts?" The memos allowed me to identify a number of themes in my data. In the second stage of analysis, I coded excerpts of text from interview transcripts with the labels of those themes as I read the transcripts line-by-line. In the third phase, I read through all of the transcripts to identify additional themes, coding text accordingly in an iterative process. In this way, I identified affinity as a theme capturing the intensity of a person's relationship with the environment, and identified severity, morality, and efficacy as qualities of the environment and people, respectively, that bear on affinity. Based on the direction of my participants' comments on these four themes, I created codes for five types of eco-social relationship, that I labeled the Eco-Engaged, the Self-Effacing, the Optimists, the Fatalists, and the Indifferent. I coded lines of text from the interview transcripts that epitomized these orientations to the environment.[51] I also used data on each participant's sociodemographic attributes to see whether there was any

variation within and across those themes, and if so, along what attributes. I describe the five eco-types in more detail in the overview of the book.

After spending two years analyzing the qualitative data, I wanted to get a sense of whether these Washington State–based patterns also existed in the general population. I hired the survey research firm Qualtrics to administer a survey I designed to a sample of their panel of US residents. The 2,619 survey respondents reflect much of the diversity in the US adult population in terms of political ideology, income, and education. The survey data represent respondents from all 50 states. To analyze the survey data, I use a cluster analysis to delineate the five eco-types, basic descriptive statistics to characterize their eco-social relationships, and a series of regression analyses to identify who is most likely to embody each of those relationships and understand variation within the eco-types.[52]

Studying Eco-Social Relationships

I have spent years reflecting on the question of who cares about the environment. These reflections were prompted by reading books and articles and taking courses about human-environment relationships, but also by my years studying forestry and working as a forester in resource-dependent towns. As a forester, I worked with people who often conveyed an antagonistic orientation toward environmental activism, many of whom did not support environmental protection policies, and whose views seemed to reflect the HEP that Dunlap and his coauthors described. Yet, as my colleagues in forestry shared photos they had taken of plants they encountered in the forest and told me the names of birds in the area and mimicked their songs, it was clear to me that my coworkers clearly felt passionate about the environment. Would I be comfortable concluding they were anti-ecological? No. Conventional explanations of human-environment relationships do not adequately capture how those who might express a HEP feel about the environment.

There is also more work to be done to complicate how we understand people who endorse biospheric values and the New Ecological Paradigm. I have many colleagues, friends, and family who fit this description. They have oriented their lives to reducing their environmental impacts, but for some, these commitments often entail leaning into market-based solutions rather than taking a wholesale critical stance on capitalism and industrialization. When I hear friends and colleagues proudly describe some of the market-based solutions to environmental problems they invest in and learn about, from solar panels and the circular economy, to reusable mugs and farmers'

markets, I question McCright and Dunlap's thesis that only conservatives embrace industrialization.[53] Liberals seem to support industrialization in a different way. While my peers and I may voice our critiques of capitalist systems, many of us are also proudly engaged in multiple forms of eco-conscious consumerism that appear to promise little to nothing in the way of challenging the distribution of power and privilege that global capitalism has given rise to.

Compounding these doubts about the bifurcation of pro- and anti-ecological orientations are my observations of the consumption patterns of the people I have known and interacted with in my life. Is the ideal environmentalist whom my friends and family admire any better for the environment than the stereotypical conservation enthusiast? Like me, many of my colleagues, friends, and family live in relatively large homes, fly frequently, and may even buy quite a bit of stuff. Several years ago, my colleagues and I analyzed data from a representative survey of households in Alberta, Canada, and we found that people who held pro-environmental values also had a large carbon footprint. We found that income, not values, mattered when it came to determining a household's carbon emissions.[54] I am not raising this point in order to lay blame on well-intentioned individuals. I do so to demonstrate why, instead of asking the more common question, *Why do some people care about the environment?* I chose to ask, *What is the place of the environment in people's lives?*

The Alberta study taught me that environmental social scientists focusing on values might not be measuring what matters, but is my approach any better? I think so; first, because my answer to the question of what role the environment plays in people's lives is derived from spending hundreds of hours listening to people in Washington State talk about the environment. Also, my results are based on an analytic approach aimed at understanding why a person's way of making sense of and responding to ecological decline is right for them. Through this process, I learned that many people care deeply about the environment. But people whose eco-type is not culturally associated with caring about the environment often experience frustration and resentment at being misunderstood or maligned. Recognizing this phenomenon is significant for understanding and overcoming political polarization and strengthening civil society, because it forces us to admit that we have misunderstood people who are not like ourselves, and invites us to identify areas of common ground where we might find unlikely allies in the fight to disrupt ecological decline.

Overview of the Book

Over the next eight chapters, I will lay out the groundwork for my argument that we all care about the environment and that an underrecognized driver of political polarization is the way in which liberals and conservatives misjudge one another's eco-social relationships. To do so, I begin chapter 1 by introducing the cultural ideal that my interview participants alluded to when evaluating their own and others' eco-social relationships. This cultural schema served as something of a specter in so many of my interviews—revered by liberals and derided by conservatives. The framework of eco-social relationships that I described in this chapter gives rise to five eco-types, and I unpack each of these in subsequent chapters, allocating a chapter to each eco-social relationship.

Chapter 2 introduces the Eco-Engaged. This eco-type is characterized by a deep affinity for the environment, bolstered by a strong belief that ecological decline is urgent and severe. The Eco-Engaged feel personally responsible for confronting that decline and generally feel capable of acting on that moral responsibility. This is the eco-type environmental social scientists often study when we want to know what motivates people to take personal and political actions to protect the environment.

Chapter 3 describes the Self-Effacing, who share the Eco-Engaged participants' perception of the environment as vulnerable and threatened by humanity and who feel a moral responsibility to help protect the environment. However, the Self-Effacing experience a profound lack of self-efficacy to act on their moral ideals. I believe much previous research has overlooked this eco-type.

In chapter 4 we meet the Optimists, who feel a strong affinity for nature and confront an environment they perceive as powerful and resilient. As a result, they accept neither diagnoses of an imminent ecological catastrophe nor appeals to reduce their personal levels of consumption. The Optimist eco-type reflects past research on the conventional climate denier as well as the embodiment of the HEP. But as I argue in the chapter, these characterizations misunderstand and overly simplify the Optimist eco-type.

Chapter 5 presents the Fatalists, an eco-type that has been overlooked or mischaracterized in existing research. Fatalists have a deeply pessimistic outlook for humanity and feel powerless to confront what they believe is driving ecological decline: corporations who are driven to endlessly maximize profits, aided by a state too powerless to stop them and uphold the

common good. This eco-social relationship has received little attention from social scientists to date.

Chapter 6 introduces the final eco-type: the Indifferent. The Indifferent express a weak affinity for the environment. Other studies have characterized a "disengaged" group of Americans and I think that adequately reflects the Indifferent.[55] For the Indifferent, other issues feel more immediate and more relevant than their relationship with the environment.

My goal in writing the chapters on eco-social relationships is to demonstrate that we all care about the environment, but do so in ways that can be unrecognizable to others. The final chapters of the book build on this foundation to demonstrate how failing to appreciate the diversity of eco-social relationships that exists, and critiquing how others care about the environment, affects political polarization. Chapter 7 brings in evidence of the cultural dynamics driving political polarization over environmental protection from my interviews with Washington State residents. In chapter 8 and the conclusion, I identify key lessons from closely studying eco-social relationships. I summarize the current landscape as encompassing seemingly incompatible relationships to a natural environment that is universally valued.

As long as we critique *individuals'* relationships to the environment and make judgments of their moral worth on this basis, we exacerbate the divisiveness of civil society. This pattern of individualizing ecological decline also obfuscates the role of the state and market in perpetuating unsustainable and inequitable production and consumption practices. If we can instead cultivate curiosity about other people's eco-social relationships, and direct our critique toward decision makers in the market and state, we can strengthen the power of civil society to protect the environment. Next, I introduce the ideal environmentalist, a cultural schema that my participants referred to when explaining what it looks like to care about the environment.

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