

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Cultivating identity through private land conservation

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Abstract

1. Private land conservation is driven by a variety of influences. As a voluntary action undertaken by landowners, it is influenced not only by external factors such as financial incentives, but also by personal and psychological factors.
2. Using William James's concept of the "extended self", this study investigates how protected land becomes a part of landowners' identity. The study is based on narrative interviews with 27 landowners who had purchased or created a privately conserved area in one of 13 countries.
3. The analysis highlights three facets of these nature reserves that enable incorporation into a landowner's sense of self: place, possession and project. Drawing on Breakwell's identity theory, Belk's analysis of possessions, and Little's project analytic theory, findings illustrate the various functions land serves in the expression and development of identity. The present research draws attention to aspects of land as possession and land as project, which have received little attention in conservation research.
4. This study points to new directions for inquiry into the relationship between land, nature, identity and self and to practical applications for program design, including implications for knowledge sharing, toolkits, networks and communication.

KEYWORDS

conservation psychology, extended self, philanthropy, place attachment, place identity, private land conservation, privately protected area, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in protecting biodiversity on privately owned land. Private land conservation (PLC) presents opportunities to extend the global protected area estate, make progress towards conservation targets and engage new actors in land protection (Stolton, Redford, & Dudley, 2014; Watson, Dudley, Segal, & Hockings, 2014). In many cases, private landowners have significant decision-making authority over land use, determining whether and how conservation activities are implemented. Conservationists and policymakers can benefit from understanding the factors that influence landowner decision making.

The field of conservation psychology provides theories, methods and research findings that can explain human action in the context of environmental protection (Saunders, 2003). Conservation psychology has been recognized as a field since the early 2000s, and its introduction occasioned optimism for the potential insight psychology could provide to the study of conservation issues (Saunders, Brook, & Myers, 2006). Although the tools of conservation psychology have been underutilized (Selinske et al., 2018), PLC has proven to be an area where there is burgeoning enthusiasm for its application.

Personal and psychological factors, such as attitudes, values and locus of motivation influence landowners' conservation actions. For

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example, in the US, pro-environmental worldviews and conservation concern are associated with participation in government conservation programmes and placement of conservation easements (Drescher, Warriner, Farmer, & Larson, 2017; Farmer, Brenner, Drescher, Dickinson, & Knackmuhs, 2016; Horton, Knight, Galvin, Goldstein, & Herrington, 2017; Welsh, Webb, & Langen, 2018). Studies on locus of motivation show that conservation action on privately owned land is associated with autonomous motivation (Yasué & Kirkpatrick, 2018), and, globally, the private purchase of nature reserves and other protected land areas is driven by engagement in intrinsically motivated, self-determined activity (Gooden & Grenyer, 2019).

Landowners also make land management decisions that align with their identity (de Snoo et al., 2012; Farmer, Knapp, Meretsky, Chancellor, & Fischer, 2011). Rural, non-farm landowners, for example, describe their properties in personal terms, characterized by themes such as “My identity is reinforced through my connection with this land” (Drescher, 2014). Identity is known to mediate the relationship between intention and behaviour (Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008), suggesting it is a useful variable for understanding landowners’ actions. Yet, there remains a gap in our understanding of the avenues for identity construction and maintenance for contemporary landowners. The present study seeks to address this gap in the context of PLC.

Private land conservation can take a variety of forms. Under the framework utilized by the World Commission on Protected Areas, private governance includes land ownership by any entity other than governments, communities or indigenous peoples; this includes landowners as diverse as individuals, families, NGOs, corporations and religious or educational institutions (Dudley, 2008). The activities undertaken can also vary widely, ranging from planting hedgerows or riparian buffers (e.g., Januchowski-Hartley, Moon, Stoeckl, & Gray, 2012) to landscape-scale protection of ecosystems (Ryan, Hanson, & Gismondi, 2014). This study focuses on a specific type of landowner: individuals who own private nature reserves and other privately conserved areas (PCAs), defined as privately owned land for which conservation is a main objective, though not necessarily the sole objective (see Methods).

As a group, PCA owners present a case study for exploring how psychological factors influence land use decisions, and vice versa, illustrating the role identity plays in shaping interactions between people and nature. PCA owners generally have a high degree of agency, with both the motivation and the means to purchase land in order to protect its biodiversity value. Moreover, many PCA owners operate their conservation properties as a personal or family project, rather than as their primary livelihood, offering a window into the psychology of voluntary purposive action (Little, 2014).

The purpose of the present research is to consider how privately owned nature reserves become integrated into landowners’ identities. I approached this question by analysing narrative interviews with people who have created or purchased a PCA through the lens of William James’s concept of the extended self (James, 1890/1990). Paraphrasing Belk (1988), I argue that a key to understanding what

PCAs mean to people is recognizing that, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, PCA owners often regard their land conservation projects as parts of themselves. In this paper, I unpack this statement by first providing an overview of the theoretical framework and methods, then exploring three facets of PCAs that enable incorporation into sense of self: place, possession and project. I conclude by discussing the implications for our understanding of landownership and identity.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In everyday parlance, the self is generally thought of as the set of mental and physical processes that operate within the confines of the body. However, many perspectives on what the self is, and how it emerges, emphasize its constructed nature (Taylor, 1989). For example, phenomenological and existential philosophies underscore the reflexive and experiential nature of the self (Farina, 2014; Snygg, 1949), and symbolic interactionists and social constructionists view the self as continually shaped through interaction with other people, blurring the boundary between self and social context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1990; Snygg, 1949). Here, I employ the concept of the “extended self”. William James conceptualized the self as a web of interactions in his 1890 *Principles of Psychology*, a volume that launched the field of contemporary Western psychology. A recent special issue commemorating the 125th anniversary of its publication celebrated the continuing relevance and insight of its findings, noting, “James’ work was not only ahead of his time but ours as well” (Cresswell, Wagoner, & Hayes, 2017, p. A1). One of the many contributions he made to psychology was recognizing the inherent relationality of psychological phenomena. His conception of the self was reflective of this approach, including not only the physical self (or “Empirical self”) but everything a person considers “me” or “mine”:

The Empirical Self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name of *me*. But it is clear that between what a man calls *me* and what he simply calls *mine* the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our fame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings and same acts of reprisal if attacked. (James, 1890/1990, p. 291)

James included not only the body but also possessions, reputation, family and work in the concept of self. To this list others have added friends, pets, mementos, beliefs and abstract ideas, personal space, ingestibles, home, tools and objects of aesthetic appeal, play and amusement (Belk, 1988). When infused with meaning or emotion, entities in each of these categories can become part of the extended self.

The concept of the extended self was revived in analyses by Russell Belk (1988) and Jerome Bruner (1990) that have been influential in the fields of consumer behaviour and psychology. In recent

years, the concept has been employed in studies of architecture (Abel, 2014) and sustainable consumption (Kunchamboo, Lee, & Brace-Govan, 2017), finding that both material and immaterial aspects of the external environment can be incorporated into the self, and that these aspects of the self can influence behaviour. In this paper, I use the concept of the extended self as a lens to examine the characteristics of PCAs that enable incorporation into landowners' sense of self.

Self and *identity* are contested terms. A commonly deployed distinction is that individuals have a singular self but multiple identities that are foregrounded in different contexts (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2013). In this paper, I use the terms self and identity interchangeably; this is in part due to a lack of conceptual distinction in the literature on which I draw, and in part to improve the readability of the text.

To support the analysis, I also draw on three additional theories (Figure 1): Breakwell's (1992) identity theory, Belk's (1988) analysis of self-extension through possession and Little's (2014) project analytic theory.

2.1 | Identity theory

Place attachment, or the bonding that occurs between individuals and the environments that are meaningful to them (Scannell & Gifford, 2016), is a well-documented motivator for people who seek to protect land (Farmer et al., 2011; Selinske, Coetzee, Purnell, & Knight, 2015). Place identity extends beyond attachment, describing the "physical world socialization of the self", which occurs when individuals incorporate a place into the self-definition (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) applied Breakwell's (1992) identity theory to explain the mechanisms by which place identity operates. Rooted in the work of James (1890/1990) and Mead (2015),

identity theory posits four principles that govern identity development: distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy. For individuals, special places can support each of these functions.

Identity theory postulates that individuals have a desire to maintain personal distinctiveness, defined as a motive to establish or maintain a sense of differentiation from others (Vignoles, Chrysoschoou, & Breakwell, 2000). There is evidence that people use place identifications to distinguish themselves or to flag themselves as a member of a distinctive place-based community (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). For example, a person might identify as a "city" or "country" person (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

Identity is also constructed through continuity of the self-concept. Continuity is achieved when past and present self-concepts are continuous over time and situation (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Places provide physical markers that serve as referents for past and future self, allowing people to preserve identity over time. The importance of place in maintaining continuity is apparent when it is absent: for example, unwanted and uncontrollable changes in the physical environment, resulting in the loss of continuity, can cause a grief reaction (Fried, 1963).

A third component of identity theory is self-esteem, a positive evaluation of oneself. Self-esteem is concerned with a person's feeling of worth or social value (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). People tend to have a more positive evaluation of themselves when they are in special places, and special places can act as a buffer against distress (Scannell & Gifford, 2016).

Finally, efficacy aids construction of place identity through application of personal skills (Bandura, 1982). Efficacy is an individual's belief in their capabilities to meet situational demands (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Places support self-efficacy to the extent that they provide a manageable environment in which a person is able to carry out her or his chosen activities.

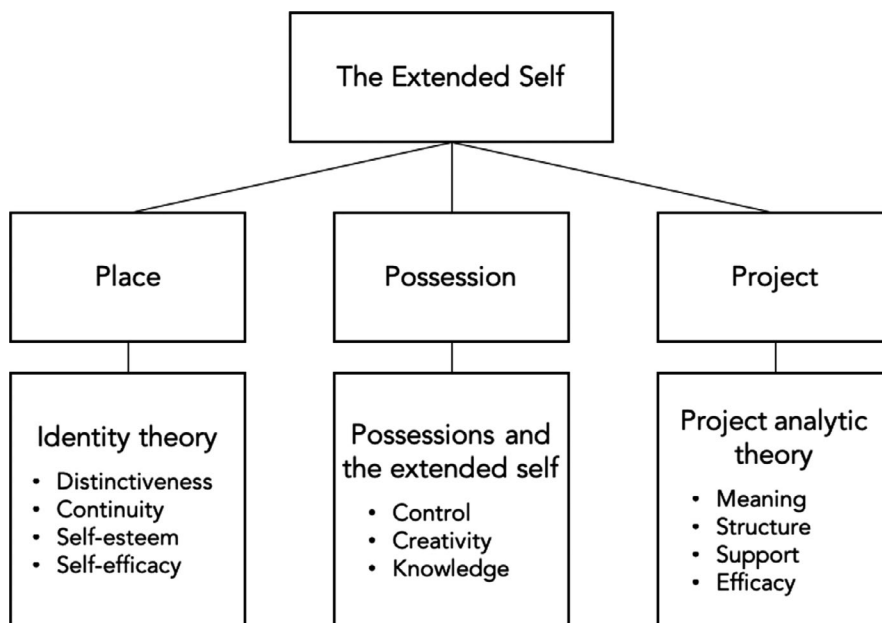


FIGURE 1 This study analyses identity through the lens of the extended self (James, 1890/1990), investigating place, possession and projects as facets of conservation properties that enable identity incorporation. These facets are explored using identity theory (Breakwell, 1992), self-extension through possession (Belk, 1988) and project analytic theory (Little, 2014)

2.2 | Self-extension through possession

In one of the most influential papers ever published in consumer behaviour literature (Ladik, Carrillat, & Tadjewski, 2015), Belk (1988) compiled evidence from anthropology, psychology and philosophy that humans infuse their possessions with a sense of self-identity. Some degree of this may be due to the mere ownership effect, in which people view items they own more favourably than items they do not own (Beggan, 1992); however, not all possessions are brought into self-identity (Ahuvia, 2005), indicating processes other than mere ownership are at work.

Objects can be integrated into the self through control, creation and knowledge (Belk, 1988). Control is perhaps the simplest method of defining psychological possession, and its connection to possession is embedded in property law (Stake, 2004). Control can be defined by agency, or ability to act upon objects, though it is also possible for feelings of merged identity to occur when the object's owner feels controlled by the object (Belk, 1991).

The act of creating an object can also contribute to a sense of ownership and self-extension. "Whether the thing created is a material object or an abstract thought, the creator retains an identity in the object for as long as it retains a mark or some other association with the person who brought it into existence" (Belk, 1988, p. 150).

Finally, knowledge can also lead to self-incorporation of possessions (Belk, 1988). An intimate knowledge of a place or object, such as a community, store or book, makes it part of the self-concept (Beaglehole, 1931). Some objects, such as souvenirs, photographs or gifts are used mnemonically to store knowledge that is instrumental in managing identity (Belk, 1991).

2.3 | Project analytic theory

A person's projects, or voluntary personal endeavours, often reflect and contribute to a person's sense of self (Gooden & Grenyer, 2019). Personal projects can contribute to one's well-being, though the extent to which they do so varies. Project analytic theory suggests projects that increase well-being tend to be meaningful, structured, supported and efficacious (Little, 2014).

Meaningful projects are more likely to contribute to well-being. To be engaged in a meaningful project is to be pursuing something that is estimable and worthwhile (Little, 1999a). Meaningful projects are worthwhile by virtue of being enjoyable, important and expressive of one's identity (Little, 1999a).

A personal project contributes to well-being to the extent that it is structured, in that one initiated it, feels a sense of control over it, and has sufficient time to devote to it (Little, 1993). A project's manageability is related to scope or scale and is a consistent predictor of subjective well-being (Little, 1999a).

Personal projects are supported if they are visible to and valued by one's social environment and carried out within a supportive network. When projects are normatively valued, highly visible and supported by others, the projects are more likely to enhance well-being (Little, 1999b).

Lastly, personal projects are considered efficacious to the extent that individuals feel their projects are progressing well and will continue to do so (Little, 1999b). The relationship between efficacy of personal projects and well-being is one of the most robust findings in project analytic theory (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1996).

3 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the recent literature, a number of conservationists have called for increased incorporation of research from social sciences and the humanities (Bennett et al., 2017; Cowling, 2014; Teel et al., 2018). This paper utilizes concepts from psychology, philosophy, anthropology and the study of consumer behaviour to provide insight into the way landowners think about nature conservation on their properties.

3.1 | Participants

Participants were 27 individuals who had created or purchased a PCA as defined below. Aggregate data about the interviewees and their properties are shown in Table 1. Two were descendants of the original landowners who spoke on behalf of their parents and also shared information about their own involvement. Interviewees came from a variety of professional backgrounds, including business, industry, consulting, real estate, science, art, music, ranching and farming. Interviewees were selected on the basis of conservation land ownership, resulting in participants with a range of incomes. All had sufficient personal resources to enable land ownership, and a minority were known high net worth individuals.

An initial search for PCA owners was conducted in media reports and internet searches, and referrals were sought from conservation professionals. As the study progressed, some interviewees also referred additional PCA owners. The sample was purposive and non-probabilistic; consequently, results are intended to provide theoretical insight rather than represent a broader population of landowners.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of interviewees and their properties

Region	Countries	Male	Female	Avg. property size (ha)
Africa	South Africa, Zimbabwe	4	0	47,720
Asia	India	1	1	80
Europe	Scotland, Spain	1	2	2,780
Oceania	Australia, New Zealand	0	2	3,860
North America	Canada, Mexico, United States	5	2	20,080
South America	Chile, Colombia, Argentina	5	4	7,580

3.2 | Privately conserved areas

I defined a PCA as privately owned land for which conservation is a main objective, though not necessarily the sole objective. I distinguish PCAs from privately protected areas because not all land owned by private individuals meets the World Commission on Protected Areas criteria for protected areas, such as legal protection or third-party verification of intent (Stolton et al., 2014). Some but not all properties had formal legal protection. The word “privately” describes ownership and governance rather than use, and it neither suggests nor precludes exclusive access.

Interviewee narratives indicated that landowners included both protection and restoration in the scope of conservation. Protection was described in scales ranging from soil to whole ecosystems. Restoration was characterized by removing alien vegetation, returning the full complement of species that were historically in the area, and eliminating barriers, such as fences, between the property and the larger ecosystem. For some, conservation was about wilderness, with few signs of human use or infrastructure, but more commonly PCA owners said that conserved land was also for human use. Anticipated outcomes associated with human use included recreation, improvement of mental and physical health and visitors recognizing the intrinsic value of nature.

PCAs included both domestic and foreign ownership, and residential and non-residential properties, and they varied in size from 4 ha to over 130,000 ha. Many properties incorporated revenue-generating activities, including tourism, game breeding and sales, hunting, agriculture, ranching/grazing, forestry and easement leases in their financial models, though only rarely did interviewees suggest that earned revenue covered the costs of conservation management. Properties were located in Canada, United States, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Spain, India, UK, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

3.3 | Interviews

Interviews were conducted as part of a larger study using constructivist grounded theory methodology, and they were intended to record landowners' stories of their involvement in PLC rather than to query topics related to identity or self specifically. (See Supporting Information for an interview guide.). Interviews were conducted in English in person or by phone, Skype or email. Interviews ranged from 20 to 90 min, with an average duration of one hour. Interviews were loosely structured, each beginning with a request for the landowner to tell the story of how she or he became interested in PLC, with follow-up questions based on responses. Unanticipated directions in conversation were followed when relevant to the conversation topic. Email was used for interviews when requested by interviewees ($n = 4$). While email interviews have less richness than in-person interviews, they also offer some benefits, such as increased opportunity for some people (e.g., those who are shy or less confident in spoken English as a second language) to respond openly (Meho, 2006).

3.4 | Analysis

The aim of this analysis was to generate theoretical insights into land ownership and identity in the context of PLC. The broader study of which this is a part was approached from an interpretive, constructivist perspective, adopting a “big Q” approach to qualitative data analysis (Willig, 2013). In contrast to “little q” qualitative analysis, which refers to the incorporation of non-numerical data into deductive research designs, “big Q” analysis refers to open-ended research methodologies concerned with theory generation and exploration of meanings (Willig, 2013).

Analysis of transcripts was iterative, moving between data and theory and using both inductive and deductive approaches. Sequentially, I began with an observation that interviewees' narratives suggested that their PCAs were part of their identity, which led to James's (1890/1990) conceptualization of the extended self. Analysis of interview transcripts using constructivist analytic methods (Charmaz, 2014) identified place, possession and project as aspects of the land that enabled identity incorporation. A further literature review yielded theories that illuminated each of these aspects, including identity theory (Breakwell, 2015), possessions' contribution to the extended self (Belk, 1988) and project analytic theory (Little, 2014), respectively. I then structurally coded transcripts using categories derived from the theories (Saldaña, 2011).

3.5 | Ethics

This research was approved by Oxford University's Central University Research Ethics Committee, #SOG-16-1A-26. Oral consent was obtained and logged at the beginning of each interview. This manuscript has been prepared in a way that protects the participants' anonymity, including removal of place references from quotes.

4 | ANALYSIS: THREE FACETS OF THE EXTENDED SELF

People interact with nature and land in multiple ways. Here, I isolate three facets of PCAs—land as place, as possession and as project—to explore how PCAs and nature can be integrated into the extended self.

4.1 | Place

Place identity describes the process that occurs when individuals incorporate a place into the self-definition (Proshansky et al., 1983; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). As one interviewee explained, a PCA can be imprinted on a person's sense of self:

You get to develop a very close personal relationship, you get to love the place and what it means. Its value increases all the time. If you have the sensibility, you

can bring your family here, your kids grow up here, you have a relationship with small things of the place, the weather, the animals, the landscape. They mark a person for life. (M497)

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) application of identity theory to place identity highlights four principles that govern identity development: distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy. For individuals, special places can support each of these functions.

Interviewees' narratives suggested multiple associations with land that express personal distinctiveness or uniqueness. One interviewee described his property as "low-maintenance", a trait he said he shared (M493). Another said her PCA was instrumental in shaping her identity as a person of the mountains:

A very important value for me is the identity. The property-person identity is very important because I suppose, or I believe, that we in the mountains have very special values. When I stayed in the Andes, I saw the people are more or less like me because the mountain imprints a character on the people. I think this is important, the identity. (F111)

Most landowners described unique characteristics of their properties, including physical characteristics such as "the second largest dune wetland" (F169) or "seven species of rare and special plants" (F283) and aesthetic characteristics such as rare beauty: "a very seductive, attractive, magical place" (M127). Another said:

Some of my beautiful swamps, I mean you ought to see those swamps with yellowwood trees. At certain times of the year, they've got the waterlilies there. If JC [Jesus Christ] would be alive again, that's where he would definitely be walking across the water. It's phenomenal. (M101)

Identity is also constructed through continuity of the self-concept. Some PCA owners said their association with the property extends even beyond death, and they foresaw themselves maintaining a spiritual connection to the land after burial (Casal, Aragones, & Moser, 2010): "I can see myself [in the property] even after I am no more, I can see that as well. I can feel my life energy flowing through it in deep form" (M232). Place can also serve as a permanent anchor connecting past, present and future selves through the personality stamp made on the land through management action: "If you leave a piece of land, and you show your kids to like it and love it, and you leave personality print on that piece of land, that's another way of being alive" (M493).

In addition to personal continuity, landowners expressed continuity via family in indications that the property will never be sold and the hopes of many interviewees that the next generation will also take on a relationship with the property.

I'm a single woman, and an objective of this is to buy something to give to the other generations of my family to show what is important: the land and the conservation. And to show the values, not only economic but also biodiversity and traditions and identity and ecology, all of these values. (F111)

In places where land protection in perpetuity was possible, this permitted continuity of the project into the distant future: "There are very few people who get to do something that will last as long as the government lasts. It will last forever. It's quite rewarding" (M122). Others express continuity in the sense of "looking after" the land. Sharing similarities with the concept of stewardship (Mathevet, Bousquet, & Raymond, 2018), this commonly repeated concept implicitly theorizes ownership as a transitory and successive state, binding the current landowner with past and future others who care for the same place.

That's my feeling, that you don't really own it. You really are just guarding it during your lifetime. Although it sounds a little bit airy-fairy for people who don't understand that kind of ownership, I think you have to keep that in the back of your mind all the time. (F332)

A third component of identity theory is self-esteem. Landowners in this study variously reported that being connected to the PCA has changed the way they view themselves, sometimes reflected through the way others view them. One landowner explained that his experience with the PCA enabled him to be recognized as a national native tree expert (M437). Another reported that the lessons he learned by observing wildlife on his property had "greatly helped me in my personal life" and in his career in a competitive industry (M232). Throughout the narratives, interviewees reported feeling more fulfilled, capable, impactful, mature, spiritual, connected, creative, energetic or giving, and with reduced ego and pride. See Box 1 for an illustration of how these characteristics can reinforce positive identity.

Finally, efficacy is expressed through personal impact, which can also be seen in the anecdote in Box 1. The majority of landowners had careers outside conservation, and they were able to experience efficacy by applying their professional skills and experience to their private reserves. For example, one interviewee explained that a career in business and industry taught him the skills of maintaining a balance, which made him more impactful in his work and was transferable to his role as a PCA owner:

You learn that you have to live in harmony with everything around you. I mean the myth that you go out and negotiate a contract with your suppliers and screw them to the ground – no, no, no, you've got to leave some meat on the bone. We all want to survive... Life needs to be in balance. Wildlife needs to be in balance. You need to make sure that your neighbors

BOX 1 Anecdote: Impact of conservation land ownership on personal identity

This anecdote from a landowner expresses how the experience of purchasing and operating a PCA led to the development of new skills, a more nuanced understanding of other people and a positive evaluation of the self:

I wouldn't say I was superficial in the past, but I was just sort of ignorant really. In the past...my projection of what my life could be was just to have a family and look after myself, have a good salary, have an interesting job. And suddenly you realize that you can make a difference, even if it's in a very small way. Your actions can make a difference. The idea of sharing the land and sharing the history with other people. We sometimes have guests who arrive, rather stressed out from a busy life in the city, and you see them at the end of the weekend looking completely different because they've actually absorbed something of the natural world in the forest that is so peaceful. The whole fact that you're able, in a small way, to make a difference to other people's lives...really does change you as a person. My ideals now would have nothing to do with personal gain. They would be just to be able to carry on with this project and make it viable, and...feel that it will carry on in the future. That it won't be lost. Yes, I am a different person, definitely. I'm more mature. Also, the fact of having to speak to very different kinds of people makes you more flexible. You also see that the way you see the world is because you've...jumped through certain hoops and you've had to change. Other people, sometimes, haven't had the same opportunities. I find in conversing with other people, talking to them, that you can actually make more of a difference than if you try and convince them or get into an argument with them. I've become more influential probably, as a person, than I would have been in the past when I would just write an angry letter to the newspaper. (F332)

live in harmony with you. Dealing with government and business prepares you for it. (M101)

In this study, efficacy was most commonly expressed in reference to interviewees' efforts and impact on the landscape. One PCA owner, for example, emphasized the value of proving that restoration could be achieved in a difficult environment:

[The property] was a total wasteland. At that point I was already interested in conservation. I thought it was worth it to try to turn it around. I wanted to create a model to show it can be done. The hydrologists said it couldn't be done. It was in the middle of the system, soils were like talcum powder, nothing to key structures into. I thought they may be right, but if I can do it, you can do it anywhere. (F455)

Place identity may have added benefits when the place as a high degree of naturalness (Castree, 2014), as vegetation and other elements of natural environments have been associated with such benefits as stress management, healing and spiritual experiences (Bowler, Buyung-Ali, Knight, & Pullin, 2010; Kaplan & Kaplan, 2009; Vining & Merrick, 2012). By serving as an anchor for distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and efficacy, PCAs enable landowners to incorporate their connection to place into a positive identity.

4.2 | Possession

While many report that they feel more like guardians or caretakers than owners, PCA owners also value control and autonomy. Some,

for example, declined offers for partnerships or land leases in favour of sole ownership. Being independent and retaining decision-making authority contribute to a sense of personal investment in the PCA and contribution to its conservation outcomes.

I think that if you hold the land, you call the shots, don't you? If I put it in a foundation, I've got to deal with trustees. I've got to deal with a whole bunch of other people. So, whilst I'm trying to create a model, I don't want to have to listen to everyone. I'm better off trying to do it privately. (M290)

Acts of creation also contribute to a sense of ownership and self-extension. This is particularly apparent among PCA owners who initiate ecosystem restoration projects. Envisioning and manifesting a restored ecosystem becomes a way for people to invest themselves in the landscape and, reciprocally, for the landscape to become incorporated into their identity. Some landowners draw upon artistic metaphors to make sense of how the natural environment responds to their efforts. For example, one landowner experienced the restoration of the property as though she were painting the landscape:

It was all about water. It changed from dry, rocky, bare land to lush, green and wet, even in the dry season. There was more wildlife, more insects, birds and bats. It's all connected. It's like a living canvas: I put water on it and other things appeared on their own. (F455)

Another, using a metaphor from music, experienced the restoration of a pond as a symphony:

It's much like music. If I'm composing a symphony, sitting at my piano, then those single notes at the piano are actually building a complete tapestry with sound. The land is similar, because I am doing things there and the land is responding to it. It is a symphony, in a different form. It is being composed by me and nature is the orchestrator. (M232)

Knowledge is a third means of extending the self through possessions (Belk, 1988). In PLC, knowledge appears in two forms. A surprising number of interviewees are involved with universities, NGOs or private consultants who carry out research on the property, generating codified or declarative knowledge (Haye & Torres-Sahli, 2017). They report that learning from visiting scientists is an enjoyable part of their experience, stating, for example, "I love it when scientists and naturalists come and they teach me" (F426). Another said:

The more we did, the more scientists came, I began to learn from the scientists. It was recharging in that sense. I saw exponentially what the benefits were. It was not just what I could see, I began to really realize the importance. (F455)

In addition, some landowners, especially those who live on the property or spend a significant amount of time there, talk about feelings of joy, delight and a sense of contribution to the world as they get to know the landscape. In contrast to codified knowledge, this affective, practical knowledge (Haye & Torres-Sahli, 2017) is characterized by intimacy, familiarity and observation of changes over time.

As the leopard grew up, she taught me many things about survival. She taught me to eat less than my hunger. She taught me to use less than my wants. She taught me to deal with harsh times, with the vagaries, yet be happy in life. The spirit of survival. To live each day as it comes. All of that. I think I have changed enormously from it. (M232)

Landowners may integrate PCAs into their extended selves through control, creation and knowledge. Each of these implies an investment of mental and emotional energy into a property, a process known as cathexis¹. Through this investment of energy, material possessions take on meaning, expressing and embodying personal qualities (Dittmar, 1992).

4.3 | Project

Labour or the "work of our hands" has long been considered a component of the self-concept (Beaglehole, 1931). Personal projects to which one voluntarily commits time and energy are particularly reflective of the self (Gooden & Grenyer, 2019). The significance of personal projects derives from their capacity to represent aspects

of the self and serve as the "outwardly visible manifestations of an individual's sense of who she is" (Little, 1993, p. 159). Projects that increase well-being tend to be meaningful, structured, supported and efficacious (Little, 2014).²

In this study, PCA owners generally found their projects to be meaningful by virtue of their contribution to addressing broader environmental problems. Land conservation as a solution to the biodiversity and climate crises were recurrent themes in interviews.

[What feels good] is that you're protecting this vast and substantial block of land. You look at it, and it makes you feel that you're doing a good thing. One has to realize that one is temporary, land is eternal. But certainly what we've done as a family makes me feel good about life. That's an important thing, to feel that you're making a contribution to preserving what nature should be. (M127)

It was common for landowners to derive meaning from considering their impact in the context of a collective effort, even those they did not know. For example: "I believe that small things can make bigger things, like our property, with corridors and connection" (F149), "Does this little plot make a difference? I say every quarter makes a difference" (F283), and "I hope everyone can do something like this with the space they can: one hectare, two, fifty, whatever" (M187). Meaning is also construed in terms of obligation and generativity, which is a sense of concern for and commitment to others, including the environment (McAdams & Guo, 2015).

I do gain personal satisfaction knowing that I am contributing to conservation in some way... I certainly have done something significant there with the wattle removal, and it gives me a great deal of satisfaction to drive into that valley and see it more or less devoid of wattles and to see the restoration taking place. It's a good feeling. (M342)

Generativity is also expressed as efforts made to improve the lives of future generations (McAdams & Guo, 2015).

We truly believe that this concept of a privately owned land trust sanctuary is the only thing that can save the forest and biosphere of the planet. If people who have money do not wake up to realize that their kids can't eat and drink money – kids need a living planet to survive. The best thing you can give to your kids is a living legacy. If your small sanctuary can be a model to others...this is the hope of the future: the private forest sanctuary. (F426)

A personal project contributes to well-being to the extent that it is structured, in that one initiated it, feels a sense of control over it and

has sufficient time to devote to it (Little, 1993). PCA owners use various strategies to structure projects. While challenging projects can demonstrate efficacy, it is important that project difficulty be matched to the resources available so that it does not overwhelm one's capacity.

The place should be in reasonable shape [so] it can be improved, but I wouldn't go to the extremes of buying a wasteland hoping to recover it. I think it has to be something in between, something that has very good parts, and some you can regenerate, so that you have the satisfaction of seeing results. (M493)

Others buy land in stages, starting small so that they feel more control over the process and can learn experientially. A stated benefit of private land conservation is landowners' ability to act more quickly than governments (Leménager, King, Elliott, Gibbons, & King, 2014), but several interviewees emphasized that they prefer moving at a slower pace: "Conservation projects must be slow and be humble. You shouldn't throw in money to boom! make a park" (F149).

Lastly, personal projects are supported if they are visible to and valued by one's social environment. Around the world, there is significant variation in the extent to which this is the case for conservation landowners. Some PCA owners in the present study report being misunderstood by neighbours, particularly where PLC is an atypical land use:

Initially they thought we were all insane. Crazy. Which I guess we are...It took time to build a relationship with local people. The [local people] are related to everyone else. We're outsiders. My husband is [from another region], and I come from the moon. (F426)

Sometimes, it's frustrating because you have a vision and you see the other people around you in that location have a different one. I don't understand why they don't see the value of the reserve. But there are other people who...understand very well. It's like everything you do in life. (F252)

Consequently, landowners derive both utility and comfort from connecting with others who are engaged in similar projects, a condition supported by a substantial body of psychological research indicating the importance of social connections (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012). In some places, such as Chile and Argentina, regional networks connect people involved with PCAs. In addition to the knowledge exchange and technical assistance that results from networking, landowners who participate in networks report that they "feel better together" (F252) and are able to connect over similar experiences.

The main thing is our combined forces. It's not one individual, it's a group, openly sharing with the world.

That's a fact. If you are of good will and respectful to nature and the environment, you are invited to enjoy this place, to care for it together with us. (M497)

Some people also convey a sense of support, collaboration and relationship with nature itself (Diehm, 2007).

Nature connects me with creation, the divine, God's creation. Once you're in the forest, something makes you connect with the whole, with biodiversity, with people, other species. The sun, sky, ocean, clouds. As an artist, it's about my sense and perception. In the forest it's the same, you can see the people, the land. It makes you feel protective. Very healing. (F149)

Whereas possessions are incorporated into the self through cathexis, projects are incorporated by means of agentivity (Bruner, 1990), which occurs when intention and action cohere in an outward effect. When PCAs are meaningful, structured, supported and efficacious, they provide opportunities for enhanced well-being and positive integration into identity.

5 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The concept of the extended self offers a way of explaining identity that is missing from other notions of the self. Phenomenological, existential and symbolic interactionist models emphasize how the self is constructed, but they have less to say about the elements of which it is made. Much of economics is dominated by a hegemony of rationality (Clark, 2010), premised upon a notion of the self as a rational agent. In comparison with the rich and multifaceted character of James's extended self (1890/1990), the rational agent appears shallow and poorly equipped to explain human action. Applying the theoretical concept of the extended self to landowner interviews reveals not only that PCAs are bound up with identity, but also that this identity can be investigated through multiple lenses of place, possession and project. This finding has several implications.

5.1 | Implications for conservation theory

Place identity has been well-theorized in conservation and geography literature, and I find evidence in support of Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) application of identity theory to place identity. In addition, the present conceptualization of PCAs as both project and as possession contributes a new theoretical perspective to the study of identity in the context of land conservation. This work builds on Gooden and Grenyer's (2019) analysis, which conceptualizes PCAs as personal projects and highlights PCAs' affordance of well-being through "well-doing" (Little, 2014). While not explicitly theorizing PCAs as personal projects, others have reported findings consistent with this conceptual framework. Farmer et al. (2016), for example, highlight the role of "functional leisure" for private landowners.

Welsh et al. (2018) describe landowners' desire to apply prior knowledge to wetland restoration activities, and van den Born et al. (2017) show that committed conservation actors in Europe are motivated, in part, by eudaimonia, or striving toward a life well-lived. In this paper, I extend these findings on personal endeavours by connecting them to identity.

Possession of land is a laden topic in conservation literature. On one hand, the agents, targets and tools of land acquisition have been scrutinized for their contribution to social inequities that have at times resulted from conservation actions (Dowie, 2011; Duffy, 2016; Massé & Lunstrum, 2016). For example, land purchase has been implicated in neocolonialism (Ramutsindela, 2015), elitism (Langholz & Krug, 2004), and negative impacts on local communities (Serenari, Peterson, Wallace, & Stowhas, 2017). On the other hand, many landowners have benevolent or pro-social intentions and make efforts to minimize negative impacts (Horton et al., 2017; Niemiec, Ardoin, Wharton, & Asner, 2016; Selinske et al., 2017). Moreover, land acquisition by governments and NGOs has been the primary strategy for land protection since the origins of the modern conservation movement because it has traditionally been seen as the surest way to guarantee the protection of valued features (Fairfax, Gwin, King, Raymond, & Watt, 2005). Here, I have looked at another dimension of possession, examining how control, creation and knowledge contribute to psychological ownership (Lähdesmäki & Matilainen, 2014; Matilainen et al., 2019; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003). In doing so, I find that PCAs serve many of the same functions as other valued possessions, such as enabling self-definition and expression (Ahuvia, 2005; Dittmar, 1992).

This study did not provide sufficient data to assess social influences on the expression, maintenance and development of the self; however, in addition to the importance of social support for personal projects, social influences are posited to affect place identity by way of belonging (Scannell & Gifford, 2016) and valued possessions by way of demonstrating a "shared self" (Wong, Hogg, & Vanharanta, 2016). It seems likely that social context also affects PCA owners' connection to land, and this topic merits further investigation.

5.2 | Implications for conservation practice

The primary focus of this paper is theoretical, but the analysis provides an opportunity to consider implications for conservation practice. The primary mechanism for minimizing biodiversity loss has been the creation of protected areas (Adams, 2004). In the modern conservation era, protected area development has been largely the work of governments (Watson et al., 2014), but today there is an increasing recognition of the need to protect biodiversity on land outside state protected areas (Drescher & Brenner, 2018; Stolton et al., 2014). Conservationists are adept at developing advocacy campaigns and applying political pressure to urge creation of state protected areas, but PLC will require different strategies. Conservationists are now faced with the task of inspiring and supporting landowners to undertake voluntary conservation action, which is dependent upon

conservationists' ability to understand, appreciate and work alongside landowners.

There are practical advantages and disadvantages of theorizing identity and self regarding private land conservation. One advantage is that identity is known to influence behaviour. Psychological theory and experiments confirm that environmentally salient identities predict pro-environmental behaviour, over and above the more commonly assessed variables of attitudes and social norms (Fielding et al., 2008; Van der Werff, Steg, & Keizer, 2014). People who identify with the natural environment—whether a particular place (place identity; Proshansky et al., 1983) or with the natural environment more generally (environmental identity; Clayton, 2003)—are more likely to make an effort to protect it. For PCA owners, incorporation of a particular property into identity may lead to an increased desire to care for the land and the nature it sustains. Moreover, identity is more durable and stable than other psychological phenomena, such as attitudes (Oyserman et al., 2013). As a result, changes in identity have the potential for long-term behavioural effects.

Theorizing identity using the concept of the extended self is advantageous in that it signposts a variety of factors that can influence the degree to which landowners identify with their properties, opening up new directions for programme design and experimentation. For example, the relationship between efficacy and identity (Breakwell, 2015) suggests landowner-directed programmes would be well served to incorporate opportunities for property owners to include self-directed projects that result in observable improvements to the land. The knowledge element (Belk, 1988) highlights the utility of field researchers sharing their findings with landowners, and the significance of project structure (Little, 1999b) underscores the benefits that can be gained by offering practical toolkits and other guidance to landowners in order to make their tasks more manageable. The importance of social support (Little, 1999b) points to the benefits of landowner networks, through which landowners can share information and offer practical and personal support (Gooden & Grenyer, 2019).

Despite the utility of identity as a construct for illuminating landowner decision-making, it also poses some practical difficulties. Because individuals' identities are generally stable and resistant to change, they can be difficult to influence (Clayton & Myers, 2015), making it an impractical approach for working with landowners who do not value land conservation. Overt attempts to influence identity could be perceived as attempts to undermine autonomy (Niemiec & Ryan, 2013), leading to a negative response. However, where landowners already have an orientation towards conservation, programmatic approaches can inspire, encourage and support landowners' conservation efforts (Clayton & Myers, 2015). Identity can be supported through social connections with others who share a similar identity, such as networks (Clayton & Myers, 2015). Identities can also be made more salient through tailored marketing campaigns. Strategies such as identity campaigning, which is an approach to environmental communications that is based on an understanding of how people think of themselves (Crompton & Kasser, 2009), can be adopted by advocates of private land conservation. Based on

the present research, messaging to PCA owners, current or potential, could emphasize connection to land as places, possessions and projects.

This study explored identity in PCA owners, but identity is also relevant to other forms of stewardship. For example, European private forest owners used their properties to craft identities through the forests' link to family, heritage and local culture and to establish a link between the environment and the self (Matilainen et al., 2019), and rural, non-farm landowners in the US constructed identities that were tied to care of land (Drescher, 2014). English landowners' identities as woodland custodians mediated participation in recreational access schemes (Church & Ravenscroft, 2008). For agricultural landowners, conservation practices may need to be incorporated into a "good farmer" identity in order to be adopted by farmers who do not have pre-existing sympathies towards biodiversity protection (de Snoo et al., 2012). Programmes such as Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (engaginglandowners.org) offer resources for developing targeted conservation marketing campaigns that resonate with diverse groups of landowners.

Stewardship need not involve land ownership (Barendse, Roux, Currie, Wilson, & Fabricius, 2016), and appeals to identity are not limited to people who own land. Place identities and environmental identities, neither of which are not dependent upon land ownership, interact with pro-environmental behaviour. "Identities do not only encourage behavior; behavior can create identities" (Clayton & Myers, 2015, p. 179). Environmental advocates have used a range of strategies to encourage connections to specific places. Examples include programmes that allow people to "adopt" a part of nature, such as an acre of rainforest, or enable groups to work together on an environmental project, such as trail-building (Clayton & Myers, 2015). A more general environmental identity can be fostered through activities such as volunteering (Dresner, Handelman, Braun, & Rollwagen-Bollens, 2015; Fraser, Clayton, Sickler, & Taylor, 2009) or participation in citizen science events (Dean, Church, Loder, Fielding, & Wilson, 2018). Collectively, PCA ownership identity, environmental identity and place identity associated with the natural environment can be labeled "conservation-positive identities". Due to identity's durability, stability and direct influence on behaviour, advocates may find that fostering conservation-positive identities strengthens the connection between people and nature and has a long-lasting, positive impact on conservation objectives.

William James wrote that an expansive and inclusive self allows people to feel they are "integral parts of the whole of this brave world" (1890/1990, p. 313). By drawing attention to PCAs' significance as part of the extended self, this paper conceptualizes private land conservation in a way that simultaneously advances land conservation goals and supports expansive, inclusive and conservation-positive identities.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Interview transcripts are not available due to the conditions of confidentiality agreements with the participants.

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ENDNOTES

¹ In psychoanalysis, cathexis may imply an over-investment of psychic energy in an object, but there is no pathological tendency implied by the present usage.

² Because efficacy is also a component of Place (4.1) and has been described previously, it will not be repeated here.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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