

## IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN: THE ROLE OF SELF-EVALUATIONS IN EXPLAINING SUPPORT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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Using a mixed methods design, we examine the role of self-evaluations in influencing support for environmental issues. In Study 1—an inductive, qualitative study—we develop theory about how environmental issue supporters evaluate themselves in a mixed fashion, positively around having assets (self-assets) and negatively around questioning their performance (self-doubts). We explain how these ongoing self-evaluations, which we label “situated self-work,” are shaped by cognitive, relational, and organizational challenges individuals interpret about an issue from a variety of life domains (work, home, or school). In Study 2—an inductive, quantitative, observational study—we derive three profiles of environmental issue supporters’ mixed selves (self-affirmers, self-critics, and self-equivocators) and relate these profiles to real issue-supportive behaviors. We empirically validate key constructs from Study 1 and show that even among the most dedicated issue supporters, doubts play an important role in their experiences and may be either enabling or damaging, depending on the composition of their mixed selves. Our research offers a richer view of both how contexts shape social issue support and how individuals’ self-evaluations play a meaningful role in understanding the experiences and, ultimately, the issue-supportive behaviors of individuals working on social issues.

At stake is the survival of our civilization as we know it and the type of world we are going to leave as a legacy for those who follow us.

Gore (2012)

Public figures can be important for drawing attention to critical social issues such as climate change. Yet, for each of these public figures, there are scores of often less visible people who act to support these issues in a variety of ways, both inside and outside of formal organizations (Bornstein, 2007). These “social issue supporters”—individuals who identify with a social issue and desire to support it—are often on the front lines of addressing pressing social issues like climate change not only through their work, but also in their daily lives.

Despite its importance, supporting a social issue can be challenging. Scholars have suggested that supporting a social issue—whether climate change, gender equity, corporate social responsibility, or something else—can come at a cost to an individual’s career, personal endeavors, and family commitments (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton,

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1998; Meyerson, 2001; Piderit & Ashford, 2003). In addition, it is often difficult to know when one is making progress in supporting an issue (Howard-Grenville, 2007), and individuals often confront setbacks and obstacles as part of their support efforts. Understanding how social issue supporters experience these difficulties—and why they act despite these difficulties—helps answer scholars' recent calls to better address the ways in which organizations and their constituent individuals can make a positive social impact (Golden-Biddle & Dutton, 2012; Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003).

Given the potential difficulties of supporting a social issue, it is not surprising that even though social issue supporters identify with an issue and have a desire to support it, they do not always act on that desire. Scholars have suggested several reasons why this might be the case. First, some organizational researchers posit that individuals evaluate the career risks of supporting an issue and that potential issue supporters withdraw support when it might undermine their image (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Yet it is not clear if these arguments hold when considering *social* issue supporters versus supporters of the more traditional strategic business issues scholars typically examine. This is because social issue supporters, by their very definition, tend to hold strong values and beliefs about an issue that may make them more willing to take risks, making image risk less of an impediment to social issue support (Ashford & Barton, 2007; Sonenshein, 2012).

Second, organizational theories for explaining issue support focus on processes that explain support in organizations, such as by focusing on the importance of individual's "sensemaking" about favorability of an organizational context in determining whether issue support is likely (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002). Organizational scholars also focus on issue supporters' interactions with top managers (e.g., Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Dutton & Ashford, 1993) and therefore emphasize contextual features such as the extent to which an issue is consistent with an organizational norm or relationships with top managers (e.g., Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Sonenshein, 2006). Scholars argue that for cases in which contextual cues suggest an organizational or relational context unsupportive of issues, individuals will likewise be less willing to support that issue. Yet, examining social issue supporters in strictly organizational contexts, and predominately around top managerial interactions, obscures the fact that social issue supporters often pursue sup-

port for issues with organizational actors beyond top managers (e.g., Bansal, 2003) as well as in other social contexts, such as with friends and family. In contrast, more traditional strategic business issues are often exclusively sold to top managers inside organizations (Dutton & Ashford, 1993).

Third, psychologists examining social issue support offer a more general theoretical perspective that examines issue support that is often independent of an immediate context. Instead, primary predictors of social issue support from this work are often couched in theories such as behavioral motivation (Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008; Nigbur, Lyons, & Uzzell, 2010), individual differences (Arnocky, Stroink, & DeCicco, 2007) or issue-related identity (Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010). These explanations suggest that an issue supporter operates largely outside the influence of context. For example, research in this area often overlooks how different situations might pose difficulties or challenges to issue supporters, focusing instead on individual differences such as beliefs (e.g., Ferguson, Branscombe, & Reynolds, 2011) or perceptions of norms (e.g., Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008) in predicting issue-supportive behavior. Furthermore, these studies often focus on the general population as opposed to social issue supporters identified with an issue. This is a critical oversight, because social issue supporters are often strongly identified with an issue and thus are different from the general population, who might be on average more apathetic or indifferent toward the issue.

Our contention is that existing research in organization studies and psychology does not adequately address the multifaceted context in which social issue supporters operate, both inside and outside of organizations. Furthermore, existing research has provided only a limited account of *how* context is linked to issue-related actions. Organizational scholars study support in an organization context, and psychologists focus on the general population, with little emphasis on context. Both perspectives, while helpful, do not acknowledge that social issue supporters traverse multiple contexts as they go to work, return home, and experience issue support in a variety of settings. By acknowledging the multi-contextual nature of social issue support, we sought to develop theory around how these dedicated and identified issue supporters experience supporting a social issue in the more complete set of contexts in which they live, something that also helps explain why they do not always act to support the social issues they care deeply about.

We began this research with a focus on understanding how issue supporters interpreted and framed social issues. We reasoned that how individuals interpreted social issues might provide a rich understanding of the experience of being a social issue supporter in multiple contexts and that issue framing might be helpful to understanding issue-related actions (e.g., Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Jackson & Dutton, 1988). As is often the case with qualitative projects, our research shifted as we collected and analyzed data. Most strikingly, our analyses revealed the prominence of self-interpretations (particularly self-evaluations) as an ongoing part of issue supporters' everyday experience. In fact, rarely did an issue's supporters interpret the issue separately from evaluating themselves.

Accordingly, we adjusted our research focus toward self-evaluations, posing the following emergent research question: How do issue supporters' everyday experiences influence their self-evaluations? Our answer to this question points to the array of challenges that social issue supporters experience and to how these challenges relate to their ongoing work of evaluating the self as an issue supporter. Using a qualitative study of issue supporters who seek to address climate change, we induce a theory of "situated self-work" that calls attention to the self-work involved in the ongoing experience of being an issue supporter. By "self-work," we refer to the effort involved in evaluating the self (where the self is defined as an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about him- or herself as a person [Leary & Tangney, 2003]), a process we develop by grounding two core constructs that arose from our data: self-assets and self-doubts. The former focuses on self-evaluations that endow the self with the psychological capabilities for acting on an issue, and the latter focuses on self-evaluations that negatively assess the self in regards to issue-related performance. By using "situated," we emphasize how both self-assets and self-doubts involve social issue supporters' ongoing self-evaluations derived from reflecting on a specific context, such as being an issue supporter for a particular social issue (e.g., environmental issues, gender equity issues) in a specific domain (e.g., work, home, school).

After unpacking issue support challenges, self-assets, and self-doubts using grounded theory, we conducted a quantitative study using observational methods to inductively examine a second research question: How do patterns of self-evaluations relate to levels of issue-supportive behaviors? To address

this question, we induced three self-evaluation profiles—self-affirmers, self-critics, and self-equivocators—and showed how these profiles relate to real issue-supportive behavior, something we explain by drawing from and advancing theory on motivation. This allowed for the presentation of two different but complementary studies using mixed methods (e.g., Creswell & Clark, 2011) to examine both how social issue supporters' everyday experiences influence their self-evaluations (Study 1) and why these self-evaluations matter through their ability to predict issue-related actions (Study 2).

A focus on how social issue supporters engage in situated self-work and the difference it makes for explaining issue-related action is important for at least three reasons. First, it provides a rich basis for understanding how the contexts in which a supporter operates (e.g., work, school, home) play a role in shaping the self by prompting self-reflection that takes the form of self-evaluation. More specifically, the idea of situated self-work links everyday and more generic issue support challenges with an individual's ongoing self-assessment, making clearer how the self is mutable (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The self-evaluations prompted by challenges are also important for explaining how issue support challenges influence supportive actions or inactions on an issue. Second, our research highlights that social issue supporters confront multiple challenges in a role that induces extensive efforts to assess whether one has the "right stuff" to be an issue supporter and whether one is doing well enough being an issue supporter; both are forms of self-work that can leave people feeling that they are competent or depleted. Third, our focus spotlights the different kinds of self-evaluation that are prompted by issue-related challenges, complicating and enriching how psychologists construe the self-evaluation process and what it means for explaining patterns of individuals' actions. Our theory of situated self-work explains why it is a psychologically tall order to support social issues that individuals care deeply about, but also how some individuals evaluate themselves in ways that allow them to meet this lofty objective.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Issue Support in Organization Studies

The primary way organizational scholars have researched social issues in ways that inform a self theory is within the issue selling paradigm (Anders-

son & Bateman, 2000; Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Howard-Grenville, 2007). According to this perspective, individuals interpret a social issue and then frame that issue to others (Sonenshein, 2006, 2009) or engage in other behaviors to influence primarily top managers (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). The theory of self that underlies this paradigm emphasizes image risk. For example, scholars propose that before choosing to support an issue, individuals weigh the potential reputation implications against their desire to support the issue (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton & Ashford, 1993). As a consequence, issue selling research largely emphasizes an outward-looking self that examines how others construe the self in ways that have implications for one's reputation or career.

In support of this outward-looking self, issue selling research emphasizes "contextual sensemaking" (Dutton et al., 2002). Contextual sensemaking refers to the effort applied by individuals to discern and interpret the degree to which the context an issue seller is operating in is favorable or unfavorable to selling an issue. By reading an organizational context, issue supporters seek out clues for diagnosing the degree to which top managers support the issue (Dutton et al., 1997, 2002) and, absent support, the best way to overcome this predicament (Sonenshein, 2006). Thus, in addition to an outwardly focused interpretation of the self based on an assessment of image risk, issue selling research emphasizes that supporters use an instrumental type of interpretation of their organizational context. In doing so, this research suggests that to the extent that this context supports a social issue (e.g., it has norms consistent with the issue, or the issue supporter has a relationship with a targeted top manager [Ashford et al., 1998]), an individual is more likely to support the issue.

One important implication of scholars' emphasis on an outward self-interpretation based on image risk and an instrumental assessment of an organization context is that it implies that when individuals detect a potential image risk or an unfavorable organizational context, they are likely to abandon or reduce their issue support (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 1997, 2002). But although individuals are often concerned about their careers and are attuned to organizational politics (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), some scholars propose that social issue supporters' deep passion for their issues may lead them to downplay these factors and instead continue with their issue support (Ashford & Barton, 2007; Sonenshein, 2006, 2012). Along these

lines, Bansal's (2003) study of unfolding environmental issues revealed that individuals' concerns about the environment helped to explain patterns in organizational responses to issue support, thereby suggesting a view of the self that matters for supportive actions and that does not focus solely on image risk. In addition, Howard-Grenville's (2007) ethnography in a manufacturing context underscored the importance of examining the situated experiences of social issue supporters, who often occupy structural positions of weakness. Given these weak structural positions, what underlying theory of self might explain how individuals experience and continue to support a social issue?

Another key limitation of previous research is that contextual sensemaking is largely restricted to organizational settings (Dutton et al., 2002). Although this is not terribly surprising given the focus of organizational scholars, it is nevertheless limiting in explaining issue supporters who not only pursue their support at work but also do so outside of work. This is because how a person interprets the self at home may impact work behaviors and vice versa. As some have argued, the roles people take and who they are at home inform the roles they take and the selves they are at work (e.g., Rothbard, 2001). Segmenting the work self from the nonwork self gives scholars an incomplete picture of the self of social issue supporters who read and react to a variety of organizational and nonorganizational contexts in ways that may ultimately shape their sense of self and their behavior.

### Social Issue Support in Psychology

Psychologists have addressed social issue support in two primary ways that inform theories of the self: planned behavior theory, and research on values and identities of social issue supporters. First, in the theory of planned behavior, Ajzen (1991) posits that issue support comes from individuals' intentions to engage in issue support. These intentions are predicted by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control. The model of self in this paradigm is shaped by social norms, in which individuals make assessments about how normative issue support is (Fielding et al., 2008). As with organizational research, this theory also conceptualizes a self that models difficulties associated with particular behaviors (Boldero, 1995; Kaiser, Woelfling, & Fuhrer, 1999; Lynne, Casey, Hodges, & Rahmani, 1995), an approach that may be less relevant

for committed issue supporters as opposed to a general population.

A second perspective in the psychological literature on social issue support focuses on particular aspects of the self that are theorized to be key for explaining actions related to values and identities. In addition, this research has focused mostly on predicting behavior versus understanding how a self is constructed in the first place. For example, scholars have found that the stronger individuals' altruistic or prosocial values, the greater their issue-supportive behaviors (e.g., De Groot & Steg, 2007, 2008; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002; Schultz & Zelezny, 1999; Stern & Dietz, 1994). Scholars have found similar effects for issue-based identities, finding a positive relationship between issue identity and issue-related intentions and behaviors (for a meta-analysis, see Rise, Sheeran, and Hukkelberg [2010]). For example, scholars have found that environmental identity predicts a wide range of environmental intentions and supportive behavior, such as recycling (Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2004; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999); intentions to consume organic vegetables (Sparks & Shepherd, 1992); and waste reduction, energy conservation, and environmentally friendly shopping and eating behaviors (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010).

These approaches focus on the strength of values and identities as opposed to processes that shape the self, taking a more decontextualized approach that often misses the social processes of how others shape the self (Leary & Tangney, 2003). Yet scholars who theorize a relational base of the self (e.g., Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Markus & Cross, 1990) would encourage consideration of how, by interacting with others, issue supporters come to know themselves and can therefore judge how well they are enacting the role of a "good issue supporter." In this relational view of self, other people are pivotal in shaping the ongoing view and understanding of the self (Chen et al., 2006). Accordingly, other issue supporters, such as those encountered at work, at school, at home, or in affinity groups, may play an important role in shaping the self involved in being an issue supporter. By focusing on a broad set of contextual shapers of the self as an issue supporter, researchers may uncover key elements for understanding self-processes that explain issue support (e.g., Wade-Benzoni, Li, Thompson, & Bazerman, 2007).

In summary, organizational scholars largely emphasize organizational context while overlooking

other key settings that may be important for explaining issue support. These scholars also emphasize image risk (a more outwardly focused basis for theorizing how the self matters), which may be less relevant for social issue supporters that are identified with an issue. Psychologists mostly examine the general population and, as a result, largely focus on factors that are likely to be less informative in explaining issue support among a group of identified supporters. This research also often overlooks context, such as how others can shape self-concept and, in turn, issue-supportive behaviors. Both literatures fail to fully examine the everyday experiences of issue supporters and how these experiences (in a variety of contexts) shape self-concept in ways that can influence issue support. To address these limitations, we first turn to our qualitative study of issue supporters in the "issue space" of the natural environment (specifically, climate change) and inductively examine the role of self-interpretations for explaining issue support.

## STUDY 1: METHODS

### Sample and Context

We selected a context to address our initial interest in issue interpretation. We started by selecting as our issue climate change, defined as rapid and profound increase in the Earth's temperature and related impacts, such as the widespread melting of ice and rising sea levels (Bates, Kundzewicz, Wu, & Palutiko, 2008). As a key issue in the broader environmental issues space, climate change has theoretical significance for our starting and emergent research question that moved to focus on self-evaluations. For example, unlike issues tied to a job or organization, climate change involves decisions and behaviors that transcend organizational boundaries and extend to individuals' personal lives. Because being a supporter of an issue such as climate change may necessitate issue engagement in multiple settings, it is a role that often requires ongoing efforts, personal sacrifices, vigilance, and commitment (Dietz, Ostrom, & Stern, 2003; Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010), thereby pushing the boundaries of existing theories of issue support that are insensitive to the everyday experiences of individuals trying to support issues in a variety of settings. Moreover, engaging with climate change may follow engaging with other environmental issues, which are often viewed as ambiguous, with conflicting interpretations about the issues coexist-

ing and competing for attention and legitimacy (Epstein, 2008). Such issues are classic “wicked problems” in the sense that they are complex and ill-defined (Mason & Mitroff, 1973), thereby allowing for more interpretive discretion.

Practically speaking, climate change weighs heavily on both organizations and society due in part to the surge of devastating natural disasters that have ravaged many communities’ health, safety, and economies. The economic damage wrought by natural disasters has affected a myriad of industries, including insurance, energy, agriculture, real estate, and manufacturing (Hoffman, 2006). In addition, the public and all levels of government regularly engage in debate about whether and how to address climate change (e.g., Gore, 2006), thereby making the impact of environmental issues on businesses (and society at large) more visible. As such, communities as well as public and private organizations are increasingly focused on remedying pressing environmental issues in an attempt to move toward a more sustainable future (Hoffman, 2009).

To examine issue support in the context of climate change, we sought a sample of identified issue supporters and located a program at a North American university called the Environment and Business Program (EBP),<sup>1</sup> whose primary mission is to develop “sustainability-oriented leaders who are widely respected as . . . catalyzing agents of change.” A main reason participants we interviewed joined the program was because they were identified issue supporters of a variety of environmental issues, including climate change. Although obviously different from the general population, our sample was important for theory development, as it allowed us to learn from a highly deviant set of individuals (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While many individuals in the general population may want to address climate change at some point, our sample represented individuals who had taken distinctive steps to learn about how to do so and to be in the position to do so.

We asked the EBP office to provide contact details on recent alumni and current students of the program to broaden the type of settings in which we could examine issue support, such as at school and at work. Since we had no other available data with which to categorize members beyond their

being either students or alumni, we asked for a random list of 25 individuals from each category. From this list, we then theoretically sampled those individuals specifically interested in climate change by indicating in our invitation the scope of the study as requesting participation from supporters of the issue. This led us to 29 participants (14 current students and 15 working alumni of EBP) who agreed to participate in the study and self-identified as climate change issue supporters.

Upon completion, the hour-long, semistructured interviews were professionally transcribed (see Appendix A for our interview protocol). Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we created contact summary forms after each interview to capture and coordinate emerging data interpretations. Most of our sample members had previous work experience (mean = 8 years) in a variety of industries. See Table 1 for an overview of our informants.

We supplemented the interview data in two ways. First, we conducted field observations at two annual social gatherings of EBP students in 2006 and 2007. Second, we collected information about the program’s mission, values, and structure from faculty, staff, and public information sources. We used these supplemental data as a way to check the credibility of our interpretations of the main data.

## Analysis

Our analysis followed three steps and is captured in our data structure shown in Figure 1.

**Step 1: Initial data coding.** We used open codes to classify informants’ statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As with many qualitative projects, ours was very iterative (Locke, 2001). For example, many informants talked about actions they engaged in to address climate change yet judged themselves as falling short in terms of doing what they could to address the issue. We elaborated on these patterns in analytic memos (Lempert, 2007) and research team meetings. During this stage, we were mindful of the different settings in which informants attempted to address climate change, inside and outside their formal organizational settings. We developed a list of open codes that attempted to stay close to informants’ interpretations. It was during this stage that we began to shift our focus to self-interpretations, as our first-order codes highlighted significant attention informants gave to the self.

**Step 2: Theoretical categories.** In step 2, we moved to create abstract, theoretical codes that grouped informants’ self-meanings and other con-

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<sup>1</sup> All names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms.

**TABLE 1**  
**List of Participants<sup>a</sup>**

Name	Interview Number	Most Recent Position
Alex	22a	Environmental health and safety affairs manager for an auto manufacturer
Alice	19a	Project director at a consulting firm
Amanda	16a	Mediator at a nonprofit
Ashley	29a	Manager of corporate responsibility and sustainability for a consumer products company
Bruce	17a	Project development manager for an energy company
Candice	1	Real estate department for an auto manufacturer
Chad	25a	Private equity specialist associate for a bank
Doug	15	Environmental protection specialist at a federal agency
Erika	6	Sustainability intern at consumer products company
Erin	4	Project coordinator for wind energy at a nonprofit
Fran	9a	Director of sustainable strategy for manufacturer
Fred	12	Small business development volunteer at a nonprofit
Hank	10a	Senior marketing manager for a technology company
Jack	7	Business development consultant for a nonprofit
Leigh	18a	Deputy director of a climate and energy program at a nonprofit
Lucy	21a	Eastern conservation director at a nonprofit
Luke	5	Investment banking associate
Matt	8	Summer associate for a utility company
Megan	13	Intern at a consumer products company
Pam	27	Energy information coordinator for a state agency
Patty	14	Policy director for a nonprofit
Paul	26a	Senior analyst of corporate strategy and business development for an electronics manufacturer
Pete	28a	Managing director for a consulting company
Roger	24	Summer associate in marketing for a pharmaceuticals company
Ryan	20a	Northeast Colorado project director at a nonprofit
Sara	23a	Environmental protection specialist at a federal agency
Seth	11a	Energy program director at a nonprofit
Tim	3	Manager at an accounting firm
Veronica	2	Sustainable business industry consultant for an auto manufacturer

<sup>a</sup> All names are pseudonyms. An “a” after an interview number denotes an alumnus of EBP.

structs into more generalizable categories (e.g., Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufman, 2006). This step involved abstracting informants’ categories to match theoretical concepts, with the goal of grouping informants’ conceptual schemes into theoretical categories. We moved back and forth between our data and existing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to develop a set of constructs grounded in our data but elaborated on with the help of existing theoretical concepts.

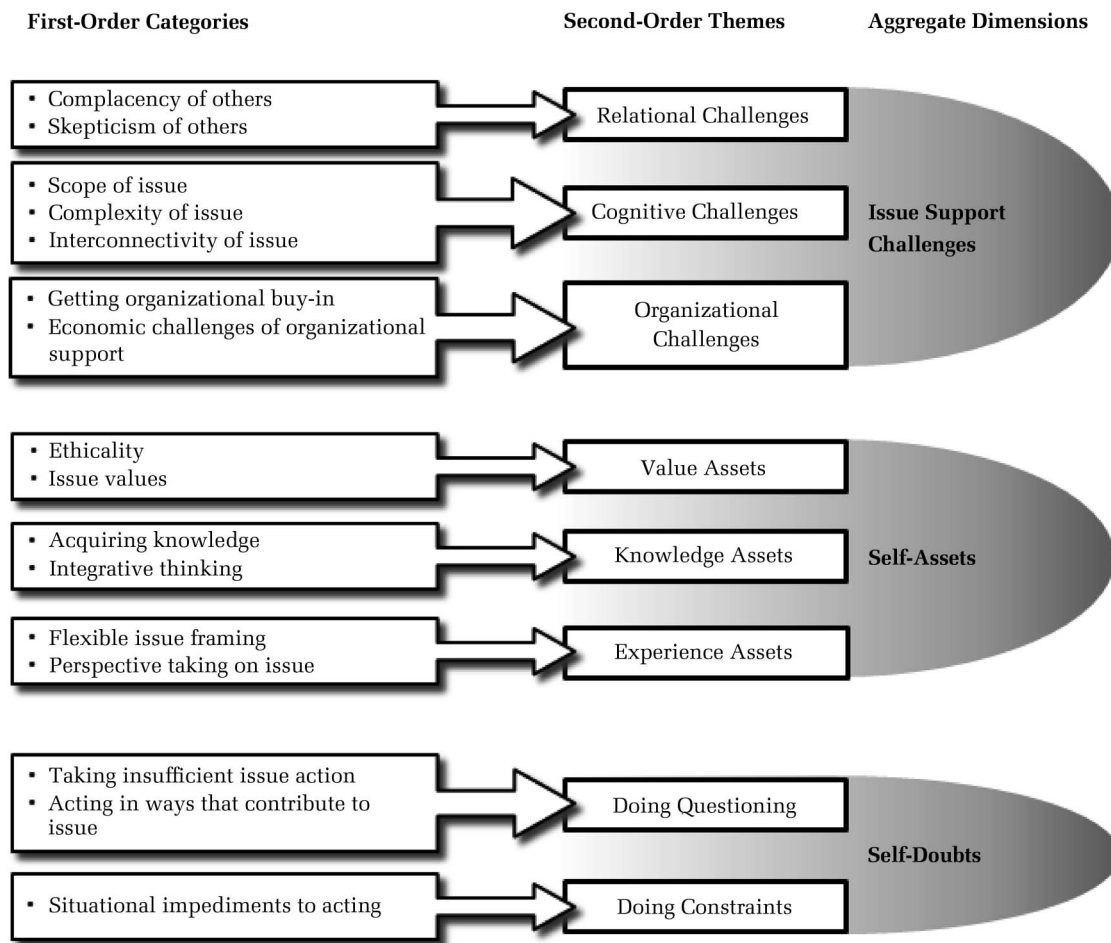
**Step 3: Theory induction.** After settling on a set of theoretical categories, we identified three key aggregate theoretical dimensions that we grouped into our theoretical categories, thereby further abstracting them from the data. These aggregate dimensions—issue support challenges, self-assets, and self-doubts—served as the basis for our induced theory. As a theory-generating study (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999), the goal of Study 1 was not to test theory, but rather to propose theory based on our findings (Golden-Biddle & Locke,

2007: 6). We experimented with several provisional theoretical claims, moving among these claims, data, and existing theory until we were confident about our own interpretations and confident that our proposed theory remained wedded to informants’ interpretations as well as to advanced theory.

## STUDY 1: FINDINGS

We find that informants interpret a variety of issue support challenges, which we group into three categories: relational, cognitive, and organizational. After unpacking these challenges, we focus on the ways that individuals interpret the self in response to these challenges. More specifically, we find that individuals’ self-interpretations focus on two key types of self-evaluation: self-assets and self-doubts. The former refers to issue supporters’ evaluations that imbue the self as having the assets or capabilities to act on an issue, and the latter

**FIGURE 1**  
**Data Structure**



refers to issue supporters' evaluations that raise questions about how they are performing to address the issue. In following conventions in qualitative research, we present power quotes throughout the main text and provide additional data to support our analysis in Table 2 (Pratt, 2008).

### Issue Support Challenges

Issue support challenges are real or imagined difficulties that issue supporters encounter, arising from a wide variety of contexts, including at and outside of work. We find three broad categories of issue support challenges.

**Relational challenges.** In the course of supporting an issue, informants face a variety of relational challenges. Relational challenges refer to difficulties arising from engagement with other people about the issue. We found two forms of relational

challenges arising from being a supporter of the climate change issue: confronting other individuals who were complacent about the issue and engaging people who were skeptical about the issue.

Erin characterized the majority of people she encountered at work as complacent about the issue, which challenged her own sense of effectiveness at issue support as she struggled to understand individuals that did not share her concerns for the issue.

Most people don't care. Most people aren't worried . . . when you raise an issue and people are like, "But that doesn't matter, like I'm going to make my couple hundred thousand dollars creating money for rich people." And I get judgmental and I'm like, "These people just don't get it." This is not just about them and their quality of life and affording that car and that house.



**TABLE 2**  
**Representative Quotations Underlying Second-Order Themes**

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations	Aggregate Dimensions
<b>Relational Challenges</b>		
Complacency of others	<p>Patty: "It didn't give me a lot of hope as far as middle America is concerned. Frankly the people that I was working with were just as middle America as you can get. I mean they got all their news from Fox. They drove their giant pick-up trucks and complained about the price of gas. To them it was like a white male world. . . . Trying to explain things like why you should care about the earth is really difficult to people like this."</p> <p>Veronica: "Getting people to do something, so anything, like just do tiny little things like re-replace their light bulbs and just, you know, drive less and stuff like that."</p>	
Skepticism of others	<p>Roger: "I think I've been trying to bring it up with people who aren't already the converted, so to speak, and trying to open up conversations about it, and the challenge is to take either people who are completely apathetic or who actively disagree or who have framed it into a box to get them more, because they are very entrenched in their . . . whoever it is, it is kind of a dogma. It's a religious belief almost. It's either you are or you aren't, so switching people's perspective on it is pretty hard."</p> <p>Ashley: "A number of people that are still skeptical about it even though that's changing, that's decreasing, but you always run into people that are like, 'Oh, you know, I don't believe it's true.' You know, and to that I say, well, you know, even if they don't believe it's true, they could still do it just to save money for the company, you know, but then I guess the other thing is it requires investment and I guess just making people comfortable with that level of investment."</p>	
<b>Cognitive Challenges</b>		<b>Issue Support Challenges</b>
Scope of issue	<p>Doug: "There's the make-or-break issue of our generation and it's the equivalent. . . . It's equivalent to World War II as for our grandparents' generation, so this will be the, this will be a defining moment in history in humanity and relations to each other and especially the planet. You know, if we don't solve it in the next 20 to 30 years, then generations will be impacted, will be detrimental. . . . It's one of those preeminent humanity issues that needs to be vastly understood by mass populous in order to do the type of radical changes necessary, and it is a huge challenge to get to that point where folks are willing to make sort of a sacrifices and life-style choices and sacrifices in consumption patterns necessary to get us there."</p> <p>Lucy: "Well it is such a . . . I mean it is such a large issue. You know like if you are by yourself as an individual and what kind of impact you can have it is so, it appears to be so small. . . . There has to be . . . I think in order to get more people to start to change their actions, they need to feel like they are actually going to if others are doing it too. That it is not just, oh, me off here by myself redoing something because what is the point of that? I can't make a significant enough impact on my own."</p>	
Complexity of issue	<p>Jack: "Such a complex issue, that it's difficult to . . . be versed in all the different areas that climate change impacts. So business, economics, policy, environment, you know, energy and social implications, developed countries versus developing countries—it's such a wide-ranging issue that it's difficult to feel like you're sort of, if not an expert, then at least, you know, well versed in all the different topic areas."</p> <p>Bruce: "It's the most complicated, you know, to quote Timothy Worth, it's probably the most difficult and complicated challenge humanity has ever faced, more so than the spread of nuclear weapons, because it's so perverse. The sources of emissions are so varied in so many different geographic locations, and they are directly tied with quality of life increases, that I think this issue is going to be an enormously difficult one to solve."</p>	

**Continued**

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations	Aggregate Dimensions
Interconnectivity of issue	<p>Tim: "This is a problem that's going to involve changing so many embedded infrastructures, and procedures, and mind-sets, and, you know, it . . . it's really going to take like just a quantum shift in . . . in our awareness, in our processes, in the way we do things and the way we approach the world around us. . . . Climate change is sort of a broad-reaching issue that spans across all other disciplines and is something that we all need to start thinking about immediately."</p> <p>Alice: "I just think there's so many stakeholders involved, and it's quite a challenge, and . . . and the more stakeholders you have involved, the more time it takes to get it sorted out, to get something that everybody can sign up to."</p>	Aggregate Dimensions
<b>Organizational Challenges</b>		<b>Issue Support Challenges</b>
Getting organizational buy-in	<p>Tim: "Many of the challenges I faced a couple of years ago, even trying to explain to people what I was interested in, why I was doing it, and some of those have evaporated and some of the bigger challenges now are trying to get the right people interested. . . . One of the big issues there was getting buy-in from the people who are making the top-level decisions. There's kind of an open question as to at what point should they take action. If the CEO or CFO has the fiduciary duty to shareholders, at what point should they say 'we'll take a little less money, but we're going to address climate change when the federal government is not taking action,' etc. It is, ultimately, there's a conflict there and it is an issue that the freedom of businesses to address this issue is oftentimes limited, and then we have a political system that has been very slow in taking action on it as well, and some times with good reason and sometimes without."</p> <p>Seth: "It's a challenge to try to translate because . . . not everybody will be convinced by the same set of arguments. So it's kind of tailoring arguments to each individual person. And then, going back to the thing I said earlier about, you know, you really have to listen to people before you can . . . you can develop a . . . an argument that works for changing their mind on something."</p>	Issue Support Challenges
Economic challenges of organizational support	<p>Erin: "It doesn't always make economic sense to act now, and it's hard to make that case that, okay, well, make as much like Exxon as you can right now, and if it . . . something bad happens, you'll have enough money to help fix it later, relying on that technological, long-term solution or that spot solution rather than the preventative approach, which I think is something I advocate."</p> <p>Alex: "I think professionally the difficult thing with it, being a traditional—I am in a traditional manufacturing environment. . . . We sell them to the automotive manufacturer, and so as hard as the dialog is with auto manufacturers and the consumer, it is that much harder sort of one level up the chain, where you know price and quality are very much in demand, and you know some of the secondary and tertiary qualities of the product that may be very meaningful and very beneficial to the end consumer, but you know they don't always garner as much interest if you can't show clearly that . . . price and quality hurdle first. . . . Some of those types of companies, you know, they don't even know how much energy they use in their facilities 'cause they just don't have the manpower or the capability to track it. Maybe they will work on ways of improving it. So professionally, it has been a . . . you know, [I] sort of had to slow down, I guess, a little bit from the time frames for my expectations of how fast things can change. And that has been a difficult thing to do."</p>	Issue Support Challenges
<b>Value Assets</b>		<b>Self-Assets</b>
Ethicality	<p>Candice: "I'm doing what I'm doing 'cause it feels right."</p> <p>Seth: "I was just compelled to do something when I graduated that . . . that really made me feel like I was, you know, at least trying to make a difference at the end of the day when I came home."</p>	Self-Assets

Continued

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations	Aggregate Dimensions
Issue values	<p>Erin: “Part of my personal philosophy, it’s where I find my spirituality, all that coming from an environmental background. . . . Protecting the environment is what drives me and helps me. . . . It makes a lot of my decisions . . . it’s been my career path since I was 16 years old. It’s just been a long-standing value that I’ve had.”</p> <p>Bruce: “I am unapologetic about my environmental leanings. I’ve said it in front of management introducing myself. I’ve used those same words. I’m in this business because it’s renewable energy and I’m unapologetic about my environmental leaning and my concern about climate change.”</p>	
<b>Knowledge Assets</b>		<b>Self-Assets</b>
Acquiring knowledge	<p>Sara: “People are always bringing in the latest articles, journal articles, or whatever, publications, reports from different sources and sharing them. So . . . I think I definitely have a high level . . . of exposure to these things at work, and it’s usually really current, and important, and you know, has been reviewed and . . . it’s really interesting to sort of have that kind of access.”</p> <p>Pam: “Personally, just educating myself more about the issue and I think especially the . . . the sort of debates on either side of . . . you know, from whether it’s happening to whether it’s not, and then also sort of [what] the impacts [are] going to be. . . . I’ve just been trying to build up my ability to enter that debate.”</p>	
Integrative thinking	<p>Luke: “Probably that I’m a bit more of a holistic thinker, so I look at the issue not only from the scientific aspect . . . but also, what are the effects relative to us sociologically. . . . I’m kind of a holistic thinker and want to sort of . . . think [about] things. . . . I don’t get mired in details as much or maybe not as concerned about details, but maybe more about the overarching system and how that system interacts.”</p> <p>Pete: “I have a global perspective, that I realize that it’s just not a glo. . . —Climate change is not just a national issue, but a global issue, that I understand the facts.”</p>	
<b>Experience Assets</b>		
Flexible issue framing	<p>Erin: “It’s given me the tools I need to communicate it without spirituality, without the value judgments. It’s given me . . . the ability to communicate with people who talk about return on equity, return on investment, you, evaluation of products, marketing from a consumer vantage point. The . . . tools of business and the rational side of this movement that I didn’t necessarily come with into school.”</p> <p>Chad: “But within the financial community, I understand how they think, why they think it, and . . . and that has enabled me then to go away and introduce new concepts to it, because I understand what they’re thinking and I can anticipate their needs, you know. And know what they want. I know what keeps them think—awake at night thinking. And nervous. And when you know that about an industry participant and for all different sectors in an industry, then you can speak their language, and then you can introduce them [to] your ideas. And so that has been tremendously valuable for me.”</p>	
Perspective taking on the issue	<p>Tim: “I was working with a fellow who’s championing climate issues within the company and had been following it for 10 years and following the development of this issue both politically and financially, etc., for [company] and working with him, I really got an understanding of the politics of the company and how to steward an issue like this through it.”</p> <p>Alice: “I do think I’ve learned a lot in terms of how business is run, how decisions are made, and how to position issues so that people would, you know, think that it’s relevant to them.”</p>	

**Continued**

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Exemplary Quotations	Aggregate Dimensions
<b>Doing Questioning</b>		
Taking insufficient issue action	Luke: "I also have some feelings of embarrassment that I personally don't do as much as I could."	
	Lucy: "I know pretty much what I can do as an individual to make some kind of a difference. But I don't take enough action I think to try to have a positive effect."	
Acting in ways that contribute to the issue	Luke: "I think it's just a matter of convenience that it's really hard to change our behavior. . . . I'll be traveling a lot on the plane and I can buy carbon offsets or . . . I want certain luxuries in my life. And even though I'm very committed, if you live in this very consumer oriented society, and it's hard to . . . curb that, it's hard to change your patterns of living. And sometimes it's in the face of significant inconvenience to do that. So to what degree should you go to . . . to those lengths? And so that an aggregate has created a significant barrier."	<b>Self-Doubts</b>
	Ryan: "I haven't made some of the personal life-style adjustments that I could."	
<b>Doing Constraints</b>		
Situational impediments to acting	Tim: "My wife and I have faced those constraints as well. We'd love to replace our furnace and get the most efficient model we can and get a new hot water heater, etc., but there's limitations to doing that when you're in graduate school and taking out a lot of debt. . . . There are steps we would love to be able to take and simply can't afford to do. . . . There's that economic tension. There's multiple tensions and issues that I've run into personally . . . that have prevented me from being carbon neutral, if you will, or greenhouse-gas free."	
	Ashley: "As a working mom, I don't have that much time to be on the lookout for information all the time."	

In this excerpt, Erin struggled with the majority of people she encountered who are not "worried," interpreting her efforts at raising the issue as clashing with others' being contented with making a lot of money without sharing her concern for the issue.

Issue supporters also faced complacent individuals at home. Sara described her parents' views on climate change as follows: "I think their attitude was partly that they're in their 60s and they're probably not going to be around to see the . . . worst of it for it to really impact their lives." As a result, our informants faced relational challenges in a variety of their life domains, interpreting these challenges as something they encounter on an ongoing basis.

Although issue supporters interpret interacting with complacent individuals, they also encounter others who are overtly skeptical about the issue—not simply being apathetic about the issue but outright questioning its legitimacy. Jack said,

[It is] challenging to always have answer to every skeptic . . . or people who don't believe in it, or don't want to believe in it . . . you can't prove a negative, so like people say, "Well, we don't know whether

like sun spots and solar flares, maybe that's like the biggest driver of climate change" . . . challenges of . . . talking with people who either don't understand it or don't want to believe it in the first place.

As Jack noted, issue supporters interact with individuals who share different views of the issue. Jack noted that skeptics try to use logic (i.e., "you can't prove a negative") to question whether climate change is occurring, which leads to challenges around trying not only to construct a viable self as an issue supporter but also to create and build support for the issue for those who do not share his assumptions about it.

Informants also identified skeptics in their own family, such as parental figures challenging their children (i.e., our informants). Pam described how her father portrays climate change: "My father likes to joke that it's a good thing [laughs], you know, it'll get warmer." But beyond levity is a sense of skepticism, according to Pam: "He started off thinking that it was, you know, not a real issue." These interactions serve as a setting beyond work in which issue supporters perceive a lack of backing from others concerning something about which they deeply care.

**Cognitive challenges.** Issue supporters also wrestled with a number of cognitive challenges that made addressing climate change difficult. By cognitive challenges, we refer to difficulties arising from the way an individual thinks about the issue, which informants experienced as draining or taxing cognitive resources. Our data suggest that issue supporters faced cognitive challenges arising from the perceived scope, complexity, and interconnectedness of the issue—all three of which were applicable inside and outside work contexts.

Informants interpreted the boundaries of climate change as being broad, making the issue seem overwhelming at times. Fran described the issue as “so enormous,” noting that “there’s . . . over six billion people on this planet that need to start to change their behavior and change how they power in their home and their vehicles. So it is pretty overwhelming when you look at . . . the issue itself.” By interpreting the issue as having such a wide scope, informants imbued it with meanings that made their task seem insurmountable. As a result, they raised questions over whether any actions inside and outside work can resolve the issue. Ryan described it as an “overwhelming issue” and asked: “Are we going to be able to deal with it?”

In addition to the issue scope, informants also interpreted the issue as complex in ways that make acting on it difficult. Tim interpreted the issue as follows:

The greatest challenge is the complexity of this issue. . . . It’s very difficult to begin to discuss what needs to be addressed in order to mitigate climate change without wanting to throw your arms in the air and wanting to give up because it requires a tremendous amount of education. . . . It requires so much investment and change in the way we’re doing things that it’s easy to get pessimistic and to think that it won’t happen. Tied in with that is simply how complex it is to convey to someone this notion that our everyday actions . . . are causing changes globally, in that you’re driving your car 30 miles to work every day is causing a frog in the rainforest . . . to go extinct.

As Tim eloquently put it, the issue’s complexity makes it hard to educate others about it, and he explained how seemingly mundane tasks (such as driving a car) relate to consequential events on the other side of the planet, such as the extinction of a frog in a rainforest. By interpreting the issue as involving this level of complexity, informants further imbued the issue with meanings that implied that an extraordinarily high degree of action is

needed to support the issue, making effectively addressing the issue especially difficult.

A final cognitive challenge involves informants’ interpretations that climate change is strongly interconnected with other environmental, and more broadly, social and economic issues. Leigh interpreted climate change as “an issue that spans consumer behavior, how businesses operate, how the United States looks at its future in terms of its economic development and the technology we use and the life style [to which] we’re accustomed.” By inexplicitly intertwining climate change with some of society’s basic institutions and practices, informants imbued the issue with formidable obstacles as they needed to address not only climate change but also a host of related issues, activities, practices, and institutions. Leigh’s interpretation also highlights how informants often readily traversed between work (e.g., “how businesses operate”) and nonwork (e.g., “consumer behavior”) settings in articulating the challenges of climate change.

**Organizational challenges.** While issue supporters wrestled with relational and cognitive challenges inside and outside of work, they also faced distinctly organizational challenges in acting as issue supporters. These challenges involved getting issue “buy-in” and managing the economic challenges of the issue. Erika talked about how tiring it was to garner organizational buy-in and contrasted work environments that differ in their propensity to support the climate change issue:

It’s exhausting to try to convince people of the threat over and over again. And I’ve definitely been doing that for like a decade now. And so I think when you are in an organization where that’s basically the conversation that you have to have every day, every day you have to say like, “Oh yeah, no, this is serious and we really need to do something about it.” . . . I think that if you’re an organization that is basically not aware or not believing . . . then that’s totally exhausting. . . . It would be a place where I frankly would probably avoid the issue after a while and stop talking about it. On the other hand, when I was working at an environmental consulting agency, which was basically all environmentally motivated and scientifically educated people, there was a lot more interesting and compelling conversations about climate change that I felt were like less rhetoric, more like education and more deep thought.

As Erika’s quotation illustrates, organizational context matters for how issue supporters interpret their support. In a supportive context, Erika found

the dialogue more scientific, which led to more insightful conversations about the issue. However, when the organization struggled to grasp the seriousness of the issue, Erika portrayed herself as becoming exhausted and interpreted that she might withdraw her effort at trying to obtain organizational buy-in.

Another organizational challenge issue supporters face involves trying to balance issue support with the realities of the economics of organizations. Luke offered a good illustration:

If your idea is to try to make things better with regard to the environment, in this case climate change, how much browbeating do you do before it gives you diminishing returns? When do you compromise? When do you try to find a middle ground? How do you maximize the improvement on that front? . . . We all are so passionate about this issue that we won't take anything less than perfection, but . . . to get to that point is just . . . it's economically infeasible. How do you get this group of people to move a little bit closer, try to get us all together so we can actually take action?

As Luke described, work contexts involve compromise, but issue supporters are prone to interpreting the world as black and white—seeking only perfection. But such perfection is economically difficult, thereby creating an inherent tension between being a good issue supporter and a realistic issue supporter. Work contexts bring to the forefront these tensions, as issue supporters face the reality of the economics of climate change, leading Luke to ultimately conclude: “There’s got to be a way to translate that information that might otherwise seem . . . idealistic or altruistic . . . into business terms. [It] is vital to be able to be able to . . . create activism within a business. It’s got to be put into financial concepts.”

### Self-Assets

In response to issue support challenges, we found that issue supporters evaluated their self-assets, defined as the ways in which individuals identify and positively assess the capabilities they have for being an issue supporter. The focus on self-assets arises from reflecting on the challenges of being an issue supporter. This suggests that self-assets reference a particular issue and arise in a routine manner as individuals interpret the challenges of supporting the issue. We found three main types of self-assets: value assets, experience assets, and knowledge assets.

**Value assets.** In the face of challenges, some informants determine that they have the correct values to be issue supporters, either in terms of their general ethics or more specific issue-related values. Ethicality involves issue supporters evaluating themselves in ways that generally focus on doing the right thing. For example, after Leigh described climate change as an all-encompassing issue that interconnects consumer behavior, economic development, and technology, she evaluated herself as follows: “I’m somebody who . . . feels a great sense of responsibility.” Roger described climate change as “the greatest business challenge and greatest sort of inner personal challenge and the greatest organizational challenge.” Roger then evaluated his ethicality, declaring: “I like to think of myself as having a political and social consciousness.”

Issue values involve self-evaluations around having the requisite values of a climate change issue supporter (or more generally, an environmental issue supporter). Roger characterized his business school classmates as “very strong antiscience kind of anti-environmentalist.” Thus, EBP members sometimes position themselves against others to positively evaluate their own environmental values while discounting the more materialistic values of others. For example, Chad evaluated his environmental values with respect to American overconsumption after interpreting climate change as “a big environmental issue.” He evaluated himself as follows: “My changing behavior and sense of ethics that I have with respect to how I live my life personally and professionally is entirely related to wanting a minimal impact in the world, and thinking that Western culture, particularly America, lives in excess.”

**Knowledge assets.** Knowledge assets capture an individual’s positive self-evaluations about the volume and appropriateness of knowledge relevant to the issue of interest here. These knowledge-based self-evaluations came in two primary forms: acquiring knowledge and integrative thinking.

Acquiring knowledge involves evaluations that an issue supporter has learned or is learning more about the issue over time. Fran interpreted climate change as “a complex science topic and . . . a very political topic” while evaluating herself in terms of her growing knowledge about the issue: “I’ve gotten much more aware of . . . the technical side. I’d say my understanding of the source of the problem increased a lot more.” Fran’s evaluation of her increasing awareness of the “technical

side” followed the specific challenge of the complexity of the issue she identified, thereby illustrating the intertwinement of the issue support challenge and self-asset.

Integrative thinking involves an issue supporter’s self-evaluation as someone who approaches climate change in a holistic way and appreciates the nuances of the issue and its relationship to other issues. After Tim outlined the cognitive challenge of climate change interconnectedness as being “so closely tied to our society, our economy, our energy infrastructure . . . otherwise pretty much everything we do,” he evaluated himself as an integrative thinker: “I’m a bit of a system thinker, if you will, and definitely think more realistically and what the impacts of different actions are, and not just the primary impacts or the short term impacts but the long term impacts. . . . I’m fairly well informed about this issue.” In short, Tim evaluated himself as having what it takes to meet the issue support challenge he identified.

**Experience assets.** Experience assets involve evaluations of the self as someone who has gained meaningful practice in supporting the issue in question. Informants described experience assets in two primary ways: by evaluating themselves as flexible issue framers and as individuals whose experiences provide them perspective on the issue.

Informants evaluated themselves as experienced in framing the issue for different constituencies, especially business organizations. In reflecting on her time at a major retailer, Fran evaluated herself as now better equipped to support the issue. Fran described a shift from a corporate responsibility role to one that involves having profit and loss responsibility:

I was in the environmental affairs department . . . didn’t have any profit and loss responsibility. . . . The whole department was geared around educating people and getting people to do things for the right reason. But actually, I think that’s a really difficult strategy to execute because people don’t all do things for the same reason. . . . With climate change, if the goal is to actually reduce emissions, we shouldn’t really care why people reduce emissions, as long as they do. And some people might do it because it’s easy and convenient for them to do. Some people do it because they care about the issue and they’re willing to make that effort. And some people do it because it might save them money. . . . That is the big shift in my thinking, from when I was in a corporate social responsibility department to then when I went into business, where I had profit and loss responsibility. . . . The more you can put it

in their language, and the more you can get them to see the benefits to them, the better.

In Fran’s reflection, she concluded that framing the issue to resonate with the needs or backgrounds of other people is an asset of hers. She related this experience to an organizational challenge she had getting the organization to embrace the issue.

A second type of experience asset involves issue supporters gaining perspective on the issue, particularly on the person or group from which one tries to gain support. Luke first interpreted a key issue support challenge, noting the “global environmental effects, global sociological problems” of climate change, and then talked about an experience that informed a self-asset of being able to take perspective on the issue. More specifically, Luke recounted an event he organized for EBP. Luke was shocked at how the event unfolded. He moved from someone who targeted environmental wrongdoers to himself becoming the target of environmental do-gooders, which provided an important perspective on issue support:

I helped organize an event that brought three environmental managers from big corporations. . . . Unbeknownst to me, there was a massive campuswide actually . . . national boycott against Coca-Cola for issues in Columbia and in India. . . . I became quickly aware of that when [I] received a flyer that . . . there was a group on campus called “Killer Coke” and this group called “Soul” that were going to protest the event that I was organizing. So I went from being the protester . . . to being the protestee. . . . That experience . . . made me realize is that it’s not cut and dry [and] dealing with both sides and trying to understand . . . the mind-set of those that are opposed to taking action.

Luke operated as an issue supporter without appreciating the perspective of activists at his school. As Luke realized, the issue was intertwined in a broader context that included an activist campaign against a soda maker. As a result, his effort to support the issue became challenged by issue supporters who questioned the integrity of Luke’s own support. Luke used the story to positively evaluate his experience as making him better able to understand the perspective of others.

### Self-Doubts

In addition to self-assets, we also found that issue support challenges led individuals to have self-

doubts about themselves as issue supporters, defined as negative self-evaluations, in which individuals assessed their performance as issue supporters in a negative light, such as falling short in some way. We found two ways in which individuals engaged in self-doubts: “doing questioning” and “doing constraints.”

**Doing questioning.** When informants engaged in doing questioning, they evaluated their actions as not fully meeting the demands of addressing the issue. We found two types of this form of self-doubt: taking insufficient action to support the issue and acting in ways that contribute to rather than resolve the issue.

Patty described the extensive efforts she has invested in recycling but questioned their ultimate impact:

I went through a lot of trouble for recycling and that sort of thing, and so the actions that I was taking, I felt that they were so small and so just individual. I was doing everything myself and I didn't feel any like I could affect the world system and all those things were beyond my control.

Patty raised a self-doubt in the context of considering the enormity, complexity, and intertwining of the issue, adding that it was “systematic and very large.” Thus, Patty interpreted the issue as involving a wide scope and came to question her own actions in being able to address it. These rather critical self-assessments were shared by other informants, with Ashley offering another powerful illustration of doing questioning: “There's . . . almost like a fear, like you can't do enough . . . a sense of inadequacy. . . . Does it make sense to do anything if you're never going to do enough anyway?”

While taking insufficient action can be construed as an act of omission, acting in ways that exacerbate the issue the supporter is trying to address is best characterized as an act of commission. In these instances, informants had self-doubts about how their actions might be contributing to climate change. For example, Megan questioned her actions rather harshly:

Knowing the facts I know, I still choose actions that aren't always right. So I put myself beyond the belief I have. My convenience and superficial happiness fronts my need to be more environmental. . . . If my need to be more environmental is more important to me than anything else, I wouldn't do many of the things that I do. . . . I eat meat. I drink wine and beer. . . . I'll buy Patagonia when I can, but I also buy North Face.

Megan traced her acts of commission to her days as a consultant, when she became “used to having a lot of money and living in a big city and having all these expectations of life,” suggesting how climate change is inextricably interconnected with basic aspects of American life and culture. As an issue intimately connected with many aspects of individuals' lives, Megan found it hard to escape her conditioning as an American, despite her commitment to the issue.

Like Megan, Seth offered a very critical evaluation of his actions, identifying an “inconsistency” he has in his life:

I'll go to a really strong word, guilt, but you know, I think something that we all have internally when we learn about this issue is kind of this contradiction that we're doing some, you know, we still go on kind of doing things as usual, business as usual. We drive our cars . . . we go out to restaurants and we buy seafood that was harvested from halfway around the world . . . we travel to Europe for vacations. And these are things that I enjoy doing. And I think . . . it's like a really hard contradiction to try to . . . remove or reduce.

Seth was acutely aware of the “very big problem” of climate change. Yet he questioned his performance as an issue supporter and raised specific examples of actions that contrast with his desire to support the issue. While the actions Seth criticized may appear common to most people in America, Seth characterized these actions as contradicting support of the issue.

**Doing constraints.** Doing constraints involve issue supporters considering that situational obstacles inhibit them from acting in sufficient ways, such as by taking an environmental job (or being a student without any job), and therefore not having an adequate wage to live in ways that would be more consistent with supporting the issue. For example, Ryan challenged his choice of automobile and declared that:

in my heart of hearts I know I should drive a Prius but . . . that is not necessarily [easy] to do given my economic choices professionally in terms of the job I do. Or adding insulation to my house or replacing windows. Those things all cost money, and so while I might to do those things, they are not necessarily easy to afford, and also you know some of that relates to infrastructure of life style.

Ryan's articulation of his constraints was also intertwined with the scope of the issue, as he pointed to the “infrastructure of life style,” thereby



acknowledging that addressing the issue implies major adjustments to how he lives.

As another example, Lucy doubted her actions as an issue supporter at home, because she had given too much to the issue at work, thereby identifying her situation as putting a constraint on her ability to support the issue: “I spend so much of my time at work doing environmental related activities that I don’t have a real strong focus outside of work. . . . I just burnt out. . . . When I leave work, I don’t want to talk about environmental stuff anymore.” Lucy went on to note that she was “trying to think about ways to be more engaged in the issue in my personal life” but considered important issue support challenges as being formidable obstacles: “Aside from family and friends, if you were to try to actually make some kind of . . . changes with your local government, I would think it would be a challenge to try to accomplish change at that level.” In her case, Lucy negatively evaluated her performance around the issue in a key setting of her life as a consequence of the time she spent on the issue in a different setting. This suggests that for some informants, the idea of always acting in ways that support the issue is rather elusive, as some participants interpreted such support as a zero-sum game, in which efforts in one sphere of their life took away from their efforts in another sphere.

### STUDY 1: THEORY DEVELOPMENT

We use the three induced constructs from Study 1—issue support challenges, self-assets, and self-doubts—to propose theory around how individuals develop ongoing self-evaluations in response to issue support challenges. The process starts with issue support challenges. Social issue supporters interpret multiple types of challenges when trying to support an issue. Cognitive challenges demand effort to think about issues that are complex, wide in scope, and interconnected with other issues; relational challenges demand effort to interact with others who are complacent or skeptical about issues; and organizational challenges necessitate effort to get organizational buy-in and cope with economic challenges of issues. Many of these challenges arise from engagement in being an issue supporter inside and/or outside of work, where social issue supporters interact with others who do not share their views and face a cognitively challenging issue that transcends organizational borders. As a result of repeatedly interpreting issue support challenges in a variety of contexts, issue

supporters are constantly interrupted by these challenges, as the issue pervades many aspects of their daily experiences. Unlike many strategic or operational issues that face supporters inside organizations, climate change—and social issues more generally—cross organizational boundaries and demand issue supporters’ attention in multiple settings. It is this frequent confrontation of issue support challenges that is psychologically disruptive (e.g., Weick, 1995), jolting a person into an awareness that the current situation may pose some barriers or difficulties to being an effective issue supporter. In response to these interpreted challenges, issue supporters engage in self-work by evaluating the self in response to two ongoing questions: (1) Do I have the assets needed to be an issue supporter? and (2) How am I performing as an issue supporter?

The first question informs what we labeled self-assets—a type of self-evaluation that positions issue supporters as having the requisite capacities to support the issue. Issue support challenges enable individuals to evaluate themselves as having the assets to meet what a given context demands. More specifically, knowledge assets may be a particularly helpful antidote to cognitive challenges, as issue supporters evaluate themselves as acquiring knowledge and being integrative thinkers, both of which can help them to wrestle with the scope, complexity, and interconnectivity of issues. For example, recall how Fran evaluated her understanding as having increased upon reflection on the “complex science” involved in the issue. Value assets may allow issue supporters to claim the ethics and values necessary to face others that either question the fundamental premises of the issue (skeptics) or simply do not care about the issue (complacent others). Such evaluations may remind individuals of the intrinsic importance of their issue support, even if others do not embrace the issue—an experience Roger recounted in his story about the charged e-mail exchange between EBP students and traditional business students. Experience assets affirm the self as having gained the requisite skills of an issue supporter, as Fran did when she moved from a role focused on environmental affairs to one with profit and loss responsibility. These experiences may be helpful for meeting organizational challenges in which it is difficult to sell an issue to others or navigate potential trade-offs between economic goals and issue goals. More generally, the matching of a particular type of self-evaluation (e.g., cognitive challenges with knowl-

edge assets, relational challenges with value assets, and organizational challenges with experience assets) suggests that self-evaluations prompted by a particular type of interpreted issue challenge might call forth certain challenge-appropriate self-evaluations to use to attempt to counteract these challenges.

Although issue supporters respond to challenges with self-assets that indicate a viable self that can meet these challenges, issue supporters also express doubts about their own performance. Thus, the second question issue supporters address in response to issue support challenges informs what we call self-doubts—a type of self-evaluation that questions the actions an issue supporter takes vis-à-vis the issue. These doubts arise as issue supporters reflect on the challenges of addressing an issue, experiencing a discrepancy between what the context demands (issue support challenges) and what the issue supporters have done. More specifically, doing questioning involves critical self-evaluations whereby an issue's supporters question the sufficiency of their actions in supporting the issue, or even more severely, question whether their actions actually exacerbate the issue. These rather harsh self-evaluations emanate from issue support challenges that supporters confront in different life domains (e.g., work, school, family). For example, by interpreting the issue as having a wide-reaching scope, issue supporters may create an insurmountable challenge to overcome, thereby rendering any action they might take as insufficient to address the issue (such as Fran's description of the issue as "enormous"). Facing organizational challenges that necessitate compromise in the face of economic realities (such as Luke's focus on perfection to enact environmental values as an all-or-nothing proposition) leads issue supporters to focus on their own actions that harm the environment, while obscuring all of the supportive issue actions they take. For relational challenges, the skepticism and complacency of others can lead issue supporters to evaluate themselves as primarily responsible for the issue, such as Jack's felt need to "answer . . . every skeptic." As a result, issue supporters often evaluate their actions as insufficient to address the issues or even as worsening them.

Similarly, doing constraints emanates from reflecting on issue support challenges in a way that highlights situational obstacles individuals confront in the course of acting as issue supporters. For example, the effort involved in managing organizational challenges around getting issue buy-in led

Lucy to evaluate herself as not having the ability to support the issue outside of work, as she viewed herself as having a limited capacity to do so. She expressed skepticism that she could muster the effort to address relational challenges outside of work to make meaningful change. Cognitive challenges such as a wide issue scope led some informants to focus on constraints to acting. For example, Ryan evaluated his choice to not buy a Prius as resulting from his financial constraints, which are intertwined with interpreting the issue as embedded in the "infrastructure of lifestyle." These examples all highlight the deeply situated nature of self-work, in which challenges encountered in being an issue supporter in specific contexts go hand in hand with self-evaluations that vary in the extent to which they endow assets or doubts. Unlike self-assets, both forms of self-doubts appear to emanate from a wider range of issue support challenges as opposed to being tied to any particular type of challenge.

We collectively label self-assets and self-doubts as self-work to capture the effortful and ongoing self-evaluations our informants engaged in to respond to the plethora of issue support challenges they interpreted. The "work" part of self-work implies that these forms of self-related processes involve efforts to focus on and evaluate the self; but it has a secondary meaning, calling attention to the significant labor that issue supporters undertake by constantly evaluating the self in context.

We further modify self-work by referring to it as "situated" because individuals reflect on different settings (including work and nonwork settings) about a specific issue (i.e., issue supporter for climate change) to evaluate the self. The context is important because it provides some of the raw materials that prompt issue support challenges that further spark the effortful undertaking of self-work. For example, some individuals evaluated themselves as having developed knowledge about the issue that was relevant to their organizations, used venues such as organizational contexts to positively evaluate their values (sometimes in reference to others in these contexts), and assessed themselves as developing a repertoire of experience through efforts at work (and beyond) that equipped them with what it took to be an issue supporter. Similarly, individuals questioned their own performance as issue supporters on the basis of how they evaluate what they are doing (or not doing) in the variety of contexts in which they regularly find themselves. Put more succinctly, situated self-work

calls attention to the elaborate challenges confronting individuals trying to support an issue that motivates effortful self-evaluations directed toward creating a viable self as an issue supporter, even as there are ongoing self-doubts about how they are performing as issue supporters.

### STUDY 1: DISCUSSION

Our theory of situated self-work portrays an active self that interprets an issue's challenges in ways that inform an ongoing evaluation of the self, positively (self-assets) and negatively (self-doubts). It shines a spotlight on the experiences of issue supporters who wrestle with imbuing a self with positive meaning while nevertheless offering harsh self-criticism. In doing so, it provides a window into the interpretive experiences of issue supporters, linking their interpretations of key challenges to self-evaluation in situated self-work. In unpacking situated self-work, Study 1 makes three key contributions to research on issue support and the self.

First, Study 1 portrays a self that differs from the self organizational scholars' emphasize, a self predicated on a strong concern for image (Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton et al., 1997, 2002). By examining the responses of some of the most ardent issue supporters, we found that instead of focusing on an outward assessment of how others construe them, and related worries about its consequences (e.g., career risk), individuals evaluated themselves particularly with regard to whether they have the assets they need to be issue supporters and whether their performance as an issue supporter is sufficient. This shift from interpretations of how others perceive the self to how the focal individual perceives the self suggests several important implications. First, freed from constraints about image and career risk, individuals may focus more on trying to advance social issues versus selling only those sanctioned by top managers (Ashford & Barton, 2007; Sonenshein, 2006). Additionally, the focus of an issue supporter's self-evaluations moves beyond a calculation about job performance and toward issue performance—namely, whether an issue supporter has what it takes to perform (i.e., self-assets) and how that issue supporter performs (i.e., self-doubts) with respect to his/her issue.

Second, we find that individuals evaluate themselves in a decidedly mixed fashion using self-assets and self-doubts. Our findings regarding the

mixed nature of these self-evaluations, which range from the most critical to the most favorable, build on other issue support research that has also discovered a mixed self, most notably the research on tempered radicals (Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). But the mixed self in research on tempered radicals is based on differences between a self identified with a social issue and a self identified with an organization that does not embrace that social issue. In our particular case, the mixed self is predicated on competing *self-evaluations* that encompass an affirmed self, but also somewhat paradoxically, an ineffective self that falls short.

Third, our theory of situated self-work explains how the different contexts issue supporters experience (such as work and home) shape ongoing self-evaluations. We describe an active self that engages in interpreting contexts, not so much to assess their favorability for issue support as previous research has suggested (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton et al., 1997, 2002), but rather to inform self-evaluations, thereby providing a richer view of how context influences issue support. This contrasts with organizational scholars' emphasis on organization context that overlooks the possibility that individuals may positively equip themselves outside of a focal organizational context to be able to engage in issue support inside that context (or conversely, may develop self-doubts outside of a work context that stymie issue support in that context). As a result, this research joins a growing emphasis of scholars on the spillover effects between work and nonwork contexts (e.g., Pratt & Rosa, 2003; Rothbard & Wilk, 2011). In this manner, a focus on how self-work is situated in multiple contexts suggests a new way of thinking about issue support as not being tied to a particular context (e.g., work, school, organizations).

On a related basis, the multiple social contexts in which individuals evaluate their issue support may present opportunities to develop self-assets about a particular issue in alternative contexts to boost the self, despite engaging in some self-doubts about that same issue. In contrast with psychological approaches about self-evaluations that often do not theoretically incorporate context (e.g., Arnocky et al., 2007; Fielding et al., 2008), we found that self-work is situated in the sense of being connected to experiences with a particular issue in multiple contexts. This is important because it suggests that individuals might still evaluate a self as having assets despite having self-doubts in another con-

text. This contrasts with a central tenet of self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), that when threatened in one domain (by, for example, self-doubts), individuals can regain confidence and self-esteem by affirming themselves in an unrelated domain of value to them. For example, after receiving negative feedback about his/her performance at work, an individual can maintain a positive, competent sense of self by thinking about how competent he/she is at parenting. Importantly, our findings suggest that social issue supporters can boost their self-esteem by developing self-assets in a single domain (i.e., social issue support). This might reflect the importance of an issue to dedicated issue supporters; that is, because of their dedication to the issue, they may see unrelated domains as less important than their work supporting the issue. Affirmations associated with the issue itself become especially powerful. Put simply, a social issue supporter's evaluations of self-doubts at work one day may be followed by that issue supporter's evaluations of self-assets at home the same day about the same issue, thereby providing an alternative pathway to self-affirmation.

## STUDY 2: OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

We designed Study 2 to empirically and theoretically deepen our core premise that social issue supporters experience a mixed self by inductively examining the different ways this mixed self is manifested and how these differences relate to issue-supportive behaviors. To do so, we recruited two independent samples of environmental issue supporters and examined whether self-assets and self-doubts could be measured and meaningfully represent those of other social issue supporters. We inductively examined these new data, which demonstrated that individuals clustered into profiles of different combinations of mixed self-evaluations based on individuals' responses to measures developed to capture the self-assets and self-doubts constructs at a single point in time. We found that among these issue supporters, three main profiles or combinations of mixed selves existed: self-affirmers, self-critics, and self-equivocators. Finally, we examined how these different profiles related to individuals' levels of issue-supportive behaviors.

## STUDY 2: METHOD

### Sample and Procedures

We first examined whether the two constructs underlying the mixed self-evaluations—self-assets and self-doubts—were reliable and valid. To do so, we collected pretest data to demonstrate construct validity for measures we created for self-assets and self-doubts (reported in Appendix B). Afterwards, we recruited a second sample of issue supporters and used surveys with concealed observation to inductively examine patterns of self-assets and self-doubts and investigate how these patterns related to issue-supportive behaviors. We collected data from 91 environmental issue supporters who were active members of environmental groups in a major North American city. We recruited participants by contacting 21 leaders of the groups whose mission statements explicitly defined them as active in environmental change and sustainability. We heard back from 19 groups, which then forwarded information about our study to their members with a link to a secure website by which they could sign up. Each of the 19 groups had 1 to 15 members who participated in the study. Participants came to a computer lab for 45 minutes in exchange for \$15 and free pizza and snacks. Participants ranged from 18 to 55 years old (mean = 23.8) and included 58 women and 31 men (2 participants did not report their gender). They averaged slightly less than 3 years of full-time work experience, and 56 percent were currently working full time in various industries.

When participants arrived, we sent them to a computer station to begin a survey. Following survey completion, we instructed them to refrain from disturbing others by talking and to raise their hand to receive instructions for the next portion of the study. A research assistant then provided a paper survey that asked for study feedback and their pizza (cheese or vegan) and beverage choice. Each participant received a beverage, three slices of pizza, vegetables, and strawberries. We left strawberries with the greens still attached, so that participants would be less likely to eat everything on their plate, even if they were hungry. Plates and napkins were compostable and beverage containers were recyclable. A compost bin of a type common in that city was set up, along with a three-part composting/garbage station of a type commonly seen in the building.

We told participants to stay as long as they wished and to finish all food and beverages in the

computer lab. We instructed participants to raise their hand upon completing the meal and then directed them to clean up their eating space and meet the research assistant at the door of the computer lab for payment instructions. A second research assistant took notes on each participant's composting behavior. We then instructed participants to go down the hall to the payment table, where a research assistant had them sign out and issued payment. After receiving payment, we told participants they would receive the results of the survey via e-mail.

Participants then left the building, presumably assuming that the study was over. However, we had two research assistants pose as environmental activists on the street about ten yards outside of the computer lab. The two research assistants wore World Wildlife Fund (WWF)<sup>2</sup> hats and carried clipboards to mimic the WWF activists commonly seen on the city's streets. The research assistants/street activists approached each participant by asking, "Do you have a minute for the Earth?" If the participant stopped, the street activist told the participant about Earth Hour—a real upcoming event sponsored by WWF—and asked the participant to sign the pledge and include her/his e-mail address for a reminder to turn their lights off for Earth Hour. Hidden from view inside a building across the street, we videotaped the street activists' interactions with participants to identify them after the study. To ensure realism, we instructed research assistants/street activists to approach participants naturally and to not chase participants who appeared to be in a rush. Additionally, to enhance the perception of realism, activists occasionally approached nonparticipants, both street pedestrians and those coming out of the university building. Following data collection, we fully debriefed all participants and asked them to again consent to the use of all of their data. No one refused consent.

## Measures

**Self-assets and self-doubts.** Following Study 1, we created and validated items with a pretest that conceptualized and measured self-doubts and self-assets (Appendix B)<sup>3</sup> as reflective constructs with

indicators (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). To provide construct validity for these items, we recruited a sample of students who participated regularly in a subject pool for payment and only selected those who self-identified as environmentalists in a pre-screen. We designed items to tap environmental issue supporters' sense that they were living up to the standard of being a "good environmentalist" primarily through their sense of whether they were "doing enough" to deserve this label. To measure self-doubts, participants rated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with three items (see Appendix C;  $\alpha = .88$ ). We also drew on our initial study in designing items to measure self-assets, which we conceptualized as a single latent reflective construct consisting of three elements derived from our qualitative study: knowledge, experience, and values. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with nine statements on a seven-point scale (Appendix C;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on all independent measures, including the items for self-assets on a single factor, covarying it with a single self-doubts factor, and allowing the error terms of the three types of self-assets to covary. Because of our small sample size, we ran a bootstrapped model ( $n = 200$ ). Although we had limited power to reject a model, our results demonstrated a sufficient fit to the data ( $\chi^2[44] = 68.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .96, RMSEA = .08) (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Each item loaded significantly with its intended construct and with no significant cross-loadings ( $p < .001$ ).

**Profiles.** We used cluster analysis to inductively examine how participants grouped into combinations of mixed selves based on degree of self-assets and self-doubts. That is, all individuals exhibited some degree of a mixed self but they varied in composition. Scholars use cluster analysis to form groups of individuals based on their similarities using a meaningful set of measures. We used Ward's (1963) hierarchical cluster analysis tech-

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theme, did not emerge from the qualitative data until after subsequent analysis (i.e., after we collected the observational data). Because of our extensive design, it was not feasible to rerun the study. However, we think that doing constraints, which emphasizes situational challenges to issue support, were less relevant to our observational study context, because we placed individuals uniformly in a different situation (i.e., as part of a study) that made the situational constraints we identified in Study 1 less relevant and less variant.

<sup>2</sup> The WWF is an activist group focused on environmental conservation.

<sup>3</sup> Our measure of self-doubts only includes doing questioning. Doing constraints, our second, second-order

nique to group participants' scores on the two scales. Following procedures to determine appropriate clustering, we examined the dendrogram that suggested a three-cluster solution was most appropriate.<sup>4</sup> Upon examining the scores associated with the individuals in each cluster, we interpreted the three clusters of participants as follows: Those having low self-doubts (mean = 2.55) and high self-assets (mean = 5.94) were *self-affirmers*; those with high self-doubts (mean = 5.12) and high self-assets (mean = 5.37) were *self-equivocators*; and those with high self-doubts (mean = 5.40) and low self-assets (mean = 4.04) were *self-critics*. We then used dummy codes to categorize participants into one of these three profiles (38 self-affirmers, 33 self-equivocators, and 20 self-critics).

### Issue-Supportive Behaviors

Our study design allowed participants three opportunities to engage in issue-supportive behaviors that represented a range of likely behaviors in a variety of contexts. First, we coded participants who composted their leftover food and/or dishware as having composted (consumption-offset opportunity). Thirty-five out of 63 participants composted. Because some people left in a rush and because we did not want to disrupt natural observation, we were unable to observe or record the composting behavior of some participants (16). Additionally, some participants refused the meal (7) and, despite our instructions, some participants took food with them as they left (5). Upon probing participants for suspicion about whether we were measuring their composting behavior, we found no one indicated any suspicion.

Second, participants had the opportunity to offer feedback in a handwritten survey (interpersonal influence opportunity). Twenty participants voiced their opinion about various aspects of our study not being environmentally friendly enough, including comments such as:

The vegan pizza was great and I like that you supported a small business. . . . In-season snacks would have been better than importing (strawberries from California, for example). I don't think any beverage products from Coca-Cola or Pepsi should be offered—both of these companies have caused massive environmental damage and have been accused of human rights abuses.

Others noted that some materials (e.g., Post-It notes) were not environmentally friendly because they were not made from recycled paper or that they would have preferred water in reusable drink containers rather than the beverage containers provided. In addition, six participants complained verbally to our research assistants/street activists about aspects of the study, focusing on issues such as environmental waste or our unsustainable behavior. We coded each participant that exhibited either a written or verbal complaint about environmental issues with our study as having engaged in an interpersonal influence attempt (26) or not (65). All participants filled out a written survey and thus had the opportunity to voice their opinion in this manner.

Finally, we examined whether participants signed the pledge to turn their lights off for Earth Hour (collective advocacy opportunity). All of the 14 participants who signed the pledge also left their correct e-mail addresses. An additional 50 participants approached by the activists did not stop to sign the pledge. We left remaining participants as missing values on this variable. More specifically, we excluded 5 participants: 4 because they knew one or both of the assistants/activists and 1 because she/he indicated suspicion of the activist. The assistants/activists did not approach another 8 participants because they were busy with other participants or it was not possible to approach them in a natural manner. Notably, 14 participants were not visible on the videotape and presumably left through a different building exit.

### STUDY 2: RESULTS

To examine how different profiles engaged in different levels of issue-supportive action, we assigned categorical codes to each profile membership and ran a one-way ANOVA with post hoc comparisons, predicting the sum of individuals' issue-supportive behaviors from profile membership. We found that self-critics engaged in the lowest number of actions (mean = 0.45 actions, s.d. = 0.76), followed by self-equivocators (mean = 0.61

<sup>4</sup> We also examined a four-cluster solution, reasoning that we might find a low self-assets and low self-doubts category to represent a complete 2 by 2. This was not the case and is likely indicative of our sample's dedication and focus on the issue. That is, as our qualitative study showed, individuals routinely interpret self-evaluations as they face issue support challenges and therefore likely have developed some combination of self-assets and self-doubts.

actions,  $s.d. = 0.70$ ), and finally, self-affirmers (mean = 1.21 actions,  $s.d. = 0.99$ ). Results of the ANOVA indicated significant differences among the categories ( $F = 10.56$ ,  $df[1]$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Tukey comparisons demonstrated that self-affirmers engaged in significantly more issue-supportive behaviors than both self-critics (mean difference = 0.76,  $s.e. = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and self-equivocators (mean difference = 0.60,  $s.e. = .20$ ,  $p = .01$ ). However, while mean differences suggested that self-equivocators had slightly more actions than self-critics, this difference did not reach statistical significance (mean difference = 0.16,  $s.e. = .24$ , *n.s.*). This might be due to several statistical issues, including low power/sample size and restricted range on the dependent variable (Hays, 1994).

## STUDY 2: THEORY DEVELOPMENT

In this section, we explain the findings from our inductive derivation of the three self-evaluation profiles using a motivation lens. Study 1 showed that informants interpret being an issue supporter as posing severe challenges. These challenges have important implications for how social issue supporters stay motivated to continue to support an issue.

### Self-Affirmers

The results of Study 2 showed that self-affirmers exhibited more extensive issue-supportive behavior than those with other profiles. This finding is consistent with motivational research in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), which explains how positive self-perceptions such as self-concordance can foster motivation. This perspective suggests that self-affirmers may have more self-concordance and therefore be more motivated to pursue their goal of issue support through more action. Self-affirmers' might also be interpreted with research on goal setting, which has shown a relationship between self-efficacy and greater goal achievement (Bandura, 1977; Locke & Latham, 1990). Individuals who have greater self-assets may in turn have greater self-efficacy in being able to achieve their goal of issue support and therefore are better able to achieve that goal.

One interesting departure from existing theory is that self-affirmers demonstrated some (albeit low-level) self-doubts, a factor that self-concordance and self-efficacy models suggest might deplete self-

efficacy and decrease goal-directed action. While somewhat speculative, our findings suggest that low-level self-doubts could foster issue-supportive behavior when found in combination with high self-assets. This may occur because, when in the presence of self-assets, low-level self-doubts might function as reminders of important goals and standards rather than as burdens. This idea is consistent with research on goal setting and self-regulation showing that self-monitoring of progress (i.e., feedback) toward important goals is crucial for goal attainment (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1982; Locke & Latham, 1990).

### Self-Critics

We found that self-critics exhibited less action than self-affirmers. For self-critics, we posit that high self-doubts are likely functioning *not* as gentle reminders, but rather as externally imposed burdens. Without greater self-assets, these individuals could see their goals and standards as less internally driven (i.e., less self-concordant), and more externally imposed (i.e., something they are forced to do) and thus as decreasing their motivation (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). While self-doubts signal to people that they are falling short of a valued goal (Carver & Scheier, 1982), self-critics who are without the motivational strength provided by self-assets may not feel they can meet these demands. That is, in the absence of important perceived self-assets, the reminder of a valued goal could make these individuals feel guilty, incapable, and hopeless—feelings that could lead to negative self-rumination, distraction, and depletion rather than increased goal-directed behavior. Notably, a tenet of self-affirmation theory (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988) is that when individuals perceive a threat to their sense of self (such as a self-doubt), which then negatively influences their behavior, they can overcome this threat by affirming the self by feeling a sense of value in a different domain. But our results differ in two key ways. First, we found that individuals can generate self-assets in the same domain in which they perceive a threat (here, environmental issue support) and that the presence of greater self-assets appears to relate to greater issue-supportive behavior. Second, we do not posit a sequential order to self-doubts and self-assets. Instead, we found that the simultaneous presence of self-assets and self-doubts was associated with different levels of action, depending on the types of self-evaluations. This is important

when thinking about Study 1, because we posit that self-evaluations are ongoing and thus do not trigger isolated self-doubts that might be more illustrative of traditional views on self-affirmation theory.

### Self-Equivocators

The final profile from our cluster analysis was self-equivocators, who have both high self-doubts and high self-assets. This group, while not statistically significantly different from self-critics, had a slightly higher mean level of behaviors. The results suggest the presence of strong self-doubts might be enough to psychologically derail these individuals and cause them to significantly decrease action, regardless of the simultaneous presence of strong self-assets. Thus, it could be that the strong doubts decrease self-concordance and self-efficacy in such a way that self-assets no longer have a positive effect on action.

## STUDY 2: DISCUSSION

Our Study 2 findings, like those of Study 1, show the presence of a mixed self in environmental issue supporters in relation to self-assets and self-doubts. Self-affirmers engaged in the most extensive issue-supportive behavior, reflecting their strong psychological foundation based on low self-doubts and high self-assets. The idea that individuals can interpret such a positive self despite a challenging context (i.e., environmental issues) contrasts with the dominant portrait of social issue supporters as actors who routinely burn out and often fall short of their objectives (Gomes, 1992; Maslach & Gomes, 2006)—a portrayal most consistent with our self-critic profile. At the same time, even the psychologically strongest environmental issue supporters had self-doubts. This may reflect the idea that highly committed individuals nonetheless retain important self-doubts (Brickman, 1987).

Our second study also raises important questions around how self-doubts function for environmental issue supporters. Although high self-doubts may overwhelm environmental issue supporters and in this case were associated with less extensive behaviors (findings consistent with research in psychology [Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1982, 1998; Higgins, 1987]), low self-doubts might compel behavior when coupled with high self-assets. In addition, self-doubts may foster a type of humility about effectiveness as an issue supporter that keeps issue supporters open to learning and self-change (Ow-

ens, Rowatt, & Wilkens, 2012). This can act as a check on overconfidence, keeping issue supporters grounded in the everyday reality of being an issue supporter. More generally, this suggests the importance of examining not only social issue supporters' beliefs and values but also their self-doubts. But somewhat paradoxically, even when issue supporters interpret negative self-evaluations—something that may happen quite frequently, given the issue support challenges we found in Study 1—they may nevertheless act supportively on this negative self-evaluation when it is combined with a positive self-evaluation. This perspective is consistent with the research of Maitlis (2009), who described the generativity and forward movement of individuals who must deal with clearly negative self-interpretations.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Using two complementary studies, we developed a theory of situated self-work and then examined how two core constructs in this theory—self-assets and self-doubts—related to real issue-supportive behaviors. Collectively, these two studies present a view that is an alternative to that of organizational scholars who emphasize an outward-looking self concerned with image and reputational risk developed from contextual sensemaking inside organizations, as well as an alternative to psychological perspectives that emphasize theories that downplay context. Instead, our two studies extend prior work by embedding self processes in multiple contexts, such as work and home, with a focus on two core ways that issue supporters evaluate themselves: through self-assets and self-doubts. These constructs not only play an important role in the process of self-interpretation but also predict real issue-supportive behaviors.

The two studies we examined, while complementary, nevertheless answer two different parts of the larger puzzle of how self-evaluations inform social issue support. Our qualitative study not only induced three core constructs pivotal to this puzzle—issue support challenges, self-assets, and self-doubts—but also developed a theory of situated self-work that has tied these constructs together. More specifically, this study addresses how individuals' self-evaluations are generated from the interpretation of issue support challenges in multiple contexts inside and outside work settings. In doing so, we developed theory about an active, mixed self that interprets self-assets and self-doubts. In our



quantitative study, we examined, at a specific point in time, self-assets and self-doubts and their relationship to real behaviors, finding that the self-affirmer profile exhibited the highest level of issue-supportive behaviors.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Our mixed methods design has several strengths. We used both qualitative and quantitative studies with different field-based samples. Furthermore, our observational study used real issue behaviors and presented evidence of validated measures of our inductive constructs. Yet, as with any research, our study has important limitations and raises new questions that scholars should investigate in subsequent research.

First, our studies raise the question of how mixed self-evaluations influence social issue support. Existing research suggests that individuals can respond to a mixed self in two primary ways. One camp argues that individuals have a strong motivation to resolve such ambivalence (e.g., Brickman, 1987; Pratt, 2000) and go to great lengths to do so, using a variety of techniques (Pratt & Doucet, 2000). This might suggest that a mixed self is a relatively fleeting state for social issue supporters. A second perspective suggests that individuals need not resolve a mixed self and instead use seemingly contradictory beliefs as a foundation for wisdom (Weick, 1998, 2004), such as by asserting beliefs and doubts (e.g., Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). According to this perspective, the contradictory forces allow individuals to be more flexible and open to a broad range of acting (Pratt & Pradies, 2012), something especially important for social issue supporters, who often integrate a concern with an issue with membership in an organization that does not endorse those same concerns (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). While future research is clearly needed, one manifestation of the wisdom of a mixed self comes from how low self-doubts create urgency. When the self acknowledges performance shortcomings, greater performance may result, because the acknowledgment functions as useful feedback, and thus individuals might adjust goals or efforts (Locke & Latham, 1991). At the same time, self-assets provide a sense of capability to reach a goal. This sense of self-efficacy has also been demonstrated as critical to individuals' motivation as they aspire to act in accordance with their valued goals (Bandura, 1991; Locke & Latham, 1991). Put simply, a mixed self may ground wisdom for a

social issue supporter by criticizing itself for not doing better while also boosting itself to ensure that it keeps trying to do better.

Second, we examined social issue support vis-à-vis the natural environment. It is not clear that our findings will generalize to other social issues. But many properties of environmental issues are common to social issues more generally, including complexity, contested nature, and seemingly unlimited opportunities to act inside and outside formal organizational settings. Even so, the self-evaluations induced by issue support challenges may vary for different kinds of social issues.

Third, additional empirical work can help disentangle the relationship between a mixed self and issue-supportive behaviors. For example, how do self-evaluations change over time and relate to ongoing issue-supportive behaviors? Our profiles represent self-evaluations at a single point in time, but longitudinal research could unpack the extent to which self-evaluations change over time. For example, do individuals end up with more self-doubts over time as they burn out from trying to support an issue, or do they accrue more self-assets as they capture small wins acting on an issue over time? Or do the different profiles of self-evaluations represent different stages in which individuals work through an ambivalent self (Pratt & Pradies, 2012)?

### Implications for Practice

Our findings help explain why it is difficult to be a social issue supporter but also present guidance for strengthening social issue supporters. Those who work on the issue of interest here in multiple contexts constantly interpret significant issue challenges. Unlike with more traditional strategic issues, there is often no refuge for social issue supporters when they leave the office. As a result, they engage in self-evaluations that generate self-doubts that question the self in multiple contexts. It is thus not surprising that a key concern for them is a high level of burnout and depression (Maslach, 1982), a likely outcome when an exceedingly strong commitment to an issue is combined with very high standards for action (Gomes & Maslach, 1991). Our findings suggest that bolstering self-assets may not be a sufficient remedy. Instead, social issue supporters may also need to devise ways to mitigate their self-doubts.

On a more positive note, our findings also reveal how, through the ways in which they evaluate themselves, social issue supporters can create con-

ditions that foster behaviors important for action on an issue. For example, our findings suggest that individuals can develop self-assets outside their work context, something that may be particularly important for social issue supporters who find themselves in contexts where they often lack access to tangible resources (such as financial resources) or in less politically legitimate parts of an organization (such as a corporate social responsibility department) (Meyerson, 2001).

## Conclusion

Supporting social issues often requires perseverance from individuals who want to make a difference. Our research explains how mixed self-evaluations of these individuals spring from their interpretation of issue support challenges. While “it’s not easy being green” or, for that matter, being a social issue supporter of any shade or stripe, our study takes an important step toward understanding of the role of this mixed self-evaluation in helping (or hindering) individuals’ actions that play a valuable role in advancing a social issue in work organizations and beyond.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

1. Describe what the issue of climate change means to you?
  - a. Follow-up: What does this description tell us about you?
2. If you are trying to describe the issue of climate change to your current boss (if no current boss, most recent boss), how would you describe it?
3. When and how did you first hear about this issue?
4. I have a simple timeline where I am trying to map your understanding over time? How has your understanding of the issue changed over time? What caused these changes?
5. Since you first heard about the climate change issue what, if any, actions have you taken?
6. What challenges, if any, have you encountered with respect to this issue? How have you responded to these challenges?

7. In what ways is the climate change issue positive?
8. When you think about the climate change issue, what feelings do you associate with this issue? Why?
9. On a scale of 1–5, how central is the climate change issue to you as a person? Please explain why you gave this rating.
10. In what ways does your work organization (if not current, previous work organization) affect how you think and feel about this issue?
11. In what ways has your participation in the EBP program affected how you think and feel about this issue?
12. If I were asking you to fill in the blank I am “\_ \_ \_” five times, how would you answer I am\_ \_ (repeat five times)
13. How does your family think about the issue of climate change? What, if any influence, does your family have on your own understanding of this issue?
14. What country/ies are you a citizen of?
15. How long have you worked full-time?
16. What was your most recent job title?
17. What place do you currently work? What was the last place you worked?
18. Were any part of your job responsibilities related to the climate change issue?
19. What year were you born?

## APPENDIX B

### Construct Validity

To demonstrate construct validity for self-assets and self-doubts, we collected data from a sample of 58 undergraduate students from a North American university's research pool. We asked potential participants to rate how strongly they agreed/disagreed with items from an environmental identity scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and only recruited those who scored at or above the mean consistent with our theoretical population. These participants came to the computer lab about one week later and responded to measures based on Study 1 (self-doubts and self-assets) as well as validated measures of self-categorization ( $\alpha = .79$ ), resilience ( $\alpha = .84$ ), self-efficacy for social change ( $\alpha = .92$ ), hope ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and optimism ( $\alpha = .83$ ) (Bandura, 1997; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, & Higgins, 1996; Wagnild & Young, 1993). In addition, we assessed participants' interest in working for environmentally responsible organizations using a six-item scale ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Finally, we asked participants to rate how likely they were to engage in five environmental issue-supportive behaviors ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

To examine the underlying factor structure of our self-assets and self-doubts scales, we placed all original 12 items into an exploratory factor analysis (principal components) model with direct oblimin rotation. Three components emerged: self-doubts, self-assets related to values and knowledge, and self-assets related to experience. All loadings were above .60. While they were unique

components with acceptable cross-loadings ( $< .4$ ), the interitem correlation matrix indicated a number of highly correlated items among the affirmation items. This, together with our qualitative findings, guided us to construct a final nine-item self-assets scale (sample  $\alpha = .88$ ) and a three-item self-doubts scale (sample  $\alpha = .81$ ) for measuring these constructs in our quantitative work (see Appendix C for final items and the text for the results of the confirmatory factor analysis).

To demonstrate convergent and predictive validity for our self-assets and self-doubts constructs, we ran correlational analyses. As expected, we found that self-assets correlated positively with cognitive resources, including optimism ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), hope ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), resilience ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ), and self-efficacy for social change ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ). Self-doubts correlated negatively, as expected, with the measure of self-categorization ( $r = -.38, p < .01$ ), in which participants were asked to place themselves on a visual diagram of a series of two gradually overlapping circles representing their current and ideal environmental selves (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Self-doubts also correlated positively with a two-item measure of “state guilt” ( $r = .31, p < .01; \alpha = .90$  [Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988]). Next, we ran a series of hierarchical regressions to examine predictive validity. As expected, participants' self-assets positively predicted their self-ratings of interest in working for environmentally responsible organizations ( $\beta = .61, p < .001$ ) and their likelihood of engagement in environmental issue-supportive behaviors ( $\beta = .53, p < .001$ ). Participants' self-doubts negatively predicted likelihood of engagement in environmental issue-supportive behaviors ( $\beta = -.35, p < .01$ ).

## APPENDIX C

### Survey Items<sup>a</sup>

#### Self-Doubts

I don't do enough to be called a good environmentalist.  
I do not deserve to be called a good environmentalist.  
A good environmentalist would be doing a lot more than I am for the environment.

#### Self-Assets

I am knowledgeable about environmental issues.  
I stay up to date on environmental issues.  
I know a lot about environmental issues.

<sup>a</sup>All items were measured on a scale ranging from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 7, “strongly agree.” We used the popular term “environmentalist” instead of the academic “environmental issue supporter” because our interviews indicated that “environmentalist” was a common way of referring to this group of individuals. Please note that the survey also included demographic items, and we also conducted a paper “filler” survey; these items are available from the authors upon request.

I am an experienced advocate for positive environmental change.  
 I am well practiced at making positive environmental change.  
 I am experienced at influencing the environmental opinions of others.  
 I care deeply about environmental issues.  
 I strongly value the protection of our environment.  
 I am someone who cares about the environment.



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