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Nature in the Balance: Symmetry in perceived human-nature relations predicts pro-environmental attitudes

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Abstract

In the face of global climate change, investigating pro-environmental behaviors and perceptions of the human-nature relationship is increasingly important. We investigated perceived asymmetries in how humans and nature impact each other across two studies. Participants (N=331) rated the degree to which they believe humans and nature impact each other (Study 1) and were asked to list and assess instances of human-nature and nature-human impact (Study 2). Study 1 results suggest that participants generally perceive humans to have a stronger impact on nature than vice versa, whereas Study 2 results suggest that participants perceive humans to have a strong-negative and a weak-positive impact on nature and nature to have a similarly strong-positive and weak-negative impact on humans. These findings suggest that while humans' relationship with nature is broadly perceived anthropocentrically and unidirectionally, when probed about specific human-nature impacts, the human-nature relationship is perceived as bidirectional, but still unbalanced.