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An Ethnographic Study of Antiwar Protestors



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ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic study of the recent antiwar protestors, focusing on the activists' objectives and motivations for their participation in antiwar rallies and addresses any discernable personality types. The overall purpose is typical of "verstehen" sociology, which seeks to understand the world as the subjects understand it. I collected data through a "snowball" networking sample of thirty-four Western Michigan interviewees and observation, both participation and non-participation. In addition, a combined survey of Altemeyer's RWA-scale and the Social Dominance Orientation Scale was administered to participants, but will be analyzed in a later study. A qualitative content analysis was conducted and applied to psycho-sociological theories. Protesters' goals and motivations were broken into two categories: objective and subjective motives, resulting in a general profile of contemporary antiwar protestors.



George Lundskow, Ph.D.
Faculty Mentor

Introduction

On October 26th, 2002, almost 500 Grand Rapids residents and students organized at a local park in disapproval of President Bush's pressures on the United Nations to pursue war with Iraq. These antiwar protestors were not unique to Grand Rapids. They were just a few of thousands of other Americans protesting that evening throughout the nation and millions more throughout the world. On February 15, 2003, the voices began to grow in number, filling the streets with the roars of "No blood for oil," and echoing in a worldwide antiwar protest. On March 20, 2003, America initiated combat on Iraq. Again, demonstrators throughout the U.S., refusing to let their opposition to their government go unheard, organized peace rallies and antiwar protests. Months later, the individuals engaged in the antiwar movement still appear to be active in their opposition to the war with Iraq and maintain involvement both at a personal and public level.

Purpose

As a researcher, my focus will be the antiwar activist. Given that the current war has sparked the largest wave of organized demonstrations against the government since the Vietnam era, my attention is directed toward the individuals involved: What are their objectives and motivations for their participation in antiwar rallies and protests? Essentially, I want to know what it is that inspires them. The overall purpose and goals are typical of "verstehen" sociology in which I seek to see the world the way the antiwar demonstrators see it.

Although beyond the scope of this project, a future expansion would be a comparison with the antiwar protestors of the Vietnam era. Certain similarities may appear obvious such as demonstrations against a perceived unjust war; however, we cannot assume

a direct correlation, both social-psychologically and within the context of their respective American culture and politics, between the present activists and those of roughly thirty years ago.

Method

I used ethnographic methods to develop a general profile of the contemporary antiwar protester. My method for retrieving such information is a three-fold multi-method approach:

1) participation observation as well as non-participation observation in antiwar protests and rallies, 2) intensive interviews with participants and supporters in the recent antiwar movement, and 3) a synthesized forty-three question survey of Bob Altemeyer's Right Wing Authoritarian (RWA) Scale and the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) Scale. For this study, I rely heavily on interviewing as a means to gather information. R.W. Connell (1994) summarizes an "intensive" research as involving the study of people in their social relations. In addition, it "involves the decoding of personal meanings in an extraordinary fine-grained way" (Connell, 1994: 16). Thus, I interviewed subjects using an open-ended questionnaire with a set number of questions that maintained consistency throughout each interview, although the interview was not limited to those questions. The questionnaire is located in the appendix. Goode and Hatt state that interviewing is a "process of social interaction" and that the data collected during an interview are "derived in an interpersonal situation" (Cicourel, 1964: 74). Remembering the importance of this social process, I conducted interviews at the convenience of the subjects, in a location where she or he felt comfortable, in hopes of stimulating spontaneous and open participation. I attended and observed two antiwar rallies, three teach-ins, and two antiwar/peace promotion meetings.

Sampling was a "snowball" type, in which friendships, referrals, and other social networking techniques guided interviewing. I interviewed thirty-four local individuals that lived in or near Grand Rapids from May 8, 2003 to June 30, 2003. I conducted thirty-two interviews because two of the interviews were with married couples. Also, I am not including one individual in the article because he denied real facts, such as the existence of a war in Iraq and his basic perception of reality was significantly distorted, but I am including him in the demographics portion of the study. The farthest that I traveled for an interview was to Holland, Michigan, which is about forty minutes west of Grand Rapids. However, this resident was not from Holland, just staying there for the summer. I define a "local" resident as anyone living within the Western Michigan area.

This research is methodologically similar to other ethnographic studies such as Arlie Russell Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Jeffery Jensen Arnett's *Metal Heads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, and George Lundskow's *Awakening to Uncertain Future: Case Study of the Promise Keepers*. Numerous other examples could be cited and although the exact topic differs in each case, the ethnographic methods are consistent: to understand people and their activity, relevant to their social environment.

Demographics

I gathered about fifty-five hours of discussion; one tape did not record properly due to a mechanical failure. The sample included fifteen white women, one Arab-America woman, and eighteen white males, ranging in age from 18 to 79. There were ten individuals in the 18-29 category, eight in the 30-39 category, five in the 40-49 category, four in the 50-59 category, five

in the 60-69, and two in the 70+ category. As one might expect, all the respondents except for one individual tended to be left-wing liberals, affiliating with the Democratic Party, Green Party, or identified themselves as an independent. Contrary to many stereotypes, the antiwar protestors I interviewed were highly educated. The majority of the interviewees, or 85%, are degree holding; 11% are in the process of getting a degree. Only 4% of the sample did not have a degree.

In addition, many of the respondents have a "worldly" perspective, which was credited to extensive traveling though various countries in Europe, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, the Middle East, and/or South America, both for pleasure and study. It became obvious through my investigations that these experiences abroad influenced the respondents' views. For example, one respondent commented on his recent travels:

A month ago, I was over in Holland and Belgium for a week on vacation – the first time I've been overseas. It's a very different society. You don't see people over there with flags for their country. They also don't have the concept of 'un-American.' I can't imagine meeting someone saying, 'You're un-Belgian!'

Many of the interviewees referenced their experiences abroad, which I believe greatly impacted their antiwar perspective and conclusions.

Their occupations, include but are not limited to the following: student, professor, retired school teacher, business owner, construction worker, playwright, interpreter, peace activist.

Interviews

I asked questions in a semi-structured format, meaning I had a list of pre-determined questions. However, all questions allowed for spontaneous

probing. Before the interview, I allowed respondents to ask me questions or express any concern that they might have about the interview. Usually, subjects asked about my research and my background. For instance, they might ask what school I am attending or why I am conducting this type of research. Some interviewees were more suspicious of me than others because of prior negative experiences with undercover police or invasive interviewers. In general, respondents were welcoming and friendly, often giving me gifts such as a plant, calendar, flyers, magazines, information sheets, articles, or suggested books to read. This behavior reflected their devotion to the antiwar movement and also their desire to give something back to me because I was frequently assumed to be “one of them,” a thinker with similar beliefs. However, interviewees were not asked or required to give me anything.

Since this study involved intensive interviewing, subjects were allowed and encouraged to exhaust a topic before moving on. Subjects were informed that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to, but no one refused to respond to any proposed questions. Although no one overtly objected, the respondents’ names will remain anonymous to insure privacy.

To help the respondents relax, I started most of the interviews with normal conversations, which often naturally lead into respondents divulging information about their involvement with the antiwar movement or their opinions of the war. Inadvertently, respondents would sometimes answer questions that were on the list, but hadn’t been asked yet. In this case, I would probe these areas for clarity. Also, some respondents were lucid in their discussion, while others sometimes had difficulty articulating their feelings. However, for this article I

made an attempt to quote each respondent at least once wherever applicable. Interviews on average took about an hour to an hour and half to complete. My shortest interview was fifteen minutes and the longest was three hours.

Analysis

Consistent with the strengths of ethnographic methods, the primary level of analysis is social-psychological – the interaction of the individual with the group and with the larger issues relevant to an antiwar orientation. Thus, the study does not focus extensively on the movement itself, observable facts or politics of the war with Iraq, nor the relationship of antiwar organizations to other institutions. Although many respondents commented on the aforementioned issues, my goal is not to review the accuracy of the comments.

The actual questions address three main areas: participants’ motivation for protesting, opinions and feelings about the war, and their feelings about President Bush and his administration. These areas are then examined and placed into one of two categories: objective motives or subjective motives. Objective motives are defined as justifications and explanations for being antiwar that are based on overt ideas and goals, which are outside of the subjects and to which a protestor adheres such as an “America-First” ideology, “World Community,” or “Moral Convictions.” Subjective motives are defined as protesters’ internal and emotional explanations for being antiwar from which the protestor gains personal satisfaction. There are three subcategories under subjective motives: Group Support, Proactive, and Social Justice.

In the following sections, I will explore the most prominent objective and subjective themes discovered in the interviews. It is important to note that

the language and choice of wording in the quotations are authentic. In addition, the number of quotations in a section does not imply a predominance of that theme. Responses were chosen because of their capacity to capture specific orientations and motivations. Motivations and goals for each respondent may individually differ from others involved in the movement. For instance, one respondent may fall under the “America-First” ideology and be more proactive than another respondent. This concept is similar to the “salient hierarchy” of motives described by Cicourel (1973).

Antiwar Sentiments and Protestors’ Objective Motives

Use of Force

In general, the antiwar protestors were against the principal of wars, yet a majority of them would not identify with being a pacifist. There were four subjects that called themselves pacifists, but the others did not oppose all forms of force. Instead, they would advocate violence as a last resort. Some try to live according to pacifist principals but admit that such ideals might not be realistic. Here are some responses:

I don’t feel aggression is a solution because it leads to more. I am adverse to policies that disregard international laws and sanctity of human life. This war in particular, and most wars, has this as something that is acceptable.

I am not a pacifist because I don’t think the principals work. I am not opposed to war if it is for self-defense purposes – this (war) had nothing to do with that.

No, not a pacifist because I think there are times when someone might have to use violence or aggression to defend themselves if

they were being attacked, but still a last resort.

No, I wouldn't consider myself a pacifist. War is OK if we are attacked on our own soil, but I wouldn't be pulling the trigger.

I wouldn't call myself a pacifist because it has been perverted in so many ways to be weak. I prefer 'peacism.'

Those who tended to be pacifist were motivated by moral convictions, religious beliefs, or they believed strongly in the pacifist morality. However, one youthful-spirited philosophical man, who identified himself as a "radical pacifist," took a different spin on why he was a pacifist. He commented:

Yes, I am against the war. But war to me is...I don't think the primary war is fought with guns. The primary one is the one fought in the minds of the people. It is an ideological, class war.

Many of the interviewees adhere to their principals and try to live by example. Believing in non-violent resolutions also means living those principals, which include opposing wars. Indeed, some respondents were not opposed to all wars, just the one initiated on Iraq because of strategical issues. Respondents suggested that the war on Iraq in particular aroused more antiwar sentiments than compared to past wars because of the "war hogs" currently in office. A Republican military veteran, who usually is pro-military, opposed the manner in which we pursued war with Iraq. He commented:

We just can't go out and kill the opposition. I liked winning the war, but I don't like the way we went

about it. Military action should be a last resort. We should have tried to cooperate with others or use covert operations. We are not going to have any friends left. We not only have to think about today but about tomorrow.

Another man, who referred to himself as a "middle-class suburban white guy for peace," had a similar reaction to the war with Iraq. He wasn't always against war. In fact, he was supportive of the Gulf War, but credits this to his prior ambivalence. He said:

I am okay with war if it was a direct attack on the US, even though my principals are not supportive of war, but I would have been more understanding. I am convinced that this war happened for economical convenience and politics and generally there is a moral cause attached to rhetoric and patriotic appeal. We could have tried to keep Europe, United Nations, and the US more in harmony with each other. This would have been a much better approach.

Another woman, who did not identify herself as a pacifist, would not completely disagree with all forms of violence if it were in self-defense. This is what she said:

I don't have a problem with war if it is for self-defense, but we have to be on an equal ground. If China came over tomorrow and blasted the heck out of us – that would be a legitimate reason to retaliate.

In general, the antiwar demonstrators' stance on the use of force is consistent throughout the sample – most advocate non-violent resolutions to conflicts and using violence as a last resort while a few identified as strict pacifists.

Three Antiwar Objective Motives

Respondents often expressed frustration, anger, disgust, and sadness when asked why they disagreed with going to war with Iraq. Since most of the protestors did not firmly adhere to pacifist morality, they did not simply object to the war because they believe violence is always wrong. The protestors' reasons for being antiwar varied among the protestors. I have narrowed the protestors' antiwar objective justifications into three categories, which I call "America-First," "World Community," and "Moral Convictions."

America-First Objective Orientation

America-First antiwar protesters object to the war because they believe that the United States already has a lot of social issues in this country, which are not being addressed. They also feel that the U.S.'s militaristic mentality is not sustainable for the future of the country. A forthright, outspoken young college graduate commented on why she was against the war:

There are more problems in our own city. We need to concentrate more inwardly. We need to improve ourselves before we can put our views on others.

She also objected to going to war with Iraq because of the loss of lives. However, she was mainly driven by a "think globally, act locally" mentality. Others opposed the war similarly:

As the war started going on, everyone was consumed with it. Because of the work I do everyday, I deal with phone calls and people with real world, everyday problems; people who are having their kids taken away or can't pay utilities. I still have a job to do trying to help low-income people in Grand Rapids.

The Iraq situation is not unique. We can't monitor the entire world. If we are, where are we going to start? We already have enough problems in this country as it is.

America-First respondents have a deep concern for the future of the U.S. They very much love and value the United States and believe in what the country stands for. War frightens them because they worry about what social and economical impacts it will have on the U.S. years from now. Here are more respondents' objective America-First motives:

I don't like the effect that this war is having on our country. We are now in a worse situation. The war didn't help anything.

I am antiwar because war is not necessary, unsustainable for long term, and is ineffective.

We have created this image around the world as being this actively warring country.

I am a concerned citizen of America. I believe in America's principals, what is written in the constitution, but right now, we are not living to those.

We are a defensive nation; we are not supposed to attack. We are not supposed to take what we are not supposed to have. WWII is a classic example of the U.S. defending ourselves and helping those who need help. This is an American tradition: doing good for others.

I am worried about the direction that our country is taking. We've become very militaristic, barbaric, and fascist.

A retired schoolteacher responded similarly:

We should not resort to war. All the reasons proposed have been unsubstantiated. Don't get me wrong – Saddam was a terrible dictator, but there are many others. Point is, we can't take them all out and make decisions for them...and the lack of complexity of the situation. We have no concept of the history of Iraq. We went to war for oil. We are the 'bulldog' of the world. We are all at risk because we are not understood.

Again, America-First respondents demonstrate that their opposition to the war with Iraq is strongly linked to their devotion, loyalty, and concern for the social and economical future of the United States.

World Community Objective Orientation
Those who hold a World Community view primarily object to the war with Iraq because of the larger social implications the war will have on the Iraqi citizens and the world, the economy of Iraq, and international relationships. These antiwar protesters believe that because of a lack of empirical evidence, such as the existence of weapons of mass destruction, America has set a bad precedence on international relations. Protestors with a World Community view commented:

My major oppositions to the war are that it is illegal, we didn't have the global community's support, and this was not a defensive war. And there is no evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

I'm against this war because it is unnecessary, unethical, and there is no evidence. We have destroyed friendships and it is not fair. This is

a case of the big guy picking on the little guy.

I feel that I am a citizen of the world. I am against the war for many reasons. I think that modern technology of war is not justifiable. All weapons are mass destructive.

I am not only objecting to the war itself, but the context of American foreign policy...this shift to imperialism. This war is a small case in the direction of the American foreign policy.

We are going to destroy ourselves with the kind of weapons that we have. It's just a matter of time. I'm a mother with two kids and I don't see the same life that I had in their future or my kids' children. We're at the top of a slippery slope to the bottom.

The U.S. is hypocritical. We once supported the regime. I think it is best to try to let the Iraqi people free themselves. Our economical sanctions have disabled the Iraqi citizens. And there is no evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

A young activist and organizer encompassed the World Community perspective perfectly. This is what she said:

First being, I don't think it (the war) is a good political move in terms of the United States' foreign policy. It is not diplomatic. Going to war shows we lack diplomacy and it is going to fuel the fire for terrorism. We don't have Asama Bin Laden from Afghanistan. We don't have Saddam. We don't have weapons of mass destruction. We came up empty handed.

War to the World Community group was an objective motive because they believed that a war causes great harm on the world as a whole and has larger social implications on both Iraq and the US. World Community respondents protested the war because they felt there was not enough justifiable evidence to go to war and also contend that this war caused great harm to the Iraq citizens. In addition, they are alarmed about the direction of America's foreign policies.

Morality as an Objective Orientation

Other protesters object to the war based on strong moral convictions. These convictions are tied to religious beliefs, pacifist morality, or simply because they believe killing is wrong despite the circumstance. One man in his thirties expressed a deep concern toward the loss of human lives involved with war, including both Iraqi citizens and American soldiers. He said:

I am adverse to policies that disregard international laws and the sanctity of human life. This war in particular, and most wars, has this as something that is acceptable.

Another respondent, a young female college student, is also adamantly against the war based on her moral convictions. She responded:

People think of war as a last resort, but don't actually do that. It is hardly a last resort. I have a problem with killing anyone for any reason. I just think that it is common sense to know that killing people for whatever reason is wrong.

A grandmother and an activist said something similar:

It suddenly hit me. I saw them (her grandkids) there. That these two,

and all children in the world, are as vulnerable as any soldier in any trench and... I'm sorry... just can't get used to that idea.

A recent organizer and founder of a pacifist club at his school objected to the war based on his religious beliefs and moral convictions. He responded:

I am strongly opposed to any war for moral and religious reasons. I didn't like the war because I thought it was an act of aggression on a small nation. I didn't think it was properly justified, as well.

A woman in her seventies who is a Quaker, retired schoolteacher, and activist had a similar reaction to why she was against the war with Iraq.

We (the Quakers) have a strong testimony against war. What you have to do is remove the causes of war. And removing causes is trying to seek justice, making sure people have homes, food, jobs – not just here in the U.S. but in the global community too.

Some antiwar protesters were against the war because of religious beliefs and/or pacifist morality, while some were against it because of their strong moral commitments and convictions. Antiwar protesters who were objectively motivated to oppose the war did so because they believed adamantly that the killing of humans, regardless of the justifications, is simply not viable, thus, making war a nonnegotiable issue.

Motives for Protesting: Subjective Goals

Group Support and Networking Motivation
Some protestors were also subjectively motivated to protest because of a sense of alienation that they felt from the pro-war sector of the American population

and protesting is a way in which activists can network and meet others who think like them. For example, during interviews when people were asked why they protested, it was very common to hear such comments as "Protests are fun," "I like the people," and "I feel empowered when I go." Protesters often admitted that they did not always feel that protests were immediately effective but that participation helped them "feel better." They commented:

Protesting to me is just a small piece of it. It gives you a boost, gives steam, but I don't actually think that they are effective.

Sometimes I feel crazy and wild and such as feeling of comradeship. And they [the protests] are amicable. You really feel connected with people.

There is such a strong sense of solidarity. Yeah, you get to know the people. And the people are great people. However, protesting is only a small part of what we do. Alone, it would be ineffective.

I stay motivated to protest because of the community, which gives me a lot of encouragement.

One thing that a protest will do is bring together a huge number of people who feel intimidated to express themselves. And this war in particular, they have been told that if they object to the war that they are unpatriotic. And they are afraid to be unpatriotic. And when they see us, it is encouraging to them.

It is healthy and important for people to publicly dissent, despite whether it makes changes. It is personally and socially helpful.

Social change came about because people took to the streets. Protesting is part of movement building.

Another protester, although unique to most respondents, enjoyed protesting because it was “an adrenaline rush.” Simply put, protesting appears to be just as much for the antiwar protestors as for the cause. As one youthful, brightly smiling, longed hair student said, “We did more for ourselves than for the cause... [we] strengthened our unity and solidarity amongst those who are against the war, but we didn’t stop the war.” Most antiwar protesters did confess that they felt protests alone were not effective but that protests created an environment where people with similar feelings could gather and network as well as gain confidence.

Proactive Subjective Motivation

Another subjective antiwar motive is the desire to be proactive. Antiwar protestors not only protest because they object to the war, but also because they have a strong urge to make a stand and to “not sit back and do nothing.” It was important for some protesters to physically be active in concordance with their antiwar sentiments. It was not uncommon to here things such as “I just had to do something,” or “I didn’t want to do nothing.” Some of the respondents offered these reflections:

I got a very constructive feeling protesting by doing something. Protesting was a personal decision – I did this, took time, and did something.

I knew that nothing was going to change, nothing was going to happen, but it wasn’t going to change how I felt.

I protested for myself. I had to make an observable statement, just to say at least I stood up. I don’t want to be seen as one of the others – an intellectually lazy nationalist.

Antiwar protesters that are motivated by a strong desire to be proactive felt this way because they believe that many Americans have taken a passive role in the politics involving the war with Iraq and strongly dislike that. Thus, they find it insulting to be seen as one of the “intellectually lazy” Americans. These people find that through physical presence and action they not only feel better about themselves, but that they have some type of positive influence on the war and in the antiwar movement.

Seeking Social Justice and Educating as a Subjective Motive

The third subcategory is based on protesters’ desire to seek social justice. In this subcategory, protestors are motivated to protest because they possess a fervent sense of justice and believe that it is their duty to fulfill this judiciousness. For instance, another retired schoolteacher, who has been involved in the peace movements for over fifty years, had a difficult time responding to why she protested. In her case, protesting was a way of life for her. It was something that she had been drawn to at an early age and it has become an ingrained part of her life. This is what she said:

I often say I do this because I have to do it. It is also because of my political view and faith. I hope that I will make a difference. It’s what’s inside of me. I’ve spent the last forty-fifty years of my life living as I believe is right.

Another antiwar demonstrator had a similar experience. When she was asked why she protested, she told me that she

couldn’t remember when she wasn’t involved in some social cause and that she stays motivated by her “sense of justice,” as well as her experiences in the Middle East. This is what she said:

I morally cannot protest. I’ve been like this my whole life. I have had a great sense of justice since I was young. I’ve been in hundreds of protests – I couldn’t even count. I’ve been doing this for forty years... and the innocent Iraqi citizens that are being killed and we are responsible for that. I can’t turn my back and live with myself if I didn’t protest.

Another part of why antiwar protesters protested, in addition to seeking social justice, is their need and desire to educate people. Thus, their involvement is not only limited to holding signs on the streets. As it has been stated before, many protesters have acknowledged that protesting alone is an ineffective tool for making large social and/or policy changes, but protests do bring attention to an issue and also create a discourse. These respondents reported:

Demonstrations are important and hard to ignore. They are good for bringing attention. In terms of policy change, they are a component, but not the end all be all. I don’t have faith in demonstrations for the answers, just a component.

Social change came about because people took to the streets. They are part of the movement building – one way to communicate to power structures – we are not going to get run over.

My role as an activist is to teach and to represent a different version of an American in the Middle East. I am a justice promoter.

At least I am not killing people. I am doing the right, just thing. I have a sense of acting from principal, no matter what. And afterwards, or twenty years from now that we acted with more decency than our government because I opposed. They perpetrated.

While the goal of the protesters in this subcategory was objective – to stop the war – their motive also remains subjective in the sense that they sought an outlet, protesting, as a means to feel better about themselves, to be proactive, and to seek justice for a cause that they believed to be wrong. Just as one man, who identified himself as a “peacenik” said, “Protesting is fun and invigorating, but it’s as much about the people going out and protesting and their own need to do something as it is about communicating.” The subjective motives for protesting encompass a variety of reasons.

Conclusions

Protesters have long carried a negative stigma. During my research, I was often asked why I was conducting my research on antiwar protesters and if I had any hypothesis as to what “type of people” they would be, implying that this was an already understood population. Prior to my research, I didn’t want to have any predetermined hypothesis of what antiwar demonstrators were going to be like. Instead, I wanted them to be able to tell their stories and to tell me who they are instead of letting mass media’s influence and old stereotypes affect this study’s perception of antiwar protesters.

Recent research has shown that protesters tend to be white, middle-class, and educated, unlike the “dumb, hippy throw-backs” stereotype that is often credited to them. For example, research conducted by Swank (1997)

examined the social backgrounds of Gulf War protesters and suggested that 91% of his participants had been to college, which is similar to my respondents’ educational attainment. In addition, Swank showed that Gulf War protesters tended to have “liberal perspectives,” just as this study demonstrated the same about the Iraq War protesters. However, it is not conclusive whether the Iraq War protesters and the Gulf War protesters had any more similarities because Swank’s study and my study examine different aspects of the protesters.

It is also important to note that the new antiwar movement is not an extension of the Vietnam protests or an expression of sixties nostalgia. In fact, unlike the Iraq War protesters involved in my study, Vietnam War supporters were disproportionately college educated (Loewen, 1995). At the beginning of the Vietnam War, supporters tended to be educated because they had more of a “vested interest” and identified more with American society and politics than their less educated counterparts. James W. Loewen suggests this theory is plausible because educated people are more likely to be economically successful and show allegiance to the society that aided in their success, while those in the lower classes are more likely to be critical of the government (1995: 301). One may ask, “Why was this phenomenon not the same for protesters of the Iraq War?” Since I did not inquire about my participants’ income levels, I cannot conclude they had similar “vested interests” as the educated Vietnam War supporters had. Perhaps what makes Iraq War protesters different from Vietnam War protesters is dependent upon the antiwar protesters’ perceptions of how the war with Iraq was covered in mainstream media.

In addition to the long-term, negative consequences they feel the war with Iraq

carries against the U.S. and the world, the new antiwar protesters also seek to address the issue that the antiwar perspective received too little, inaccurate, or incomplete media coverage. For instance, one protester commented on the media’s influence on the perceptions of antiwar protesters. She said:

I feel that we have a corporate media that is often times owned by weapons manufacturers and they control how we are portrayed. Yes, we are rational people. We are Americans and we are patriots. We want to see our country go in a positive direction and be responsible for the actions of our country.

The Iraq War protesters felt their side was not being heard and their opinions were discarded because of what they perceive as corporate media guided by interests other than an accurate portrayal and coverage of the relevant issues surrounding the war.

My research discovered that antiwar protesters oppose the war for various reasons and are not simply adhering to their moral or pacifist convictions. Instead, we can see that antiwar protesters struggle within a pro-war context and prioritize their lives differently in order to uphold their antiwar sentiments in a manner that they feel to be productive and active. They feel alienated from pro-war Americans because of a “differing in opinions.” This war in particular, they suggest, fueled these feelings by the creation of a catalyst approach to revitalizing patriotism and segregating the American public into two groups, for or against America, based on war sentiments. Thus, protesters found refuge in protests, social support, and a network of comrades within the movement and at rallies. Their motives

were both objective and goal oriented, as well as subjective and internally driven.

Protesters admit that demonstrating is not “the be all and end all,” but rather one step in the dissension. Because of America’s history of ignoring or excluding antiwar protesters in the mainstream war discourse (Loewen, 1995), the people resorted to taking to the streets because they felt that they were not being heard. It was as if their valiant efforts to get their ideas and beliefs out through other manners such as letter writing and speaking, went to no avail. Whether it was the civil rights movement or the women’s movement, activists and organizers have used protesting as a technique to gain attention for social issues and maintain solidarity amongst the protesters. This movement was not unique in this aspect.

Moreover, this study proposes more questions. For instance, aside from

protesters motives and goals for protesting, why has there been a switch from uneducated antiwar supporters to educated antiwar supporters?

Statistically, racial minorities and the uneducated participate in protests less often. Is there an explanation for this? Is there an element of luxury involved with protesting or do certain people prioritize how to express their antiwar sentiments differently? And why in a democratic society, do some protesters feel their government does not hear them? These are sociological questions that should be addressed.

In his book *Sociological Imagination* ([1959] 2000) C. Wright Mills proposed that social scientists should try to provide leadership and imagination to ask sociological questions. Concordantly, sociology has a role to be engaged in vital current issues and has something to contribute to society and politics through studies such as mine. Although it blends activism with science, such an

overlap is unavoidable if we want to work toward social change.

This study focuses on events that are still unfolding. Should the war expand or the occupation of Iraq continue, numerous new issues will arise. For instance, if the government reinstates the draft or the military federal budget expands, the movement will likely extend beyond the populations in the current research. Thus, this project is a beginning and not a definitive conclusion.

Appendix

Interview Questions

- 1) What do you do for a living?
- 2) Where do you live?
- 3) What would you call yourself in regard to your antiwar sentiments?
- 4) Why did you not like the war? Can you see another situation where your ideas about the war might have changed?
- 5) Do you know someone who was in favor of the war? If so, please characterize them. How do you feel about them?
- 6) Are your antiwar feelings related to political ideas, from your heart, family upbringing, or religious convictions?
- 7) What political party do you tend to vote for and why?
- 8) How did you get involved in protesting?
- 9) How many protests have you gone to?
- 10) Do you feel your government listened to the protests?
- 11) What do you think were the Bush Administration's justifications for going to war?
- 12) What do you believe to be a driving force for you to protest? What keeps you motivated?
- 13) How do you feel about your president? Why is Bush so popular?
- 14) Is the war over?
- 15) Any other comments?

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