

## **Age of Stupid research summary**

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### **Sample**

The first two questionnaires (Q1 and Q2) were answered by 241 people at the Filmhouse in March 2009. The first follow-up (Q3) was completed by 162 people (67.2% of the initial sample) in June 2009 and the final survey (Q4) was completed by 104 (43.2% of the original sample) a year later. Respondents were most likely to be aged 25-34, with other age groups fairly evenly represented. The sample was skewed towards women, and respondents were more highly educated and more likely to be employed in managerial/professional occupations than the general population.

The people who answered the questionnaires tended to have a very high level of concern about climate change even before they saw *The Age of Stupid*. In the year prior to seeing it, 61.8% of the initial sample had donated money to “a local or national group that campaigns partly/wholly about climate change/global warming”, and 36.1% stated that they were “actively involved (e.g. writing letters/attending events/taking personal action)” in such a group. For 60.9%, concern about climate change was the main reason for coming to see the film. The people who stayed in the survey all the way through were even more motivated and engaged with the issue than the initial sample.

### **Changes in concern, motivation to act, etc**

Immediately after the film, people expressed more concern about climate change, more motivation to take action, a stronger belief that they can do something about climate change, and less agreement with the statement “I do as much as I can about climate change/global warming”. The film didn’t seem to change how much people felt they knew about what to do to cut their carbon emissions, or affect fears about whether humanity will do enough to prevent catastrophic climate change. However, the levels of concern, motivation etc had gone back to the pre-film levels by the time of the follow-up surveys, and concern was actually a little lower on the final follow-up. Belief that it’s worth lobbying politicians about climate change had fallen by Q3 and fell even further by Q4.

### **Beliefs about catastrophe and responsibility**

A large majority of the sample believed that there is a significant possibility of the kind of devastation shown in the film, by 2055. Most believe that at least some responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions lies with individuals. The overall message people seemed to take from the film could be summed up as “Do something NOW!”

### **Action/behavioural changes**

The first follow-up questionnaire asked about 20 actions that people might have taken in the areas of awareness raising and lobbying politicians, home energy, transport, and food. Responses are shown in the table overleaf. In general, people were already doing the simpler/cheaper things and didn’t start doing the more costly/difficult things, but for every action there was at least one person who said they had started doing it, or were doing it more, because of seeing the film. In fact, 60% of people who answered the follow-up questionnaire attributed at least one action they are taking (or doing more of), to the effect of having seen the film. The main barriers to change/action were lack of time for awareness raising/lobbying, cost for home energy improvements, and lack of options relating to travel and food.

**Responses on first follow-up questionnaire (Q3) to multiple-choice questions about specific behaviours** (the most common response to each statement is highlighted in bold)

	Not done/doing	Done/doing more, due to film	Done/doing but not due to film	
<i>Awareness raising/lobbying politicians</i>	%	%	No. <sup>a</sup>	%
Trying to raise awareness among people I know	14.2	27.8	(45)	<b>58.0</b>
Sent message to politician(s) - last 12 months	<b>53.7</b>	12.3	(20)	34.0
Actively involved in campaigning group	<b>59.6</b>	4.3	(7)	36.0
Attended rally outside Scottish parliament	<b>81.4</b>	7.5	(12)	11.2
Calculated 'carbon footprint' - last 12 months	<b>65.0</b>	6.3	(10)	28.8
<i>Home energy use</i>				
Installed low energy light bulbs – most/all lights	5.6	6.2	(10)	<b>88.3</b>
Turned down heating/cut time heating on	3.7	9.3	(15)	<b>87.0</b>
Washing clothes at 30°C (usually/always)	26.9	10.0	(16)	<b>63.1</b>
Drying clothes on rack (usually/always)	6.2	3.1	(5)	<b>90.7</b>
Installed more insulation/draught-proofing	<b>55.9</b>	2.5	(4)	41.6
Changed to 'green electricity' supplier/tariff	<b>64.4</b>	4.4	(7)	31.3
Generating energy through home renewables	<b>93.2</b>	1.2	(2)	5.6
<i>Travel</i>				
Cut down/avoid driving	6.8	11.7	(19)	<b>81.5</b>
Car sharing/car club (leave blank if never drive)	<b>66.9</b>	0.8	(1)	32.2
Planning/taking holidays without flying this year	<b>42.6</b>	17.9	(29)	39.5
Decided to reduce/stop holiday flying long-term	<b>40.6</b>	21.9	(35)	37.5
<i>Food</i>				
Avoiding buying bottled water	14.2	15.4	(25)	<b>70.4</b>
Buying more local produce	12.3	17.9	(29)	<b>69.8</b>
Reduced meat consumption/eat vegetarian/vegan	27.8	8.6	(14)	<b>63.6</b>
Composting food waste	<b>49.1</b>	2.5	(4)	48.4

<sup>a</sup> Number of respondents who attributed behavioural changes to the film

### The longer-term picture

The responses to questions on the final follow-up in June 2010 about actions being taken raise concerns about the reliability of the data. Taken at face value, there is some evidence that those who started taking action as a result of the film generally continued it, and that there may be a small 'late starter' effect, with some people taking time to take action as a result of the film, so that it might have had a bigger impact that appeared by the time of the first follow-up. However, there were significant numbers of people who said on Q3 that they were taking an action but not because of the film, but on Q4 stated that they started/increased doing it because of the film. This suggests that participants attributed action to the impact of the film in retrospect that in fact they were already taking. It's therefore not possible to draw reliable conclusions about the impact of the film on behaviour from these data.

One thing the final follow-up did allow me to look at was whether people's intentions about flying, stated on Q3, were carried out. I found that there was no correlation between intentions formed as a result of seeing the film and actual reported behaviour when it came to taking holidays involving flying.

If you have any questions about this, or would like a copy of the paper that I've had published in the academic journal *Global Environmental Change* 21(1):177-187, (which includes discussion of these results) please email me: r.a.howell@sms.ed.ac.uk. I have submitted a second paper, about the final follow-up, which is as much about the difficulties of conducting longitudinal studies of behaviour as about the results, and I will also be able to send out copies of that when it's published if you're interested.