

“I went to the rally and it didn’t work”:

13 reasons why people do
and don’t stay involved in
peace activism

Winnifred R. Louis
School of Psychology,
University of
Queensland

These are the overheads for the talk that I gave to Just Peace in Brisbane November 11th, 2003. The data presented mostly come from studies on peace activism, political action and alienation. Summaries of the results of the individual studies may be read at <http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/> . A great deal of the theory and other research that I presented is summarized in Klandermans (1997) *The Social Psychology of Protest* Oxford, England: Blackwell. I welcome your feedback and questions at w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au .

Acknowledgements

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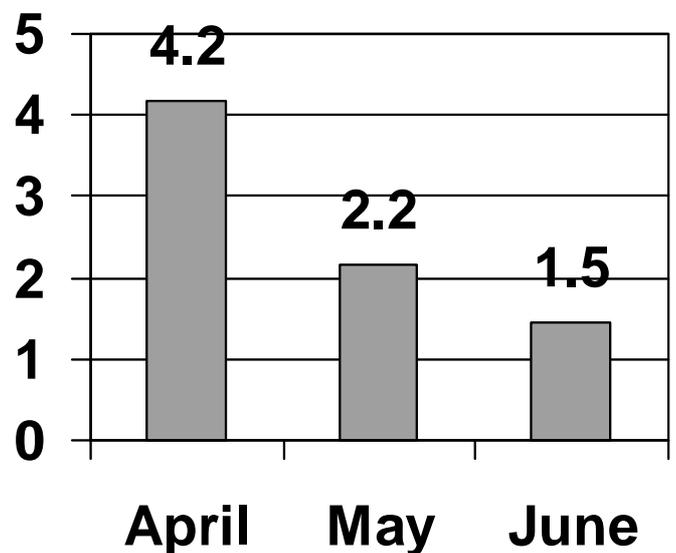
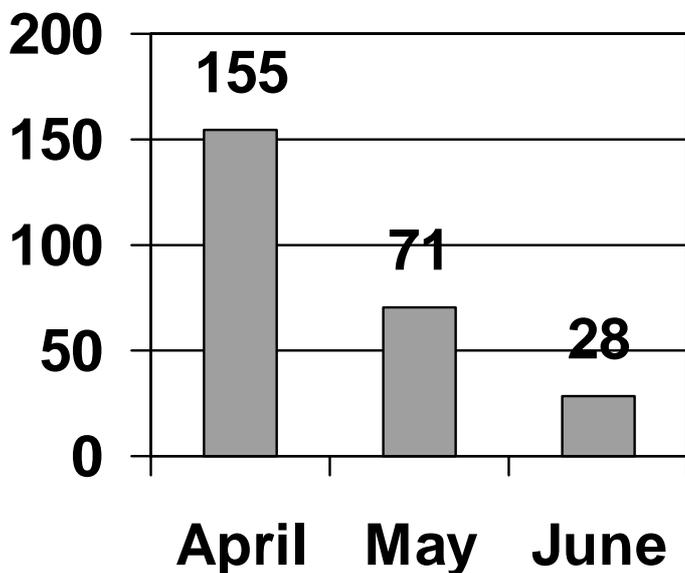
School of Psychology, University
of Queensland

Debbie Terry, Leda Blackwood,
Ashley Heiner.



Peace Actions Study

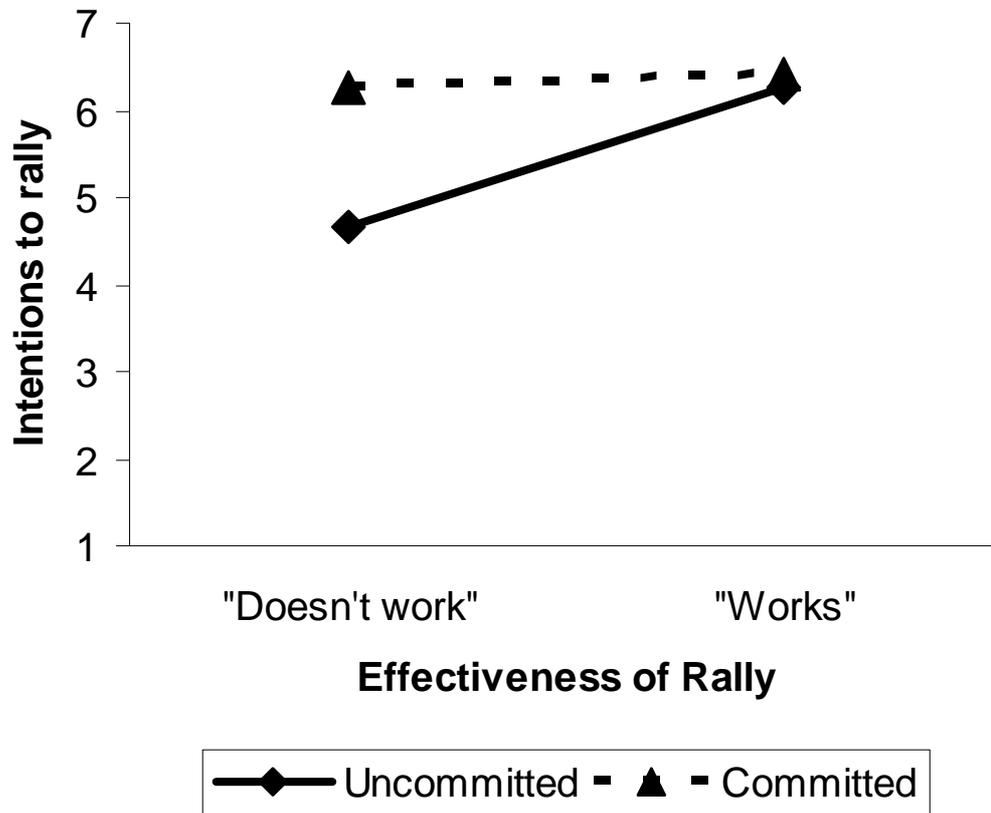
- 62% women
- Aged 16-75 (avg 35)
- Green (63%) or Democrat (19%)
- 93% tertiary-educated
- 62% group members
 - 45 groups in sample



■ Participation

■ # Actions in month

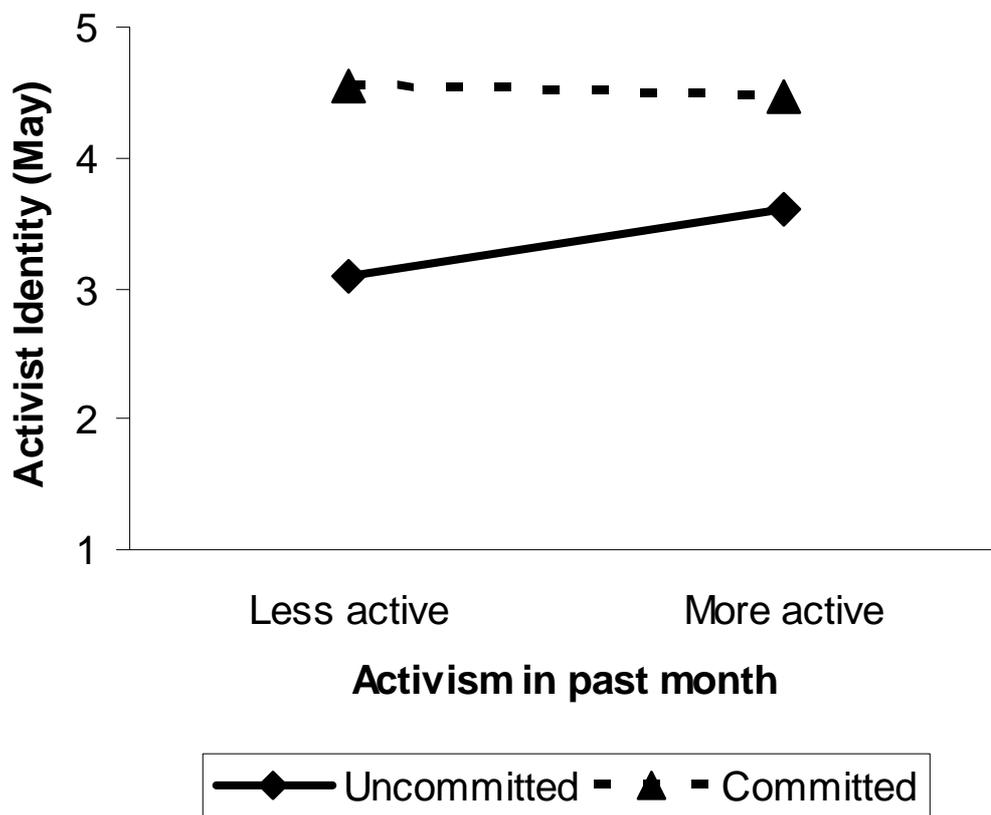
1. People do peace activism to stop war, don't they?



- Beginning activists need it to “work”
And that means
 - If Coalition is adamant, no point in rallying?
 - Have to be careful about framing movement goals
 - opposition vs change - Stop the war vs Not in Our Name
- Fostering activist ID is important!

Building the activist identity:

2. People do peace activism because they've done it before?



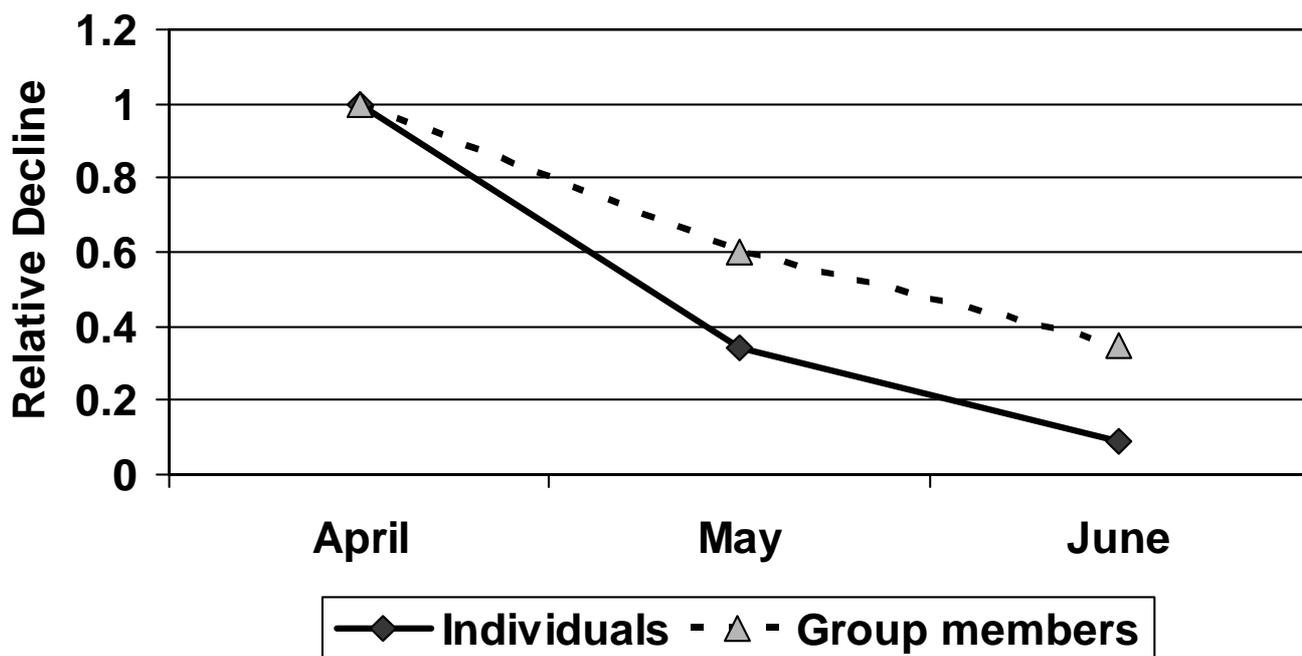
- For beginning activists, collective action builds commitment

And that means

- Motives change when you become an activist
- Activist ID and behaviour self-perpetuate?

Building the activist identity:

3. People do peace activism because they're in groups

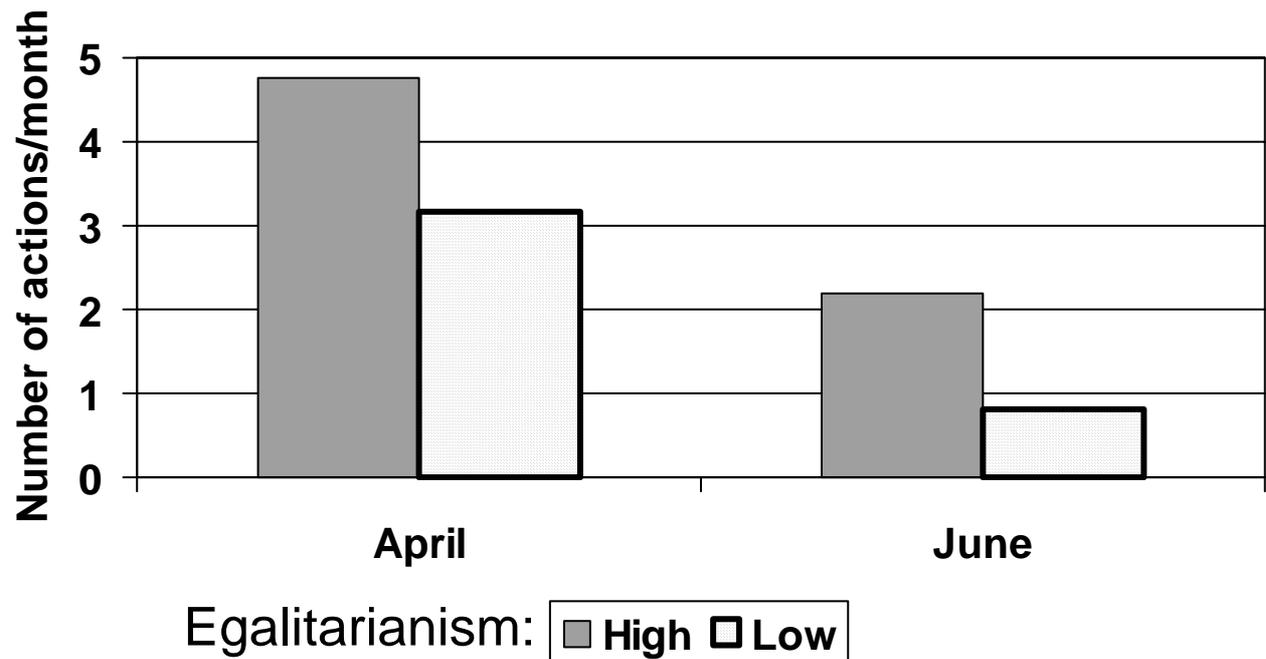


- Group members 2x as active in April – and controlling for that:
- Group members are 4x less likely to drop out

And that means

- Grab them while they're hot?
 - Cheap & easy 1st memberships?

4. People do peace activism because of their values



- People who rejected hierarchical values more = more identified and more active
- People learn values & they change with reinforcement

And that means

- Vigilance about the media / political discourse
- A long term vision is to strengthen egalitarian values / socialization

Sustaining activism: Beliefs –

5. anticipate a longer war

- People anticipating a long war (in April) were less likely to drop out

And that means

- Skepticism about the media / political discourse of April?
 - Quick & triumphalist fall of Baghdad

6. anticipate higher Iraqi civilian casualties

- People who estimated > Iraqi civilian casualties were less likely to drop out
- Terror risk to Aus, US; military casualty estimates unrelated to activism

And that means

- Importance of under-reporting of Iraqi casualty figures?

Sustaining activism: Other identities / norms –

7. political affiliation

- Affiliating w/ parties that strongly opposed war <-> activism
- For e.g., Green supporters' activism = more sustained

And that means

- Social group networks can reinforce activism

8. Australian nationalism

- Nationalism and peace activism unrelated in April
- But Nationalists 2/3 as active in May and 1/2 as active in June !

And that means

- Different IDs can conflict
- Fighting for the higher level IDs

Peace activism vs other activism

– heartbreaking, abstract, future-oriented, universalist

- Responsibility
 - Commission > omission
- Issues in the public eye
- Costs > benefits
- Present > future
- Close > far
- Concrete & immediate effects and control



➤ The relative avoidance of positive peace work

Why stay an activist?

- It's gratifying
 - Friends, peers -> social support
 - Benefits like learning & skill development
 - It's working
 - Perceiving successes
 - Matching expectations
 - It expresses important values & identities
 - A stake in the work x no attractive alternatives
- ↑
↓
- ◀ Very important to beginning activists
 - ◀ Activist ID fostered by action
 - ◀ Group IDs & norms reinforce or conflict
 - ◀ Other soc movt competitors?



The 50,000 – where now?

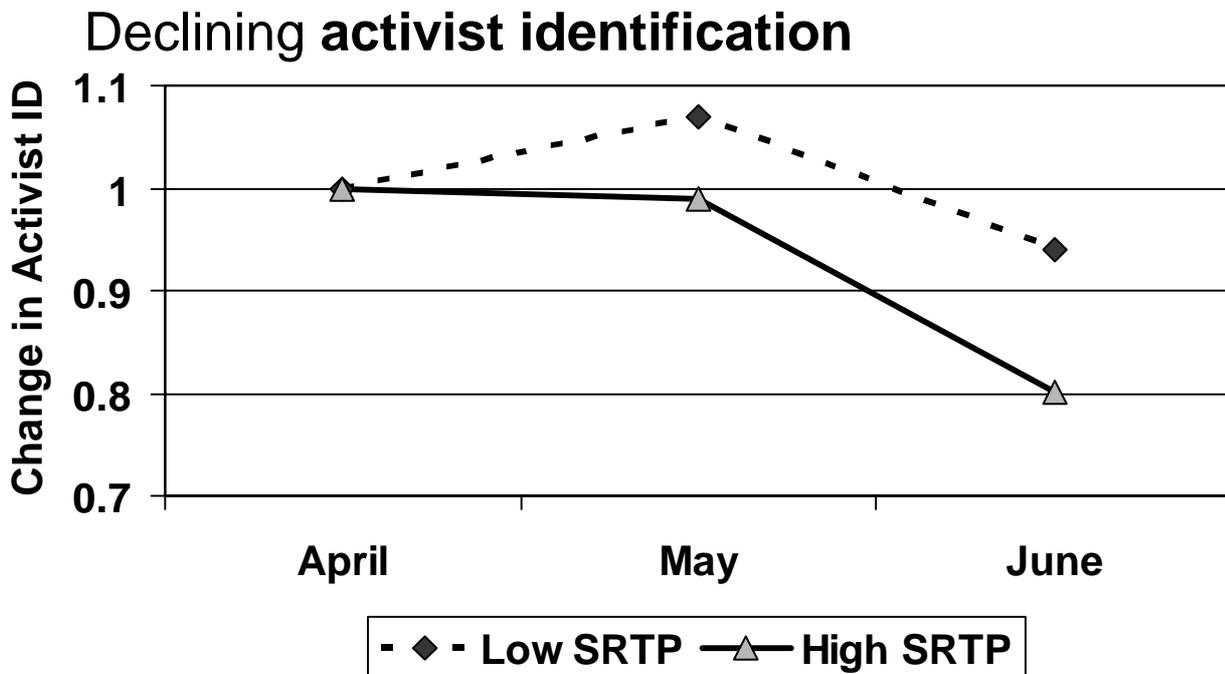
Pessimism :

- Converted to war support
- Turned off activism

Optimism :

- A reservoir of potential
 - A deterrent to Australia's participation in the occupation
 - A deterrent to Australia's participation in future wars
- Working in other areas
 - More perceived responsibility
 - More perceived leverage
- Can be remobilized with :
 - effectiveness, control, social & material rewards
 - interpersonal and group infiltration
 - leadership

9. PDPA because they have the energy?



What is burnout?

- Frustration
 - Irritability
 - Cynicism
 - Drained sense of pressure
- ◀ Over-commitment (can't slow down)
 - ◀ Being essential
 - ◀ Role conflict
 - ◀ Unmet expectations

What is the solution?

A. Gratification:

1. Acknowledge stress – ask about it - take it seriously
2. Take time off / Delegate
3. Refocus on ST reward
4. Suggest breaks, double-up on jobs, reduce load
5. Offer change – try to deliver friends, control, and benefits (e.g. learning)
6. Encourage achievable goals
7. Celebrate success

B. Affirm values and identities:

1. Ritualize value/ID affirmation
2. Reduce role conflicts
3. Acknowledge & value work
4. Acknowledge difficulty & stress

C. Alternative social movements

1. Find a niche?
2. Do something else!

Mobilizing for a peace rally in the Netherlands, 1980s

- Did not agree with goals (26%)
- Agreed with goals (74%)

- Not aware of rally (15%)
- Aware of rally (59%)

couch potato problem

- Did not intend to go (49%)
- Intended to go (10%)
 - Did not go (6%)
 - Attended rally (4%)

Klandermans & Oegema (1994)

People do activism (in general) because of:

(10) Engagement:

- Political interest
- Political knowledge
- Political efficacy
- Concern about an issue

- ◀ Norms
- ◀ Identities

(11) Resources:

- Time
- Money
- Skills

- ◀ Education
- ◀ Family income
- ◀ Retirement

(12) Finding out opportunity to act

- Being recruited
- Networks of friends & groups

- ◀ Past behaviour
- ◀ Formal group membership

Rationales for inaction

Not qualified to judge

-I often avoid having an overly passionate opinion on political issues because it is rare that 'ordinary' Australians have the 'full story'.
- Confusion about who to believe, who's wrong - often lesser of 2 evils, Saddam & Bush both wrong, not black & white. Age and lack of knowledge about different political parties and their policies - I haven't voted for anyone yet.

Trust issues

- I think we should trust our PM to do the right thing for our country. He knows a lot more [] than we do....
- Fear that not everyone has the same agenda
- A lot of the people (especially at uni) who organise the protests / peace rallies / activism rallies, protest against everything.

Pragmatic issues

- Avoid: time, family commitments, money, study, lack of personal effect of war ...

13 reasons why people drop out of peace activism

A. People change their mind

B. Motivation to act decreases

C. Tactical views change

A. People change their mind

1. Natural turnover: don't panic
2. After a shake-up, return to baseline of friends and family
 - Recruit friends / groups
3. Social groups bond internally and push apart externally
 - Higher-level / umbrella IDs really important – common values & goals
4. Countermobilization of “new info” (e.g., Saddam's mass graves).
 - Remobilize -> make the links
5. Countermobilization vs dissent
 - Wider power struggle
 - Goal of having goals coopted

B. Motivation to act decreases

6. War ends, status quo becomes more tolerable
 - Focus on future, LT costs
7. Responsibility decreases when Australia is out
 - Shared humanity, indirect role
8. Mainstream media agenda shifts
 - Alliances/e-networks, alt media.

C. Tactical views change

9. Unexpected barriers
 - Organization, information, planning
10. Countermobilization vs tactic
 - Innovation, remobilization
11. Protest “doesn’t work”
 - Careful about goal frame
 - Draw on value / IDs
12. Protestors “not like me”.
 - balance needs to bond / challenge w/ creating a safe space for conservatives
13. Cycle of frustration: burn-out.
 - permission to take breaks, job rotation