Back in May-June this year, you participated in a study for the Psychology department on Australian-American relations and support for the “War on Terrorism”. Although you have probably forgotten all about it by now, back then you expressed some interest in hearing about the results of the study. We are very glad to be able to send you this short summary of what we’ve looked at to date. If you have any additional questions and comments, we would be glad to hear them!

1. SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

We recruited 166 participants for the present study, but excluded 12 respondents who were not Australian citizens. This left us with 57 men (37%) and 97 women (63%) with ages ranging from 16 to 57, with a median of 18.

2. WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR

Psychological research suggests that groups are evaluated in relative terms by comparing “ingroups” in which one is a member to “outgroups” to which one does not belong. A primary motive in social contexts is argued to be the achievement of a positively distinct ‘social identity’: a sense that one’s “ingroups” are different from and superior to “outgroups”. Thus, the more strongly that people identify with a group, the more likely they are to rate their ingroup as different from, and superior to, salient outgroups. Behaviourally, the more people identify with a group, the more likely they are to support that group against other groups.

To increase cooperation between members of two groups, research suggests that it is helpful if the groups share common goals or values that make salient a shared superordinate identity. For example, in the context of the “War on Terrorism,” a shared “free world” coalition identity might motivate Australian support, whereas if the issue is framed at the level of national identity (Australia and the USA) it might decrease Australian support. This dynamic adds an interesting complexity to communication between allied nations: rhetoric designed to assert the qualities of one nation in a coalition may have the effect of reducing allies’ commitment to a shared conflict, because it makes the national level salient at the expense of the shared superordinate identity. The present study tested this proposition by exposing participants to pro-American nationalist rhetoric. Stereotypes of, and emotions regarding, Australians and Americans were then assessed together with support for the “War on Terrorism.”

3. WHAT WE DID

All participants were recruited at the University of Queensland, in Australia, for a study of “Australians, Americans, and Social Relations”. Participants completed a questionnaire comprising the manipulation of nationalist rhetoric, measures of stereotypes, affect, authoritarianism, national identification, perceptions of American threat, support for the “War on Terrorism,” and demographic measures.

MATERIALS. Participants first completed a scale adapted from Sidanius and Pratto (1999) which was originally designed to measure hierarchical values in domestic and international contexts. In the present study, however, the scale constituted a source of American versus Australian nationalist rhetoric. Half of the participants completed a version in which the referent was Australia, whereas half completed a version in which international items retained the original American referent (e.g., “Sometimes it is necessary for the USA to make war on other countries for their own good”).
Participants then rated the valence of 20 traits (e.g., arrogant) and estimated the percentage of Australians and Americans who possess each trait. The weighted difference scores were averaged. The degree to which thoughts about each group would make participants feel each of six positive and negative emotions (e.g., admiring) was then assessed. Positive emotions were reverse scored, and differences were averaged. Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988) was measured with 20 items such as “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn”. Perceptions of American threat were assessed by averaging four items (e.g., “American military force threatens the world balance of power”). A five-item scale measuring national identification (e.g., “How important is being Australian in your everyday life?”) was completed. In addition, support for the war on terrorism was assessed with six items such as “Australia has a moral duty to support the War on Terrorism with troops”.

3. WHAT WE FOUND
Participants who were exposed to pro-American or pro-Australia rhetoric were compared on national identity, anti-American stereotyping and emotions, perceptions of American threat, and support for the “War on Terrorism”. Emotional hostility to Americans was higher in the pro-American rhetoric condition than in the pro-Australian condition, and Americans were perceived as more of a threat. In addition, there was a trend towards more negative stereotypes of Americans in the pro-American rhetoric condition relative to the pro-Australian condition. However, contrary to our expectations, national identity and support for the war were unaffected by the manipulation.

Multiple regression analyses were then conducted, with rhetoric condition as a control variable, to compare the degree to which national identification, threat perceptions, and authoritarianism predicted (1) support for the war, versus (2) anti-American stereotyping, and (3) anti-American emotions. Threat perceptions predicted low support for the war, more anti-American stereotypes and more anti-American emotions. Authoritarianism predicted support for the war, but was not associated with negative stereotypes or hostility. The most interesting pattern emerged for national identification, however: stronger identification as an Australian was associated with stronger support for the “War on Terrorism” but _also_ with anti-American stereotyping and emotional hostility.

4. WHAT IT ALL MEANS
This study draws attention to a societally important and theoretically interesting phenomenon: that processes surrounding a group identity may influence willingness to support one’s allies independently from cognitive and emotional hostility to that group. In the present study, as expected, exposure to pro-American rhetoric increased hostility to Americans. Moreover, consistent with psychological theorizing, those Australians who more strongly identified with Australians as a nationality evaluated Americans more negatively, with more Anti-American stereotyping and hostility. Unexpectedly, however, the hostility to Americans produced by pro-American rhetoric did not change participants’ support for the war, which was predicted independently by authoritarianism and low perceptions of American threat. Moreover, although strongly identified Australians were more negative to Americans cognitively and emotionally, they were also _more_ ready to commit Australia to the “War on Terrorism”. This dissociation between cognitive/emotional hostility to an ally and behavioural support for the ally is something that we are following up with further research and analyses.

THANK YOU!
Thank you for your participation in the survey last semester, and for your expressed interest in our results! If you aren’t completely exhausted by your reading of this summary,
you can send questions, comments, or requests for the scientific write-up, if & when it is completed, to Dr. Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, x56406, wlouis@psy.uq.edu.au.