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RUNNING HEAD: Counter-Conformity

On Being Loud and Proud:
Non-Conformity and Counter-Conformity to Group Norms

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Abstract

Most experiments on conformity have been conducted in relation to judgments of physical reality; surprisingly few papers have experimentally examined the influence of group norms on social issues with a moral component. In response to this, we told students that they were either in a minority or in a majority relative to their university group on their attitudes toward recognition of gay couples in law (Experiment 1: N=205) and a government apology to Aborigines (Experiment 2: N=110). We found that participants who had a weak moral basis for their attitude, or who perceived high societal support for their attitude, were more willing to privately act in line with their attitude when they had group support than when they did not. In contrast, those who had a strong moral basis for their attitude, or who perceived low societal support for their attitude, showed non-conformity on private behaviors and counter-conformity on public behaviors. Incidences of non-conformity and counter-conformity are discussed with reference to the traditional theoretical emphasis on assimilation to group norms.

On Being Loud and Proud:

Non-Conformity and Counter-Conformity to Group Norms

> Not only is there widespread consensus among many diagnosticians of the climate of our times that this is an age of conformity; the relevant psychological literature is almost unanimous in its emphasis on conditions accounting for conformity. Actually, there is, of course, ample evidence for the existence of independence not only in common-sense observations but also in every single experiment which rejects the null-hypothesis of independence ... There is a tacit implication in many of these experiments that those insubordinate subjects who are outside the hypothesis-confirming majority are a nuisance. (Jahoda, 1959, p.99).

In the above quote, Jahoda (1959) criticizes the over-emphasis placed in the psychological literature on themes of conformity, an emphasis that obscures the reality of non-conformity and counter-conformity. This theme was later reinforced by Moscovici and colleages (e.g., Moscovici, 1980; Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972), who made a concerted effort to shine a stronger theoretical light on the reality of activism, deviance, and dissent. However, over 40 years following Jahoda's comments, the "conformity bias" in the literature remains. To a degree, this bias is understandable. Conformity to group norms or to role expectations can lead to destructive behavior (Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo, 1969), distorted perceptions of reality (Asch, 1952), and/or poor decision-making (Janis, 1972). The consequence of this, however, is that we know surprisingly little about the psychological processes underlying independence from group norms.

In the current paper we examine some conditions under which we might expect defiance, rather than compliance, to group norms. Central to our paper is a critical examination of normative influence; that is, the notion that people are more likely to conform to group norms in public than in private because they are motivated to avoid social censure. We argue that, although fear of social sanction is a real phenomenon, that there are circumstances under which people's desire to be right might override their need to be accepted. Specifically, where a person is deeply invested in their attitude, people may treat public actions as either a way of converting other group members or to reinforce their

privately held sense of self. We believe that much previous work has failed to identify this dynamic because they have examined attitudes regarding benign issues that have little relevance to the self. Below, we review two experiments in which we demonstrate some evidence for public counter-conformity in the face of group norms. First, however, we review theory and evidence relating to conformity and independence.

Informational and Normative Influence

People do not always make decisions in isolation; rather they look to others to guide their thoughts and actions (e.g., Asch, 1952; Festinger, 1950; Sherif, 1936; Turner, 1991). In looking to others, people might pay attention to two factors. First, they may be interested in what society says they should do or think in a situation. These rules or beliefs about what is appropriate in a situation may stem from family, church, significant others, or be embedded in the deeper moral fabric of society (e.g., one should not steal). The second factor that might be taken into account is what people actually do or think in a situation. Do other people share your opinion? How do others behave? Are you in a majority or in a minority? Information about what is typical or common is referred to as the descriptive norm (see Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990).

There is still some debate about why descriptive norms might affect people's attitudes and behaviors. On the one hand, people might be uncertain about what to think and do in a situation. Under these circumstances, people might rely on others to determine what is correct, particularly if the reference group is seen to be motivated and competent. As described by Deutsch and Gerard (1955): "From birth on, we learn that the perceptions and judgments of others are frequently reliable sources of evidence about reality" (p.635). Thus, this form of influence—referred to as informational influence—is not an irrational process; rather, it is a functional way of defining a position in the face of limited information.

Informational influence is internalized by the individual and, it is assumed, leads to genuine attitude change.

Alternatively, descriptive norms might influence people to the extent that they want to "fit in" with the majority. This form of influence—labeled normative influence—does not imply genuine attitude change, but rather a strategic effort on behalf of an individual to be accepted and to avoid social censure. This form of influence is predicated on the assumption that a minority position is aversive; it can lead to hostility, disapproval, or rejection from others. To avoid such social punishment, people may be motivated to conform to the majority position in public regardless of what opinion they hold privately.

Evidence For Normative Influence

Several studies have been designed to examine the extent to which conformity to group norms is driven by a desire to avoid social censure. This has been done by comparing people's public behaviors and their private behaviors. The assumption is that normative influence will cause changes in public but not in private behaviors. Informational influence, on the other hand, is assumed to cause change in private behaviors as well.

In one of the original investigations of this issue, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) assessed conformity in relation to a perceptual accuracy task using a variation of the Asch paradigm. In this study participants were required to judge the relative length of two lines. Unknown to the participants, some of the respondents were stooges who were instructed to give the wrong answer. Participants responded either in an anonymous setting or, as in the original Asch experiments, in a face-to-face setting. Compared to a control condition, participants in the anonymous condition showed greater levels of conformity, suggesting informational influence. In the face-to-face condition, however, conformity was greater again, suggesting that the pressure to comply to the majority position was also an important psychological variable. Using Asch-style paradigms, a similar pattern of results was demonstrated by

Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, and Turner (1990) and by Insko, Drenan, Soloman, Smith, and Wade (1983). They found that people conformed to ingroup members' responses in both public and private conditions, although the effect was stronger again when the responses were made public.

A separate tradition of research has examined people's willingness to speak out in the face of majority opposition. Much of this work has been designed to test Noelle-Neumann's (1974, 1993) spiral of silence theory, which can be interpreted as a generalization of the notion of normative influence to the domain of attitude expression. Spiral of silence theory argues that people will be deterred from expressing their true opinion if they feel that it runs counter to the majority opinion. The theory is based on the assumption that expressing a minority opinion is anxiety provoking because it raises the possibility of social isolation. Furthermore, it is argued that avoiding social isolation is more important to people than holding to one's true opinion. As a result, when people are in a minority, they will feel pressure to either keep quiet or to conform to the majority opinion in public. Through this process minority positions become increasingly marginalized while majority positions carry more and more authority and legitimacy.

Some support has been found for this theory. For example, Salwen, Lin, and Matera (1994) examined people's willingness to speak out on the issue of whether English should be the official language of the US. They found that the more people anticipated that others held a different opinion to their own, the less willing they were to get into a conversation with a person holding a different opinion to their own. A meta-analysis of 17 studies found tentative support overall for the spiral of silence theory (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997), with a significant correlation between perceptions of opinion support and willingness to speak out. However the correlation was extremely small ($r = .054$), raising questions as to the robustness of the phenomenon.

Evidence Against Normative Influence

One limitation of the spiral of silence argument—and, by extension, with the notion of normative influence—is the continued existence of robust and vocal minorities who have fought to change the status quo in the face of explicit opposition. Shamir (1997), for example, examined the willingness of Israelis to speak out about the future of the Palestinian territories. In this case the status quo was being actively threatened by forces of change, and so both sides of the argument had realistic hopes of winning and realistic fears of losing. Under such circumstances, it can be argued that the need to express one's cherished values will override the fear of social isolation. Consistent with this notion, Shamir found that "doves" and "hawks" in Israel were as willing—or even more willing—to speak out about the future of the Palestinian territories when the prevailing government was in opposition to their views than when the government was sympathetic to their views.

In a similar vein, Frideres, Warner, and Albrecht (1971) asked people to rate their attitudes toward legalization of marijuana. Participants were told either that their vote would be disclosed via various mass media throughout the state (public condition) or that it would not (private condition). As expected, when participants were placed in a group whose attitudes were inconsistent with their own, attitude-behavior consistency was significantly reduced. Unexpectedly, however, the extent to which people voted in line with their attitude did not differ across the private and public conditions.

Finally, there is a range of unpublished work conducted at the University of Queensland that shows conformity in public to be no greater than conformity in private. Smith, Terry, and Hogg (2000), for example, asked university students to indicate their attitudes toward voluntary student unionism, a controversial issue that was the center of a vigorous ideological contest on campus. Consistent with Frideres et al. (1971), attitude-behavior consistency was stronger when they were led to believe they had majority support

than when they were led to believe they did not. However the level of conformity did not change depending on whether people were responding publicly or privately. Similarly, White, Terry, and Hogg (2001) examined the influence of group norms on attitudes toward introduction of comprehensive examinations in universities, and found equal levels of conformity in public as in private. Finally, Crosier & Duck (2001) found that, when Australians felt as though public opinion was moving away from them in relation to an important referendum, they expressed more of a desire to speak out than when people perceived growing support for their attitude.

How can we account for the fact that, in some studies at least, group influence is no greater in public than in private? One possible reason is offered by proponents of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) who argue that, when a group membership is salient, people assimilate their private attitudes to the norms of the group. Because of this process of depersonalization, it is expected that people will think and behave according to the group's values regardless of whether there is an ingroup audience or not (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Turner, 1991).

An alternative argument, however, is that people's desire to be accepted may be cancelled out (or even reversed) by their desire to defend a deeply held conviction. Such a process may be particularly strong in public for two reasons. First, the public arena provides a forum for people to convert other group members. Second, it is possible that people might use public behaviors to help reinforce their self-definition. Tice (1992) argues that public behaviors communicate information not just to others but also to the self. Individuals can use self-presentation to construct an identity, but this may also reflect back on the self-concept. By publicly aligning themselves with an attitude, people are able to remind themselves as well as other people what they stand for.

The implication of the above analysis is that normative influence is likely to be weaker on issues of social or personal importance than on judgments of physical reality. Many years ago, when reflecting on the Asch conformity studies, Crutchfield (1955) made a similar argument:

> (The individual) may be led to accept the superiority of the judgment of the group on matters where there is an objective frame of reference against which the group can be checked. But he does not, thereby, automatically accept the group's superiority on matters of a less objective sort. To some degree, therefore, it can be argued that the individual is functioning with respect to his group in a manner which strikes a sensible balance by sometimes making relevant use of a group's judgments as a resource in his own judgments, without at the same time becoming indiscriminately dependent upon the group's judgments in all matters. (p.????)

Indeed, when one looks at the pattern of data in the literature, there is some evidence for this notion. Interestingly, all the studies that have demonstrated greater conformity in public (i.e., Abrams et al., 1990; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko et al., 1983) used emotionally neutral paradigms (for example, making judgments about the length of lines). It is possible that in paradigms such as these, the need to be accepted outweighs the need to be right. In all the studies that have shown little support for normative influence have been conducted using hotly contested, controversial social issues. Where people are faced with the opinions of others on social issues (as opposed to physical reality), it can be argued that the need to be right counterbalances the need to belong.

The Current Experiments

The primary aim of the current experiments was to examine the conditions under which people will show compliance or defiance to group norms. In Experiment 1 we did this by examining the influence of group norms on attitudes to gay law reform. In Experiment 2

we used the topic of whether the Australian government should formally apologize to Aborigines for historical atrocities. These issues were chosen because, at the time of the studies, they had been the source of vigorous and emotional debates in the national media.

For reasons of simplicity, only participants who held a position contrary to the status quo were included in the current experiments; that is, pro-gay law reform participants, and participants who supported a government apology to Aborigines. As well as helping to simplify the design of the studies, there is a theoretical reason for only choosing participants who opposed the status quo. This is because many of the behaviors that we seek to predict relate to protest action (e.g., distributing leaflets, attending rallies, writing letters to the editor). These behaviors make far less sense for the individual who advocates a position already supported by legislation.

In Experiment 1, pro-gay law reform students were given information that, on the whole, students from their university either agreed or disagreed with their position. They then completed a questionnaire assessing their willingness to engage in public and private behaviors consistent with their original attitude. We predicted that people would be more likely to act in line with their attitude in private when they had group support than when they had no group support for their attitude. This is consistent with previous research showing that, where there is some ambiguity about what to do or think in a situation, people look to others as a source of information (e.g., Asch, 1952; Sherif, 1936; Turner, 1991).

It was unclear, however, what we might expect on the public behaviors. On the basis of research using the Asch paradigm (Abrams et al., 1990; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko et al., 1983), we might expect greater conformity on public behaviors than on private behaviors. We conjecture, however, that on controversial issues such as gay law reform, people may choose to use the public domain to reassert their original position in the face of majority opposition. One possibility is that this process will cancel out any perceived pressure to

comply, meaning that people will conform no more in public than in private. A stronger form of this hypothesis is that the motivation to present one's position publicly may outweigh fears of social isolation, resulting in non-conformity or even counter-conformity.

One factor that is relevant to our analysis is whether or not there is a strong moral basis for the attitude. There is growing evidence that, when people feel a moral compulsion to behave in a certain way, there is a stronger link between their attitudes and their behavior (see Manstead, 2000, for a review). This research suggests that people are more likely to comply with their attitudes when the attitudes have a moral dimension. Similarly, it seems logical to suggest that those with a strong moral basis to their attitude will be more motivated to spread their message to others. For such people, the knowledge that the group holds a contrary opinion to their own is unlikely to result in high levels of conformity; indeed, in the public domain, it is possible that such people will engage in counter-conformist behavior. To examine this, we obtained measures of the extent to which people have a moral basis for their attitude before exposing them to information about whether they had minority or majority support for their position.

Another factor that might affect the extent to which people show public support for their attitude is the extent to which they feel they perceive high or low support from society in general. If people feel they already have considerable support for their attitude in society, there is little motivation to advocate the message publicly. In contrast, if people feel that their attitude has little support in society, they are more likely to feel a need to convert others. This need might be alleviated if they find they have group support, but exacerbated if they feel they do not. We examined this notion by measuring the extent to which people perceive societal support for their attitude before exposing them to the group norm.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and eighty introductory psychology students participated in the experiment in return for course credit. Upon arrival, participants were first required to rate their attitudes on three issues: legalization of marijuana, mandatory sentencing of repeat criminal offenders, and recognition of gay couples in law (1 = strongly support, 6 = strongly oppose). The issues of legalization of marijuana and mandatory sentencing were included so as to reduce the transparency of the study. Of the overall sample, 205 identified themselves as being pro-gay law reform (scoring 3 or lower) and these people were retained for the experiment. The sample consisted of 152 females and 53 males (M = 19.88 years). The 75 anti-gay law reform students were given a questionnaire relating to a different research topic, and their data are not analyzed here.

Materials and Procedure

Measuring moral basis for attitude and societal support. After indicating their position on gay law reform, participants rated the extent to which they had a moral basis for their attitude and the extent to which they perceived societal support for their attitude. Perceptions of societal support were measured using eight items assessing the extent to which society as a whole endorsed or agreed with their opinion (e.g., “To what extent do you feel your opinion on gay law reform is representative of people in general?”, “To what extent do you feel society agrees with your opinion?”; 1 = not at all, 9 = very much; α = .89). Moral basis was assessed using three items: “To what extent do you feel your opinion is morally correct?”, “To what extent do you feel your position is based on strong personal principles?”, and “To what extent do you feel your position on gay law reform is a moral stance?” (1 = not at all, 9 = very much; α = .73). There was a moderate correlation between our measures of moral basis and societal support (r = .23); however a principal components analysis confirmed that the constructs are separate, to the extent that the two sets of items loaded on separate factors.

Manipulation of group norm. Group norm was manipulated using a method that has been used previously by White, Terry, & Hogg (in press). Participants were told that the study was part of a wider program of research investigating the attitudes of University of Queensland (UQ) students on various issues. They were then presented with three graphs ostensibly summarizing the results of the surveys for the last three years.

Although there was some minor variations between the three graphs, the pattern of results was similar. In all cases, UQ students were reported to be evenly divided on the issues of legalization of marijuana and mandatory sentencing (i.e., approximately half of students in favor and half against). However, on the issue of recognition of gay couples in law, UQ students were portrayed to be either strongly in favor or strongly opposed. In the group support condition, participants were told that UQ students were strongly in favor of gay law reform across the three years (on average 85% support, 8% oppose, 7% undecided). In the group opposition condition, participants were told that UQ students were strongly opposed to gay law reform across the three years (on average 85% oppose, 8% support, 7% undecided). To ensure that the manipulation of normative support was understood by the participants, participants ticked a box indicating whether UQ students mainly supported recognition of gay couples in law, mainly opposed the issue, or equally supported or opposed the issue. All participants correctly answered this manipulation check.

Dependent measures. Following manipulation of group norm, participants completed a dependent measures questionnaire assessing their willingness to act out their attitudes in the private and public domain. To measure private and public intentions, participants were asked to indicate how willing they would be to perform a number of activities provided they had the time and opportunity to do so (1 = not at all willing, 9 = very willing). Three private behaviors were included: signing a petition, voting in a referendum, and voting for a political party that had pro-gay law reform policies. The public behaviors were signing a letter to the

editor, distributing information leaflets, and attending a rally in favor of gay law reform. Overall, the items reflecting private behaviors ($\alpha = .88$) and public behaviors ($\alpha = .88$) formed reliable scales. In all cases, questions were repeated to also address the issues of mandatory sentencing and legalization of marijuana, however these measures were not analyzed.

Results

Overall

A series of multiple regressions was performed using participants' ratings of private and public intentions as criteria. In each case, measures of group norm (dummy coded), moral basis, and societal support were entered as predictors. Also entered as predictors were the product terms representing the two-way interactions among group norm, moral basis and societal support. Where the interaction terms were significant, simple slopes analysis was conducted in the manner recommended by Aiken and West (1991). Preliminary analyses revealed that the three-way interaction (Group Norm x Moral Basis x Societal Support) did not approach significance on any of the measures. Consequently, this term was dropped from further analyses.

Private Intentions

On its own, group norm did not significantly impact on participants' private intentions, but there were significant main effects of moral basis and societal support. Participants intended to act in line with their attitudes the more they had a moral basis for their attitude—$\beta = .68$, $p < .001$—and the less they perceived societal support for their attitude, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$. However significant interactions also emerged between group norm and societal support, $\beta = .29$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 1) and between group norm and moral basis, $\beta = -.20$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 2).

Analysis of simple slopes showed that participants who perceived high societal support for their attitude intended to privately act in line with their attitudes more when they had group support than when they had group opposition, β = .26, $p < .01$. In contrast, for those who perceived low societal support for their attitude, there was a marginal trend for participants to be more intent on acting in line with their behavior when they had group opposition than when they had group support, β = -.14, $p = .086$. Similarly, for those who had a weak moral basis for their attitude, participants were more intent on privately acting in line with their attitudes when they had group support than when they had group opposition, β = .20, $p < .05$. For participants who had a strong moral basis for their attitude, however, group norm had no significant impact on private intentions, β = -.08, ns.

Public Intentions

As in the previous analyses, people's intentions to publicly act in line with their attitudes were greater the stronger the moral basis for their attitude, β = .56, $p < .001$. This main effect, however was qualified by an interaction between group norm and societal support, β = .21, $p < .05$ (see Figure 3). There was also a marginal interaction between group norm and moral basis, β = .-17, $p = .086$ (see Figure 4).

For those who perceived high societal support for their attitude, group norm did not have an impact on their willingness to engage in public attitude-consistent behaviors, β = .11, ns. In contrast, participants who perceived low societal support for their attitude were more willing to act publicly in line with their attitudes when they had group opposition than when they had group support, β = -.19, $p < .05$.

A somewhat similar pattern emerged for the interaction between moral basis and group norm. Participants who had a weak moral basis were not significantly affected by the group norm, β = .08, ns. In contrast, there was a marginal trend for participants who had a strong moral basis for their attitude to be more willing to act publicly in line with their

attitudes when they had group opposition than when they had group support, β = -.16, p = .085.

Discussion

Our contention in the current paper is that group norms can influence behavior in two directions: just as people may sometimes be motivated to move toward the group norm, there may be situations in which people will resist the group norm or even move away from it. Consistent with this, we found that some participants were more likely to publicly act out their attitudes when they had normative opposition than when they had normative support. This was the case where people perceived weak societal support for their attitude. A similar trend—though weaker—emerged for those who had a strong moral basis to their attitude. Interestingly, even those participants who showed conformity in private (those with a weak moral basis for their attitude and those who perceived high societal support for their attitude) did not demonstrate significant conformity on the public intention measures.

The current findings appear to contradict previous research demonstrating greater conformity to group norms when the behavior is public than when it is private (Abrams et al., 1990; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko et al., 1983). However these studies were conducted on attitudes that had little consequence to the self-concept (e.g., judgments about the length of lines). Under such circumstances, it is unlikely that conformity will violate one's personal belief system. However, on social issues, conformity to group norms might not be a legitimate option. In such situations, people may feel that it is important to be seen to be consistent with one's personal values.

Although promising, caution should be exercised in interpreting the current data. First, evidence for counter-conformity is relatively weak. When examining perceptions of societal support, there was a small but significant display of counter-conformity. When examining moral bases for the attitude, the effect was only marginally significant. This is not

necessarily a problem; given that most previous literature has demonstrated assimilation to group norms, it is not surprising that the move away from a group norm should prove to be a relatively subtle effect. It does suggest, however, that the effect would benefit from replication, preferably with respect to a different social issue.

The second interpretational difficulty with Experiment 1 is that it provides little insight as to what the psychological underpinnings of the effects are. For example, although the constructs of societal support and moral basis are clearly separate ($r = .23$), their similar effects cause us to speculate as to whether they are operating as a function of similar underlying processes. One possibility is that the effects are simply an artifact of attitude strength. Thus, it could be that people who report a strong moral basis to their attitude are those who feel more strongly about the attitude, and it is attitude estrength that is causing the move away from the group norm in public. A similar argument could be made for those who perceive weak societal support for their attitude; the very fact that they maintain an opinion they believe to be unpopular suggests that they might hold the attitude particularly strongly. By measuring attitude strength we might be able to provide more clarity about the psychological processes driving the effect reported here.

In a similar vain, Experiment 1 is unable to comment on why people who have a strong moral basis for their attitude and who perceive weak societal support for their attitude should move away from the group norm, and then only in public. Earlier, we suggested two possible reasons. First, it cold be that these people are trying to convert the group; in other words they are engaging in persuasion. Second, it could be that people feel the need to publicly reinforce their personal values and their self-identity (Tice, 1992). Although the second interpretation is difficult to capture empirically, the first can be tested with little difficulty.

The third limitation of Experiment 1 is that it does not provide a thorough test of the social identity perspective on group influence. For example, it is unclear the extent to which participants are realigning their group identities in the face of normative opposition. Specifically, it could be that, on discovering that the majority of UQ students oppose their attitude, people are psychologically detaching from the UQ identity and (a) individuating, or (b) assimilating toward an alternative group norm defined on ideological grounds (a left-wing group, for example). If this were true it would help resolve the current data with the social identity perspective, which emphasizes assimilation to relevant group norms.

Finally, Experiment 1 is limited to the extent that there is a dissociation between the level at which the norm is manipulated (UQ) and the level at which the behavior is measured (the general public). Specifically, the public behaviors used in the study did not imply that other group members would be the audience; rather, they referred to behaviors with a generalized audience. A more complete test of the pressure to comply should involve behaviors that are acted out in front of other group members. Experiment 2 was designed to correct this problem, as well as responding to the other limitations mentioned above.

Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, UQ students who supported a government apology to Aborigines were given information that, on the whole, students from their university either agreed or disagreed with their position. They then completed a questionnaire assessing their willingness to engage in public and private behaviors consistent with their original attitude. So as to link the group norm with the behavior, public behaviors were measured in terms of their willingness to express their attitudes to other UQ students. To help clarify some of the psychological underpinnings of the effects, the need to convert was measured, as was attitude strength (pre- and post-manipulation). Finally, to more closely test the social identity processes, post-manipulation identification items were included.

To help simplify the design, we restricted our analysis to the moral component of the attitude. In light of Experiment 1, we predict that participants with a weak moral basis for their attitude would express more of an intention to behave in line with their attitude when they had group support than when they had group opposition. In contrast, we expected that participants who had a strong moral basis for their attitude would show no assimilation to the group norm. Specifically, we expected that these people would show non-conformity in private and counter-conformity in public.

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it was unclear whether or not this effect would be a function of attitude strength. To test this, regression analyses were conducted before and after inclusion of attitude strength. A second research question related to the extent to which the need for convert would be instrumental in driving counter-conformity. On the basis of the conversion explanation for counter-conformity, we expected that any move away from the group norm on public behaviors would disappear when the need to convert was entered in the design. Finally, from a social identity perspective, it was argued that participants who showed counter-conformity would be more likely to express disidentification from their UQ group.

Method

Participants

One hundred and sixty-six introductory psychology students participated in the experiment in return for course credit. Of the overall sample, 110 identified themselves as being in favor of a government apology to Aborigines and so were retained for the experiment. The sample consisted of 72 females and 38 males ($\underline{M}$ = 19.53 years).

Materials and Procedure

Pre-manipulation measures. After indicating their initial attitude, participants rated the extent to which they had a moral basis for their attitude using the same three items used in

Experiment 1 (α = .78). We also measured how strongly people felt about a government apology to Aborigines, and how certain and confident they felt with regard to their attitude. Although there is an argument that strength and certainty may be different constructs, we found them to be highly interrelated here, and so combined them into a single 3-item scale labeled strength (α = .91).

Manipulation of group norm. As in Experiment 1, group norm was manipulated by telling participants that UQ students were either strongly in favor or strongly opposed to a government apology to Aborigines. Following exposure to this information, eight participants incorrectly reported the extent to which UQ students agreed with the issue, and so were removed from all analyses.

Post-manipulation measures. Following manipulation of group norm, participants rated the extent to which they felt a need to convince other UQ students that their personal opinion was correct, and the extent to which they felt a need to convert other UQ students to their view. These items were combined into a single scale measuring the need to convert (α = .93). They also rated the extent to which they identified with the UQ group and the extent to which they felt strongly about their attitude (1 item).

Private behavioral intentions were measured using the same items used in Experiment 1 (α = .88). Public behavioral intentions were measured by giving participants two scenarios. In the first scenario, participants were told to imagine that they were on a bus talking to a student when the issue of apologizing to Aborigines came up. In the second scenario, they were in a tutorial when somebody raised the issue of a government apology to Aborigines. In each case, participants were told that the expressed opinions of the other person was the opposite of their own. After reading each scenario, participants used a 9-point bipolar scale to rate the extent to which they would be willing to express their true attitude on apologizing to

Aborigines (1=very unwilling, 9=very willing). These two items were combined into a single scale of public behaviors ($\alpha = .63$).

Results

Private Intentions

A main effect of moral basis, $\beta = .68$, $p < .001$, was qualified by an interaction between moral basis and group norm, $\beta = .22$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 5). Simple slopes analysis revealed that, where participants had a strong moral basis for their attitude, group norm had no effect on their intentions to engage in private behaviors, $\beta = .06$, ns. In contrast, where people had a weak moral basis for their attitude, behavioral intentions were stronger when they had group support than when they had no group opposition, $\beta = -.27$, $p < .05$.

Public Intentions

On public intentions, the effects of moral basis and group norm were tested before and after entering the proposed mediator: need to convert. As for private intentions, a main effect of moral basis, $\beta = .37$, $p < .001$, was qualified by a marginal interaction between moral basis and group norm, $\beta = .24$, $p = .058$. Contrary to expectations, after including the need to convert, the interaction term actually became larger, $\beta = .28$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 6). Simple slopes analysis revealed that, where participants had a weak moral basis for their attitude, group norm had no effect on their intentions to engage in private behaviors, $\beta = -.19$, ns. In contrast, where people had a strong moral basis for their attitude, behavioral intentions were marginally stronger when they had group opposition than when they had group support; in other words, there was some evidence for counter-conformity, $\beta = .22$, $p = .088$.

Post-manipulation attitude strength **(drop this??)**

On measures of attitude strength, main effects of moral basis, $\beta = .49$, $p < .001$, and group norm, $\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$, were qualified by a significant interaction, $\beta = .26$, $p < .05$ (see

Figure 7). Simple slopes analysis revealed that, where participants had a strong moral basis for their attitude, group norm had no effect on their attitude strength, $\beta = .01$, ns. In contrast, where people had a weak moral basis for their attitude, they felt more strongly about their attitude when they had normative support than when they had no normative support, $\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$.

Identification

On measures of post-manipulation identification, a significant interaction emerged between moral basis and group norm, $\beta = -.41$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 8). Simple slopes analysis revealed that, where participants had a weak moral basis for their attitude, group norm had no effect on their intentions to engage in private behaviors ($\beta = .17$, ns). In contrast, participants who had a strong moral basis showed stronger group identification when they had group support than when they had group opposition, ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .001$).

Relationship between moral basis and attitude strength

Unsurprisingly, the link between moral basis and (pre-manipulation) attitude strength was relatively high ($r = .67$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, however, when pre-manipulation measures of attitude strength were included in the regression, the interaction between moral basis and group norm remained marginally significant on both private intentions, $\beta = .17$, $p = .059$, and public intentions, $\beta = .21$, $p = .075$. Furthermore, the interaction effects on post-manipulation measures of identification, $\beta = -.44$, $p < .001$, and attitude strength, $\beta = .19$, $p < .05$, remained significant. This suggests that moral basis for the attitude was interacted with the group norm for reasons other than attitude strength or certainty.

Discussion

The effects of moral basis on responses to group norms were remarkably similar across Experiments 1 and 2. Like Experiment 1, the data for Experiment 2 suggest that people are only likely to conform to group norms if they have a weak moral basis for their

attitude. Those with a weak moral basis for their attitude are less likely to behave in line with their attitude, and hold their attitudes less strongly when they feel they are in a minority with respect to their group than when they feel the are in a majority. This finding reinforces a large amount of theory and literature demonstrating how people use group norms as a guide to what to think and how to behave.

For those with a strong moral basis to their attitude, however, the effects of group norms do not play out as one might expect. Rather than assimilating to the group norm, these people showed as much conviction in their attitude and as much intent to privately act in line with their attitude when they faced group opposition as when they faced group support. In line with Experiment 1, there was also evidence that those with a strong moral basis for their attitude were more determined to publicly act out their attitudes when they had group opposition than when they had group support. When taken in conjunction with Experiment 1, this counter-conformity appears to be a relatively consistent, if subtle, effect. The findings of Experiment 2 are particularly reassuring because, unlike Experiment 1, they were measured with respect to behaviors conducted in front of other group members. Furthermore, it seems that the effects of moral basis were not driven by constructs such as attitude strength or certainty. When variance relating to these constructs was removed, the effects of moral basis remained. Thus, whatever it is about people with a strong moral basis for their attitude that leads them to resist group norms, it is not merely a function of attitude strength.

Why is it that there should be so little evidence for conformity in public? One possibility is that people are motivated to try to change the attitudes of others through public displays of minority action. However there is no direct evidence for such a process. Indeed, where the motivation to convert others was taken into account, the interaction between moral basis and group norm became stronger. This suggests that there is a more personal basis to the act of group defiance. Perhaps, as suggested by Tice (1992), public acts of defiance were

driven by the need to define the self, and to remind the self of one's cherished values. Rather than influencing the individual to abandon their values, the group norm might be making salient the individual's personal values.

The failure to find conformity among a subset of our sample poses a challenge to social identity theory, which would predict assimilation of attitudes and behaviors to the group prototype. One possible explanation for the current data is that some people are disidentifying from the group when they find out the group's attitude is in opposition to their personal view. When presented with information that the group's values are contrary to their personal values, people who have a moral basis for their attitude might be reconfiguring their group identities along ideological lines, and thus discounting the group's norms as a relevant reference point. In Experiment 2 we find some evidence for this. For those with a strong moral basis for their attitude, identification with the group becomes dramatically lower when they find out the group does not share their attitude. For those with a weak moral basis for their attitude, identification remains relatively strong regardless of the group norm.

General Discussion

To date, the bulk of our knowledge about conformity stems from people's judgments about physical reality (e.g., judging line lengths). From this research there is a general consensus that people are motivated to move toward the majority position. In some cases, this may be a rational response to uncertainty. People do not always hold their attitudes with complete assurance; there is sometimes an element of doubt, or a suspicion that one has not availed oneself of all the information necessary to formulate a correct position. In this situation, people may look to others as a guide as to what the correct position is. However there is also evidence that people conform more in public than in private (Abrams et al., 1990; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko et al., 1983). This suggests that at least part of the motivation to conform is about being liked or accepted by the group. People conform to the

majority even when they know the majority position to be wrong, because this is a way of avoiding unwelcome attention.

In this paper, we reflect critically on the notion that people are motivated to assimilate to group norms in public for strategic reasons. When conformity is measured with respect to judgments of physical stimuli, the psychological costs associated with letting go of one's personal view may be relatively small next to the benefits that accrue from fitting in. However, when conformity is measured with respect to judgments of social attitudes, the costs to one's personal integrity may be considerably higher. Rather than assimilating to the group, we find remarkably little movement toward the group norm on two attitudes that have social significance. Furthermore, we find evidence that some people (i.e., those with a strong moral basis to their attitude, and those who perceive weak societal support for their attitude) react against the group norm on public behaviors. This process of counter-conformity does not appear to be driven by a need to convert the group or to change the opinions of others; rather, it appears to be driven by more personal needs for self-definition.

On the surface, this finding may be interpreted as being inconsistent with the social identity theory of conformity. However this is not necessarily the case. Social identity theory was never intended to argue that people are automatons, mindlessly assimilating to the norms and values of whichever group is activated by an experimenter. Rather, the theory argues that people weigh up the group in terms of the extent to which it "fits" the context. In other words, people actively weigh up whether the group is relevant reference point in a particular situation. One way of reading the current data is that, for some people, the group norm information simply made salient how different their own values were. The individual then has three choices. First, they can assimilate their personal views to that of the group. Second, the individual can disidentify with the group and individualize. Third, the individual may reconfigure the intergroup context along ideological grounds (e.g., they may assimilate to the

norms of a pro-gay law reform group). In the case of the second and third strategies, counter-conformity and non-conformity make theoretical sense.

The current data offer some ideas as to when and why people may pursue the first strategy (conformity) as opposed to the second and third strategies (disidentification). In short, it seems that people are more likely to defy group norms if they have a strong moral basis for their attitude or if they perceive they have weak societal support for their attitude. One possible interpretation of this data is that these people simply feel most strongly about the attitude, and so will defend it more vigorously. Regression analyses, however, suggest that the effects are driven by factors other than attitude strength per se. This leaves us with the question: what is the psychological construct underpinning these two effects?

One possibility relates to the extent that people's attitudes are embedded in their self-concept. Presumably, participants with a strong moral basis to their attitude have a greater personal commitment to the view, in the sense that it is deeply internalized and does not require external validation. A similar argument could be made for those who perceive weak societal support for their attitude; the very fact that they maintain an opinion they believe to be unpopular suggests that they are relatively committed to their attitude independently of what others think. The notion of embeddedness, though difficult to measure, provides an intuitively appealing explanation of why some participants in our studies defy the group norm.

Although promising, we acknowledge that the current studies are limited in the sense that they measure behavioral intentions, but not actual behaviors. One problem with interpreting results on behavioral intentions is that people may be responding in terms of how they would like to behave, rather than how they actually would behave. This is not to say that intentions are not important constructs; to the contrary, they provide valuable insight into people's self-expectations. However, it is possible that, in using measures of intentions, we

could be underestimating the extent to which people do inhibit public behaviors in order to fit in.

Despite this caveat, we view the current data as a counterpoint to the emphasis in the social psychological literature on conformity. Over 40 years ago, Jahoda wrote “To the extent that the experimental literature is largely limited to manipulating conditions of influence with regard to matters in which the individual has no investment, it now becomes understandable why we know in psychology so much more about conformity than about independence” (1959, p.104). In line with Jahoda, we hope that this study might make researchers more conscious of the nature of their paradigms when studying conformity. By using real-world social issues rather than judgments of physical stimuli, theorists may be in a better position to examine real-world examples of non-conformity, counter-conformity, and protest.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Private intentions as a function of societal support and group support: Experiment 1

Figure 2. Private intentions as a function of moral basis and group support: Experiment 1

Figure 3. Public intentions as a function of societal support and group support: Experiment 1

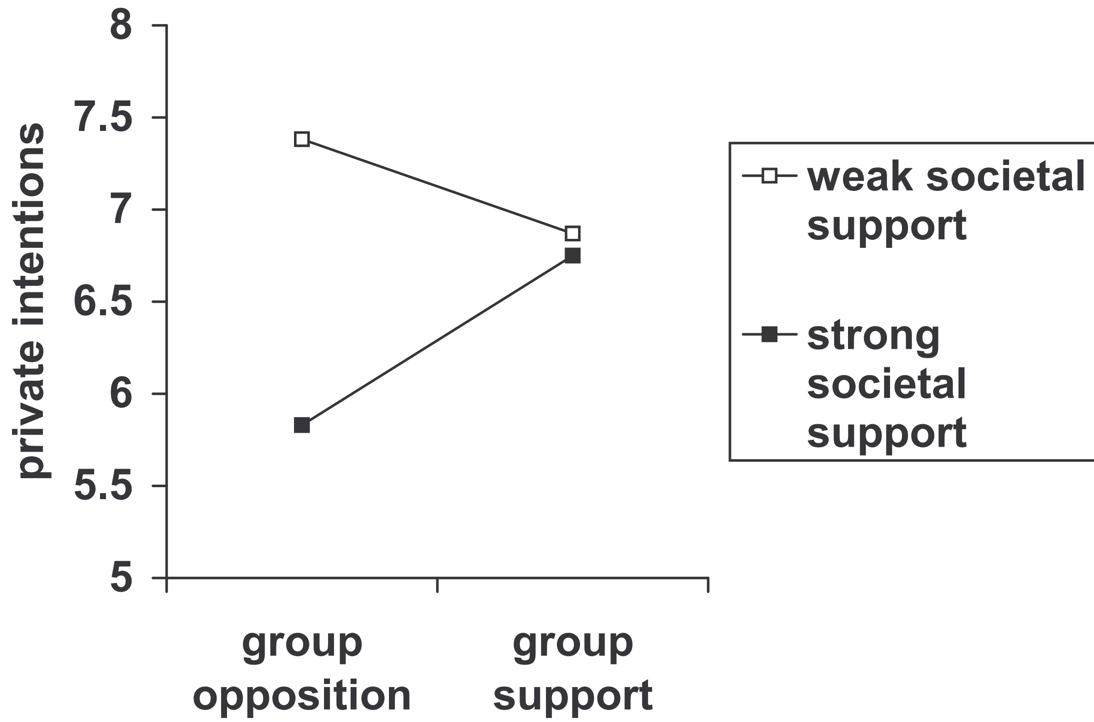
Figure 4. Public intentions as a function of moral basis and group support: Experiment 1

Figure 5. Private intentions as a function of moral basis and group support: Experiment 2

Figure 6. Public intentions as a function of moral basis and group support: Experiment 2

Figure 7. Identification as a function of moral basis and group support: Experiment 2

Figure 8. Attitude strength as a function of moral basis and group support: Experiment 2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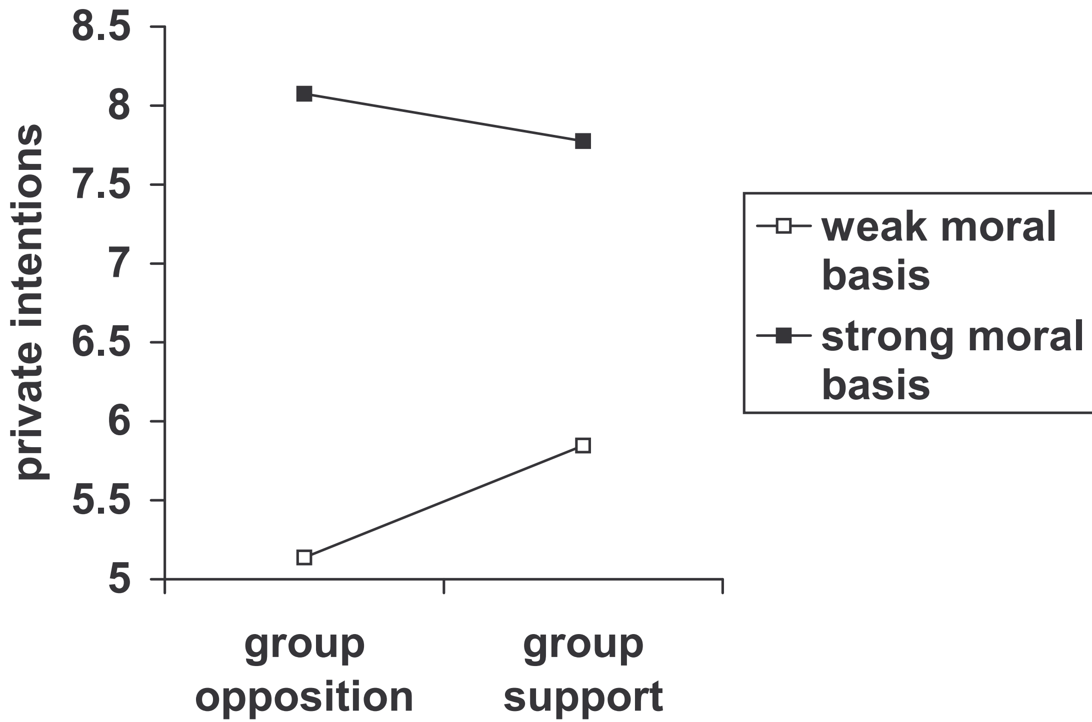
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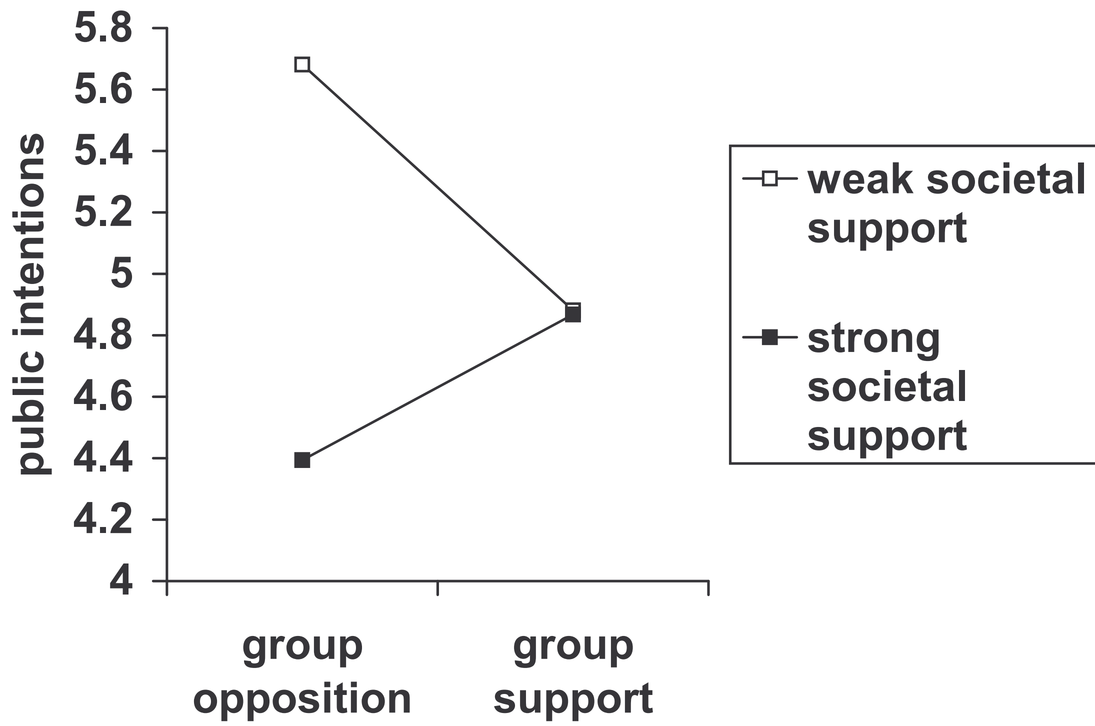

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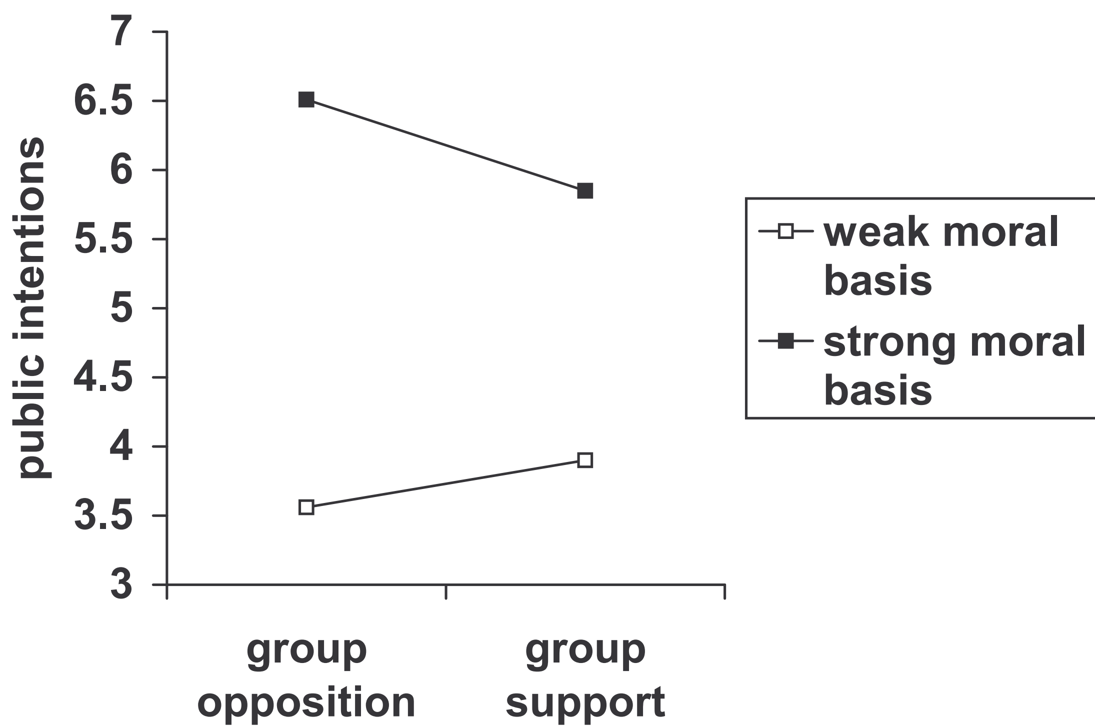

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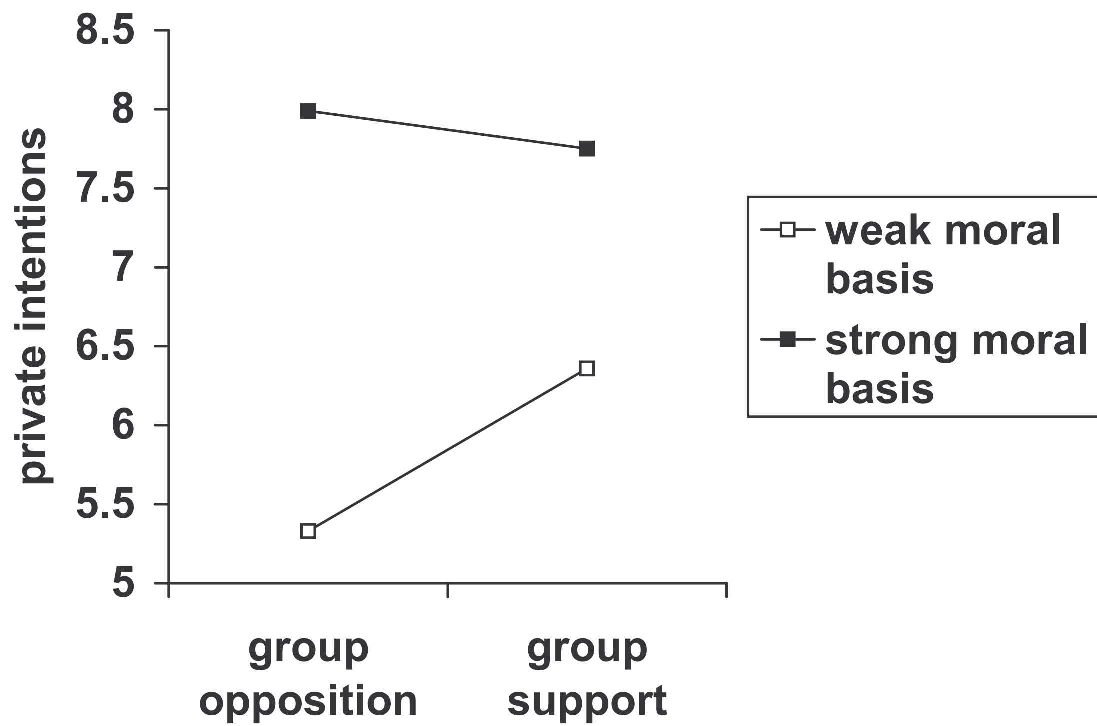
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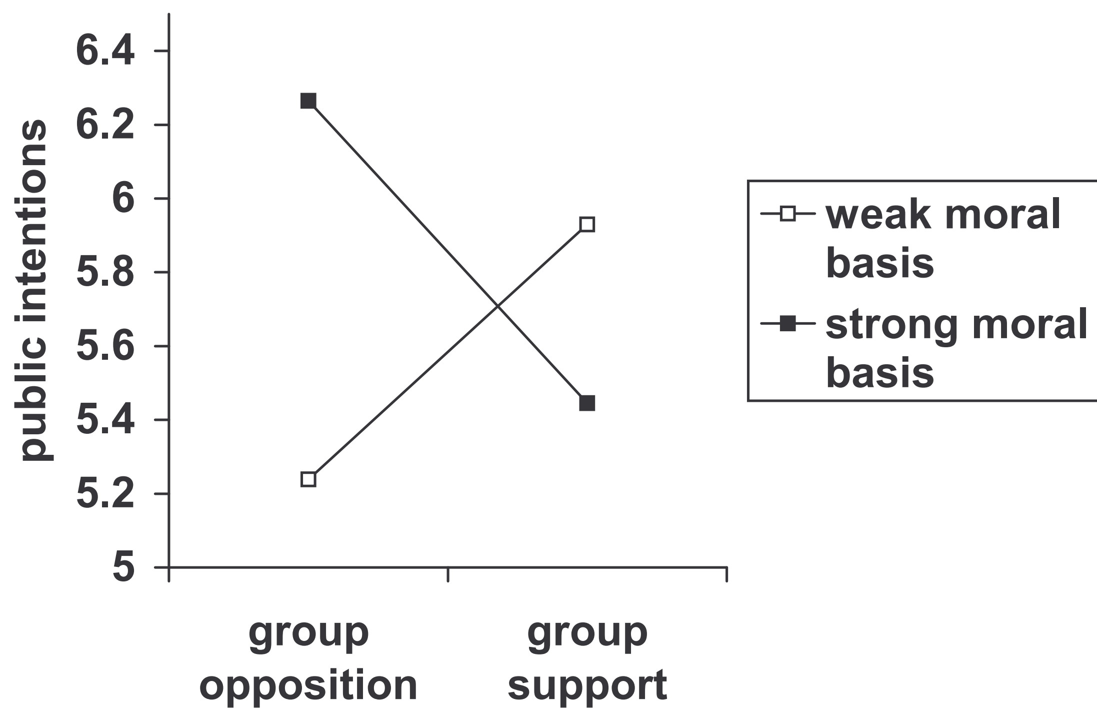
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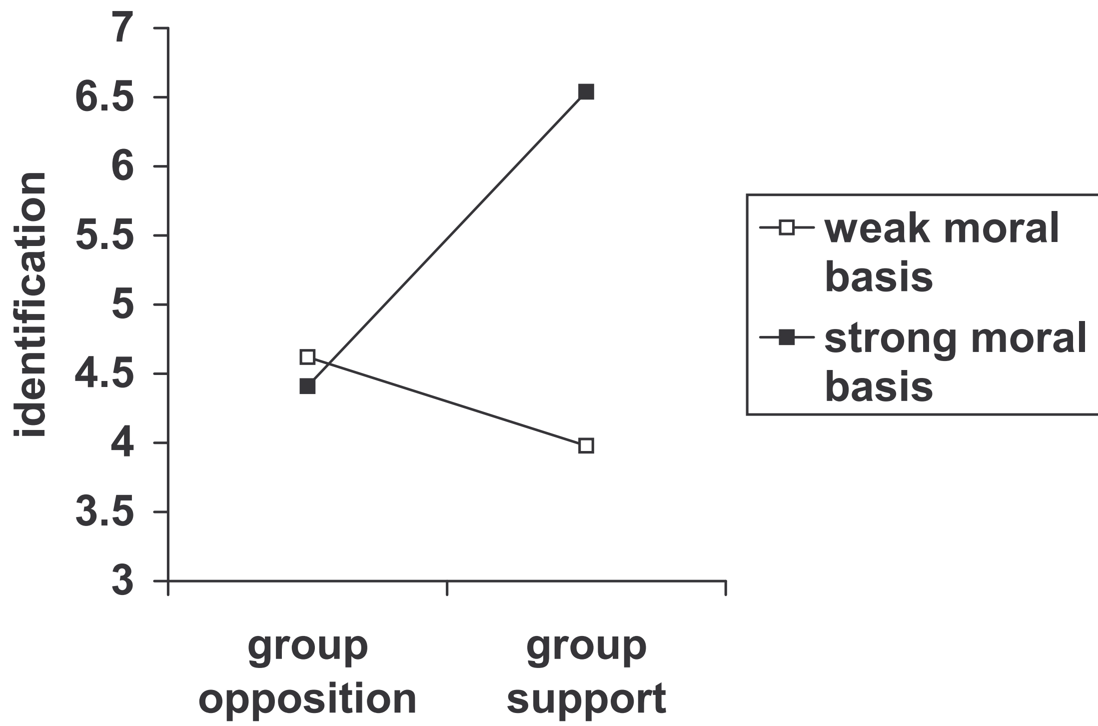
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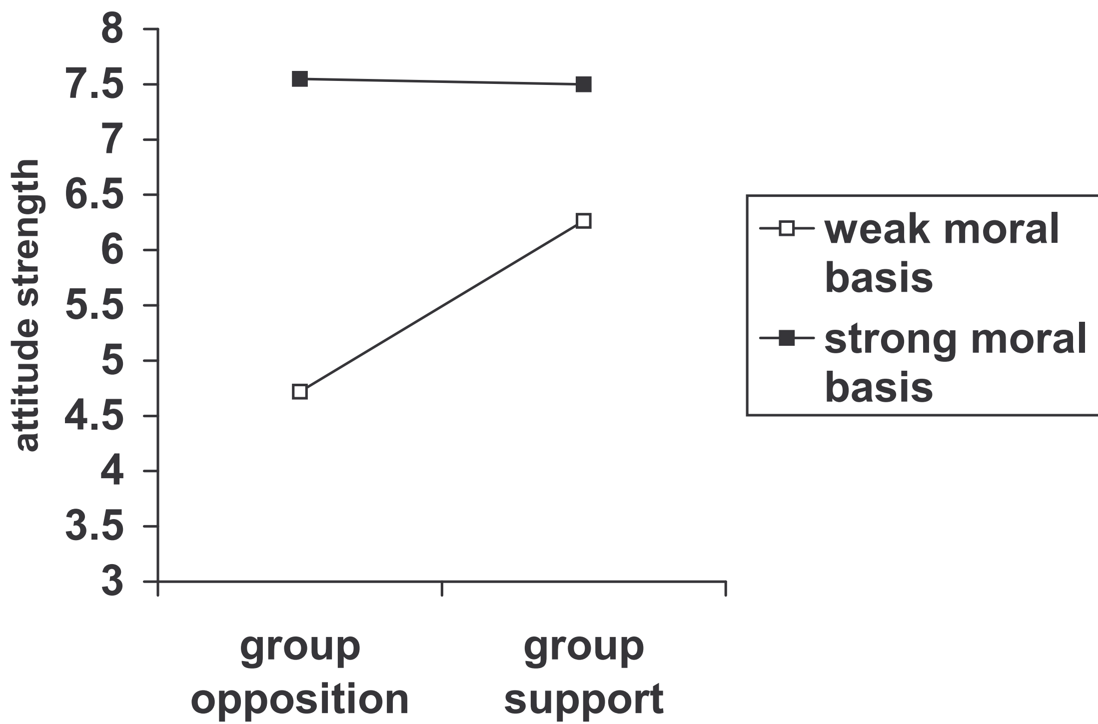
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