Greetings,

You recently participated in a study about "Ordinary Australians and 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 (relatively) short write-up looks at what we were looking for and the participants in the study, 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: ORDINARY AUSTRALIANS & THE WAR
Working paper, 12/5/03. This paper has not been peer reviewed. Please do not copy or cite without author's permission.

WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR
Our main focus was in looking at what would make people disengage from the war: avoiding news, expressing anger and frustration directed at politicians or protestors, and avoiding activism. For many people, political attitudes are not translated into action very often, despite strong views on particular social issues (e.g., the war, asylum seekers). Clearly, one reason not to engage in activism is if you support the war or the government. But what about people who aren't happy with the situation, yet don't know what to do about it? What we wanted to do in this study is start off by controlling for people's support for the war and party affiliation, and then see if we could predict disengagement versus engagement from knowing people's beliefs about the consequences of the war, their emotional reactions, and their perceptions of responsibility.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS
During the time period April 1-10 (i.e., as the fighting was going on in Iraq), 276 people completed the survey. The respondents were recruited from four classes in sociology, economics, religious studies, and social science. Altogether there were 94 men (34%) and 179 women (66%), ranging in age from 17 to 57 with a mean of about 21. Most participants (76%) were Australian. Among the Australians, 20% were politically unaffiliated, and of those who indicated a party preference, 46% supported the Liberal/National coalition and 52% one of the opposition parties (26% the Greens, 21% ALP, and 5% Democrats).

WHAT WE FOUND
1. ATTITUDES TO THE WAR ON IRAQ. Attitudes were measured with 3 items like "I support Australia's participation in the war on Iraq". The average was significantly below the scale midpoint, meaning that overall the participants opposed the war. More specifically, 55% had unfavourable attitudes to the war, 12% were relatively neutral, and 33% had favourable attitudes. No gender differences were observed in attitudes, and Australians and non-Australians were equally opposed to the war. Older respondents opposed the war more strongly than younger people did, however. And not surprisingly, big differences emerged between parties. Whereas 82% of opposition supporters and 55% of unaligned respondents were opposed to the war, only 20% of coalition supporters opposed the war.
2. CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR. People were asked about the consequences of the war for Australia (36% thought it would be good), for the US (57% thought it would be good), and for Iraq (33% thought it would be good). Supporters of the war thought the consequences would be better for each country than opponents did. People were also asked how much they
thought their views of the war were based on the outcomes for each country. Only 40% of respondents said they thought their views of the war were motivated by the effects on Australia, while 55% said they were motivated by the effects on Iraq, and 26% by the effects on the US. People who supported the war were more likely to say that they were motivated by the effects on Australia or the US, but supporters and opponents were equally likely to say they were motivated by concern about Iraq.

3. PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR. There were two sets of questions about responsibility for the war. One focused on Australia's responsibility relative to the US, and the second focused on ordinary Australians relative to the government. Most participants (84%) saw the US as responsible for the war, compared to only 26% who saw Australia as responsible. Most (92%) agreed "The US will pursue the war regardless of Australian views" and 68% agreed that "Australia's decisions have no real impact ...". However, supporters of the war gave more responsibility to Australia than opponents did. Similarly, most participants (88%) saw the government as responsible for the war, compared to only 27% who saw ordinary Australians as responsible. Most (82%) agreed "The government will pursue the war regardless of ordinary Australians' views" and 72% agreed that "Ordinary Australians' decisions have no real impact ...". However, again supporters of the war took more responsibility. Supporters saw ordinary Australians as more important in government decisions and were less likely to believe the government's actions were not based on voters' support.

4. EMOTIONAL REACTIONS. We had a five-item measure of negative emotional reactions to news of the war, with items like "News of the war is depressing". The average was significantly above the scale midpoint, meaning that overall the participants felt bad about the war. However, those who supported the war felt less negative than opponents did.

5. ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

A. MEASURES. We looked at engagement in three areas. First, media viewing was measured with 4 items like "I read, listen to, or watch news of the war almost daily". The average was significantly above the scale midpoint (i.e., most people were following the news closely). Second, emotional reactions (anger & frustration versus warmth & admiration) were measured towards politicians, protestors, and (for comparison) average Australians. On average, people felt angry & frustrated towards politicians, and warm & admiring towards protestors and ordinary Australians. Finally, people were asked whether they had engaged in four pro-peace actions in the last month, and intended to engage in these actions in future. Only 27% had signed a petition, 18% attended a rally, 7% had volunteered time to a pro-peace group, and 6% attended a meeting. Most (67%) had not done any of these in the previous month, and 64% had low intentions to engage in the actions in the next month. (This included 95% of people who supported the war, but it also included 51% of people who opposed it.)

B. PREDICTORS. We then did two analyses to look at why people were engaging in, versus disengaging from, the war. First we looked at attitudes to the war, past behaviour, and party affiliation. Supporters of the war were more likely to be following the news closely; felt more positively about politicians and ordinary Australians and more negatively about protestors; and had low intentions of engaging in future pro-peace actions. Coalition supporters, compared to opposition supporters, were equally tuned in to the news and positive towards ordinary Australians; were less negative to politicians and tended to be more negative to protestors; and had lower intentions for activism. In comparison, people who had previously engaged in activism, compared to people who hadn't, were more likely to be following the news closely; were less negative to protestors, equally negative to politicians, and less positive towards ordinary Australians; and were more likely to intend to engage in activism.

Then our next analyses controlled for attitude, previous behaviour, and party affiliation and looked at whether there were additional effects of perceived consequences, responsibility beliefs, and emotional reactions to the war. We found that people who were following the
media more closely tended to see the war as more beneficial to the US and to see ordinary Australians as having more responsibility for the war. Emotionally, people who were more negative towards politicians were more likely to see the government as ignoring the views of ordinary Australians about the war. People who were negative to protestors felt less emotional about the war, perceived fewer costs of the war for Australia, and were more likely to see ordinary Australians as having no impact on the government. Feeling negative towards ordinary Australians was associated with seeing Australia as more responsible for the war and the government as more responsive to ordinary Australians’ views. Finally, people who perceived higher costs of the war for Australia and had more negative emotional reactions to the war had stronger intentions to engage in activism, while people who saw Australia and ordinary Australians as having less responsibility for the war had lower intentions.

SUMMARY

Overall, people opposed the war; they felt bad about it & were angry at politicians, whom they saw as ignoring the views of ordinary Australians. However, there was a minority who supported the war: supporters viewed the war as beneficial and felt less emotional about the news of the war. Supporters also saw ordinary Australians as having more responsibility in bringing Australia into the war, and they saw Australian support for the US as having more responsibility for the war on Iraq.

In terms of engagement, most people were following the media reports pretty closely, and felt pretty emotionally engaged in the war, yet even among those who opposed the war, most had not engaged in any pro-peace political action. Why not? Overall, there seemed to be two clusters of predictors: one was supporting the war and government and/or seeing the war as more beneficial, or at least as low in costs (which reduces involvement/motivation for action) and another was seeing the government as unresponsive to ordinary Australians, and Australia as unimportant on the world stage (which reduces feelings of responsibility and perceptions that activism will be useful). Where would these beliefs come from? Since most people have no personal experience re war outcomes & little experience of political action, we would expect their responsibility, efficacy, and cost-benefit perceptions to have been socially learned from experts (politicians, media) and from friends & family. This is the line that we are following up in our other studies.

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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