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) 3365-7295, 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 in 2004
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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 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. We had also done the exact same study the previous year, so we wanted to look at similarities and differences in the conflict frames in 2004 and 2003.

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 213 people to participate in the study, from classes in sociology, religious studies, and economics as well as in psychology lab studies. The data were collected during May 10 - June 3 2004. The sample was about 64% women, ranged in age from 17-65 (but 61% of respondents were 20 or younger), and was mostly Australian (83%).

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, 6% of Australian respondents were unaffiliated, 33% supported the Liberal/National coalition, and 61% one of the opposition parties (38% ALP, 18% Green, 5% Democrats). Most respondents did not consider their political affiliation very
important in their everyday lives. In terms of power, coalition and ALP supporters thought their party had more power to achieve their goals than Democrat and Green supporters did. 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 and Democrat supporters perceived their party’s opposition as stronger than ALP supporters did).

Most respondents (60%) personally opposed the war in Iraq, with 13% neutral, and 27% who supported the war. Coalition supporters, on average, were neutral towards the war; and opposition supporters opposed the war (Green and Democrat supporters more strongly). Overall, however, only 16% of Coalition supporters, 15% of ALP supporters, 13% of Democrats, and 25% of Green supporters saw themselves as activists. Looking specifically at pro-peace activism in the last month, 7% of the sample had been to a rally, 6% had volunteered time to a peace group, 6% had attended a meeting, 10% had donated money, and 32% had signed a petition. In all, 64% of respondents had not engaged in any of the five pro-peace behaviours. This non-activist majority included 87% of people who presently supported the war, as well as 96% of people who were presently neutral, and 47% of opponents of the war. On average, also, people did not intend to engage in activism in the next month. This inconsistency between political attitudes and (in)action is very common in political decision-making research.

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 three actors each, the most common being the US/Bush (69%), Iraq/the Iraqi people (44%), the ‘coalition of the willing’ or countries supporting the US (42%), and Australia/Howard (39%). The next most common actors identified were the UK/Blair (19%), the UN (17%), terrorists (16%), and coalition soldiers (11%). The US and coalition soldiers, when listed, were seen as having moderate power to achieve their goals, averaging 7.3 and 7.5/10 respectively. Australia, the UK, and the Coalition were seen as less powerful (5.8, 5.7, and 5.8 respectively), and Iraq and the UN were seen as weaker still (4.3 and 3.6). Interestingly, when people mentioned the terrorists they were rated as relatively powerful (5.9).

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 the total number of actors, nor did attitude predict the likelihood of mentioning any of the eight most commonly listed actors. War supporters tended to rate the US and the Coalition (when mentioned) as more powerful, however.

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). Activists were more likely to specifically mention the Iraqi people as a factor in the conflict. No differences emerged in the likelihood of mentioning any of the other 7 main actors, but activists rated the UN 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 Western countries or politicians that were opposed to the war as having a role to play.

C. EFFECTS OF ORDER ON CONFLICT FRAME AND ACTIVISM. We found that order influenced conflict framing, in that those who got the war frame task first listed more groups than those who completed the task second. But since the order effect wasn’t linked to war attitudes, self-rated activism, and activist behaviour or intentions, this effect could be due to task fatigue rather than an the more interesting interpretation that people simplify representations of the war when it is considered in the context of Australian domestic politics! There
was no effect of framing task order on the pattern or strength of people’s political affiliation, either, which reinforces the interpretation that the order effect changed motivation but didn’t change their political approach.

D. COMPARISON WITH FRAMES STUDY IN 2003. We ran the exact same study last year – the results are online at http://www2.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/wl0603_1.pdf. There were a number of interesting changes in the pattern of results. One of the most striking: overall opposition to the war was similar (60% opposed in both years) but public activism was down this year (e.g., 22% vs 7% had been to a rally in the previous month). Similar numbers of participants as last year had donated money (-10%) or signed petitions (-33%) though, pointing to the importance of considering behaviours that are under people’s control separately from political acts that require a broad mobilization, like rallying.

The way people saw Iraq had changed dramatically, too, from a 4-country frame last year (Iraq vs the US, Australia and the UK) to a messier and more US-focused description this year. Last year, war supporters were more likely to write about the “coalition of the willing” as a group and opponents more likely to write about Australia and the US as two separate actors – but that didn’t happen this year, perhaps because far fewer people saw Australia as playing a role overall. Last year war opponents who were activists were more likely to see the conflict as unequal than people who opposed the war but hadn’t acted - that wasn’t replicated this year, in that everyone saw Iraq as weak. But opponents this year were more likely to specifically mention the Iraqi people as a group in the conflict. The relationship of political attitudes to conflict frames had also changed. Last year, opposition supporters who had completed the war frames task first rated their party affiliation as more important, whereas coalition supporters rated their party less important if they did the war task first. This year, there was no such effect. The main similarities were that in both years war supporters rated the US more powerful, and activist war opponents had more complex representations of the war and were more likely specifically to see anti-war actors as playing a role in the conflict.

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. War supporters tended to rate the US/Coalition as more powerful. Among opponents of the war, activists 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. But the pattern of results had changed quite a bit from one year to the next, pointing to the instability of conflict frames in the context of the changing world environment. Our future research will likely focus on three 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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