Greetings,

You recently participated in a study about "Australian and American attitudes," and said that you would be interested in hearing about the results. We appreciate your help with our research, and we are happy to have the opportunity to tell you about the findings. This write-up looks at what we were looking for and then tells you about what we found. If you would like to ask questions, to comment on what you read, or to find out more, you can contact project staff by phoning (07) 3365-6406, by e-mailing w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au, or by writing to Dr. Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, McElwain Building / University of Queensland / St. Lucia, QLD 4072.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN ATTITUDES
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WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR

In this study, we exposed students to information that American and Australian students supported versus opposed the war. We wanted to see whether that would have an impact on participants’ attitudes towards the war, or willingness to express their attitudes behaviourally. This study's theoretical context is a model called "referent informational influence" (Terry & Hogg, 1996), which says that the norms of groups you belong to ('ingroups') are very important in decisions, while the norms of groups that you don't belong to ('outgroups') are generally unimportant in shaping attitudes. When people find out that others in their ingroup have similar attitudes, this research shows that people are more likely to act out their attitudes behaviourally. If people find out that there is a norm in their group opposing their personal views, they are less likely to act, and even change their views. But information about other groups usually has no effect. So, the model says that Australian students will be most influenced by reports about the Australian (ingroup) attitudes, but not influenced by outgroup views (for American students, in this case).

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

During the time period March 10-21 (i.e., in the lead up to the fighting, which broke out on March 17th), 72 people completed the study. The participants were all recruited from first year classes in psychology, ranged in age from 17 to 45 (but two thirds were 20 or younger), and were predominantly women (80%). Participants were Australians and had all lived more than ten years in Queensland.

WHAT WE FOUND

1. PRE-MEASURES OF ATTITUDES TO THE WAR ON IRAQ. Before exposure to the norm manipulation, participants’ attitude towards Australia's military support for the US was measured. The average was significantly below the scale midpoint, meaning that overall the participants opposed Australia's participation in the war. More specifically, 60% had unfavourable attitudes to the war, 12% were neutral, and 28% had favourable attitudes. Men and women and older and younger respondents were all equally opposed to the war, on average.

2. RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM. People's trust in authority, favouring social similarity, and endorsing traditional values were measured with a 30 item scale. We expected
that this variable might be linked to students' social attitudes. The average was significantly below the scale midpoint, meaning that overall the participants rejected RWA values. As expected, people who endorsed RWA values were more likely to support the war.

3. EXPOSURE TO NORM MANIPULATION. At this point, participants were given graphs that ostensibly showed the results of previous studies at UQ about American and Australian students’ support for the war. In fact, the graphs were made up so that American (outgroup) and Australian (ingroup) student norms were either high and low in support for the war. There were four conditions, then: the graphs showed that both opposed the war, both supported it, Australians supported & Americans opposed the war, or Americans supported & Australians opposed the war. Manipulation checks suggested that all participants could understand the graphs. Six people said they were suspicious about whether the graphs reflected students' opinions though, so these people were left out of the analyses.

4. MEASURES. In the final questionnaire, we took measures of how salient the Australian identity was (i.e., how much people felt they were thinking about being Australian while filling in the questionnaire), as well as measures of stereotypes about Australians and Americans (arrogance, sense of humour, etc.) and emotional reactions to both groups (anger, admiration, etc.). Overall, people evaluated both Australians and Americans positively, but felt more strongly positive towards Australians than to Americans. Interestingly, supporters and opponents had similar stereotypes of Australians and Americans, were equally focused on being Australian while filling out the questionnaire, and were equally positive emotionally about being Australian. But people who supported the war and people who endorsed RWA values were more positive emotionally towards Americans than opponents and people who rejected RWA values.

Finally, we took measures of participants' attitude to the war, self-reported willingness to engage in a variety of actions to support or oppose the war (e.g., to distribute leaflets, sign a petition, etc.), and actual letter-writing behaviour (signing a letter to Prime Minister Howard). All the measures were recoded so that a higher score indicated attitudes, willingness, or behaviour that was consistent with people's initial views (so if you supported the war, but you didn't write a letter or if you wrote a letter saying you opposed the war, that would be low consistency in behaviour). Overall, people's attitude and willingness were significantly above the midpoint of the scale, meaning that their later attitudes and willingness to act were in line with their initial attitudes. When you looked at their actual behaviour, though, there was only a non-significant trend towards consistency, because for a lot of people (39%) even though they supported or opposed the war, they did not want to act on that (by writing a letter). People who had stronger opinions on the pre-measure were more consistent later in their attitudes and willingness to express their views, and also tended to be more consistent in their behaviour than those participants who had who had weaker opinions originally. In addition, we found that people who supported the war, and people who endorsed RWA values, were less consistent. For example, 67% of people who opposed the war wrote a letter, but only 35% of people who supported the war did. (Possibly supporters felt less need to act on their attitudes, because the government was already acting in accordance with their views.)

5. PREDICTING CONSISTENCY & EXPRESSED BEHAVIOUR. What we were most interested in, though, was the effect of our norm manipulations (graphs of American and Australian support for the war) on people's consistency. As we had predicted, when people were told that other Australians disagreed with their original attitudes, their consistency decreased compared to if they were told that other Australians agreed with them. This effect was true only for people who said they were thinking about being Australian as they filled in
the questionnaire, however. When people's identity as an Australian was salient, and other Australians disagreed, people's attitudes tended to shift in the direction of other Australians' views, and their willingness to express their attitudes dropped significantly. For people who weren't thinking about being Australian (whose Australian identity wasn't salient), the information about what other Australians thought had no effect. This finding provides support, then, for the referent informational influence model.

However, the Australian norm didn't significantly affect participants' actual letter-writing behaviour. Instead, the outgroup (American) norm did! This was a kind of tricky interaction that we weren't expecting, so we are not totally sure about what the results mean. But we found that people who had bad feelings about their own group (Australians) were less likely to write to the Prime Minister about the war overall, and were less influenced by whether Australians agreed with them. But these guys were more likely to write a letter to express their views when American students (outgroup people) agreed with their attitudes to the war. This could be some kind of alienation effect - feeling hostile to your own group and then being influenced by other groups - but it's an unusual finding in a conflict context. So we will definitely be following this finding up in future research: trying to replicate the results and figure out what it all means!

**SUMMARY**

Remembering that the war was breaking out as we were conducting the study, and people would have been getting a lot of information that would have consolidated their attitudes and guided their actions (media coverage, friends' views, etc), we were pleased to find effects of our graphed norm manipulations. These findings show the surprisingly strong influence of even subtle normative information on people's decision-making. When people's identity as Australians was salient, and when people were given graphs that demonstrated that other Australians agreed with them on a socially important topic, they were more consistent in their attitudes and expressed more willingness to act out their attitudes than if they found out that other Australians disagreed with them. It should be noted that the effect of the norm was weaker on behaviour than on attitudes and willingness to act - a discrepancy that is common in attitude-behaviour research, which is why we always try to measure behaviour as well as willingness in our studies! Overall, however, the results of this study are supportive of the referent informational influence model. Even for issues that people feel strongly about, when people are deciding whether to act or not, they are influenced by whether they think the social context is supportive of their views.

**THANKS AGAIN...**

So that's a description of what we found in this study! If you have any questions, or would like a copy of the longer write-up when we get that done (in several months) please get in touch. And thank you again for your participation and interest!

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