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Apathy towards Environmental Issues, Narcissism, and Competitive View of the World

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Abstract

In this study, hypothetical model included personality variables and social psychological variables by employing narcissism and competitive worldview as predictors towards apathy about environmental issues. The study was conducted on 225 college students (138 males, 87 females; Mage = 18.25 years, SDage = 2.13 years) taken through convenience accidental sampling technique from several majors of a university in Jakarta, Indonesia. The results of path analysis showed that narcissism was able to predict apathy towards the environment indirectly through a competitive view of the world ($\chi^2 = 0.11$, $p = 0.736$, RMSEA = 0.000).

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1. Introduction

Gopalan (in Karl Kübel Institute for Development Education, 2006, p. 19) stated “nature’s fury alone does not cause disaster”. What truly causes disaster is human apathy and the failure to implement strategies to prevent the impact of nature’s wrath.

Most research on attitudes towards the environment has been focused on factors which influence positive and negative attitudes to the environment. There have not been many studies that explore factors which influence apathy or indifference about the environmental issues, especially among youths. This study aimed to fill the theoretical gap. Indifference or apathy can be as destructive as anti-environmental

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attitudes. At the macro level, when since childhood or youth people possess no environmental concern; it is likely that if they become political leaders, they will produce political policies that neglect environmental issues.

General apathy toward environmental issues is “a lack of interest in environmental issues, and a general belief that problems in this area have been exaggerated” (Thompson & Barton, 1994, p. 151). Annita (2012) added that apathy or lack of interest toward the environment cannot be a parameter which indicates that most of the citizens do not have an understanding about environmentally damaging behaviors. Annita gave examples that remind us to the classical concept of Hardin (1968) “the tragedy of the commons”:

“They understand, but they are apathetic Another example is a pile of garbage which is usually found in traditional markets held in the roadway and the town square. People may think, ‘Later on there will be someone who will clean it up,’ ‘It is too much trouble to find the bin’, or ‘Why should I be a caring person?’”

It is clear that apathy problem must be solved; therefore explanation about causes of apathy is needed. In the literature, there are at least three explanations related to apathy; those are (1) psychoanalytic explanation, (2) evolutionary explanation, and (3) explanation of free-market ideology.

Lertzman (2008), by using psychoanalytic explanation, stated that apathy toward the environment is caused by extreme anxiety about ecological problems. The excessive anxiety unconsciously brings people to the defense mechanism; that is denying or pretending as if there is no environmental problem (denial), or if the problem exists, it is the other people responsibilities (projection). Here, the keywords are fear, powerlessness, and sense of disempowerment. Lertzman cited Krosnick and his colleagues (2006) which found “people stop paying attention to a problem when they realize there are no easy solutions for it” (p. 16). In another term, Nagel (2005) proposed a term called ‘learned hopelessness’. This term refers to a suffer feeling action paralysis. The paralysis is produced by a thought that the damage of the environment is extremely difficult to be stopped and only a little that can be done to prevent it. For dealing with this apathy, Winter and Koger (2004, p. 219) suggested that:

“When problems seem too depersonalized or distant, people become inactive or apathetic. To keep arousal in the optimal moderate range, Weick suggested that we define problems in terms of small wins. Small wins have immediacy, tangibility, and controllability that reverse powerlessness and apathy.”

Griskevicius, Cantú, and van Vugt (2012), by using evolutionary explanation, stated that environmental apathy is rooted in human evolution. Human ancestors passed the process of evolution in which they emphasized the present rather than the future. This condition is called ‘future discounting’. Thus, human does not have evolutionary mechanisms for reacting to large-scale but slow-moving environmental problems, such as climate change (Penn, 2003, in Griskevicius, Cantú, & van Vugt, 2012). In addition, evolution does not make our brain sound the alarm when we faced with new dangers that were rarely encountered in the history of human civilization, for instance pollution.

Through their research, Heath and Gifford (2006) found that people with free-market ideology tend to have optimism that free-market system which is not interrupted will bring beneficial outcomes for everyone. However, it causes apathy toward the environmental problems. The explanation is as follows (p.52):

“Because the free-market system is to take care of everything in the end (i.e., the ‘invisible hand,’ Smith, 1776), there is not much for an individual to be concerned about regarding the environment.”

Considering the perspectives above, this present research assumes that environmental apathy is influenced by worldview. Worldview is “a set of assumptions about physical and social reality that may have powerful effects on cognition and behavior.... [Worldview] is a way of describing the universe and life within it, both in terms of what is and what ought to be” (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 3, 4).

Worldview chosen to be a predictor of environmental apathy in this present study is ‘competitive jungle worldview’ as theorized by Duckitt and Sibley (2010). Competitive-jungle worldview is a social worldview believing “the world is a ruthlessly competitive jungle in which might is right, the strong win, and the weak lose as opposed to a place of cooperative harmony, in which people care for, help, and share with each other” (p. 1869).

There are two reasons why the worldview is selected based on the theories above. First, related to Lertzman (2008) and Nagel (2005) who proposed that sense of powerlessness is a variable which causes people to be apathetic toward environment; we are interested in finding out the effect of sense of powerfulness. In this case, there is object difference. According to Lertzman and Nagel, object of sense of powerlessness is manageability toward environmental problem; while, according to Duckitt, object of sense of powerfulness is control or dominance or superiority over others. However, if we agree with the rejection of Plumwood (1993) against hyperseparation between humanity and nature; we will find a structure of analogous experience between both continuums of the sense of power.

Second, evolutionary claims as proposed by Griskevicius, Cantú, and van Vugt (2012), of course, need further empirical test. This research proposes that one of the proxies of the evolutionary human development is worldview. Related to that matter, Duckitt’s concept about competitive-jungle worldview contained a view “the social world is a competitive jungle characterized by a ruthless and amoral Darwinian struggle for survival, for resources and power” (Duckitt, 2001, p. 51; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002, p. 77). Thus, worldview chosen in this research is in line with evolutionary paradigm, which is proposed by Darwin.

People who are high in the competitive-jungle worldview score will be low in the agreeableness personality scale (sympathetic, compassionate, and forgiving); in contrary they will be high in the scores of tough-minded, hard-hearted, and uncaring (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). They do not have empathy in chasing power and their individual purposes. Considering that cooperative action in the social dilemma situation (including environmental problems) will be higher for empathetic people (Rumble, Van Lange, & Parks, 2010), this research assumes that there is positive predictive correlation between competitive-jungle worldview and apathetic toward the environment. Seemingly, either sense of powerlessness or sense of powerfulness—especially in the absence of empathy, in their extreme poles, can equally produce environmental apathy.

This research also presumes that competitive-jungle worldview is influenced by someone narcissism. It is based on the Pincus’ *et al.* proposition (2009, p. 366), “Normal narcissism supports asserting interpersonal dominance and fuels achievement motives such as competitive strivings” The assumption that narcissism is related to competitive-jungle worldview is in accordance with the finding of Nicholls and Stukas (2011, p. 209):

“In our study, more narcissistic participants reported a decrease in closeness to an actual friend following the social comparison threat of being outperformed in an area known to be important to them (narcissism was highly correlated with Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale/CSWS competitiveness) than did less narcissistic participants.”

Grafeman (2009) also found that the individuals, who show themselves through self-report questionnaires as being high in narcissism-related traits, are perceived by their peers as being competitive, hostile, and having a great willingness to control others. The psychological mechanisms underlying hypothesis about the predictive correlation between narcissism and competitive-jungle worldview can also be described by an analysis by Bushman and Buameister (1998) which stated that narcissism is characterized by the feelings of superiority toward others; so that the neglect done by a narcissist toward other’s rights and feelings can produce higher aggression. The narcissist perceives the social life as a series of struggles for dominance, thus they can attack others even though there is no direct threats. They

carry out the attack only as a means to put them in a superior position by conquering or intimidating others.

By integrating all of the propositions above, this research hypothesize that competitive-jungle worldview is a mediator of predictive relations between narcissism and environmental apathy.

2. Methods

2.1. Participant and design

The participants of this research are 225 students (138 males, 87 females; Mage = 18.25 years old, SDage = 2.13 years old) who are citizens of Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The participants are recruited by using convenience accidental sampling technique from several majors of a university in Jakarta. Self-report questionnaires are distributed to classes which are attended by students from various study programs. The educational background composition of the participants of this research includes the following: Economics (Accounting, Management) 88 persons, Computer Science 74 persons, Visual Communication Design 41 persons, International Relations 10 persons, and others (Communication, Psychology, etc.) 12 persons.

The design of this research is a predictive correlational design. The data of this research is analyzed using path analysis done with the assistance of LISREL 8.8 program. Path analysis is an analytical method which is employed to see the relation of three or more variables (Seniati, 2009). According to Kenny (2012):

“A mediational model is a causal model. For example, the mediator is presumed to cause the outcome and not vice versa. If the presumed model is not correct, the results from the mediational analysis are of little value. Mediation is not defined statistically; rather statistics can be used to evaluate a presumed mediational model.”

The predictor variable in this research is narcissism. The mediator variable is competitive-jungle worldview. The criterion variable is environmental apathy. According to Seniati (2009), the criteria to determine whether the model fit or not (the suitability between research model or measurement model with empirical data) are (1) Chi-square: Chi-square is valid if the normality assumption fulfilled and the size of the sample is large; The model is fit if $p > 0.05$; (2) Goodness of Fit Indices (GFI): The model is fit if $GFI > 0.90$; (3) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): The model is fit if $RMSEA < 0.05$.

2.2. Materials and procedures

The participants were given psychological scales in Bahasa Indonesia, which consist of three segments, to measure the predictor, mediator, and criterion variables. The scales were presented with six response choices, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (scored 1) to “Strongly Agree” (scored 6). Preliminary items tryout, evaluation of the scales for their validity and reliability, as well as deletion of the unnecessary items were conducted in advance. Tryout (instrument testing) data were obtained from 55 students (31 males, 24 females).

The psychological scale for measuring environmental apathy is adapted from Thompson and Barton (1994). This scale consists of 9 items. The examples of these items are as follows: (1) "Environmental threats such as deforestation and ozone depletion have been exaggerated"; (2) "I do not think the problem of depletion of natural resources is as bad as many people make it out to be"; (3) "I do not feel that humans are dependent on nature to survive"; (4) "I do not care about environmental problems"; and (5) "I'm opposed to programs to preserve wilderness, reduce pollution and conserve resources". The analysis

of reliability and validity shows indices of Cronbach's Alpha 0.731 and correct item-total correlation ranged from 0.282 to 0.637, by deleting 3 items.

Psychological scale, which is used to measure competitive-jungle worldview, is adapted from Duckitt (2010). This scale consists of 14 items. The examples of these items are as follows: (1) "Winning is not the first thing; it is the only thing"; (2) "If it is necessary to be cold blooded and vengeful to reach one's goals, then one should do it"; (3) "It's a dog-eat-dog world where you have to be ruthless at times"; (4) "My knowledge and experience tell me that the social world we live in is essentially a competitive 'jungle' in which the fittest survive and succeed; power, wealth, and winning are everything; and might is right"; and (5) "If you have power in a situation, you should use it regardless of how you have to get your way". The analysis of reliability and validity show indices of Cronbach's Alpha 0.768 and correct item-total correlation ranged from 0.300 to 0.617, by deleting 7 items.

Psychology scale employed to measure narcissism is adapted from Pincus et al., (2009). This scale consists of 52 items. The examples of these items are as follows: (1) "It's hard to feel good about myself unless I know other people admire me", (2) "I often find myself envying others' accomplishments" (Contingent Self-Esteem); (3) "I find it easy to manipulate people" (Exploitative); (4) "I feel valuable when others rely on me" (Self-Sacrificing Self-Enhancement); (5) "I often hide my needs for fear that others will see me as needy and dependent" (Hiding the Self); (6) "I often fantasize about accomplishing things that are probably beyond my means" (Grandiose Fantasy); (7) "Sometimes I avoid people because I'm afraid they will not do what I want them to" (Devaluing); and (8) "I typically get seriously angry when I'm unable to get what I want from others" (Entitlement Rage). The analysis of reliability and validity shows indices of Cronbach's Alpha 0.928 and corrected item-total correlation ranged from 0.272 to 0.752, by deleting 3 items.

3. Results

Path analysis shows that narcissism is able, indirectly, to predict environmental apathy through a competitive worldview (Fig. 1; $\chi^2 = 0.11$, $p = 0.736$, $RMSEA = 0.000$). The more narcissistic a person is the more the person sees the world as being full of competition, and as a result, the more the person does not care about the environment.

Structural equations derived from the model are as follow:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Apathy} = 0.28 * \text{Competit}, \text{ Errorvar.} = 34.10, R^2 = 0.048 \\ (0.097) \qquad \qquad \qquad (3.72) \\ 2.91 \qquad \qquad \qquad 9.17 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Competit} = 0.081 * \text{Narcissi}, \text{ Errorvar.} = 18.99, R^2 = 0.12 \\ (0.017) \qquad \qquad \qquad (2.07) \\ 4.88 \qquad \qquad \qquad 9.17 \end{array}$$

Observed from the coefficient of determination (R^2), 4.8% of environmental apathy are contributed by competitive-jungle worldview, and 12% of competitive-jungle worldview are contributed by narcissism.

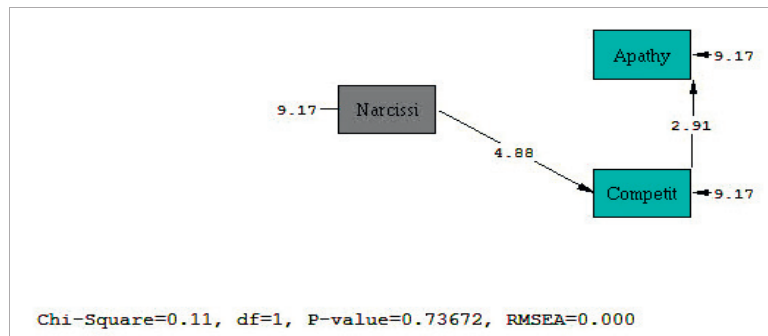


Fig. 1. The result of path analysis (GFI = 1.00; $T > 1.96$)

4. Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first research which found out that narcissism predicts environmental apathy through competitive-jungle worldview. The finding that competitive-jungle worldview can predict environmental apathy is in line with Hine, Gifford, Heath, Cooksey, and Quain (2009). They found out through literature review that, in the common dilemma situation, competitive individuals or pro self-oriented, rather than cooperative individuals or prosocial-oriented, tend to overharvest jointly managed resources. In their empirical research, they found out that competitive individuals monitor the resources extraction that others do. The purpose is not to maximize collective outcomes, but to maximize personal benefit. Through the mechanism of upward social comparison, competitive individual increase resource extraction to make it more than their competitors, or maximize his own result (payoffs) before other people extract the resources. They also found out that individual with high score in the environmental apathy scale increases resources extraction after receiving feedback that other people also extract substantial resources. Theoretical contribution of this present research is the inclusion of narcissism as a predictor variable. This research confirms recent findings of Luchner, Houston, Walker, and Houston (2011) that stated there is a relation between normal or non-clinical narcissism and competitiveness. Moreover, overt narcissism (e.g. grandiose narcissism) and covert narcissism (e.g. vulnerable narcissism) correlate positively with hyper-competitiveness, and overt narcissism correlate positively with general competitiveness. As cited in Luchner, Houston, Walker, and Houston (2011, p. 780):

“General competitiveness is a potentially adaptive trait across a wide range of occupational domains, including business, law, and sports Hyper-competitiveness is associated with heightened self-worth fluctuating with underlying low self-esteem, decreased need for others, interest in admiration and recognition from others, and high levels of neuroticism”

The results of this empirical study rebut Seth Robbins' (in Singer, 2009) speculation arguing “Narcissism can help people believe that they have the power to solve large, complex problems such as climate change.” This present research found out narcissism firstly influences competitiveness (competitive-jungle worldview), before influences environmental attitude (apathy). However, different from Robbins statement; the influence of narcissism is not constructive toward environment.

This research also confirms the finding of Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman (2012):

“Millennials reported thinking about social problems fewer, having less interest in government, making less effort to conserve energy, and being less interested in taking ‘green’ actions to protect the environment, either personally or through government.”

Millennials meant by the researchers are people born after 1982. The participants of this current research are categorized in Millennials. However, this research gives new insight concerning psychological

mechanism of narcissistic people in behaving toward the environment. This research succeeds to prove empirically that competitive worldview is responsible as a mediator of the relationship between narcissism and environmental apathy. It is understandable since narcissistic people have self-absorption tendencies and exploitative characteristics, for them environment are instruments functioning to gratify self-interest. The proliferation of narcissism and competitive worldview in the Millennials community cannot be separated from the role of mass media, which by various contests and reality shows provides a spotlighted stages and podiums. For instance in Indonesia, Nasution (2010) noted in his diary written using a satire-sound statement:

“Is it too wrong to be popular? Is it too wrong, then, if we want to be popular?

Is it too wrong when our children are born, cry, and want to be a participant of Indonesian Idol?

Life is short. Live your life to the fullest. Be exist, be narcissistic, be popular.

Since it seems, according to popular opinion, being popular means being loved.

Since it seems, being loved is the goal of all of us.”

In relation to the matter above, it is necessary to examine the findings of Asmuni, Khalili, and Zain (2012). They found out that university students with a rural background show behavior scale of environment conservation (turn off unused electricity and purchase of energy saving appliances, turn off unused taps, use of designated recycle bins and some reuse activities) which is higher than students with urban background. Considering that this research is conducted toward students in the capital city of Indonesia, the findings of this research all at once can a little bit explain Asmuni, Khalili, and Zain researches. Narcissism and the competitive worldview might not grow in the rural area; this condition is in contrary with urban area such as Jakarta.

This explanation is in line with the finding of Cai, Kwan, and Sedikides (2012) recently which defines that urban persons are more narcissistic than rural persons. However, another crucial thing is that values and the worldview from a rural area can affect environmental conservation behavior in the future. Inspired by the findings, the intervention which can be proposed to overcome environmental apathy related to the view of the world is the finding of authentic identity (Piliang, 2010, p. 422). We have to escape from the ‘identity trap or jeopardy’ socially constructed within the discourse of consumerism and popular culture which is not authentic, dependent upon the imagination, fantasies, and illusions provided by the elite of cultural producer.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The assumption of the hypothesis supported by this study is that chronic admiration on the self and attitude of ‘selfishness’ in Darwinian terms made people competitive and lose the capacity to pay attention to the environment. The findings of this current research imply that if we want to reduce apathetic among youths toward the environmental issues, we need to be attentive, to provide immediate treatment to their narcissism, and manage their worldview.

Various professions, such as social psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, school counselors, media experts, and environmental scholars can optimize their roles in helping youths to realize the psychological facts to prevent apathetic attitudes toward the environmental issues.

The book edited by Barry, Kerig, Stellwagen, and Barry (2011) may add the understanding of how narcissism is formed and how to conduct an assessment to recognize it on the stages of early development; so that preliminary intervention can be done.

Further research may extend the thesis of this research by finding psychological or sociological variables that can be mediator or moderator candidates between variable of competitive worldview and variable of environmental apathy. The researches on the role of social influence from online social

networks (Twitter, Facebook) in the relationship among variables which are examined in this research are also worth considering doing.

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