Greetings,

You recently participated in a study about Australians and their views on the war in Iraq, and indicated that you would be interested in receiving a short summary of the findings. We appreciate your help with our research, and we are happy to have the opportunity to tell you about the results. This short write-up looks at the participants in the study and 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: VIEWS ON THE WAR IN IRAQ
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SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Forty people completed the survey of war attitudes during the time period April 9-14 (i.e., as the fighting was winding down in Iraq). Everyone was a student in the first year psychology course participant pool, and completed the study for course credit. Altogether there were 24 women and 16 men, but no gender differences were observed in attitudes to the war. We also asked about GPA, but most participants weren't sure yet (65% of participants were in first year). For those who estimated their GPA, grades had no relation to war attitudes. Finally, we asked about religious and political affiliation. A majority of participants said they were Christian (54%), with 25% unaffiliated and 21% indicating "Other," but there were no differences in war attitudes across religious groups. Ideologically, most participants identified as centre (71%), with 11% as left-wing and 18% as right-wing. Most participants (65%) didn't see themselves as supporting one political party more than another, but 15% supported the Liberal party and 20% one of the opposition (Greens, Labor, or Democrats). Interestingly, there were no reliable differences in war attitudes as a function of political affiliation either. Some right-wing & government supporters opposed the war, and some left-wing & opposition supporters supported the war.

WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR
This is a cross-cultural study in which data is being collected for a US research team from students in the US, Australia, and several other countries. The basic idea was to look at three questions in each country: (1) the level of support for the war; (2) perceptions of responsibility for the war; and (3) the relationship between favourable war attitudes and responsibility. We only have information here about the UQ students, however. We are going to forward the data to the US, and will only hear back about the other countries in several months!

WHAT WE FOUND AT UQ
1. ATTITUDES TO THE WAR ON IRAQ. There were ten items measuring attitudes towards the war on Iraq, including items such as "The attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon occurred because Saddam Hussein hates U. S. democracy" and "The U. S. should have waited for the United Nations to make a final judgment about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction before taking military action" (reverse-scored). One of the items, "The war against Iraq is due to U. S. support of Israel," was not associated with the other items, so it was dropped from our analyses. The other nine items formed a reliable index of favourable attitudes to the war on Iraq, and were averaged. The mean on this scale was 2.82, which is marginally below the scale midpoint of 3 (i.e., overall the participants were marginally
Across the participants, 45% had unfavourable attitudes to the war, 20% were relatively neutral, and 35% had favourable attitudes.

2. PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR. There were two sets of questions about responsibility for the war. One focused on individuals: participants had to give a percentage of responsibility to each of four targets, namely Osama bin Laden, George Bush, Ariel Sharon, and Saddam Hussein. The other question focused on broader forces: US power, Muslim fundamentalism, Israeli oppression, and third world poverty.

A. INDIVIDUALS. If the responsibility were divided equally among the four targets, each would be given 25% responsibility for the war. In fact, in this study, Saddam Hussein was assigned significantly higher responsibility (35%), Bush (30%) & bin Laden (27%) were at a moderate level, and Sharon was assigned significantly less responsibility (8%).

B. SOCIAL FORCES. Among the four social forces, across participants, US power was seen as significantly more responsible for the crisis in Iraq (44%), while Muslim fundamentalism was assigned a moderate level of responsibility (29%), and Israeli oppression (16%) and third world poverty (11%) were seen as significantly less responsible.

C. ATTITUDES TO THE WAR AND PERCEIVED RESPONSIBILITY. At the individual level, higher blame for Hussein and bin Laden, and lower blame for Bush, were significantly associated with favourable attitudes towards the war. At the social level, higher blame for Muslim fundamentalism and Israeli oppression, and lower blame for US power, were significantly associated with favourable attitudes towards the war. Attributed responsibility to Sharon and third world poverty was low for everyone, and not associated reliably with attitudes.

CAUTION: OUR SAMPLE VS AUSTRALIA?

Because of the way the data was collected (piggy-backing with a cognitive study and a study that looked specifically at social science students), the sample was a bit different from the general psychology pool in that a lot of the participants were from math and science programs. So the sample shouldn't be seen as representative of psychology students as a group! Moreover, psychology students are not representative of UQ students, and UQ students are not representative of Australians. So how can researchers compare "Australians" and "Americans" with such an unrepresentative sample?

It is very common in cross-cultural research in psychology to have to work with convenience samples (which are cheaper than trying to get big samples that represent the community). What it means is that the cross-cultural differences between samples are confounded with other variables. Using demographic variables as controls, the researchers will have to try to tease apart the different explanations for similarities and differences statistically and theoretically. It's quite difficult, but also quite interesting! Overall, we can say only that in this study most participants in this study had unfavourable attitudes towards the war and saw US power as the dominant social force causing the war. However, people also saw Hussein as the dominant individual cause of the war. Across the sample, then, there was quite a lot of variation and ambivalence in people's attitudes.

THANKS AGAIN....

So that's a description of what we found in this study! If you have any questions, please get in touch. And thank you again for your participation and interest.