

The Spread of Behavior: When Do Proenvironmental Behaviors Spread to Other People and Other Behaviors?

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Introduction

- Properly addressing many environmental problems (e.g., climate change) requires that large groups of people engage in a range of proenvironmental behaviors (e.g., both recycle more *and* drive less)
- An improved understanding of the processes that lead people to engage in both types of the spread of behavior – the spread of behavior *within* the person from behavior to behavior (“behavior spillover”; Truelove et al., 2014) and the spread of behavior *between* people from person to person – would help ensure that large groups of people engage in a range of behaviors
- One process that could contribute to both types of the spread of behavior is getting people to recognize the links between a target behavior (e.g., recycling paper) and other environmental issues (e.g. recycling paper also saves energy, water, etc.) – appreciating these links may motivate people to be more likely to both engage in related behaviors and attempt to get other people to engage in the target behavior

• Some interventions types (e.g., persuasive messages) could be crafted to influence these beliefs about the links between a target behavior and other environmental issues, whereas other common intervention types are less flexible and only focus on a target behavior and not the richer behavioral context (e.g., modeling interventions or planning interventions)

• Thus, we expected that interventions that emphasize links between recycling paper and other environmental issues (e.g., a persuasive message), as compared to interventions focused on *just* recycling paper (i.e., modeling and planning interventions), should be more effective at influencing individuals to engage in other proenvironmental behaviors and should influence people to try to get others to recycle paper

Method

- Students ($N=166$) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (or a control condition) targeting paper recycling at home: reading a persuasive message, watching a modeling video, or engaging in a planning activity
- Afterwards participants reported their beliefs about how paper recycling is linked to other environmental issues, their intentions to recycle paper at home, intentions to engage in related proenvironmental behaviors (i.e., recycle other products; take the bus, buy organic food, and use reusable bags at the store), and intentions to spread their paper recycling to others
- Over the course of two weeks participants then reported daily engagement in paper recycling, engagement in related behaviors, and efforts to influence the paper recycling of others

Results: Beliefs and Intentions Immediately After the Intervention

- People in the message condition, compared to all of the other conditions, perceived a clearer link between paper recycling and other environmental issues ($b = 1.34$, $CI = .79$ to 1.90 , $p < .001$, $d = .80$)
- As compared to people in the control condition, people in either the message condition ($b = .68$, $CI = .24$ to 1.11 , $p = .003$, $d = .75$) or the modeling condition ($b = .52$, $CI = .02$ - 1.01 , $p = .042$, $d = .52$) increased their intentions to recycle paper at home
- People in either the message condition ($b = .61$, $CI = .28$ - $.94$, $p < .001$, $d = .93$) or the modeling condition ($b = .35$, $CI = .06$ to $.63$, $p = .017$, $d = .59$) increased their intentions to recycle other products; the interventions did not increase participants’ intentions to engage in non-recycling proenvironmental behaviors
- Only people in the message condition increased their intentions to try to spread their paper recycling behavior to others ($b = .78$, $CI = .35$ to 1.20 , $p < .001$, $d = .93$)

Results: Behavior Over Time

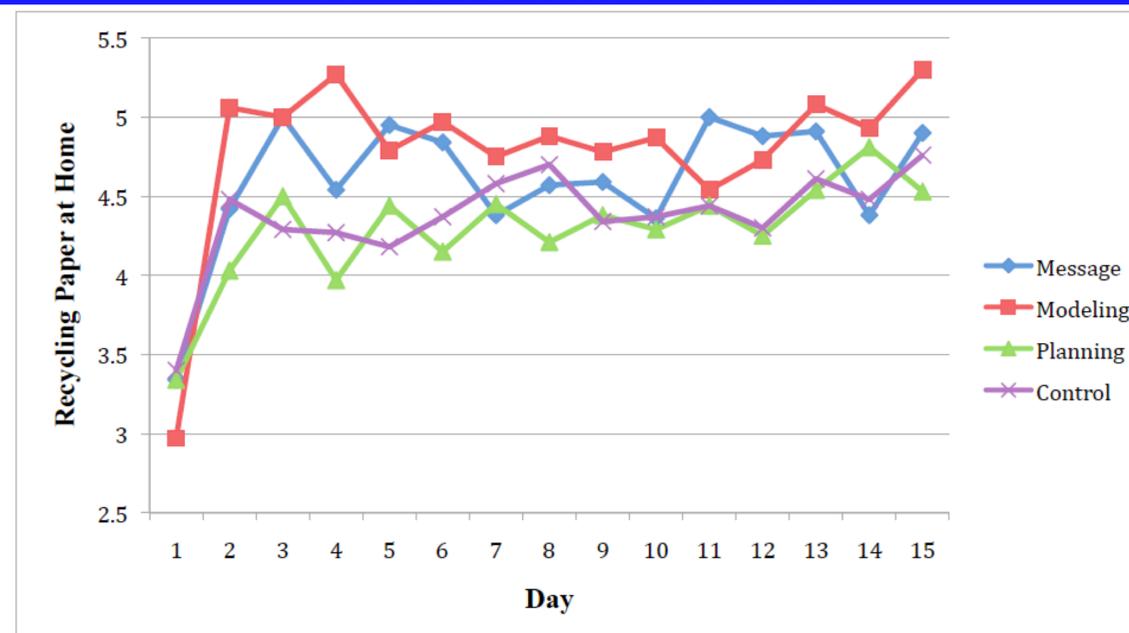


Figure 1: Daily reporting of recycling paper at home by condition (note: Day 1 represents baseline behavior; scale ran from 0, not at all, to 6, all the time)

Results: Behavior Over Time

- Only people in the modeling condition initially increased their recycling of paper at home ($b = .84$, $CI = .24$ to 1.45 , $p = .01$, $d = .70$)
- Only people in the message condition trended toward initially increasing engagement in other recycling behaviors at home ($b = .41$, $CI = -.13$ to $.94$, $p = .14$, $d = .42$); none of the interventions increased engagement in non-recycling proenvironmental behaviors
- People in either the message condition ($b = .67$, $CI = .06$ to 1.27 , $p = .03$, $d = .55$) or the modeling condition ($b = .83$, $CI = .19$ to 1.46 , $p = .01$, $d = .65$) initially increased their efforts to spread their behavior to others

Conclusion

- People in the persuasive message condition perceived stronger links between the target behavior (i.e., recycling paper at home) and other environmental issues, and also increased their intentions to engage in the target behavior, intentions to engage in related behaviors, intentions to spread the target behavior to others, and increased their efforts to spread the target behavior to others
- However, the modeling intervention had the strongest effect on the target behavior, and also significantly influenced efforts to spread the target behavior to others

• Future research should further explore the processes that simultaneously influence both types of the spread of proenvironmental behavior, and should also test new intervention approaches to more effectively influence both types of the spread of behavior

Reference and Notes

Truelove, H. B., Carrico, A. R., Weber, E. U., Raimi, K T., & Vandenbergh, M. P. (2014). Positive and negative spillover of pro-environmental behavior: An integrative review and theoretical framework. *Global Environmental Change*, 29, 127-138.

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