Greetings,

You recently participated in a study about "Values & Attitudes for Supporters & Opponents of the War," 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. You can also read about other studies that we've done on political decision-making at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: NORMS FOR POLITICAL LETTER WRITING
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WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR
The primary goal of this study was to expose people to information that students who supported or opposed the war had favourable or unfavourable attitudes to a particular form of political action, namely writing a letter to a politician, and see whether that would have an impact on participants' attitudes towards letter-writing, or on their willingness to engage in the action. 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 students who support the war will be most influenced by reports about the supporters (ingroup) attitudes, but not influenced by outgroup views (for students who oppose the war), and vice versa.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS
During the time period April 7-16 (i.e., towards the end of the fighting - Baghdad fell April 9), 76 people completed the study. The participants were all recruited from first year classes in psychology, ranged in age from 17 to 40 (but 72% were 20 or younger), and were predominantly female (59%) and Australian (97%). In terms of political affiliation, 11% had no political preference; among the remainder, 52% supported the coalition and 48% one of the opposition parties (25% ALP, 16% Green, 7% Democrat).

WHAT WE FOUND
1. PRE-MEASURES. Before exposure to the norm manipulation, we took pre-measures of war attitudes and political behaviour. In terms of WAR ATTITUDES, we asked people to self-identify as supporting or opposing Australia's involvement in the war on Iraq. Overall, 49% supported the war, and 51% opposed it. Men & women and older & younger respondents did not differ significantly. But party affiliation was important: 90%+ of Greens and Democrats opposed the war, along with 77% of ALP supporters, while only 23% of Coalition affiliates opposed the war.

We also looked at self-reports for 22 BEHAVIOURS that people could have engaged in in the past month, and whether people approved or disapproved of these actions as a means of
expressing political attitudes. In the past month, a majority of respondents had looked for info on the war in the news (87%) and spoken to family (91%) and friends (96%) about the issue. Large minorities also reported trying to convince other people to change their views (37%) and resisting/arguing when someone tried to convince them (48%). These behaviours were equally common among opponents and supporters.

The explicitly political behaviours were uncommon overall, but less rare among war opponents than supporters. The key dependent variable in this study was writing a letter to a politician about the war. Most (97%) of the respondents had not written a letter, even though most (72%) approved of this means of expressing political attitudes. On average, war supporters and opponents were equally likely to approve of letter writing in theory (and to have done nothing about it in practice). By contrast, bigger differences appeared on some of the collective actions. Most (78%) of the opponents had favourable attitudes to attending a rally, and 67% had favourable attitudes to signing a petition; only 41% and 47% of war supporters approved of these actions. Whereas 21% of opponents had signed a petition and 26% had attended a rally, fewer than 5% of supporters had done either of these. Supporters may have felt less need to act, because the government was already acting in accordance with their views. However it is striking to observe that the majority of opponents, who both opposed the status quo and favoured the actions in theory, had not translated their views into practice. This attitude-behaviour inconsistency is very common in political decision-making.

2. SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION. People's endorsement of hierarchical social systems (It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and others are at the bottom) versus egalitarianism (All groups should be given an equal chance in life) was also measured in this study; we expected that this variable might be linked to students' social attitudes. Most participants (86%) endorsed egalitarian values and rejected hierarchical values. However, as predicted, we found that people who endorsed hierarchical values were more likely to support Australia's involvement in the war.

3. ROLE MODELS. In general, most people (75%) reported that they knew their role models' views on the war in Iraq, and agreed with their views (70%). Unsurprisingly, the role models' views on the war were associated with their views on other political positions (e.g., role models who supported the war were also likely to support mandatory detention for asylum seekers). Supporters and opponents of the war were equally likely to know about, and agree with, their role models' views on the other issues: there were no apparent differences in the way people were relating to role models as a function of their views on the war. We havent entirely finished coding this data though, so these results are even more preliminary than the rest of this summary!

4. EXPOSURE TO NORM MANIPULATION. After the role model questionnaire, participants were given graphs that ostensibly showed the results of previous studies at UQ about the views of war supporters and opponents on three political behaviours: letter writing, signing a petition, and attending a rally. In fact, the graphs were made up to vary in students' ostensible attitudes to letter-writing: the key independent variable. Specifically, there were four conditions: the graphs showed that both supporters and opponents had positive attitudes to letter-writing; that both had negative attitudes; that supporters had favourable attitudes & opponents had unfavourable attitudes; or that supporters had unfavourable attitudes & opponents had favourable attitudes. Manipulation checks suggested that four participants could not understand the graphs; these four were left out of the analyses, along with four others who said they were suspicious about whether the graphs reflected students' real opinions.
5. MEASURES. In the final questionnaire, we took measures of how salient peoples’ identity as a supporter or opponent of the war was (i.e., how much people felt they were thinking about their war attitudes while filling in the questionnaire), as well as measures of the perceived benefits and costs of letter-writing, willingness to write a letter, 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 letter writing originally, but changed your mind at Time 2 or you didn’t write a letter, that would be low consistency). Overall, people’s attitudinal consistency was significantly above the midpoint of the scale, meaning that their Time 2 attitudes were in line with their initial attitudes. Both for their willingness to write a letter and their actual behaviour, though, there was only a non-significant trend (lots of inconsistency).

Overall, people who had stronger opinions about letter-writing at Time 1 were more consistent in their attitudes at Time 2, and also tended to be more consistent in their willingness and actual behaviour, compared to participants who had who had weaker opinions. In addition, we found that people who supported the war were less likely to actually write letters at Time 2 (again, they may have been less motivated because the government was already acting in accordance with their views). Since most of the supporters favoured letter writing in theory, supporters emerged as significantly less consistent in their behaviour than war opponents.

6. PREDICTING CONSISTENCY & EXPRESSED BEHAVIOUR. What we were most interested in, though, was the effect of our norm manipulations (graphs of attitudes to letter-writing) on people's consistency. We found that as predicted, when people were focused on their identity as a war supporter or opponent, and were looking at graphs showing that people with similar views on the war agreed with them about letter writing, participants attitudes were more consistent. If ingroup members disagreed, however, participants attitudes tended to change and become similar to other ingroup members views. But the opinions of outgroup members on letter writing had no effect on attitudes. This finding is consistent with the referent informational influence model.

However, the ingroup norm didn't significantly affect participants' willingness to write a letter or their actual letter-writing behaviour. Instead, the outgroup norm did. When outgroup members disagreed with participants on letter writing, participants became more consistent in their willingness to write a letter. And if the graphs showed that outgroup members supported letter writing, participants were less likely to write an actual letter!

The fact that people react behaviourally to outgroup members is quite interesting, theoretically, and is something that has been a focus of past research in our lab. We don't always get the effect, however, and when we do, we sometimes see that people are more likely to act if the outgroup opposes the behaviour (as here) and other times that people are more likely to act if the outgroup favours the behaviour. At the moment, we are trying to follow up the dynamics that govern the effect of outgroup norms on behaviour experimentally, in the lab.

SUMMARY

Remembering that the war was being waged 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 a supporter or opponent of the war was salient, and when people were given graphs that demonstrated that other students with similar views on the war agreed with them on whether letter writing was appropriate, participants were more consistent in their attitudes to the behaviour. The results of this study are supportive of the referent informational influence
model. Even for issues that people feel strongly about, when people are thinking about how to act, they are influenced by whether they think the social context is supportive of their views. But in this study, people were also more likely to act if outgroup members opposed the action - a very interesting and more theoretically ambiguous finding, that we are following up in other research!

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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Winnifred R. Louis, PhD
School of Psychology, McElwain Building [Rm: 463]
U of Queensland, St. Lucia, QLD
Australia 4072
Ph: +61 7 3365-6406  Fax: +61 7 3365-4466
E-mail: wlouis@psy.uq.edu.au

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