Dear participants,

Over the past 8 months, you participated in a study titled “The 2008-9 Brisbane Activists’ Survey”. This research was supported under the Australian Research Council’s Discovery funding scheme and was conducted by Dr. Winnifred Louis and colleagues. We appreciate your help with our research, and we are happy to tell you about the findings. 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) 3346 9515, by emailing 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 about social influence and decision making at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study was to examine the factors associated with higher levels of activism and choices among different types of behaviour. We measured both individual factors (e.g., benefits of action for the individual, significant others’ approval of action, etc.) and group factors (e.g., benefits of action for the group, group approval of action, group identification, etc.) as well as intentions to engage in the different actions at Time 1. At Time 2 and Time 3, we measured the same factors as Time 1 but also included measures of past behaviour (e.g., “How many times since completing Survey 1 have you disseminated information and educated people?”).

As well as looking at theoretical models from past research, we wanted to see if the climate of the group at Time 2 impacted on group level factors and individual factors and intentions to engage in activist behaviours. Specifically, at Time 2, participants were asked to think about how their group had either high or low power and whether public opinion either supported or opposed their group. We thought that focusing on varying levels of group power and normative support might impact on individual and group factors and intentions to engage in activist behaviours. But this didn’t produce any particularly strong effects, as noted below. 😊

Demographic information about participants

From October 2008 through to March 2009, volunteers were recruited to complete online surveys via e-mails to activist group convenors and networks. Fifty eight volunteers completed the Time 1 Survey. Most participants were female (74%), and the majority of participants identified as Australian (72%). Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 75 with the mean age being 43 years. Forty-two different volunteer organisations were represented in the sample with group membership ranging from less than 1 year to over 20 years. Approximately 20% of participants were also members of multiple organisations. Following completion of Survey 1, 49 participants returned to complete Survey 2 and 42 participants went on to complete Survey 3.

Preliminary results of the study

Attitudes. Eighty one percent (81%) of respondents feel that the current power arrangements in society are unfair, but most (80%) believe that these power arrangements are hard to change. Most (88%) also believed that their personal actions are important in the achievement of group goals.

Personal costs and benefits of different actions. Sixty eight percent (68%) of people feel that there are more benefits than costs in disseminating information and educating people, 62% for political lobbying and election campaigning and 71% for
participating in lawful protest action. On the other hand, 88% of people feel that there are more personal costs than benefits in participating in unlawful protest action, 100% for the threat and/or use of violence, and 93% for doing nothing.

*Group costs and benefits.* Ninety three percent (93%) of respondents indicated that there are more benefits than costs for the group in disseminating information and educating people, 87% for political lobbying and election campaigning and 82% for participating in lawful protest action. On the other hand, 82% of people feel that there are more costs than benefits for the group in participating in unlawful protest action, 98% for the threat and/or use of violence and 100% for doing nothing.

*Group approval.* All participants reported that their own group holds moderate to high levels of approval of disseminating information and educating people, 86% for political lobbying and election campaigning and 89% for participating in lawful protest actions. On the other hand, only 18% think that the group approves of participating in unlawful protest actions, 2% for the threat and/or use of violence and 95% perceive that the group disapproves of doing nothing.

*Opponent approval.* Thirty six percent (36%) of participants feel that their opponents hold moderate to high levels of approval of disseminating information and educating people and political lobbying and election campaigning and 25% for participating in lawful protest actions. On the other hand, only 7% think that their opponents approve of participating in unlawful protest actions and the threat and/or use of violence and 73% for doing nothing.

*Groups seeking to influence approval.* Eighty five percent (85%) of participants feel that the groups they seek to influence hold moderate to high approval of them disseminating information and educating people, 78% for political lobbying and election campaigning and 70% for participating in lawful protest actions. On the other hand, only 11% think that these groups approve of participating in unlawful protest actions, 4% for the threat and/or use of violence and 31% for doing nothing.

Similar findings on the above measures were also found at Time 2 and 3.

*Other group factors*

The results indicate that 88% of respondents have a moderate to high level of identification with their group with 12% reporting a low to moderate level of group identification. Encouragingly, 99% of people believe that the goals of their group can be achieved through collective action and that the active participation of many others in achieving these goals is very important. Most (81%) also feel that it is likely to very likely that many others will act collectively to achieve these goals.

Forty nine percent (49%) of people feel that their group holds moderate to high levels of power, 44% for their supporters, 84% for their opponents, 70% for the general public, 95% for the decision makers (e.g., government, corporations) and 91% for the media.

Twenty nine percent (29%) of respondents think that their group is militant, 93% perceive their group as mainstream and 84% see their group as holding long term goals. Only 18% feel that their group can achieve their goals within the existing power structure and 53% feel that the group’s goals can only be achieved by changing the existing power structure.

Similar patterns for group factors were found at Time 2 and 3.

*Emotions*

In response to opposition to the group’s value and goals, 3 general groups of emotions emerged. These were anger (angry, outraged, disgusted), determination
(determined, purposeful) and serenity (calm, hopeful). Thirty five percent (35%) of respondents expressed anger as their most intense emotion in response to group opposition, 52% determination and 13% serenity. It appears that respondents also think that other group members hold similar feelings with 34% perceiving that group members would feel anger, 41% determination but only 4% serenity. These emotional responses are also linked to cost-benefits perceptions of behaviours. For instance, the greater the level of determination, the higher the perceived group benefit of disseminating information/educating people. Furthermore, the greater the level of serenity, the higher the perceived personal and group benefit of doing nothing.

At Time 2, 20% of respondents expressed anger, 78% determination and 4% calm in response to group opposition. Both anger and calm decreased from Time 1, however, determination increased by 26%. At Time 2, participants were asked to think about how their group had high or low power. When participants believed that the power of their group was low they reported more determination ($M = 5.81$) compared to when they believed power was high ($M = 4.64$). On the other hand, regardless of the level of group power, feelings of anger and calm did not differ, and intentions to act did not change.

**Predicting intentions to act**

At Time 1, 71% of respondents intended to disseminate information and educate people in the next 4 weeks, 61% intended to engage in political lobbying or election campaigning and 34% intended to engage in lawful protest action. Only 4% intended to engage in unlawful protest action, no participant intended to threaten to and/or use violence and only 16% intended to do nothing.

The greater the belief that society is hard to change, the lower people’s intent to disseminate information/educate people. On a positive note, the more people believe their own action is important, the greater their intent to disseminate information/educate people. Perceiving an action as beneficial to the self was associated with stronger intentions, in general. And we found that the higher the level of determination in response to group opposition, the stronger intentions to disseminate information/educate people and the lower intentions to do nothing. A similar pattern of associations was found at Time 2 and 3.

Focusing in on collective factors for the activist’s group, the more highly people identified with their group/organisation, the more likely they were to intend to disseminate information/educate people and the less likely to do nothing. Intentions to disseminate information/educate people were also associated with stronger beliefs that the goals of the group can be achieved through collective action, and that many others will act collectively. Group approval of the behaviour and perceptions of benefit to the group were also associated with stronger intentions to engage in political lobbying/election campaigning, disseminating information/educating people, and doing nothing. Again, similar patterns were found at Time 2 and 3.

**Conclusion and Implications**

Promoting action involves the beliefs and emotions of the individual. For example, the beliefs that society can change, your action matters and that action benefits you were all linked to greater intention to engage in action in this data. Also, the emotion of determination in response to group opposition was connected to higher intentions to act, but interestingly the emotion of anger was not.

The culture of the group was also found to be important in promoting action, in this study. The extent to which people identify with the group (i.e., the meaning
people have attached to group membership, feelings of belonging to the group, group pride, etc.) was linked to higher intentions to act. Perceptions of group approval and benefits to the group of performing the behaviour were also associated with stronger intentions. Interestingly, whether or not your political opponents approved of the behaviour had no impact on future intentions. It is also interesting (and old news to most activists!) that perceptions of benefit to the group of acting were more strongly associated with intentions than personal benefits were.

Despite the historical focus on the individual in promoting action, the current study highlights the importance of more group based or collective factors. It suggests that, in order to initiate and maintain action in organisations, we need to look at the individual as well as the group. It should be noted that what we have here is a small group of highly committed activists and we weren’t able to show cause and effect relationships very clearly. In future research, we hope to have a more diverse group and use an even stronger methodology to address these questions.

So that’s a description of what we found in our preliminary analyses! We are going to conduct more complex analyses in the coming months. 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. We hope to bring back former participants and recruit new participants every year to complete the survey in order continue our research on the factors that initiate and maintain action in organisations. We hope you are share our enthusiasm and take part in future surveys.

Thank you again for your participation and interest.

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