

Faulty Towers of Belief:

Part I.

Demolishing the Iconic Psychological Barriers to 9/11 Truth

By

Laurie A. Manwell

“It is as hard for the good to suspect evil, as it is for the evil to suspect good.”

- Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Statesman, orator, writer (106-43 BCE)*

“If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line between good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

- Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

“When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love has always won. There have been murderers and tyrants, and for a time they can seem invincible. But in the end they always fall. Think of it, always”

-Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Political and spiritual leader (1869-1948)*

Imagine for a moment that you are trying to discuss the 9/11 truth movement with a family member, friend, or even a colleague, and are met with remarkable resistance (of course if you are reading this, you most likely do not need to use your imagination). On the rare occasion, perhaps you've heard, "Hmm, that's interesting, tell me more." More likely though, merely the mention of alternative theories of the events has of 9/11 drawn dismissal, joking, or even ire: "I don't listen to conspiracy theories," "Yeah I've heard some really crazy stories that the government did it," or "How dare you mock the victims of 9/11!" You begin to wonder, why are some people less willing to examine all of the events of 9/11 than others? Is it really because they are obstinate or in denial? Is it because they are apathetic or judiciously lazy? Or perhaps is it because they are uninformed or purposely misinformed? *Are there any other explanations?* These are all very important questions to be explored if all of the *properly investigated facts and evidence* of 9/11 are ever going to reach the forefront of public consciousness.

Hence, the purpose of this article is to review relevant scientific studies of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that arise in response to information that contradicts the deep-seated beliefs that people have about 9/11. If we can better understand the reasons why people are not willing to investigate and evaluate other possibilities we should be better able to proceed in a more informed manner and engage others in more productive discussions of the factual events of September 11th 2001. We need to find ways to encourage awareness of *all of the events* related to 9/11, along with open discussion and debate with as many people as possible – as soon as possible. There are many people who, if they could recognize and overcome some of the psychological blocks to exploring alternate accounts of the events of 9/11, could greatly contribute to

the impetus for a new and truly independent international investigation. In fact, after hundreds of hours of careful consideration, this is how the author was able to reach such conclusions herself – by the willingness to explore her own psychological biases and errors in evaluating the events of 9/11, and thus to be better able to objectively evaluate the evidence. To be able to report information as a behavioral neuroscientist, I rely on the research method, but as a person who is just as susceptible to bias and error in reasoning as everyone else, I must also be vigilant that my worldviews are always examined alongside my scientific views:

We tend to resolve our perplexity arising out of the experience that other people see the world differently than we see it ourselves by declaring that those others, in consequence of some basic intellectual and moral defect, are unable to see things “as they really are” and to react to them “in a normal way.” We thus imply, of course, that things are in fact as we see them and that our ways are the normal ways. (Ichheiser, 1949, p. 39).

Attitudes as Barriers to Objective Evaluations

One of the major barriers to objective discussion of the events of 9/11 are previously formed attitudes. An *attitude* is basically a compilation of all of the thoughts, feelings, and actions a person may have about something, whether it is a person, place or thing, including experiences, events and ideas. Not only do attitudes regarding the official government account of 9/11 present significant obstacles to open discussion, but all of the attitudes a person has about anything and everything have the potential to strongly influence his or her evaluation of the evidence. For example, attitudes regarding

patriotism, government, the media, science, and even religion can all impact on a person's ability to make reasoned judgments and decisions about the events of 9/11, even if they are not aware that such attitudes are influencing them.

Research on the role of attitudes in evaluating information has revealed a complex interaction between thoughts (*cognitions*), feelings (*affect*), and actions (*behavior*) (for review, see Tesser and Martin, 1996). For example, one's beliefs that another person is safe may lead one to feel secure in approaching that person, and thus interact with him or her in a positive way. Alternatively, one's beliefs that another person is dangerous may elicit fear, and thus lead one to avoid any interaction with that person. Similarly, one can feel safe or fearful in approaching a subject of discussion, such as September 11th 2001. Each facet – thoughts, feelings or behaviors - has the potential to change any of the others. That people want to maintain congruency between these three facets is not surprising. Being aware of inconsistencies in one's thoughts and actions can cause inner conflict and emotional tension, which for many people may feel like a loss of control.

One widely known way of maintaining consistency between these three facets is called *cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957). For example, if you work for a government institution because you believe strongly in democracy and government by the people, but have recently discovered that some of your colleagues are using the rule of law for personal gain, you would likely experience inner conflict and tension between these beliefs. In order to resolve this conflict, or at least reduce the tension you feel, you could voice your concerns, possibly ending up as a “whistleblower,” and likely even losing your job. Alternatively, you could change your opinion on the matter in one of two ways: either you were wrong about your strong beliefs in democracy, or you were wrong in

your beliefs that your colleagues had done something to violate the rule of law. *The attitude that is the weakest is the one most vulnerable to change* (Petrocelli et al., 2007), which means that in this situation, you would most likely change your mind regarding the most recently formed belief about your colleagues, as opposed to your long-standing belief about government. Thus, you might decide that nothing was done that wasn't necessary, so that essentially, you can look the other way without feeling guilty.

Although most people choose to change their beliefs, which is the most effortless option, some do not, as exemplified by the case of researcher Dr. Jeffery Wigand and the tobacco industry.¹ Upon discovering that his employer Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation was intentionally manipulating the effect of nicotine in cigarettes, he exposed the company's practice of "impact boosting" in the mainstream media, was fired, testified in court, was constantly harassed, and even subjected to death threats because of his actions. With respect to 9/11-related events, there have been many "whistleblowers" who, rather than change their beliefs, chose instead to publicly expose the problems they encountered in their respective fields of expertise. Among the hundreds of people voicing their objections to the official account of 9/11, the following people are included: former FBI Translator Sibel Edmonds,² U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney,³ Bill Doyle

¹ Dr. Wigand's interview on *60 Minutes* with CBS correspondent Mike Wallace (Feb. 4, 1996): "WALLACE: Last August we talked with Jeffrey Wigand, previously the \$300,000 research chief at Brown & Williamson. He is the highest-ranking executive ever to reveal what goes on behind the scenes at the highest level of a tobacco company. WIGAND: We're in a nicotine-delivery business. WALLACE: And that's what cigarettes are for? WIGAND: Most certainly. It's a delivery device for nicotine." [<http://www.jeffreywigand.com/insider/60minutes.html>] (see also *The Insider*, with Russell Crowe and Al Pacino, 1999) [http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=181097]

² *Sibel Edmonds: Lawyers try to gag FBI worker over 9/11*. "A former translator for the FBI with top-secret security clearance says she has provided information to the panel investigating the 11 September attacks which proves senior officials knew of al-Qa'ida's plans to attack the US with aircraft months before the

and Bob McIlvaine,⁴ Ellen Mariani and Attorney Philip Berg,⁵ former U.K. Government Minister Michael Meacher,⁶ former U.S. Director of Advanced Space Programs Dr. Robert Bowman,⁷ media critic Barrie Zwicker,⁸ former German Minister of Defense and

strikes happened.” London Independent, April 27, 2004.
[<http://www.prisonplanet.tv/articles/april2004/042704lawyersgag.html>]
[http://www.prisonplanet.com/Pages/230904_edmonds.html]

³ Representative McKinney held a congressional briefing on Capitol Hill on July 22, 2005, the first anniversary of the release of the 9/11 Commission Report to address outstanding issues regarding the September 11, 2001, attacks. Press Release, Office of Representative McKinney. See also, *Jones, R.L. (2003). “Black Hawk” Down: Cynthia McKinney, America’s War on Terror, and the rise of Bushism, The Black Scholar, 32: 27-36.* [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Cynthia_McKinney]
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynthia_McKinney]

⁴ Bill Doyle and Bob McIlvaine recently filed a petition with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) seeking correction of inaccurate factual statements and analysis in NIST’s reports on the destruction of the Twin Towers. Mr. McIlvaine, an outspoken 9/11 truth activist, lost his son Bobby when the World Trade Centers were destroyed. [<http://georgewashington.blogspot.com/2007/04/911-family-members-file-petition-with.html>]. Bill Doyle is the head of the *Coalition of 9/11 Families* and lost his own son Joey in the collapse of the twin towers. “*Representative Of Largest 9/11 Families Group Says Government Complicit In Attack Tells radio host 9/11 Commission a sham, “cover-up beyond belief”*: The representative of the largest group of 9/11 families says that the official version of events is a fallacy and that the NORAD stand down and evidence of incendiary devices used to bring down the towers amount to government complicity in the attacks - a conclusion shared by half of the 9/11 families he represents... Doyle also spoke out on establishment charities withholding large portions of donations from 9/11 families and how 9/11 whistleblowers have been punished meanwhile individuals who facilitated the attacks were rewarded.” (July 8, 2006) [<http://prisonplanet.com/articles/july2006/080706governmentcomplicit.htm>]

⁵ Mrs. Mariani, whose husband was on United Airlines Flight 175, and represented by former Deputy Attorney General of Pennsylvania Philip Berg, is suing the Bush White House over the Sept. 11th Attacks under the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act. Complaint available at: [<http://nancho.net/911/mariani.html>]

⁶ BBC World Service: Former UK Government Minister speaks out about the standdown of NORAD on September 11th, PNAC (Project for a New American Century) and the pre-planned wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Guardian, September 5, 2003. (see also PNAC homepage and *Rebuilding America’s Defenses* at [<http://www.newamericancentury.org/>]
[<http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>]

⁷ Dr. Robert Bowman is also a former United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel with over 100 combat missions in Vietnam and holds a Ph.D. in Aeronautics and Nuclear Engineering from the California Institute of Technology. He is currently working towards a new independent 9/11 investigation and impeachment of US President George W. Bush: “I’m an old interceptor pilot, I know the drill, I’ve done it. I

former Minister of Technology Andreas von Bülow,⁹ and most notably, former FBI Counterterrorism expert John O’Neill,¹⁰ who was killed in the WTC on September 11, 2001.

Most laypersons would agree with research showing that attitudes influence a person’s evaluation of a subject – whether it be an idea or another person – and that the stronger the attitude, the greater influence it will have in evoking a positive or negative evaluation (Fazio et al., 1986; Fazio and Williams, 1986; Bargh et al., 1992). However, the types of reasoning processes that laypersons believe they use when evaluating information are not necessarily the processes that they actually use. Research repeatedly shows that what people say they are doing, and what they are actually doing, are often

know how long it takes, I know the rules... and... critics on the government story on 9/11 have said: "Well, they knew about this, and they did nothing". That's not true. If our government had done nothing that day, and let normal procedure be followed, those planes, wherever they were, would have been intercepted, the Twin Towers would still be standing and thousands of dead Americans would still be alive...*9/11 was their new Pearl Harbor.*" *American Scholars Symposium: 9/11 and the Neo-Con Agenda*, June 2006, L.A. California.[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKoqEQ7hb_4]

⁸ Barrie Zwicker is an award-winning Canadian journalist, documentary producer, writer, and one of the first in the mainstream press to go public with his research on the events of 9/11. He produced *The Great Conspiracy: The 9/11 News Special You Never Saw* and wrote *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-up of 9/11*. [http://www.fromthewilderness.com/free/ww3/091106_official_conspiracy.shtml]. "In his work, Zwicker contends that fear was used to control the public after 9/11, and states that the "War on Terrorism" is a public control mechanism. He also analyses the military breakdown on 9/11 and claims that the president and his aides acted entirely inappropriately that day. Throughout, mainstream media is accused of being either compliant or complicit with a cover-up. Zwicker followed this with an additional documentary entitled, *Deep Complicity, 9/11 and the Media*, released in 2004." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barrie_Zwicker]

⁹ Discussed in von Bülow’s book, *Die CIA und der 11. September: Internationaler Terror und die Rolle der Geheimdienste (The CIA and the 11th of September: International Terror and the Role of the Secret Service* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2003).

¹⁰ John O’Neil was “the investigator who had resigned from the FBI [on August 22, 2001] after having his attempts to investigate al-Qaeda obstructed. On September 10, the day after Masood’s assassination, O’Neill moved into his new office in the North Tower of the WTC, where he had become director of security, and on 9/11 he was one of the people killed. On the night of September 10, he had reportedly told a colleague: “We’re due for something big. I don’t like the way things are lining up in Afghanistan.” In *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions about the Bush Administration and 9/11*, by David Ray Griffin.

two very different things (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977a/b; Gilbert et al., 1989; Krull, 1993). For example, when students are given a positive introduction to an instructor, they respond more favorably than when given a negative introduction to the same instructor. Yet, both groups give similar reasons for their conclusions (summarized in Tesser and Martin, 1996):

As might be expected, subjects who had heard the warm introduction reported liking the instructor more than did subjects who had heard the cold introduction. Moreover, subjects with the warm introduction characterized the instructor's accent and mannerisms as charming, whereas those with the cold introduction characterized the accent and mannerisms as annoying. The most interesting part, though, was the subjects' explanations. Subjects who liked the instructor said they did so in part because of his quaint mannerisms and accent, whereas those who disliked the instructor said they did so in part because of his quaint mannerisms and accent. In other words, the subjects' overall evaluations as well as *their evaluations* of the instructor's mannerisms and accent *were a function of the warm/cold introduction*. Yet, *the subjects interpreted the mannerisms and the accent as the causes* of their evaluations. The moral: we don't always evaluate things for the reasons we think we do. [italics added]

In fact, research shows that most of the psychological *processes* that are used in day-to-day reasoning and decision making are typically unconscious, even though people can consciously report on the *contents* of their thoughts and judgments (Festinger, 1957; Nisbett and Wilson, 1977a/b; Kunda, 1987; Dunning et al., 1989; Ditto and Lopez, 1992; Wilson and Brekke, 1994; Lieberman et al., 1994; Dawson et al., 2002; Pronin et al.,

2004). Thus, in evaluating the events of 9/11, we need to keep in mind that there are many factors that influence our judgments, including previously formed attitudes and beliefs, many of which are resistant to change, and some of which we may not even be aware of at the time of the evaluation.

Automatic Activation of Attitudes and the Antecedents of Action

How much conscious, intentional control then does an individual have over the processes that govern his or her decisions and behaviors? In a review of the automaticity of mental processes, Bargh and Chartrand (1999) present a strong case that people have very little conscious control over most of their moment-to-moment psychological lives. Specifically, they argue “that most of a person’s everyday life is determined not by their conscious intentions and deliberate choices but by mental processes that are put into motion by features of the environment and that operate outside of conscious awareness and guidance” (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). Studies of information processing commonly distinguish between processes that are conscious (i.e., largely voluntary) and those that are automatic (i.e., largely involuntary) (e.g., Posner and Snyder, 1975; Schneider and Shiffrin, 1977; Shiffrin and Schneider, 1977). Conscious processes are those which: a) we are aware of, b) we intend (i.e., derived from an act of will), c) require effort, and d) can be controlled at some point during their occurrence (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). Although there exists far less consensus on what constitutes automatic mental processes,¹¹ they can be broadly described as those processes which: a) free a

¹¹ Automatic processes are generally defined as processes which occur effortlessly, unconsciously, and/or involuntarily and which, once initiated, run to completion without conscious monitoring (Posner and Snyder, 1975; Neuman, 1984; Carr, 1992; Bargh, 1989). Although automatic processes are considered ballistic in the sense that they will run to completion in the absence of intervention, it is

person's limited attentional capacity, b) can occur without intention, c) can occur outside of conscious awareness, d) are involuntary or uncontrollable, and e) are instantaneous (Miller, 1956; Kahneman, 1973; Posner and Snyder, 1975; Neuman, 1984; Bargh, 1989, 1994).

Regarding the mental processes that guide behavior, many studies have also shown that a person can be manipulated outside of conscious awareness. For example, people can be unconsciously manipulated by another party into acting either prosocially (i.e., increasing feelings of self-worth results in people being more helpful to strangers) (Brown and Smart, 1991) or antisocially (i.e., threats to self-esteem can elicit aggressive behavior towards others) (Bushman and Baumeister, 1998). Manipulating behavior, through manipulating thoughts and feelings, can have profound consequences in the real world. For example, people who have had their subjective sense of equanimity violated by images of a natural disaster, such as the Tsunami in south-east Asia in December 2004, and then reminded of such images, are more likely to engage in helping behaviors to benefit others, such as donating money and volunteering (Grietemeyer et al., 2006). In comparison, people who have had their beliefs in a "fair and just world" strongly challenged, such as by the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001, and then reminded of the event, are more likely to report more distress and significantly greater desires for revenge (Kaiser et al., 2004). Furthermore, New York residents who continued to report greater distress (e.g., being angry, suspicious, scared, and avoiding certain cities and events) a year after the attacks, also displayed a greater willingness to surrender some

possible to "derail" some automatic processing by simple manipulations such as diverting attention (Besner et al., 1997; Manwell et al., 2004).

of their civil liberties when *merely prompted* to discuss the events of 9/11 (Greenberg et al., 2004). More recently, in a U.S. national field experiment, people who were led to reflect on angry emotions, instead of feelings of sadness, made more causal attributions for the attacks on 9/11, claiming it was because of specific people (e.g., Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, Bill Clinton, and “the terrorists”) or specific events (e.g., world fanaticism and violence, religious groups, and weak foreign governments) (Small et al., 2006):

For example, sadness triggers active, deliberate [or intentional] thought (Alloy and Abramson, 1979; Wenzlaff et al., 1988; Gleicher and Weary, 1991; Bodenhausen et al., 2000; Ambady and Gray, 2002), whereas anger triggers relatively heuristic [or stereotypic] thought (Lerner et al., 1998; Tiedens and Linton, 2001). In a direct comparison of these two negative emotions, sad people used more systematic, detail-orientated strategies than did angry people, including relying less on stereotypes and other heuristic cues (Bodenhausen et al., 1994).

Thus, prompting (also known as *priming*) people with reminders of 9/11-related events can significantly influence their behavior, which in turn has the potential to interfere with objective analysis when presented with facts that do not support the official account. Discussions of the events of 9/11, then, will always have the potential to be dominated by strong emotions which can block reasoned judgment. For example, even arousing people’s anger evokes more attributions directed at others, such as thoughts focusing on blame and justice (Lazarus, 1991; Small et al., 2006), whereas arousing

sadness leads to more attributions about situations, such as focusing on how to improve matters (Bodenhausen et al., 1994; quoted from Small et al., 2006):

People clearly felt and may still feel many emotions about the [9/11] attacks, whose salience may vary when the time comes to make a judgment. For example, anger may be primed as a result of an angry political speech; sadness may be primed when reading a newspaper obituary. Furthermore, specific emotions may be mitigated by certain political actions, such as suppressing images of dead and wounded soldiers. Our results suggest that [people's] attributions will depend on the specific emotion that dominates. Namely, evoking sadness may reduce the number of causal factors people blame, relative to evoking anger....A focus on causes might prompt a desire for actions targeting offenders, such as retaliation. Alternatively, a focus on the loss might prompt actions targeting victims, such as healing.

Even though people believe that they are making informed and rational judgments regarding the events of 9/11, research suggests otherwise. For example, such judgments may be based upon faulty mental processes that are influenced by emotions triggered by both conscious and unconscious reminders of the attacks on 9/11. Taken together, these studies strongly suggest that there will always be inherent “blocks” to discussing the events of 9/11. This is particularly true when the facts in question challenge a person's worldviews and attitudes or provoke emotions that can alter decision-making processes.

Perception and Attention: Objectivity Resides in the Eye of the Beholder

As we can see, attitudes and perceptions provide critical links between our external environment and our behavior, and that those links, whether we are consciously aware of them or not, can be entirely automatic (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). In a classic experiment, Berkowitz (1984, 1997) demonstrated this link using a model that examined the effects of media upon individual behavior. Berkowitz (1984) was able to show that perceiving the aggressiveness of an actor in a movie or television show increased the tendency for the viewer to subsequently act in an aggressive manner. He surmised that the mechanism by which this occurred was the perceiver's own behavioral representations of aggressiveness being activated in a nonconscious manner. However, Berkowitz (1984) emphasized that "aggression is in the mind of the beholder," noting that an event will not activate aggression-associated thoughts unless the perceiver labels what he or she saw as an aggressive act (see also Berkowitz and Alioto, 1973; Donnerstein and Berkowitz, 1983). Considering that the events of 9/11 were aggressive and violent acts in the extreme, constant reminders of these attacks upon the U.S. and the angry, retaliatory reactions of some people reported daily in the mainstream American media, *without equal representation of the many other reactions such as sadness, restraint, or even forgiveness*, it quite plausible that many people imitate the more aggressive reactions than the more restrained reactions. Again, automatic activation of anger and aggressive reactions can prevent people from objectively discussing 9/11-related events and making informed and reasoned decisions. For rational thinking to reemerge, a period of "cooling off" is needed. Yet, on a societal level, this has not happened in the years since 9/11, with the growing culture of fear promulgated by the

current U.S. administration's "war on terror," as recently warned by former national security adviser Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski¹² (2007):

The "war on terror" has created a culture of fear in America. The Bush administration's elevation of these three words into a national mantra since the horrific events of 9/11 has had a pernicious impact on American democracy, on America's psyche and on U.S. standing in the world. Using this phrase has actually undermined our ability to effectively confront the real challenges we face from fanatics who may use terrorism against us. The damage these three words have done -- *a classic self-inflicted wound* -- is infinitely greater than any wild dreams entertained by the fanatical perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks when they were plotting against us in distant Afghan caves. *The phrase itself is meaningless.* It defines neither a geographic context nor our presumed enemies. Terrorism is not an enemy but a technique of warfare -- political intimidation through the killing of unarmed non-combatants. But the little secret here may be that the vagueness of the phrase was deliberately (or instinctively) calculated by its sponsors. Constant reference to a "war on terror" did accomplish one major objective: It stimulated the emergence of a culture of fear. *Fear obscures reason, intensifies emotions, and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue...*Such fear-mongering, reinforced by

¹² Quoted from the article by Dr. Brzezinski, *Terrorized by 'War on Terror': How a Three-Word Mantra Has Undermined America* [<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=5186>]

Dr. Brzezinski was the national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter and author of several books including, *The Grand Chess Board: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, and *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*.

security entrepreneurs, the mass media and the entertainment industry, generates its own momentum...The record is even more troubling in the general area of civil rights. The culture of fear has bred intolerance, suspicion of foreigners, and the adoption of legal procedures that undermine fundamental notions of justice. Innocent until proven guilty has been diluted if not undone, with some -- even U.S. citizens -- incarcerated for lengthy periods of time without effective and prompt access to due process...Only a confidently determined and reasonable America can promote genuine international security which then leaves no political space for terrorism. *Where is the U.S. leader ready to say, "Enough of this hysteria, stop this paranoia"?* Even in the face of future terrorist attacks, the likelihood of which cannot be denied, let us show some sense. Let us be true to our traditions.

[italics added]

Recent research by McGregor and Pyszczynski demonstrates that threats to a person's beliefs regarding oneself and one's worldviews can also result in derogatory and aggressive behavior towards those who hold dissimilar views (McGregor et al., 1998; Pyszczynski et al., 2006). Even merely making a person uncertain about his or her personal beliefs can threaten his or her self-integrity, which can in turn evoke more extreme conviction about social issues, a phenomenon also known as *compensatory conviction* (McGregor et al., 2001). Thus, it is not surprising that, when confronted with the inconsistencies of the events of September 11, 2001 - for example, conflicts between information widely reported by the mainstream media, government, and 9/11 commission, and dissimilar information presented by less well known alternative media, dissenting experts, scholars, and whistleblowers - many people react by aggressively

defending the “official story,” even to the point of fabricating arguments to support their beliefs. For example, even President George W. Bush would not consider alternative accounts in the weeks after 9/11, disparaging them as completely implausible, *almost 3 years before* the 9/11 Commission Report¹³ was even released (as demonstrated in his address to the UN General Assembly on 11/10/2001¹⁴):

We must speak the truth about terror. Let us never tolerate outrageous conspiracy theories concerning the attacks of September the 11th, malicious lies that attempt to shift the blame away from the terrorists themselves, away from the guilty.

Studies evaluating psychological reactions to death and traumatic experiences, and in particular 9/11, in the context of terror management theory (Solomon et al., 1991), report that a number of outwardly-aimed psychological defenses are used when people are reminded of their mortality (Greenberg et al., 1997; Solomon et al., 2004). When people are prompted by thoughts of death, known as *mortality salience*, most often they react by inflating their faith in their personal worldview. For example, they may display greater bias towards their country or religion (e.g., Castano, 2004; Greenberg et al., 1990). The effect of 9/11 then, on Americans in particular, is well summarized by Kosloff et al. (2006):

¹³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*
[<http://www.amny.com/news/local/groundzero/ny-fullreport0722,0,3906131.acrobat>]

¹⁴ See also article by Robert Lederman (November 23, 2001). G.W. Bush on 9/11 conspiracy theories. What really happened: The history the government hopes you don't learn. [Robert.lederman@worldnet.att.net]

Consistent with this research, the years since 9/11 – an event that made mortality quite salient to most Americans – have been replete with surges in patriotic fever and persistent efforts to fortify faith in the American worldview and its value (Landau et al., 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 2003; Pyszczynski et al., 2006).

Research on terror management theory also shows that when people are reminded of their mortality, they exaggerate the number of people who hold similar worldviews; a phenomenon called *consensus bias* (Pyszczynski et al., 1996). Similarly, information appearing to represent the *majority opinion* tends to induce *immediate persuasion*, in comparison to *minority opinions*, which often induce *immediate resistance* (Wood et al., 1994). Recent research by Tormala et al. (2007) confirms this:

The traditional explanation has been that people seek to publicly agree with majority messages and reject minority messages to avoid aligning themselves with deviant groups or positions (e.g., Moscovici, 1980, 1985; Mugny and Perez, 1991). Thus, whether it stems from simple, low-effort rejection or more thoughtful but negatively biased processing, people often show immediate, direct, and public resistance to messages associated with minority sources (e.g., Darke et al., 1998; De Dreu and De Vries, 1996; De Dreu et al., 1999; Erb et al., 1998; Mackie, 1987; Trost et al., 1992; see Erb and Bohner, 2001; Tormala et al., in press). *Of interest, though, initially resisted minority sources have been known to exert a hidden or delayed impact.* For example, when people resist minority sources, they often show evidence of persuasion when their attitudes are measured at a later point in time (e.g., Moscovici, 1980; see Wood et al., 1994, for a review). [italics added]

Thus, one of the most common responses to being asked to consider alternative accounts of 9/11 is that one does not need to because very few people believe them, when in fact, there are substantial numbers of people who *do question the official account*, and *their questions are not trivial ones*, as described by Grossman (2006), concerning the WTC Towers destruction (2006):

Take a look if you can stand it, at video footage of the World Trade Center [Towers 1, 2, and Tower 7 that was not hit by a plane] collapsing. Your eye will naturally jump to the top of the screen, where huge fountains of dark debris erupt out of the falling towers. But fight your natural instincts. Look farther down, at the stories that haven't collapsed yet. In almost every clip you will see little puffs of dust spurting out from the sides of the towers. There are two competing explanations for these puffs of dust: 1) the force of the collapsing upper floors raised the air pressure in the lower ones so dramatically that it actually blew out the windows. And 2) the towers did not collapse from the impact of two Boeing 767s [WTCs 1 and 2] and the ensuing fires [WTCs 1, 2, and 7]. They were destroyed in a planned, controlled demolition [*in particular WTC 7*]. The dust puffs you see on film are the detonations of the explosives planted there before the attacks...The population of [those who believe] No. 2 is larger than you might think. A Scripps-Howard poll of 1,010 adults last month found that 36% of Americans consider it "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that government officials either allowed the attacks to be carried out or carried out the attacks themselves. Thirty-six percent adds up to a lot of people. This is not a fringe phenomenon. *It is a mainstream political reality.* [italics added]

In fact, in the years since 2001, more and more Americans believe that their current federal government has not been completely forthcoming on the issue of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, according to a poll by the *New York Times* and *CBS News* in 2006:¹⁵ “53% of respondents think the Bush administration is hiding something, and 28% believe it is lying.” An Angus-Reid poll comparing responses from 2002 and 2006 found similar results, and that in 2006, *only 16%* of Americans believed that the government is telling the truth about the events of 9/11:¹⁶

Responses	October 2006	May 2002
Telling the truth	16%	21%
Hiding something	53%	65%
Mostly lying	28%	8%
Not sure	3%	6%

In addition to engaging in consensus bias when their self or worldviews are threatened, people also display an escalation in behaviors that confirm their worldviews, such as defending national and religious icons and derogating those with dissimilar views, some even to the point of aggression (Greenberg et al., 1997). For example, in the year after 9/11, a study of Canadian attitudes showed that threats to self-worth and feelings of uncertainty induced people to exaggerate their pride and confidence in their

¹⁵ The New York Times / CBS News: Methodology: Telephone interviews with 983 American adults, conducted from Oct. 5 to Oct. 8, 2006. Margin of error is 4 per cent. [<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/13469>]

¹⁶ Angus-Reid Global Monitor, Polls and Research (October 14, 2006) [http://www.angus-reid.com/admin/collateral/pdfs/polls/NYT_October2k6.pdf]

country and to deride Islam (Haji and McGregor, 2002). Threats to self-regard and feelings of uncertainty also provoked some people to become more extreme in their views regarding the U.S. invasion of Iraq (McGregor et al., 2005; McGregor and Jordan, 2007). Such reliance on bolstering personal worldviews in the face of threat may resolve feelings of uncertainty and distress in the short-term, but may have serious consequences for oneself and society at large in the long-term (Baumeister and Vohs, 2001; Robbins and Beer, 2001; Bonanno et al., 2005). McGregor (2006) highlights these consequences:

Indeed, mortality salience threats have not only caused zeal about in-group preferences and other forms of worldview defense (Greenberg et al., 1997), but they have also increased Americans' support for terrorism strikes (Landau et al., 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 2006). Other kinds of self-threats similarly have caused increased extremism and zeal about suicide bombing, the American invasion of Iraq, and capital punishment (McGregor and Jordan, 2007). In social conflicts in which opposing groups feel threatened by one another, indulging in awesome displays of pride and militant conviction may insulate the self but, unfortunately, may also shock one's opponent with additional threats. In response, opponents may likely mount reciprocal zeal and further fuel the cycle of zealous extremism. Research on defensive zeal, the present findings, and lessons gleaned from history's zealots and crusaders, *indicate that although zealous responses to threats may be alluring, they can also be self-defeating. Even though zealous responses to threats may feel right because they relieve concern, strategically they may be woefully wrong.* [italics added]

As we can see then, when discussing the events of 9/11, any information that contradicts or threatens a person's worldview or self-regard, *can automatically trigger defensiveness*, which itself then becomes a significant barrier to objective evaluation of the subject. Asking someone to consider evidence that contradicts the official story, and more importantly, *to begin to think about how these alternative accounts could change their worldviews*, is a request that needs itself to be carefully considered. Specifically, we need to consider how reminders of death, and more drastically, *threats to one's perceived fundamental freedoms*, can trigger nonconscious defensiveness that blocks a person from engaging in such discussions.

Studies focusing on the effects of death-related information, regardless of whether the person is consciously aware of the information or not, show that increases in mortality salience can trigger displays of psychological dissociation and related behaviors. That is, threatening thoughts and emotions that are associated with an event are separated from the self, putatively to protect one from experiencing trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Herman, 1997; Gershuny and Thayer, 1999; Pyszczynski et al., 2003; Kosloff et al., 2006). The effects of mortality salience on behavior then become especially important in discussing the events of September 11, 2001. For example, even just hearing the phrase "9/11" itself can automatically prime an individual for defensive and aggressive behavior via the mechanism of mortality salience. "9/11" has become implicitly associated with violence, death, destruction, and terrorism, which are in turn tied to extremely strong emotions and beliefs. Moreover, mere *subliminal* exposure to 9/11-related stimuli can bring death-related thoughts closer to consciousness (Landau et

al., 2004).¹⁷ Such reactions have likely been fostered by repeated media presentations of highly emotional images (Cho et al., 2003), such as images of the WTC Twin Towers being destroyed that have been paired with the horrific screams of witnesses, which produces enduring aversion and fear to these events. That words and phrases can conjure visual images and intense emotions, which strongly influence people's attitudes, is regrettably all too common. Let me illustrate this with a few unforgettable examples:

- "the Holocaust" = death; mass murder; gas chambers and concentration camps
- "Pearl Harbor" = death; mass destruction; planes bombing & crashing into ships
- "Hiroshima" = death; mass destruction; mushroom cloud; nuclear fallout
- "Vietnam" = death; mass casualties; guerilla warfare; torture; napalm bombs
- "Columbine" = death; mass murder; kids killing kids with guns in school
- "Rwandan genocide" = death; mass rape and murder; killing with machetes

Similarly, the phrases "official account" and "conspiracy theories" about 9/11 can invoke strong attitudes, which can result in bias in evaluating evidence and forming objective conclusions:

- "Official account" = government; 9/11 commission; scientific study; FEMA/NIST¹⁸
- "Conspiracy theories" = conspiracy nuts; mental instability; hoax; anti-establishment

Clearly, emotional reactions arising from terms such as "conspiracy theory" can interfere with a person's desire, and even ability, to objectively consider facts that do, or

¹⁷ In fact, when people are just *exposed to reminders* of their mortality and 9/11, their support for U.S. President George W. Bush and his counterterrorism policies increases (Landau et al., 2004).

¹⁸ FEMA: Federal Emergency Management Agency; NIST: National Institute of Standards and Technology

do not, support the theory in question. However, as many academics have pointed out, the “official account” is itself, in fact, a “conspiracy theory,” one which is *not supported by evidence* that has been gathered by independent researchers who are respected experts in their fields (Griffin, 2004; quoted from Fetzer, 2007; Jones, 2007a/b):

Yet according to the government’s “official account,” on 9/11, nineteen Islamic fundamentalists hijacked four commercial airliners, then outfoxed the most sophisticated air defense system in the world, and perpetrated these deeds under the control of a man in a cave in Afghanistan. Because it only requires two or more persons who collaborate together to perpetrate an illegal act to qualify as a “conspiracy,” the government’s own account is a conspiracy theory.....And if those who study 9/11 arrive at conclusions that are at variance with the government’s “official account,” isn’t it just possible that they have arrived at those conclusions on the basis of logic and evidence and the standards of research appropriate to their respective fields?

Of course, even scientists are not immune from political or corporate pressure in developing their theories. In the scientific method, first observations are made and the facts gathered, then hypotheses are formed *and tested to see if they fit* the observations and facts. Then, and only then, are conclusions drawn. In contrast, it seems that in the “political method,” the conclusion is presented and then facts are gathered to support it. The latter is an example of “pathological science,” which arguably can be noted in the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) report on the collapse of WTC 7, which was not hit by a jet airliner. Before research was conducted, the NIST contract mandate had already reported their conclusions, directing their scientists to determine

how fires caused the destruction of the top of the building, while completely ignoring the bottom floors 1 to 7, rather than conducting experiments to determine what could have caused the collapse: “fires and damage did it, just look at floors 8 to 46 and tell us how fires made it collapse straight down” (Jones, 2007b). More importantly, those who hold a personal stake in the “official theory,” such as those paid to report their findings based on corporate directives, or people dependent upon governmental institutions for their livelihood or security, are more likely to resist questions that threaten the status quo. As eloquently pointed out by Professor Peter Dale Scott:¹⁹

To ask questions about 9/11 risks raising questions about the legitimacy of our government. Above all, it raises questions about the radical restrictions of basic freedoms that have been introduced since September 2001. The more status someone has in society, the harder it is for them to listen to suggestions that there is something illegitimate about the power structure in which they have that status. Thus the paradox – that ordinary people are more likely to disbelieve the official theories of 9/11 than are people with higher education and greater access to information....The 9/11 report is an example of concerted cover-up, partly by omissions and just as importantly by its “cherry-picking” of evidence and contrived misrepresentation of fact. And there is a *pattern* to the misrepresentations.

¹⁹ Dr. Peter Dale Scott’s Lecture at the *Arizona 9/11 Accountability Conference*, February 25th, 2007. Dr. Scott is a Professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, a former Canadian diplomat, and the author of several books and articles including: *Drugs, Oil, and War*; *9/11 & American Empire: Intellectuals Speak Out*; *The 9/11 Conspiracy: The Scamming of America*; *Censored 2006 : The Top 25 Censored Stories*; and his forthcoming book, *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*, which has been accepted for publication by the University of California Press for 2008. [<http://www.peterdalescott.net>]

Once again we see that reminders of 9/11 can activate the attitudes that people already hold, and that the stronger they hold them, the more resistant to change they are. In addition, challenges to a person's worldviews, and reminders of death and the loss of control that are associated with questions about 9/11, are considerable obstacles to discussing alternative accounts and evidence that contradicts the official story. How then can such obstacles be overcome?

New Paths in Perception: Revealing, Recognizing, and Rerouting Reactions

Although perceptions can be activated automatically, this does not mean that people are entirely passive in experiencing the world around them. People have desires and goals that they actively wish to pursue and go about doing so. Take the example of meeting a new person. If one of our goals is to have that person like us and perhaps pursue a friendship, we will be motivated to act quite differently than if one of our goals is to protect ourselves from rejection and avoid getting hurt. Friendship (or *approach-oriented*) goals may influence us to walk over to the person and begin a causal conversation, making eye contact, speaking in a soft tone, and even gentle physical gestures or contact. In contrast, self-protection (or *avoidance-oriented*) goals may influence us to sidestep introductions, steer clear of eye contact, speak in short-sentences or one-word answers when necessary, maintain physical distance, and even excuse ourselves from the situation. Similar to how personal goals can direct us to approach or avoid other people, personal goals can also direct us to approach or avoid questions about 9/11. In general, many of our responses to the environment around us are determined largely by which goals we are currently pursuing, and are reflected in our subsequent

judgments, decision, and behaviors (Bargh, 1989; Gollwitzer and Moskowitz, 1996; Kruglanski, 1996; Kunda, 1990; Wicklund and Steins, 1996).

In fact, sometimes we are consciously aware of our personal goals and how they affect our behavior, and sometimes we are not. Bargh et al. (1995) showed how people can be prompted to act in certain ways merely by activating their goals. For example, Bargh et al. (1995) used the association between sex and power, which is stronger for some men than others, to show that men who were classified as sexual aggressors would rate a female associate as being more attractive if they were primed (prompted) ahead of time with power-related words than men who were not given prior exposure to power-related words. Another provocative study, which looked at the automatic activation of stereotypes, tested whether or not threats to an individual's self-image would *automatically initiate* the goal of restoring a threatened self-image (Spencer et al., 1998). People who had just received a blow to their self-esteem, in the form of negative feedback concerning their abilities, responded by using more stereotypes in their judgments of others than people who had not had their self-esteem threatened (Spencer et al., 1998). Obviously, one route to re-establishing self-esteem is to denigrate others (e.g., easily elevating one's self-feelings simply by putting down people associated with groups of low power and status within society). Thus, the threat to self-esteem automatically set into motion a goal to deride others, even under circumstances wherein stereotyping effects are not normally found, and without people being consciously aware that they were doing so.

Similarly, for many people, reminders of the September 2001 attacks triggered hostile reactions to people who were perceived as being even somewhat related to the purported terrorists who attacked the WTC and the Pentagon (McGregor et al., 1998; Haji and McGregor, 2002; Reed and Aquino, 2003; McGregor et al., 2005; Pyszczynski et al., 2006; Small et al., 2006, 2007). More important, however, is that *not all people were vulnerable to such reactions*. In fact, some people responded with imperative restraint and concern for the safety of others potentially stereotyped as “terrorists” (Reed and Aquino, 2003). When people are exposed to similar reminders of the events of 9/11, why do we see such a discrepancy in their responses? Clearly, there are underlying reasons beyond the automatic activation of goals that motivate people’s behavior. Thus, it is important to look at what *types of goals* are triggered and how they influence people’s responses to the same events.

One factor that can help explain the discrepancy is the activation of a person’s self-protective goals (Reed and Aquino, 2003), which are related to i) maintaining certainty about one’s self and worldviews, ii) preventing threats, iii) and avoiding mortality salience, as already discussed. However, Reed and Aquino (2003) propose another goal that likely mediates people’s reactions, known as *moral identity*, which is the ability to show concern for the needs and welfare of others. The defining characteristic, as it has been argued, of a person with a “legitimate moral identity, is that he or she extends feelings of sympathy and affiliation toward a larger segment of humanity than someone whose moral identity is less important (Hart et al., 1998; Younis and Yates, 1999)” (Reed and Aquino, 2003). Thus, when a person with a strong moral identity has goals associated with that identity activated, their reactions to others outside

of their social group are more likely to be characterized by the following: a sense of obligation to the welfare of others; desires to share personal resources; increased sensitivity to perceived aggressive and hostile behavior; tempering of desires for retaliation; and greater willingness for understanding and forgiveness (Reed and Aquino, 2003):

In contrast to the hostility that some Americans showed towards Muslims and Arab Americans after September 11th, others pleaded for racial tolerance and openly condemned acts of discrimination directed against fellow citizens and even noncitizens (c.f. Coalition for World Peace: <http://www.actionla.org/peace/#point>)...When the activation potential of moral identity is high – that is, when moral identity assumes high self-importance – the self/other relation should be characterized by a more expansive conception of the in-group toward which a person feels obligated to exhibit moral regard.²⁰ We refer to this premise as the “circle of moral regard” hypothesis: Rather than confirming one’s in-group to a narrow set of others (e.g., family, kin, fellow citizens), a person whose moral identity has high self-importance should include a larger set of social groups. In the extreme, this psychological boundary might include all of humanity...The data suggest that the concept of a moral self may collapse the mental barriers separating in-groups and out-groups, thus highlighting the possibility that in some “simple, perfectly impenetrable” way, we are all brothers.

²⁰ “Following the definition of morality proposed by moral philosophers (e.g., Hume, 1751/1996) and psychologists (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Rest, 1979), moral regard is defined in this study as showing concern for the needs and welfare of others.”

In fact, the ability to reach beyond one's own needs and goals, and actively working towards social justice, has been one of the primary motives of the 9/11 truth movement. The ability to identify with the victims and families of the victims of 9/11 has motivated and encouraged many people to speak out and demand a new, proper, and complete independent investigation. This is honorably exemplified by Professor Steven Jones, the co-founder of Scholars for 9/11 Truth and Justice and the founder of the Journal of 9/11 Studies (Jones, 2007b):

I do not plan to make a career out of 9/11 research, and I am not making money from my investigations in any way. We need a formal, solid investigation of the 9/11 crimes committed, not a long-term study which endlessly debates all alternatives. With others, I seek such solid evidence of an insider crime (beyond a reasonable doubt) that some of us will successfully demand a criminal investigation to confront key individuals who may have insider information – within one year, if possible-- not many. It is time to unite and seek an end to the 9/11 wars by bringing out the truth of what happened on 9/11. We seek truth, justice – and peace. The growing body of evidence for controlled demolition of WTC 7 and the Towers is truly compelling. I espouse peaceful methods seeking truth and justice, in particular the Constitutional remedy of impeachment. In my studied opinion, there is already sufficient compelling evidence to motivate and support such proceedings.²¹

If people have such very different goals and motivations that can impact information processing and behavior, and conscious acts of will are not needed to activate

²¹ See [<http://journalof911studies.com/>, <http://911research.wtc7.net/> and <http://911truth.org/>].

these goals, then how do automatic evaluations affect *deliberate, conscious judgments* about an individual, object or event? This question is so important precisely because studies show that the automatic evaluation occurs *before* the conscious judgment, and thus it will have a *significant impact* upon the conscious judgment (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). This is especially true for judgments individuals make regarding novel people and situations. Although people may believe that they are still in the process of evaluation, *they have already made up their minds*, mostly in the instant people first encounter the new person, object, or idea (Ambady and Rosenthal, 1992). Ambady and Rosenthal (1992) found that a surprising amount of information about an individual is transmitted by way of unintended behavior and that, in fact, more lengthy conscious observation and deliberation does not lead to judgments different than those based upon a “thin slice of evidence.”

Our immediate and automatic impressions persist then, highlighting the limitations of conscious evaluation and judgment (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). For example, when people are confronted with evidence that contradicts the official story, the likelihood that prolonged discussion and debate will change their minds is simply not very strong. In fact, a common tactic to effectively absolve oneself from further consideration of the events of 9/11 is to attribute the other person’s need to discuss the subject as a defense mechanism. Uncertainty in one’s beliefs may evoke what is known as *defensive zeal*, which is the adherence to strong convictions that seem unreasonable or self-defeating, and that are intended to restore confidence in one’s worldviews (McGregor and Marigold, 2003; McGregor, 2006). However, therein lies an interesting paradox: *which person is engaging in the defensive mechanism?* Is it the person

presenting the alternative account of 9/11, or the person adhering to the official account? Herein the corollary of defensive zeal must be examined (McGregor and Marigold, 2003):

Although many instances of conviction are surely not defensive, we propose that for some people, in some circumstances, zeal can serve as the cognitive equivalent of putting one's fingers in one's ears and loudly repeating "not listening!"...Most political and social groups have fundamentalist factions convinced that only *their* worldviews are valid, even with full awareness that other factions' fundamentalists feel equally certain about their opposing views. Similarly, most contentious social issues and intergroup conflicts have zealots at either extreme who seem blind to the possible merits of each others' perspectives and intent on annihilating or at least hating one another...When distressing uncertainties loom, defensive individuals exaggerate compensatory convictions, and doing so appears to crowd uncertainties out of awareness.

Such interpersonal conflict can also create the ideal setting for the emergence of very different subjective interpretations of an event (Baumeister et al., 1990), especially one as emotionally laden as 9/11. For example, in a study examining how people view themselves in situations of interpersonal conflict, an overwhelming discrepancy emerged between the portrayals of "victims" and "perpetrators" of the conflict and the explanations of their actions. Moreover, between victims and perpetrators, it was not so much the question of who was correct that was the most revealing, but *who was telling the story*. Stillwell and Baumeister (1995) devised a stimulation to test the very question of "who's telling the truth" in victim versus perpetrator interactions. College students

were assigned at random to play either the role of the perpetrator or the victim in a minor altercation. The students were supplied with a factual description of the incident then asked to tell the story in their own words, as if it had actually happened to them. The roles of the perpetrator and the victim were decided by the flip of a coin and all students received the exact same objective information regarding the history of events. The students were to recite, from memory only, the incident as it had occurred, specifically from their perspective as either the victim or perpetrator. The results were surprising: victims and perpetrators *both distorted the facts, in opposite directions, to an equal degree!* While perpetrators slanted the facts to make them seem more innocuous, victims embellished the facts to make the offense seem worse. In addition, perpetrators were more likely to make situational attributions in explaining their behavior, such as emphasizing that they were under severe stress at the time, while the victims tended to omit such facts regarding the perpetrators' behavior. Victims tended to focus on the lasting negative consequences of the perpetrators' behavior, which perpetrators downplayed or completely omitted from their recollections.

In the study by Baumeister et al. (1990), the same systematic distortions between victims and perpetrators were found. Again, the portrayal of perpetrators as deliberately malicious was primarily a victim interpretation: perpetrators rarely saw themselves in such malevolent light. Most interesting was the fact that *these systematic interpretations persisted, even when the students were instructed to switch personas* and repeat the story from the other person's point of view! When moving from the victim to the perpetrator, students appeared to change their manner of thinking about the incident (Baumeister et al., 1990). Baumeister et al. (1990) concluded that "the gap between the actions perceived

as meaningful on one side and senseless on the other side may be an important factor in the genesis of interpersonal conflict and anger.”

That the horrific attacks of 9/11 provided the motivation for some Americans to claim themselves as “innocent victims,” and cast those who do not hold the same worldview as “terrorists” and “evildoers,” is abundantly clear in the context of the “war on terror” and the pursuit of unrestrained foreign policy, as described by Professor John McMurtry (2007):

Documented reports of criminal abuse of prisoners by US forces had been coming to high command since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 with no decision to stop the routines.²² “Stress positions,” “humiliation,” “use of [attack] dogs,” “sleep deprivation,” “subjection to noise,” prolonged isolation,” “food and water deprivation,” “restriction of toilet facilities,” and diet denial” were generic orders.²³ Yet ever since 13th November 2001 shortly after 9/11, Presidential decree had unilaterally overridden the US-signed Geneva Convention of 1949 on the Treatment of Prisoners for the first time in its history. Anyone who objected was deemed to be “lending support to terrorists.”...What could explain the systematic disconnect from reality with

²² “The torture began as routine as soon as the invasion of Afghanistan occurred with all of the methods exposed in Iraq only three years later used primarily on ordinary people picked up at random. “The torture was in many ways worse,” observed the Human Rights Watch in the area, “not operated even nominally in accordance with the Geneva Conventions – the whole system operates outside the rule of law.” The Independent Human Rights Commission set up in June 2002 by the European Union “Bonn agreement” concurred: “From those who are talking about human rights and democracy, it is a great shock” (Duncan Campbell, “America’s Afghan Gulag,” *Guardian Weekly*, 2nd-8th July 2004, pp. 15-16.). Over two years before, a press report had revealed that prisoners had been held in inhuman conditions at the US Bagram airbase in Afghanistan with fatalities from the criminal abuse (Dana Priest and Barton Gellman, “US Decries Abuse, but Defends Interrogations,” *Washington Post*, 26th December 2002).”

²³ “See, for example, John Stanton, “The Practices of Torture,” *Global Outlook*, Summer 2004, p. 26.”

no consciousness of it?...Something deeper than class and faction is at work. A regime of meaning operates across classes and scientific discipline themselves to disconnect the elements so that the whole cannot be seen. To be above the law – including laws applied by the US to prosecute others – was assumed by all as “America’s leadership of the Free World.”That the same justification was used decades earlier by the Third Reich was not observed, least of all by those invoking “appeasement of Hitler” as a justification to invade poor non-industrialized countries.²⁴ The comparison was unthinkable through America’s lenses of self-conception which assumed itself as the “society of human rights.”....The problem of the collectively unthinkable runs deep into the psyche. “I can’t believe...” is the sign pointing back to the mind-block behind it....*The reference points of meaning were pegged beneath consciousness by determining pre-suppositions which organize understanding to conform to them, and to screen out all that does not.*

In summary, people generally prefer to view aggression in morally defined terms, such as viewing *victims* as innocent and virtuous, versus viewing *perpetrators* as evil and malicious, especially in light of the attacks of September 11th 2001. Similarly, people generally prefer to view the accounts of 9/11 in morally defined terms, such as viewing the *government’s official account* as right and reputable, versus viewing *dissenting alternative accounts* as wrong and anarchistic. Thus, considering that increasing evidence points to the fact that most people only become defensive or aggressive *when they believe that they are under some form of attack* (Berkowitz and Alioto, 1973; Berkowitz et al.,

²⁴ “See, for example, William Shirer’s classic, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (Greenwich: Simon and Schuster, 1960), pp. 453-54., 792-93). German commander-in-chief’s words were almost exactly the same as the American’s almost seventy years later: “We have no interest in oppressing other people – He has led a reign of terror - [with] a tremendous military arsenal – It is intolerable for a great power to remain a passive onlooker” (CCPA Monitor, April 2003, p. 9).”

1986; Cohen and Nisbett, 1994; Baumeister et al., 1996; Baumeister, 1997; Bushman and Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister, et al., 2000), it is quite understandable that many people first question the legitimacy of the threat before questioning the legitimacy of the evidence when discussing the events of 9/11. Clearly, when people feel that their beliefs are threatened they will not only turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to alternative accounts of 9/11, but will aggressively attempt to counter such evidence using illogical and rhetorical means such as dismissal, defamation, derogation, and intimidation, including death threats. Indeed, many outspoken individuals who question the “official story” have received death threats, including Canadian writer and journalist Michele Landsberg,²⁵ physicist Dr. Steven E. Jones,²⁶ journalist Wayne Madsen and WTC survivor William

²⁵ Michele Landsberg is an award-winning Canadian writer, social activist and feminist who wrote a major column for the Toronto Star newspaper. Landsberg wrote several articles for the Toronto Star on 9/11 [<http://globalresearch.ca/articles/LAN305A.html>] including, “The 9/11 Questions Aren’t Going Away” (May 18, 2003) and “Conspiracy Crusader Doubts Official 9/11 Version” (May 11, 2003) on award-winning Canadian journalist Barrie Zwicker who also wrote and directed *The Great Conspiracy: The 9/11 News Special You Never Saw*. Landsberg is also the wife of Stephen Henry Lewis, a Canadian politician, broadcaster, and diplomat, and is currently a Social Science Scholar-in-Residence at McMaster University, having recently completed his term as United Nations special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa.

²⁶ Dr. Jones, known mainly for his work on muon-catalyzed cold fusion, is a founding member of Scholars for 9/11 Truth and Justice. His hypothesis is that the World Trade Center was destroyed by controlled explosive demolition during the September 11 attacks has received strong support but also criticism and death threats. See “Steven E. Jones: A Physics Professor Speaks Out on 9/11 Reason, Publicity, and Reaction” by Victoria Ashley, June 14, 2006 [<http://911research.wtc7.net/essays/jones/StevenJones.html>].

Rodriguez,²⁷ Alex Jones and InfoWars reporters,²⁸ and most recently, celebrity co-host of ABC's *The View*, Rosie O'Donnell.²⁹

However, there is a silver lining to such serious controversy, and that is this: the more these dissenting opinions are repeated, the more accessible the information within them becomes, and this familiarity can translate into increased popularity of these dissenting opinions, as demonstrated in recent research by Weaver et al. (2007):

Repeated exposure to an opinion increases the accessibility of the opinion in memory and results in a feeling of familiarity when the opinion is encountered again...Opinion repetition from one source can lead individuals to change their own attitude toward an issue (Weaver and Schwarz, 2005).

What then, is the best way to advocate for a new independent investigation into the events of 9/11 in a non-threatening, yet convincing manner? And more importantly, why should this matter nearly six years after the attacks of 9/11? These questions will be addressed in the succeeding article, *Faulty Towers of Belief: Part II. Rebuilding the Road to Freedom of Reason*. As a prelude, let me restate the main goals: i) bringing evidence of the true events of 9/11 to the forefront of public consciousness for discussion and debate,

²⁷ "On the Heels Of Death Threats Coming Out Of Washington, WTC Janitor Has Jersey City Apartment Burglarized: Journalist Wayne Madsen has left Washington over death threats and William Rodriguez, 9/11 truth-seeker, had his apartment burglarized. Both fit the description of the person supposedly targeted by the government." <http://www.arcticbeacon.citymaker.com/articles/article/1518131/32348.htm>

²⁸ "9/11 Truth Activist Gets Death Threats: Infowars reporter who exposed Silverstein's September 11 warning receives threatening phone calls"
[http://www.infowars.com/articles/sept11/911_truth_activist_gets_death_threats.htm]

²⁹ "Evil MSNBC Attack on Rosie: *Bonaduce Advocates Murder of Rosie O'Donnell*" / Neo-Con: 'Execute Rosie For Questioning the Government: Feverish MSNBC guest calls for death penalty to stop free speech'
[<http://prisonplanet.com/articles/march2007/300307executerrosie.htm>]

ii) doing so in the most effective manner, to effect the most change, which will result in, iii) a new independent international investigation, concurrent with iii) eventual criminal prosecution of the true perpetrators involved, and iv) a concerted effort by the international community to bring an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq which were perpetrated on the basis of the attacks of 9/11. As presented in this article, the means of changing people's attitudes towards objectively evaluating the evidence, and reaching all of these crucial goals, will need to focus on reducing automatically triggered defensiveness and enhancing intentional open-mindedness. Regarding the manner of change, let me leave you with a quote by Dr. Robert Bowman³⁰ as an interlude:

The answer is one person at a time. But we have to speak up.

We have to raise our voices. We have to speak truth to power. We can't just sit back and let somebody else do it... We need to convince them that they don't really know the truth and that they should. We need to stir the pot.

*We need to create dissonance in their belief system,
so that finally, it will wake them up.*

For correspondence, please contact:

Laurie A. Manwell: lmanwell@uoguelph.ca

B.Sc. Biology and Psychology, University of Waterloo

M.Sc. Biology (Molecular, Cellular, Developmental) University of Waterloo

Ph.D. Candidate Behavioral Neuroscience, University of Guelph

³⁰ American Scholars Symposium: 9/11 and the NeoCon Agenda, June 2006, L.A. California.
[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuZdWj6ji7Y&mode=related&search=>]

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