Greetings!

You recently participated in a study about actors in the Iraq conflict & political attitudes and behaviour, 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 write-up gives you a quick look at what we were looking for and 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. You can also read about other studies that we’ve done on responses to the war or political decision-making at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/.

"WHAT’S GOING ON IN IRAQ?": CONFLICT FRAMES & ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS RE THE WAR
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WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR

In this study, we asked students to do two things: (1) list some of the actors in the Iraq conflict and their goals, and rate the power of each actor to achieve their goals, and (2) tell us their own political identity and attitudes, and peace activism. What we did is vary the order of the tasks, so that half of the participants first gave us their political attitudes and behaviour and then evaluated the actors in the conflict, whereas half did the reverse. There were three main goals of the study: (1) relating different ways of framing the conflict to attitudes about the war; (2) among people who opposed the war, relating different ways of framing the conflict to activism; and (3) evaluating whether there would be different frames, or different reports of political attitudes and behaviour, generated as a function of the order of the tasks.

The study's theoretical context is a model called self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1991), which says that people’s attitudes and actions often change in relation to how they’re thinking about themselves. Depending on the social context, different aspects of people’s identities come to mind or become salient for example, you could think of yourself as an Australian, or a supporter of a particular political party, or an individual, depending on what context you were in. According to self-categorisation theory, when you think of yourself as a member of a particular group, you are likely to express the attitudes and engage in the actions that are normative, or appropriate, for that group. If the model applies to the war context, people who have different levels of identity should have different representations of the conflict, and focusing on particular social contexts could change people’s identity, attitudes and behaviour. That’s what we wanted to test.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

We recruited 149 people to participate in the study, from classes in sociology, religious studies, and economics. The data were collected during March 27 - April 8 (i.e., while the fighting in Iraq was going on). The sample was about 67% women, ranged in age from 17-72 (but 60% of respondents were 20 or younger), and was mostly Australian (77%).

WHAT WE FOUND

SECTION 1: POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS. In this section, we had measures of political affiliation and identification, attitudes to the war, and activist identification, behaviour, and intentions. Politically, 5% of Australian respondents were unaffiliated; of the remainder, 40% supported the Liberal/National coalition, and 60% one of the opposition parties (33% Green, 22% ALP, 5% Democrats). Most respondents did not consider their political affiliation very important in their everyday lives, but coalition supporters considered their affiliation even more unimportant on average than opposition supporters. In terms of power, coalition supporters thought their party had
more power to achieve their goals than Labor and Democrat supporters, who in turn thought their party had more power than Green supporters did. Within each party, people who identified more strongly with their party also rated it as higher in power. In terms of position on the war, Coalition supporters saw their party as supporting the war, whereas opposition parties perceived the parties opposed the war (Green supporters perceived their party’s opposition as stronger than Democrats and ALP supporters did).

Most respondents (58%) personally opposed the war in Iraq, with 6% neutral, and 36% who supported the war. Coalition supporters, on average, supported the war; Democrats were relatively neutral, and ALP and Green supporters opposed the war (Green supporters more strongly). Overall, however, only 8% of Coalition supporters, 10% of ALP supporters, 9% of Democrats, and 46% of Green supporters saw themselves as activists. Looking specifically at pro-peace activism in the last month, 22% of the sample had been to a rally, 9% had volunteered time to a peace group, 11% had attended a meeting, 10% had donated money, and 35% had signed a petition. In all, 56% of respondents had not engaged in any of the five pro-peace behaviours. This non-activist majority included 91% of people who presently supported the war, as well as 56% of people who were presently neutral, and 36% of opponents of the war. On average, also, people did not intend to engage in activism in the next month: People who supported the war or were neutral had definite intentions not to engage in activism, and opponents of the war did not have definite intentions to act.

SECTION 2: PERCEPTIONS OF ACTORS IN THE CONFLICT. In this section, we asked people to list the actors in the conflict, describe the actors’ goals, and rate the power of each actor to achieve their goals. What we’ve presented is an analysis of who the actors were and how powerful they were perceived to be. (Coding the goals themselves, while fascinating, is likely to take quite some time.) Across the sample, people listed an average of four actors each, the most common being the US/Bush (78%), Iraq/Hussein (77%), Australia/Howard (58%), and the UK/Blair (52%). The next most common actors identified were the Coalition broadly (22%), the UN (20%), and the Iraqi people (18%). The US and the Coalition, when listed, were seen as having strong power to achieve their goals, averaging 8.3 and 8.4/10; Australia and the UK were seen as less powerful (6.8 and 7.3, respectively); Iraq, the UN, and the Iraqi people were all seen as weak (3.4, 3.2, and 2.9).

A. RELATIONSHIP TO WAR ATTITUDES. We found that overall attitude to the war did not predict the complexity of the representation significantly, in terms of number of actors, nor did attitude predict the likelihood of mentioning Iraq, the Iraqi people, or the UN. However, opponents of the war were more likely to list Australia, the US, and the UK as actors with different power and interests. For example, 68% of opponents listed Australia as an independent actor in the conflict, compared to 44% of war supporters. Interestingly, supporters and opponents did not differ in how they evaluated most actors’ power (Australia, UK, Iraq, UN, etc). But when listed as an independent actor, the US was seen by war supporters as having more power to achieve its goals than by opponents.

B. RELATIONSHIP TO ACTIVISM IN OPPONENTS. Focusing on those who opposed the war, we looked at whether those who engaged in activism were likely to frame the conflict differently than those who were opposed to the war without having acted politically. We found that activists tended to have more complex representation of the conflict than opponents of the war who had not engaged in activism (i.e., listed more actors). No differences emerged in the likelihood of mentioning any of the 7 main actors, but activists rated the US as more powerful and Iraq as less powerful than opponents of the war who had not engaged in activism. Looking at some of the less commonly identified actors, we also found that activists were specifically more likely to mention the peace movement or peace protestors as actors in the conflict, and more likely to mention Western countries or politicians that were opposed to the war (e.g., France, Germany). For example, 3% of non-activist opponents, but 13% of activist opponents, mentioned peace groups as actors.
C. EFFECTS OF ORDER ON CONFLICT FRAME AND ACTIVISM. We found that order had no effect on conflict framing, either in terms of the number of actors, or likelihood of mentioning the main 7 actors, or their power evaluations. Similarly, we found that order had no effect on self-rated activism, and activist behaviour or intentions. On the other hand, we observed an unexpected difference in how people evaluated their _political party_ as a function of the order of the tasks! Opposition party supporters tended to rate their party affiliation as more important to them if they thought about the war and then evaluated their party, whereas coalition supporters tended to rate their party as more important to them if they evaluated it before they thought about the war. Unexpected effects should always be interpreted with caution, but this is certainly an effect we will try to replicate. If generalizable, it would suggest that the conflict frame exercise reinforced opposition supporters’ identity and undermined coalition supporters’ identity, and we would then try to figure out why in more detail.

SUMMARY
The results of the study provide broad support for the self-categorisation model, in linking people’s identities (political & activist) to attitudes and behaviour, on the one hand, and framing of a social conflict, on the other. Opponents of the war were more likely to frame Australia as an independent actor, with different power and interests than the US/Coalition. Among opponents of the war, activists were people who perceived the conflict between the US and Iraq as more unequal, compared to people who opposed the war but didn’t act. Activists also listed more actors in the conflict in general, and were specifically more likely to see anti-war nations, politicians, or peace organisations as playing a role. Our future research is likely to pick up on three of those themes: understanding what drives power perceptions, how people learn particular representations of conflicts, and what processes create links between conflict frames and particular identities.

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. You can also read about other studies that we’ve done on responses to the war or political decision-making at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/. And thank you again for your participation and interest!

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