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In Denial of Democracy: Social Psychological Implications for Public Discourse on State Crimes Against Democracy Post-9/11

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Abstract

Protecting democracy requires that the general public be educated on how people can be manipulated by government and media into forfeiting their civil liberties and duties. This article reviews research on cognitive constructs that can prevent people from processing information that challenges preexisting assumptions about government, dissent, and public discourse in democratic societies. Terror management theory and system justification theory are used to explain how preexisting beliefs can interfere with people's examination of evidence for state crimes against democracy (SCADs), specifically in relation to the events of September 11, 2001, and the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. Reform strategies are proposed to motivate citizens toward increased social responsibility in a post-9/11 culture of propagandized fear, imperialism, and war.

Keywords

state crimes against democracy; terror management; system justification; government; media

> I got the conch! . . . I don't agree with this here fear. Of course there isn't nothing to be afraid of in the forest. Why—I been there myself! You'll be talking about ghosts and such things next. We know what goes on and if there's something wrong, there's someone to put it right. . . . You don't really mean that we got to be frightened all the time of nothing? . . . . Unless . . . unless we get frightened of people.
>
> William Golding (1954), *Lord of the Flies* (pp. 89-90)

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> Nearly everyone in our transport [to Auschwitz] lived under the illusion that he would be reprieved, that everything would yet be well. We did not realize the meaning behind the scene that was to follow. . . . Again, our illusion of reprieve found confirmation. The SS men seemed almost charming. Soon we found out their reason. They were nice to us as long as they saw watches on our wrists and could persuade us in well-meaning tones to hand them over.
>
> Viktor E. Frankl (1939/1963), *Man's Search for Meaning* (pp. 16-20)

Around the same time Golding (1954) composed his moral tale of the disintegration of an immature society—with Piggy naively decrying the power of fear to override reasoned debate in democratic governance—a landmark symposium by leading political scientists in *American Political Science Review* (Griffith, Plamenatz, & Pennock, 1956) reported agreement that the psychological attitudes necessary to sustain a democracy—individual liberty, equality, and responsible participation—must be internalized by its citizens for that democracy to survive. Documenting changes in attitudes toward democratic values across 50 years, researchers have called for greater public education on matters requiring political tolerance. That the freedoms bestowed by Western democracies have been under attack since September 11, 2001, is obvious, but the dynamics underlying this threat are not so obvious. Piggy prophesied the crisis now upon us: The right to dissent with the majority opinion, and the necessity to have this dissenting discourse within the public sphere, must be protected. This article discusses the role that individual and collective attitudes play in public discourse and dissent regarding the current state of democracy in the post-911 world. Preserving democracy requires exposing illusions of external threat that can prevent citizens and leaders from addressing more concrete internal threats to continued self-governance. The use of repression and terror, including threats of censorship, suppression of information, imprisonment, and torture, by leaders to subjugate political opponents and dissidents is not exclusive to authoritarian states—such tactics can also be employed by leaders of democratic states: a fact that can be difficult for people to acknowledge, especially if it is not congruent with their belief system (Altemeyer, 1996).[1] Indeed, as some have argued, "In a sense, government repression is the inverse of terrorism" (Baumeister, 1997, p. 112). For example, the most recent Human Rights Watch World Report, repudiating many leaders and governments worldwide as "despots masquerading as democrats," reveals how leaders use rhetoric, fear mongering, and suppression of a free press to undermine the rule of law: charges relevant to the current state of democracy in North America (Roth, 2008):

> Today, democracy has become the sine qua non of legitimacy. Few governments want to be seen as undemocratic. . . . Determined not to let mere facts stand in the way, these rulers have mastered the art of democratic rhetoric that bears little relationship to their practice of governing. . . . The challenge they face is to appear to embrace democratic principles while avoiding any risk of succumbing

> to popular preferences. Electoral fraud, political violence, press censorship, repression of civil society, even military rule have all been used to curtail the prospect that the proclaimed process of democratization might actually lead to a popular say in government. . . . Because of other interests—energy, commerce, counterterrorism—the world's more established democracies too often find it convenient to appear credulous of these sham democrats. Foremost has been the United States under President George W. Bush. In a troubling parallel to abusive governments around the world, the US government has embraced democracy promotion as a softer and fuzzier alternative to defending human rights. . . . Talk of human rights leads to Guantanamo, secret CIA prisons, waterboarding, rendition, military commissions, and the suspension of habeas corpus. . . . To make matters worse, the Bush administration's efforts to rationalize the invasion of Iraq in terms of democracy promotion has made it easier for autocrats to equate pressure on them to democratize with an imperial, militarist agenda. (pp. 1-4)

Under conducive social conditions, for example, when mass fear is used to increase public compliance with government and there is a concordant lack of institutional safeguards protecting citizens from authoritarian leaders (Baumeister, 1997), persons in positions of authority certainly "come to devalue those over which they wield control," leading to tyranny and atrocity (Bandura, 1999, p. 200). As Frankl (1939/1963) cautioned, we must be ever vigilant of the motives of leaders who would persuade us to surrender our property, liberty, and humanity, one priceless piece at a time.

Brief Review of Social Psychological Foundations of Democracy

Alexis de Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America* (1835/1945), argued that the civic culture necessary to support early representative government flourished in America primarily because of the near equality of social ideas and economics of the times, cautioning that, "to remain civilized," these must "improve in the same ratio" for all citizens (Vol. II, p. 110). He also equated "America to a developing individual, going from childhood to adolescence" (deHaven-Smith, 1999, p. 7) and emphasized the necessity of a free press to the maintenance of self-government (Graber, 2004). In the 1950s and 1960s, researchers recapitulated Tocqueville's emphasis on the individual and collective attitudes necessary to support a vibrant democracy. Many political scientists agreed that "there should be a consensus on the procedural norms by which substantive matters are negotiated, as well as on fundamental values such as liberty, equality, and individualism" (e.g., Griffith, Plamenatz, & Pennock, 1956; cf. Sullivan & Transue, 1999, p. 627). A decade later, analyzing data from more than 20 countries, Neubauer (1967) argued that democracy requires citizens to be socialized into the "rules of the game" and that mass communication systems supporting this are essential to the performance of political democracy, even more critical than substantial socioeconomic developments. By the 1980s, research on how divisive

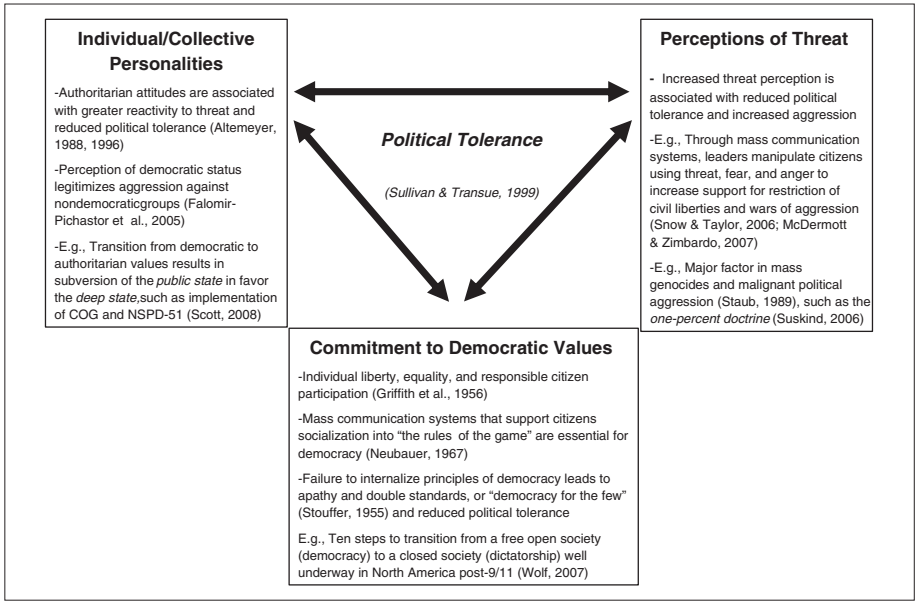

Figure 1. Model of political tolerance. Democracy requires tolerance of alternative political views, including public discourse on threats posed by the state toward its citizens. Authoritarian attitudes, threat perception, apathy, and manipulation by leaders and media result in double standards, or "democracy for the few."

political culture affects an individual's attitudes and participation in democratic governance generated interest in the concept of *political tolerance* (refer to Figure 1):

> Robust democracies require citizens to tolerate others' efforts to participate in politics, even if they promote unpopular views. Research shows that citizens' *political tolerance* is *influenced strongly by the depth of their commitment to democratic values, by their personality, and by the degree to which they perceive others as threatening*.
>
> . . . Altemeyer (1988, 1996) has shown that right-wing authoritarians are highly threatened and highly reactive to threat. He views this as one of the major sources of their authoritarian attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Staub (1989) also identifies threat perceptions as one of the primary contributing factors to mass genocides and malignant political aggression in general. (Sullivan & Transue, 1999, pp. 625, 632; italics added)

Failure to internalize important principles of democracy, such as majority rule, protection of minority rights, free speech, and equal voting, leads to apathy and double standards, or "democracy for the few" (McClosky, 1964; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Stouffer, 1955). Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978) argued that improvements in

public education have contributed to the general public's support for equal application of democratic principles across all citizens, reducing reliance on political leaders as "carriers of the [democratic] creed" (Sullivan & Transue, 1999, p. 629). For example, individuals with greater political understanding and experience tend to be more tolerant of dissimilar views (Sullivan, Walsh, Shamir, Barnum, & Gibson, 1993), and participation in politics requires citizens who are aware of, fully understand, and accept their responsibilities to protect democracy (Sullivan & Transue, 1999):

> Thus, aggregate levels of intolerance are somewhat malleable, depending upon how political elites and the media portray those with less popular ideas. Threat perceptions—both dispositional and environmental—play a central role in determining whether a set of citizens will internalize and apply the democratic principles of restraint and tolerance, or whether they will set them aside in particularly difficult situations. (p. 633)

The important role of political tolerance in applied judgments was underscored in a study on people's evaluations of intergroup aggression. In two experiments, Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, Depuiset, and Butera (2005) tested the theory that when an aggressive act is committed, it is the perception of the perpetrator's political association, as either *democratic-egalitarian* or *authoritarian-hierarchical*, that determines whether the act is perceived as legitimate. Democratic-egalitarian groups were defined by the "presence of collectively designated leaders and by participation of all group members in important decisions," whereas the authoritarian-hierarchical groups were determined by "self-proclaimed leaders [who] took decisions without consulting other group members" (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005, p. 1684). The results were telling, particularly because research participants were university students in psychological and educational sciences: When people who commit aggressive acts were viewed as democratic, and their victims were viewed as authoritarian, the aggression was perceived as legitimate. However, any aggression committed against a democratic group was always perceived as highly illegitimate, whether the aggressor was seen as authoritarian or, instead, also democratic. Hence, the less socially valued the group, the more legitimate any transgression against it was viewed, even when aggressive acts consisted of deadly force. Falomir-Pichastor et al.'s (2005) summary stresses the importance of such research in the post-9/11 world:

> In recent years, democratic nations have initiated a number of armed conflicts and wars, albeit not against other democratic nations, but against nondemocratic states. . . . How can these aggressive state behaviors be justified without giving up the democratic principles of peace and rationality? We suspect that political leaders take advantage of democracy's good reputation. . . . In spite of sometimes considerable public opposition to war decisions, most aggressions have by and large been accepted and considered as legitimate.
>
> . . . The results of the present studies provide potentially important insights for understanding how real intergroup and international conflicts are framed by

> elites to maximize their legitimacy and attract the necessary popular support. . . . *Many past and recent military interventions have been justified by portraying them as an opposition between "good," democratic forces and "evil," nondemocratic forces*. Unfortunately, such a claim has a high price because it implies that democratic lives count more than nondemocratic lives. We hope that the present research can contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics underlying not only public support for but also widespread opposition to Western-democratic aggressions against nondemocratic targets. (pp. 1683-1684, 1693; italics added)

Threat Perceptions and Political Tolerance Post-9/11: "Democracy for the Few" Revisited

The U.S. government and news media's explicit and implicit linking of 9/11-related terrorism to any group or government construed as hostile to "vital American interests"—primarily state and nonstate actors with nondemocratic status—continues to dominate North American political culture without the public scrutiny Tocqueville would have considered de rigueur of American civic culture (Edwards, 2004; Miller, 2004; Rich, 2006; Zwicker, 2006). This abdication of civic duty has resulted in the 9/11-wars on Afghanistan and Iraq (Rich, 2006) and currently leads the call for a war on Iran (Hersh, 2008). Evidence that U.S. officials have used the attacks of 9/11 as a means to manipulate the mass public into accepting two major wars of aggression has been dangerously ignored by mainstream media and academia until recently, as discussed by social psychologists McDermott and Zimbardo (2007):

> An alternate hypothesis for the current system that bears examination suggests that leaders strive to manipulate public opinion through the strategic use of fear and anger in order to gain political power and advantage. . . . If leaders want or need backing for a particular campaign that is likely to be unpopular or expensive in lives and material, such as war, or restrictions on civil liberties, then the effective use of anger, threat, and fear can work to enhance public support. In this way, a terrorism alarm can simultaneously serve as both a political and a strategic tool. (p. 365)

Thus, protecting democracy demands that citizens must be made aware of how they can be manipulated by government and media into forfeiting their civic liberties and duties: information vital to protecting citizens from crimes against democracy orchestrated by the state, as history has repeatedly demonstrated can happen particularly in times of disaster, collective shock, and national threat (Klein, 2007; Wolf, 2007).

Social and Psychological Constructs Interfering With Inquiry and Investigation of State Crimes Against Democracy (SCADs)

Representative democracies are susceptible to "subversion from within," such as leaders' and officials' attempts to circumvent, exploit, or otherwise deconstruct laws and institutions for personal or political gain, events collectively referred to as SCADs (Lasswell,

1937-1962; cf. deHaven-Smith, 2006; p. 331). However, alternative explanations of political assassinations, terrorist attacks, and other national tragedies that differ from official state accounts can be dismissed by mass publics because they evoke strong *cognitive dissonance*, a psychological phenomenon occurring when new ideas or information conflict with previously formed ideologies, accepted beliefs, and corresponding behaviors (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2008).

Although people may harbor some cynicism about bureaucrats and politicians, most do not want to believe that public officials in general, and especially those at the highest levels, would participate in election tampering, assassinations, mass murder, or other high crimes (Altemeyer, 1988, 1996; Baumeister, 1997; Chanley, 2002; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005; J. Greenberg, Solomon, & Arndt, 2008; Jost, Pietrzak, Liviatan, Mandisodza, & Napier, 2008; Peck, 1983; Stout, 2005; Zimbardo, 2008). For example, although public cynicism toward government was high in the months prior to 9/11 (e.g., fewer than 30% of U.S. citizens indicated that they trusted their government to "do what is right"), trust in U.S. officials in Washington rose significantly (e.g., more than doubled to 64%) in the weeks following the terrorist attacks, suggesting that heightened focus on national security breeds support for incumbent foreign policy makers (Chanley, 2002). Claims that state intelligence and other officials within democratic states could conspire with criminal elements to kill innocent civilians are difficult for citizens of those states to comprehend, even when backed by substantial corroborating evidence (Griffin, 2004; Mandel, 2004; Blum, 2005; Parenti, 2007; Bugliosi, 2008; Hersh, 2008; Scott, 2007c, 2008).

Research shows that people are far less willing to examine information that disputes, rather than confirms, their beliefs; information that contradicts worldviews often paradoxically serves to strengthen preexisting beliefs (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2008). For example, conservative portrayals depicting America as a benign or benevolent providence to the rest of the world, and "just how important continued American dominance is to the preservation of a reasonable level of international security and prosperity" (Kagan, 1998, p. 11), are broadly disseminated within North America in the media (D'Souza, 2002; Griffin, 2007c), although actual historical precedent documents the extent to which imperial ambitions have tarnished nearly every U.S. foreign imbroglio (Barber, 2003; Blum, 2005; Bugliosi, 2008; Klein, 2007; Mailer, 2003; Mandel, 2004; D. Miller, 2004; Parenti, 2007; Roberts, 2004; Scahill, 2008; Scott, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008; Taylor, 2003; Wolf, 2007). This is succinctly illustrated by Richard Falk (2004),[2] professor emeritus of international law and policy at Princeton and recently appointed UN official:

> There is no excuse at this stage of American development for a posture of political innocence, including unquestioning acceptance of the good faith of our government. After all, there has been a long history of manipulated public beliefs, especially in matters of war and peace. Historians are in increasing agreement that the facts were manipulated (1) in the explosion of the USS Maine to justify the start of the Spanish-American War (1898), (2) with respect to the

> Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to justify the previously unpopular entry into World War II, (3) the Gulf of Tonkin incident of 1964, used by the White House to justify the dramatic extension of the Vietnam War to North Vietnam, and, most recently, (4) to portray Iraq as harboring a menacing arsenal of weaponry of mass destruction, in order to justify recourse to war in defiance of international law and the United Nations. . . . Why should the official account of 9/11 be treated as sacrosanct and accepted at face value, especially as it is the rationale for some of the most dangerous undertakings in the whole history of the world? (pp. ix-x)

To expose and prosecute officials responsible for orchestrating SCADs, people first must be presented with information of such crimes within the public sphere and, second, must be able to objectively consider evidence supporting those allegations—even facts that challenge their preexisting beliefs about democratic governance and citizen trust in leaders. As one of America's most prominent criminal prosecutors explains in his recent book, *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder*,

> You *have* to disabuse yourself of any preconceived notion you may have that *just because* George Bush is the president of the United States he is simply *incapable* of engaging in conduct that smacks of great criminality. Because if you take that position, a position that has no foundation in logic, you're not going to be receptive to the evidence. (Bugliosi, 2008, p. 13)

How Social Motivations and Goals Can Influence SCADs Inquiry

People's behaviors are largely regulated by *social motivations* and *goals* (refer to Figure 2). Motivations are the processes that initiate an individual's behavior directed towards a particular goal, which is defined as the "cognitive representation of a future object that the organism is committed to approach or avoid" (Elliot & Fryer, 2008, p. 244). Motives and goals are focused either on desired or rewarding end states (*approach*) or on undesired or punishing end states (*avoidance*) (Gable & Strachman, 2008). For example, one's beliefs that another person is harmless may lead one to feel safe in approaching and interacting with that person in a positive way; a response based on *approach-oriented motives or goals*. Alternatively, one's beliefs that another person is threatening may elicit fear, leading one to avoid any interaction with that person or interact in ways that provoke confrontation; a response based on *avoidance-oriented motives or goals*. (These cognitive-behavioral mechanisms also underlie *self-fulfilling prophecy*, wherein one's motives, goals, or stereotypes directly influence interpersonal behavior in ways that tend to confirm, rather than disconfirm, preexisting beliefs [Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978].) Conversely, interactions that disconfirm one's beliefs may lead to cognitive dissonance, which can be a powerful motivator for changing both public behavior and private beliefs (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2008). For example, if

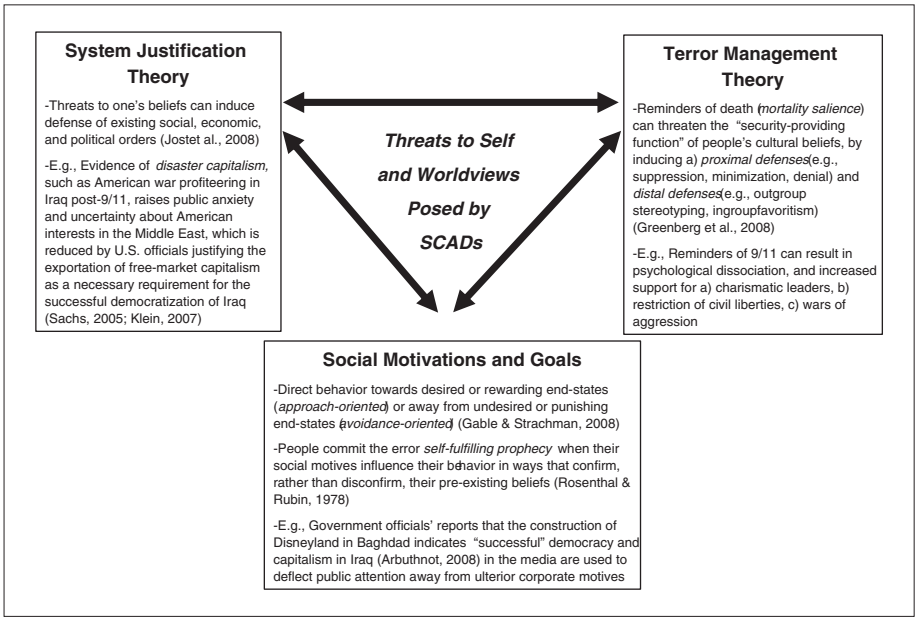

Figure 2. Model of reactions induced by threats to self and worldviews posed by SCADs. Threats to one's beliefs can inducecognitive dissonance and worldview defense. Evidence of SCADsthreatens citizens' beliefs about democracy, which can induce thought suppression, denial, stereotyping, and aggression towards the source of the dissonant information.

one works for a government institution because one believes strongly in democracy and government by the people but has recently discovered that colleagues are using the rule of law for personal gain, one would likely experience inner conflict and tension between these cognitions (refer to Figure 3). To resolve cognitive dissonance, one could publicly voice his or her concerns, becoming a "whistleblower," even at the expense of one's employment. Alternatively, one could change his or her opinion on the matter in one of two ways: Either one was wrong about one's strong belief in democracy, or one was wrong in one's belief that his or her colleagues had done something to violate the rule of law. The attitude that is the weakest is the one most vulnerable to change (Petrocelli, Tormala, & Rucker, 2007); hence, in this situation, one would most likely change one's mind regarding the most recently formed belief about one's colleagues—the path of least resistance—as opposed to one's long-standing belief about government. Thus, one might decide that nothing was done that was not necessary so that, essentially, it is tolerable to look the other way without feeling tension or guilt.

Research indicates that many people experiencing cognitive dissonance change their beliefs to make them congruent with otherwise dissonance-causing information;

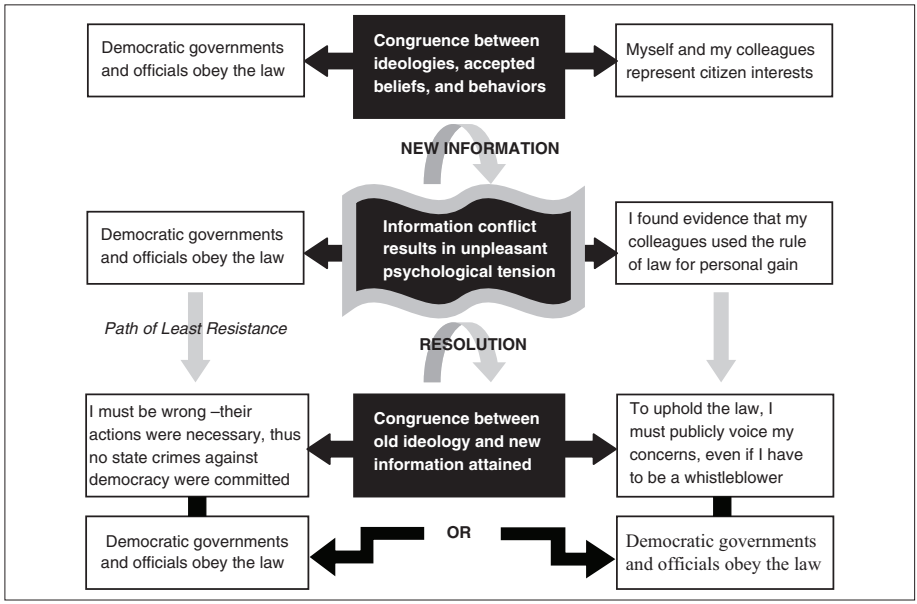

Figure 3. Model of cognitive dissonance. Psychological tension arises when new information conflicts with previously formedideologies, accepted beliefs, and corresponding behaviors. Tension is resolved by changing private beliefs or public behavior.

but occasionally, some do not, as exemplified by the case of researcher Dr. Jeffery Wigand and the tobacco industry.[3] After discovering that his employer, Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, was intentionally manipulating the effect of nicotine in cigarettes, Wigand exposed the company's practice of "impact boosting" in the mainstream media, was fired, testified in court, was constantly harassed, and was subjected to death threats because of his actions. With respect to alleged SCADs, 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. In response to the U.S. government's official account of the attacks of September 11, 2001, hundreds of officials, academics, and professionals have publicly expressed their objections.[4] Most recently, Brigham Young University physics Professor Steven Jones, who was forced into early retirement for his work analyzing World Trade Center (WTC) dust for evidence of thermite residue, an explosive used in controlled demolition, published several articles with his colleagues—in the *Open Civil Engineering Journal*, the *Environmentalist*, and the *Open Chemical Physics Journal*—countering several popular myths about the WTC collapses and findings of chemical energetic materials in the recovered debris (Harrit et al., 2009; Jones, Legge, Ryan, Szamboti, & Gourley, 2008b; Ryan, Gourley, & Jones, 2008).

People's judgments and corresponding behaviors can be profoundly influenced by the different types of motives and goals that are activated when they are exposed to

reminders of 9/11 whether they are consciously aware of such influence or not. Studies show that people are influenced by nonconscious evaluations of information that often occur before conscious judgments are made (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999): Although people may believe that they are still in the process of evaluation, they have in fact already made up their minds, mostly in the instant they first encounter a new person, object, or idea (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). In fact, a substantial amount of information about an individual is transmitted by way of that individual's unintended behavior, for which more lengthy conscious observation and deliberation does not lead to judgments different from those based on a "thin slice of evidence" (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). When people are confronted with evidence contradicting the U.S. official account of 9/11, it is unlikely that immediate, prolonged discussion and debate regarding evidence supporting alternative accounts will change people's minds. However, the more the general public is presented with dissenting opinions, the more accessible to conscious processing that information becomes; such familiarity can translate into increased support for those dissenting opinions, as demonstrated in research by Weaver, Garcia, Schwarz, and Miller (2007):

> An opinion is likely to be more widely shared the more [frequently that] different group members express it. . . . 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. (pp. 831-832)

By implication, social truth and justice movements and reform initiatives need to include strategies for resolving the cognitive dissonance and worldview defense reactions that their claims and proposals regarding SCADs inevitably provoke. Drawing from research on *terror management theory* (TMT) and *system justification theory* (SJT), the following sections discuss the cognitive constructs that can prevent people from processing information that challenges preexisting assumptions about government, dissent, and public discourse in a democratic society.

TMT: Mass Manipulation of Behavior via Mortality Salience

Threatening the validity of a person's worldview—and hence the "security-providing function of that worldview"—can result in vigorous cognitive-behavioral defenses, reactions collectively referred to as *worldview defenses* (J. Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997), ranging from contempt to physical aggression directed toward the source of the dissonant information (J. Greenberg et al., 2008; see Figure 2). According to TMT, people construct and defend cultural belief systems to deal with the existential dilemma of an "inevitable fate of nonexistence" after death (J. Greenberg et al., 2008):

> The two most illuminating implications of TMT for understanding social behavior concern self-esteem and prejudice. By explicating how self-esteem comes to

> serve an anxiety-buffering function, the theory can explain the groping for self-esteem that seems to play such a prevalent role in human behavior—including the facts that those with high self-esteem fare much better in life than those lacking in self-regard, and that threats to self-esteem engender anxiety, anger, and all sorts of defensive reactions (from self-serving attributions to murder). The theory also offers an explanation for what is humankind's most tragic and well documented flaw: the inability to get along peacefully with those different from ourselves. If culturally derived worldviews serve a deep security-providing psychological need and are yet fragile constructions, it makes perfect sense that we respond to those espousing alternative worldviews with a combination of disdain, efforts to convert those others to our views, and aggression. (pp. 116-117)

TMT is supported by research repeatedly showing that when people are exposed to information that increases death-related thoughts, known as *mortality salience*, they display more worldview defenses, such as showing greater bias toward their country or religion (known as *compensatory conviction*; I. McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001) and increased support for charismatic leaders, especially in times of national threat (e.g., Castano, 2004; J. Greenberg et al., 1990, 2008; Landau et al., 2004). J. Greenberg et al.'s (2008) TMT dual-defense model proposes that mortality salience first activates *proximal defenses*, serving to immediately remove from conscious awareness thoughts related to death (e.g., via suppression, minimization, and denial), followed by *distal defenses*, acting to preserve one's self-esteem and worldview (e.g., via out-group stereotyping and in-group favoritism) (J. Greenberg et al., 2008). Research indicates 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 mediated independently of conscious awareness, rather than integrated, putatively to protect one from reexperiencing trauma (Gershuny & Thayer, 1999; J. Herman, 1997; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kosloff et al., 2006; Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, heightened mass anxiety and fear have likely been fostered by classical conditioning of emotionally laden thoughts and behaviors (Carlson, 1994). For example, repeated media presentations of highly emotional images (Cho et al., 2003), such as images of the WTC Twin Towers being destroyed paired with the horrific screams of witnesses, have produced enduring fear and aversion associated with these events (Embry, 2007). Because subliminal exposure to 9/11-related stimuli can bring death-related thoughts closer to consciousness (Landau et al., 2004), the phrase "9/11" (similar to the "911" emergency response in North America) has become implicitly associated with traumatic death, destruction, and terrorism. The effect for many Americans and Canadians has been a corresponding increase in defensive and aggressive behavior when exposed to reminders of 9/11. For example, research shows that when Americans are exposed to reminders of their mortality and 9/11, their support for U.S. President Bush and his counterterrorism policies increases (Landau et al., 2004). In another study, designed to evaluate people's

reactions to media coverage, political leadership, the cognitive and emotional impacts of the attacks, and policies to deter further acts of terrorism, New York residents who continued to report greater distress (e.g., being angry, suspicious, or scared and avoiding certain cities and events) a year after the attacks also displayed a greater willingness to surrender some of their civil liberties (e.g., favoring the use of citizen identification cards at all times to show police immediately upon request and allowing the U.S. government to monitor e-mails, telephone calls, and credit card purchases) (M. Greenberg, Craighill, & Greenberg, 2004). Similarly, 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 country and their contempt for Islam (Haji & McGregor, 2002; c.f. I. McGregor, Nail, Marigold & Kang, 2005 and I. McGregor, 2006). 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 (I. McGregor et al., 2005; I McGregor & Jordan, 2007). Such reliance on bolstering personal worldviews in the face of threat may placate 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 & Vohs, 2001; Bonanno, Rennicke, & Dekel, 2005; Robbins & Beer, 2001), such as fueling the "cycle of zealous extremism" between opposing groups (I. McGregor, 2006, p. 348) and contributing to mass political intolerance and aggression. Clearly, then, prompting people with reminders of 9/11 may arouse strong emotions that can be used by both government officials and mainstream media to manipulate citizens' behaviors. For example, arousing people's anger evokes more *dispositional* attributions (e.g., explaining causes in terms of individual's personality or motives), such as thoughts focusing on blame and justice (Lazarus, 1991; Small, Lerner, & Fischhoff, 2006), whereas arousing sadness leads to more *situational* attributions (e.g., explaining causes in terms of environmental influences), such as focusing on how to improve matters (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994), as explained by 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. (pp. 295-296)

Although reminders of the 9/11 attacks triggered out-group hostility toward people who were perceived as being even somewhat related to the purported terrorists who attacked the WTC and the Pentagon (Haji & McGregor, 2002; H. A. McGregor et al.,

1998; I. McGregor et al., 2005; Pyszczynski et al., 2006; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Small et al., 2006), not all people engaged in overt displays of intolerance; some responded with imperative restraint and concern for the safety of others potentially stereotyped as "terrorists" (Reed & 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? As already discussed, one factor that can help explain this discrepancy is the activation of a person's *self-protective* motivations (Reed & Aquino, 2003), which are related to maintaining certainty about one's self and worldviews, preventing threats, and avoiding mortality salience, as already discussed. However, Reed and Aquino (2003) propose another motivation 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" (Reed & Aquino, 2003, p. 1271).

Thus, when people with strong moral identities have goals associated with those identities activated, either consciously or nonconsciously, their reactions to others outside of their social group are likely to be characterized by the following: a sense of obligation for 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 & Aquino, 2003). This was evident in the efforts of some Americans who publicly "pleaded for racial tolerance and openly condemned acts of discrimination directed against fellow citizens and even noncitizens" (Reed & Aquino, 2003, p. 1270).The majority of research on TMT indicates that people's motivations to reduce the anxiety that arises from reminders of death and 9/11 can result in strong religious and patriotic displays and intolerance for people holding different cultural and political beliefs, "ominous findings that do not bode well for the rational democracy envisioned by the Founding Fathers" (J. Greenberg et al., 2008, p. 130). Similarly, justification of the current social system can serve to reduce anxiety arising from uncertainty when the system's faults are exposed (Jost et al., 2008), again, findings that do not bode well for progressive social change in the face of injustice and crimes perpetrated by the state against its citizens.

SJT: How Preexisting Social Attitudes Can Suppress Evidence of SCADs

According to SJT, there are many "social psychological mechanisms by which people defend and justify the existing social, economic, and political arrangements, often to their own detriment" (Jost et al., 2008, p. 591; see Figure 2). Similar to reducing the negative effects of mortality salience proposed by TMT, justification of the system also maintains "consistency, coherence, and certainty, and existential needs to manage various forms of threat and distress and to find meaning in life" (Jost et al., 2008, p. 598). SJT is supported by research showing that people can be strongly motivated to

truncate their evaluations of information to acquire or preserve a "definitive answer to a question as opposed to [experiencing] uncertainty, confusion, or ambiguity," known as the *need for closure* (e.g., Kruglanski, 1989; cf. Kruglanski & Young Chun, 2008, p. 84). The persistence of faulty beliefs, then, at both individual and societal levels, may perform an important psychological function, for example, by promoting feelings of safety and justice rather than permitting acknowledgment of potential vulnerability and exploitation (Baumeister, 1997; J. Greenberg et al., 2008; Jost et al., 2008; Thompson & Schlehofer, 2008). Hence, system justification motives may interfere with SCADs inquiry because people are highly motivated to defend the institutions with which they are most familiar (e.g., religious and political conservatism, American capitalism, and military foreign interventionism), behavior that is supported largely by selective attention and interpretation of information (Jost et al., 2008):

> Even when faced with incontrovertible evidence of the system's failings, people tend to support it as the best available option. Enduring support for the status quo is often explained in terms of the power of ideology to explain, justify, and rationalize discrepancies between the ideals of the system and its reality. . . . Several studies have shown that ideological endorsement, stereotyping, and ingroup (or outgroup) favoritism are all undertaken in response to system threat. (pp. 594-595)

Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004) argue that citizens' needs to "defend and justify the system against threat" have contributed greatly to the important psychological and social aftereffects of the 9/11 attacks, as with bolstered support for the otherwise quite unpopular President Bush (Moore, 2001), significantly increased trust in the U.S. government (Chanley, 2002), and heightened stereotyping of Arab Americans (Goodwin & Devos, 2002; c.f. Jost et al., 2004). Research on authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988, 1996) and political conservatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) indicates that system justification is a mechanism for some people to resist change and to rationalize inequalities in the status quo, even to their own detriment. In addition, social change is largely impeded by the low occurrence of collective action and protest against the system unless it is brutally unjust and by the fact that criticism of the system can paradoxically increase justification and rationalization of the status quo, particularly when alternatives appear unlikely (Jost et al., 2008). This is especially true for alternatives proposed by a minority of dissenters, as research shows that information appearing to represent the majority opinion tends to induce "immediate persuasion," in comparison to minority opinions, which often induce "immediate resistance" (Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994), as confirmed by Tormala, DeSensi, and Petty (2007):

> 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. . . . 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. . . . 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. (p. 354)

Contributing to people's failure to think critically about the validity of their worldviews is another psychological phenomenon known as *naive realism*: the tendency to believe that oneself always sees and responds to the world objectively, and thus when others do not agree, it is because their cognitions and behaviors are not based on reality (Ross & Ward, 1995, 1996). In fact, research shows that when people are reminded of their mortality, they exaggerate the number of people who hold similar worldviews (known as *consensus bias*; Pyszczynski et al., 1996). Naive realism, cognitive dissonance, TMT, and SJT all indicate that what generally supports the persistence of preexisting worldviews—particularly in the face of evidence to the contrary—is uncertainty reduction and threat management (J. Greenberg et al., 2008; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2008; Jost et al., 2008; Ross & Ward, 1995, 1996). It is not surprising, therefore, 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 initially react by aggressively defending the official story, even to the point of fabricating arguments to support their beliefs. As playwright Arthur Miller once remarked,

> Few of us can easily surrender our belief that society must somehow make sense. The thought that the state has lost its mind and is punishing so many innocent people is intolerable. And so the evidence has to be internally denied. (quoted in. Pilger, 2004, p. 23)

Research on TMT and SJT strongly suggests that defending the current U.S. political system and its prerogatives post-9/11 requires individual and collective denial to block out any and all information undermining the government's account of 9/11 and hence the archetypal image of "America under Attack."[5] When a particular mindset governs the collective consciousness to promote a particular agenda, such as the U.S. government's account of 9/11 parroted by the mainstream media without judicious investigation, the result is what McMurtry (2007) refers to as a "ruling group-mind" (RGM):

> Here is a "regulating group-mind" or socially regulating syntax of thought and judgment which locks out all evidence against its assumptions and blinkers out the destructive effects which reveal its delusions. . . . Since the *ruling*

> *group-mind* always operates *a priori*, facts cannot dislodge what its categorical structure perceives and knows already. . . . [For example] primary connections which are pre-empted on the most general plane are: (1) the policy declaration in 2000 by U.S. national security planners in PNAC,[6] which expressed the commitment to "full-spectrum dominance" by the U.S. state across the world; (2) its expressed desire for a fast-track to this dominance rather than a "prolonged one"; and (3) the perfect consistency between this policy, what happened on 9/11, and what happened afterwards through the 9/11 Wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. (p. 225)

The specific role of defensive denial in supporting flawed ideological belief systems was recently highlighted in two case studies analyzing the psychodynamics of attitude change. Bengston and Marshik's (2007) identification of several mechanisms of *attitude resistance* (e.g., dissociation,[7] narcissistic withdrawal,[8] and hyperrationalization[9]) underscored the fact that merely arousing cognitive dissonance is not a sufficient catalyst for changing behavior. Bengston and Marshik also identified several mechanisms of *attitude change* (e.g., moral culpability,[10] realism,[11] and experiential enlightenment[12]) and discussed both findings in regard to public education on matters of democratic responsibility:

> For [democratic governance] to work as a viable alternative to rule by sheer power, citizens have to be not only knowledgeable *but also educable—able to learn from civil experience and debates about policy* to take a more perspicuous view of what constitutes their interests than they might have started with. But defensiveness has its appeal. If it did not, if ideologues and neurotics would not be amply gratified by their illusions and delusions, they would have no reason to resist moving forward. And so it is a measure of teaching effectiveness, on a par with successful psychoanalysis, that it can cultivate open-mindedness in persons who would otherwise be happily closed-minded. (p. 1)

However, according to SJT, when changes to the collective worldview become inexorable, people's defense of the status quo begins to weaken in response to a growing support for the emergent worldview (Jost et al., 2008):

> The implication of a system justification analysis for social change is that it will either come not at all or all at once, the way that catastrophic change occurs in dynamic systems and in *tipping point* phenomena (e.g., Gladwell, 2000; Johnson, 1966). (p. 602)

Since 2001, a growing number of Americans do not believe that their federal government has 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, "53% of respondents think the Bush administration is hiding something, and 28% believe it is lying."[13] 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 was telling the truth about prior knowledge of the events of 9/11 (i.e., in response to a) "telling the truth," b) "hiding something," c) "mostly lying," and d) "not sure," the proportion of people endorsing these statements were, respectively, 21%, 65%, 8%, and 6% in May 2002, and 16%, 53%, 28%, and 3% in October 2006).[14]

Indeed, citizen trust in the current political system is moving toward a tipping-point phenomenon that threatens to change the status quo: Questions about the motives of the Bush administration post-9/11 are translating into questions about the complicity of U.S. officials in the events of 9/11, which could have future repercussions on democracy in America. According to Grossman (2006),

> 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.* (p. 1; italics added)

Consequences of the Dismissal of SCADs by the Mass Public

Democracies are not immune from government officials using fear and propaganda to gain popular support for policies of external aggression and internal repression (Wolf, 2007). As North Americans struggle with repercussions of the attacks of September 11, 2001—the deaths of nearly 3,000 people from 90 countries on that day, the U.S. declaration of a global war on terrorism, the erosion of civil liberties by the passing of PATRIOT Acts I and II, and the hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by the 9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—American and Canadian citizens continue to be manipulated by their governments and media into forfeiting their freedoms and duties in exchange for security, grave matters that continue to be ignored by the mainstream media (Rich, 2006; Zwicker, 2006), the putative "watchdog" of democracy. As a political culture grows increasingly intolerant, public dissent is often demonized, as with the persistent, broad refusal to challenge current political posturing despite overwhelming evidence that the Bush administration misled or outright lied about the events of 9/11 and its ensuing wars (Bugliosi, 2008; Griffin, 2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Scott, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). The integrity of a free press, where dissenting opinions and public discourse are presented—a matter integral to democracy—is already disappearing in Canada, according to a report on the news media from the Senate of Canada (2006).[15] One of the greatest threats to democracy is mainstream news media's collusion with government in censoring information, especially in times of war (Williams, 1992):

> Wars prosecuted by democratic societies are done so in the name of the people. If the public supports a war then it has a responsibility for the consequences. Citizens have rights and responsibilities, and surely one of the responsibilities in

> wartime is to see—or at least be provided with the opportunity to see—the price being paid to prosecute the war, whether this is the body of your neighbor's son or innocent civilians killed in the crossfire. Even if people do not want to accept their responsibilities it is difficult to argue that they have a right to be protected from seeing what happens on the battlefield. This would appear to deny a necessary democratic impulse. (p. 161)

According to alternative news media, this "necessary democratic impulse" is being sublimated to the detriment of both "democratic" and "nondemocratic" lives, albeit unequally, as reported by Escobar (2008):

> Roughly two minutes of coverage, per network, per week. This is what the 3 major U.S. networks [ABC, CBS, NBC] now think that the drama in Iraq is worth…the networks are not telling Americans that more than one million Iraqis have been killed due to the 2003 U.S. invasion, according to sources as diverse as the medical paper *The Lancet*, [the website] *Iraq Body Count*, the British polling firm *Opinion Research Business*, and the website *Just Foreign Policy.* The networks are not even discussing the different numbers of violent Iraqi deaths, which may range from 600,000 to 1.2 million. The networks are not talking about the Pentagon underreporting or not reporting Iraqi civilian deaths. As Donald Rumsfeld used to say, the Pentagon "don't do body counts." The networks are not talking about the millions of Iraqi widows of war. The networks are not talking about almost 5 million displaced Iraqis - 2.4 million inside Iraq and 2.3 million in Jordan and in Syria. And the networks are not talking about - and especially not showing - U.S. soldiers coming home in body bags. Iraq is a human disaster worse than 9/11. (transcript)

Recently, insiders from both the Bush administration and U.S. news media publicly acknowledged that underreporting on the 9/11 wars is not because of lack of sensationalism—just the opposite: a collusion to manipulate public opinion in favor of wars of aggression,[16] constantly invoking 9/11 and falsely reporting links to Saddam Hussein.[17] The effect of government and media manipulation on political tolerance is summarized by Snow and Taylor (2006):

> The dominance of censorship and propaganda is a triumph of authoritarian over democratic values. During times of international crisis like the Cold War or now in the so-called 'Global War on Terror', authoritarian values of secrecy, information control and silencing dissent would appear to take precedence over democracy, the First Amendment and a free press. The general trend since 9/11, especially in the U.S., has been away from openness and toward increasing government secrecy coupled with what can seem a rise in contempt among inner circle policy-makers for a public's right to know that may override national and homeland security concerns. . . . The military-industrial-media complex is likely

> to remain a formidable force in American politics and foreign policy. It is unlikely to weaken because power once obtained does not voluntarily give up its domination. (pp. 390, 401)

Managing Fear by Justifying the System: Denial of Deep State Politics and Defense of Disaster Capitalism

Perhaps the most serious threat to political tolerance, and thus democracy, is the *one-percent doctrine*:[18] a policy, emanating from the Bush administration, of preemptive aggression against any state or nonstate actor posing even a "1% chance" of threat, which must be treated as a 100% certainty (Suskind, 2006; see Figure 1). For example, as the November 2008 U.S. presidential election neared, neoconservatives continued to invoke the threat of "radical Islamic extremism" as the "absolute gravest threat" to the existence of America, even conceding that another 9/11-like terrorist attack would be "a big advantage to [Republican Presidential candidate John McCain]."[19] Incredibly, the Bush administration and mainstream media were still following in the same steps that led up to the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, this time preparing to support a possible Israeli-led war on Iran before President Bush left office in January 2009.[20] In fact, Pentagon officials have acknowledged that covert operations against Iran "to create a *casus belli* between Tehran and Washington," including plans to use "surrogates and false flags—basic counterintelligence and counter-insurgency tactics" similar to those used in Afghanistan, have been underway since 2007 with congressional approval and no major public debate (Hersh, 2008, p. 6). In fact, war propagandists are now predicting that Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities will be welcomed by the Arab world, stating that their reaction will be "positive privately . . . [with] public denunciations but no action,"[21] words sounding alarmingly familiar to Vice President Dick Cheney's erroneous prediction that Iraqi's would greet Americans "as liberators."[22] Furthermore, the rhetoric of fear in attempting to link 9/11 terrorism to Iran cuts across both conservative and liberal party lines. In a speech as the Democratic presidential candidate, Barack Obama made repeated references to the terrorist threat facing the United States as "a powerful and ideological enemy intent on world domination" with the "power to destroy life on a catastrophic scale" if terrorists were permitted nuclear bombing capabilities:

> The future of our security—and our planet—is held hostage to our dependence on foreign oil and gas. From the cave-spotted mountains of northwest Pakistan, to the centrifuges spinning beneath Iranian soil, we know that the American people cannot be protected by oceans or the sheer might of our military alone. The attacks of September 11 brought this new reality into a terrible and ominous focus."[23]

Within the first 6 months of taking office, President Obama has expanded the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, asserting similar fear-provoking rhetoric as the prior Bush administration:[24]

> My single most important responsibility as President is to keep the American people safe. . . . This responsibility is only magnified in an era when an extremist ideology threatens our people, and technology gives a handful of terrorists the potential to do us great harm. We are less than eight years removed from the deadliest attack on American soil in our history. We know that al Qaeda is actively planning to attack us again. We know that this threat will be with us for a long time, and that we must use all elements of our power to defeat it. . . . For the first time since 2002, we are providing the necessary resources and strategic direction to take the fight to the extremists who attacked us on 9/11 in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We are investing in the 21st century military and intelligence capabilities that will allow us to stay one step ahead of a nimble enemy. We have re-energized a global non-proliferation regime to deny the world's most dangerous people access to the world's deadliest weapons, and launched an effort to secure all loose nuclear materials within four years. We are better protecting our border, and increasing our preparedness for any future attack or natural disaster. We are building new partnerships around the world to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates. And we have renewed American diplomacy so that we once again have the strength and standing to truly lead the world. (p. 1)

This continued shift toward ever-increasing authoritarianism and imperialism, precipitated by the mass fear and propaganda of 9/11, brings in its wake an ever-more-closed security state (Wolf, 2007; see Figure 1). According to Wolf (2007), all of the 10 historical steps prospective despots employ to close down open societies are well underway in North America: (a) invoking national external and internal threats, (b) establishing secret prisons, (c) recruiting paramilitary forces, (d) surveilling ordinary citizens, (e) infiltrating citizens' groups, (f) arbitrarily detaining and releasing citizens, (g) targeting dissenting individuals, (h) restriction of the free press, (i) reframing criticism as "espionage" and dissent as "treason," and (j) subverting the rule of law. In *The Road to 9/11: Wealth, Empire, and the Future of America*, Scott (2007c) argues further that at least since World War II, the emergence of a "deep state" (e.g., covert actions by the CIA and other officials with little or no congressional oversight) and a "security state" (e.g., similar military actions by the Pentagon) have circumvented the "public state" of politics, threatening the future of North American democracies. Scott (2008) proposes that the attack on 9/11 was a deep state event with serious constitutional repercussions that have redirected political control away from the public state permanently:

> With the introduction of COG [continuity of government] before 10:00 AM on September 11, 2001, the status of the U.S. constitution in American society has changed, in ways that still prevail. . . . The mainstream U.S. media (as we now clearly see them) have become so implicated in past protective lies about Korea, Tonkin Gulf, and the JFK assassination that they, as well as the government, have now a demonstrated interest in preventing the truth about *any* of these

> events from coming out. This means that the current threat to constitutional rights does not derive from the deep state alone. . . . The problem is a global dominance *mindset* that prevails not only inside the Washington Beltway but also in the mainstream media and even in the universities, one which has come to accept recent inroads on constitutional liberties, and stigmatizes, or at least responds with silence to, those who are alarmed by them. . . . Congress has shown little or no desire to challenge, or even question, the over-arching assumptions of the war on terror. The constitutional implications of this state of emergency were aggravated by the President's "National Security and Homeland Security Presidential Directive" (NSPD)-51, of May 9, 2007, which decreed (without even a press release) that: "When the president determines a catastrophic emergency has occurred, the president can take over all government functions and direct all private sector activities to ensure we will emerge from the emergency with an "enduring constitutional government." (pp. 5-8)

In an increasingly fearful and intolerant political culture, this authoritarian mindset—escalated primarily by the events of 9/11—is also a disastrously dissociative one: It exemplifies "democracy for the few." This belief system places a premium on democratic rather than nondemocratic lives and compartmentalizes a paranoiac fear of terrorism away from a patriotic fervor to spread democracy and capitalism through war and occupation to anti-American states in the Middle East. These simultaneously disparate beliefs are fueled by the imperialist agenda of American leaders committed to both military and economic conquest of regions in the Middle East (Chossudovsky, 2008; Klein, 2007; Mandel, 2004; Sachs, 2005; Scahill, 2008). The Bush administration implemented numerous policies that promote *disaster capitalism*—economic profiteering in the aftermath of collective shocks, such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and war—both in America and abroad in regions where it maintains military control, primarily, Iraq (Klein, 2007; Scahill, 2008; see Figure 2). Huge profits can be acquired in the aftermath of wars through "postconflict reconstruction" loans provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, organizations "often consulted prior to the onslaught of a major war" and that have been pivotal in "channeling 'foreign aid' to both Iraq and Afghanistan" (Chossudovsky, 2008, p. 1). Rationalization of free-market policies in difficult times, such as falsely promoting beliefs that economic markets must be free for democracies to survive even though example shows that democratization "does not reliably translate into faster economic growth" (Sachs, 2005, p. 315), serves to manage the American public's anxiety and reduce uncertainty about U.S. interests in anti-American states. System justification research repeatedly shows that "endorsing fair market ideology [is] associated with the tendency to minimize the seriousness of corporate ethical scandals" and that "people generally believe that companies with profits are more ethical than companies posting losses" (Jost et al., 2008, p. 594). These policies have permitted collusion between war profiteers and elite opinion makers in Washington on one hand and the news media on the other to support a growing disaster capitalism complex, one in which

corporately controlled media fails to investigate allegations of a "global war [being] fought on every level by private companies whose involvement is paid for with the public money" while simultaneously promoting "the unending mandate of protecting the United States homeland in perpetuity while eliminating all 'evil' abroad" (Klein, 2007, p. 12). U.S. officials have also used justification of free-market economic systems to minimize focus on the human disaster in Iraq and to rationalize and defend the exportation of American capitalism as a means to support democracy in the Middle East: Recently, the major U.S. entertainment conglomerate Disney announced its plans to increase profits by building an amusement park on expropriated Iraqi national park land in the middle of one of the most violent war zones in the Middle East, even though it clearly will not service the immediate needs of the Iraqi people (Arbuthnot, 2008; see Figure 2):

> In an "agreement" with the "Mayor" of Baghdad, the fifty acre Zawa Park is to be developed into a trashy Disneyland by the Tigris, complete with malls, hotels, housing, amusements, entertainment and a museum. Iraq's National Museum with its millennias of treasures and the National Library's irreplaceable ancient volumes and manuscripts were looted and destroyed under the U.S. watch in 2003. . . . Announcing his plans in Baghdad, financier Llewellyn Werner stated: "I'm not here because I think you are nice people. I think there is money to be made here…I wouldn't be doing this if I wasn't making money." . . . On May 9th, Dick Cheney, on the Paul Gallow Show in Mississippi, told Americans that the proposed development was a sign that things in Iraq were "going swimmingly." The Pentagon is fast tracking this development as a centerpiece for the new Baghdad in the new Iraq.
>
> . . . The obscenity of this project—before limbs, wheelchairs, clean water, hospitals, schools, sufficient food, decontaminating the radioactive waste, from weapons designated three times by the United Nations as weapons of mass destruction, which litters the country and the region from the U.S. and U.K. weapons—beggars belief. When Medical Aid for Iraqi children sent children's wheel chairs after the invasion, the U.S. Army disappeared them. But with countless hundreds of thousands of legless, limbless children, throughout Iraq, resultant from their actions, not medical help, but free skateboards can be funded. (pp. 1-4)

To preserve what is left of North American democracy—and our responsibility for tolerance and restraint toward citizens of nondemocratic states—the culture of fear and political intolerance and a governing dissociative mindset of "democracy for the few" must be subjected to immediate serious public scrutiny and debate. This must begin with the thorough and scientific vetting of evidence that contradicts the U.S. government's official account of 9/11, on which two wars of aggression have been predicated, with the possibility of a third looming in the near future; for it was this event, more than any other in modern history, that has precipitated an epochal change in the social psychology of "We, the People."

Reform Initiatives for Improving Public Discourse Regarding SCADs

The importance of continued public education and debate about SCADs in the post-9/11 world cannot be emphasized enough, especially with governments and media attempting to silence dissenting voices, often with ad hominem attacks. Many scholars have already "debunked" non sequitur labels, such as "conspiracy theory/theorist," as mechanisms for a priori dismissal of a person's arguments, particularly within the realm of scientific discourse (E. Herman & Chomsky, 1989; Simons, 1994; Parenti, 1996; Coady, 2003; Chomsky, 2004; Fetzer, 2007; Griffin, 2004, 2007a, 2007b; Jones, 2007a, 2007b). In a recent sociological analysis, Husting and Orr (2007) discussed the inherent dangers of applying "conspiracy" labels to public exchanges of ideas and scholarly dialogues in a democracy:

> In a culture of fear, we should expect the rise of new mechanisms of social control to deflect distrust, anxiety, and threat. . . . Our findings suggest that authors use the conspiracy theorist label as *(1) a routinized strategy of exclusion; (2) a reframing mechanism that deflects questions or concerns about power, corruption, and motive; and (3) an attack upon the personhood and competence of the questioner*. . . . The mechanism allows those who use it *to sidestep sound scholarly and journalistic practice, avoiding the examination of evidence, often in favor of one of the most important errors in logic and rhetoric—the ad hominem attack.* While contest, claim, and counterclaim are vital to public discourse, we must recognize that "democracy is a fragile and delicate thing" (Denzin, 2004) and mechanisms that define the limits of the sayable must continually be challenged. (pp. 127, 147; italics added)

Accordingly, social truth and justice movements and reform initiatives must address the social and psychological defense mechanisms that their inquiries into SCADs can provoke in the mass public. This approach needs to address both short-term and long-term solutions. First, immediate strategies to increase public awareness of SCADs should focus on framing information in neutral, nonthreatening language that gradually introduces people to the most serious of charges. Alternative accounts should be repeatedly presented within the public sphere with specific requests for citizens to themselves research the information presented to them and pass their findings along to others. This is supported by research showing that (a) when controlling language is used to influence a message, it can arouse psychological reactance in people that results in rejection of that message (Brehm, 1966; C. H. Miller, Lane, Deatrick, Young, & Potts, 2007; Worchel & Brehm, 1971); (b) civic participation is greatly increased when people are recruited to become involved during discussions of social responsibility (Klofstad, 2007; Zuckerman, 2004); and (c) message repetition increases familiarity, which can translate into message tolerance and/or acceptance (Weaver et al., 2007). Regarding alleged 9/11 SCADs, public messages should encourage people to compare information presented by the 9/11 Commission Report (2004) with facts reported by

nongovernmental sources and to contact their political representatives to follow up on any questions that they have not had answered. To reclaim their democratic rights and responsibilities, Scott (2008) recommends that citizens mobilize nationwide pressure on Congress and the media, compelling their political representatives to

a) Review and revise the Military Commissions Act of 2006, to unequivocally restore habeas corpus, within the limitations of the U.S. Constitution, Article One, Section 9.
b) Unequivocally outlaw torture.
c) Review and restrict the provisions for warrantless electronic surveillance in the Protected America Act of 2007.
d) Vote for The American Freedom Agenda Act of 2007 (H.R. 3835), which addresses these and other issues. This bill was introduced by the U.S. Rep. Ron Paul on October 15, 2007, and is supported by both the Republican American Freedom Agenda, and the Democratic American Freedom Campaign.
e) Insist on the right of the Homeland Security Committees in Congress to review the COG appendices to National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-51.
f) Support a law to force all government agencies to collaborate with the National Archives, in fulfillment of the 9/11 Commission's commitment to release its supporting records to the public in 2009. (p. 10)

Concerned citizens can also refer to papers published in the *Journal of 9/11 Studies* that provide evidence refuting the U.S. official account of 9/11 (e.g., Griffin, 2007a; Jackson, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Jones, Farrer, et al., 2008; MacQueen, 2006; Scott, 2007b) and provide detailed examples of how to effectively discuss such information with fellow citizens (e.g., Legge, 2007; Manwell, 2007a, 2007b).

Additional long-term solutions should include future public policy changes focused on increasing public education on (a) media literacy (Senate of Canada, 2006) and (b) the social and psychological manipulation of citizens by the state (McDermott & Zimbardo, 2007). This is supported by research showing that (a) knowledgeable citizens possessing "firm, well-grounded political opinions are less susceptible to priming than audience members who know little about issues that dominate the news" (Graber, 2004, p. 548); (b) "majority decisions tend to be made without engaging the systemic thought and critical thinking skills of the individuals in the group" but that dissident minority influence has been most effective when it "persisted in affirming a consistent position, appeared confident, avoided seeming rigid and dogmatic, and was skilled in social influence" (Zimbardo, 2008, p. 267); and (c) when people are educated about and highly motivated to reduce their interpersonal biases, they "exhibit less prejudice" and develop more "shared social beliefs" (Stroessner & Scholer, 2008, p. 583). Regarding SCADs, secondary- and postsecondary-level education should include courses on political psychology that deal with the social psychological foundations of democracy and citizens' rights and responsibilities to protect themselves from manipulation by the state and media.

Conclusion

This article presented, first, a brief review of the social psychological foundations of democracy; second, research suggesting how preexisting beliefs can interfere with SCADs inquiry, specifically in relation to the events of September 11, 2001; and third, strategies to educate the public on how it can be manipulated by government and media into forfeiting civil liberties and duties. In the same year that William Golding proffered his warning about the importance of dissent in a climate of fear, another great spokesman, Edward R. Murrow, also reminded us of the necessity of dissent to fulfill our responsibility of defending democracy from rampant fear:

> We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof, and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men—not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular.[25]

We scholars can and must take seriously the citizen's call to action and not allow fear to override the demand for interpersonal tolerance of different political views. We can and must create dissonance in the public psyche to encourage social responsibility and education on matters of national interest. We can and must investigate the current state of affairs for ourselves and not delegate accountability to elected officials who may harbor alternative agendas. We can and must remember that trading freedom for security divests our contemporary and all future collective power to participate in democratic governance. We can and must believe that change is possible when we choose to be a part of it. We can and must dissent in the face of everyday denials of democracy.

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Notes

1. In response to an item on Altemeyer's 1982 Right Wing Authoritarian Scale (Altemeyer, 1988, p. 22-23), although 66% strongly disagreed and 8% were neutral or undecided, a full 26% of 1,233 American lawmakers agreed with the following statement: "Once our government leaders and the authorities condemn the dangerous elements in our society, it will be the duty of every patriotic citizen to help stomp out the rot that is poisoning our country

from within" (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 297). When presenting these data to academic audiences, Altemeyer found that most people were shocked and some even incredulous of his findings, arguing, "Surely nobody agrees with that" and "Only an out-and-out Nazi thinks that way" (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 297). Altemeyer (1996) also cites the example of people's responses to a real crisis in Canada after the October 1970 terrorist kidnapping of two Quebec officials, in which 87% of citizens supported the federal government's implementation of the War Measures Act, a measure meant only for national emergencies. Even though it was later substantiated "that no danger of an insurrection had existed, and the government had knowingly, massively misrepresented the situation," Altemeyer explains the damage that was done: "But we believed the government's deceit, and thus had risked the loss of our democracy. . . . We had our 'Reichstag Fire Test,' and we failed it" (p. 297).

2. "U.N. Official Urged Commission to Study Neocon Role in 9/11," *New York Sun*, April 9, 2008 (http://www.nysun.com/news/foreign/un-official-urged-commission-study-neocon-role-911).
3. Dr. Wigand's interview on *60 Minutes* with CBS correspondent Mike Wallace, February 4, 1996; see http://www.jeffreywigand.com/insider/60minutes.html.
4. Examples of 9/11 whistleblowers include the following people: former U.S. director of advanced space programs Dr. Robert Bowman, former FBI translator Sibel Edmonds, former CIA analyst Raymond McGovern, German minister of defense and former minister of technology Andreas von Bülow, former U.K. government minister Michael Meacher, former Canadian diplomat and professor Peter Dale Scott, and so on, found at http://patriotsquestion911.com/. The most notable critic is former FBI counterterrorism expert John O'Neill, who was actually killed in the World Trade Center (WTC) on September 11, 2001. 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 [the Northern Alliance General Ahmad] 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.'" (Griffin, 2004, pp. 110-111)

5. The collective unconscious, as described by Carl Gustav Jung in *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (1911; revised in 1956 as *Symbols of Transformations*), refers to the vast, hidden, psychic resources commonly shared by all people, such as the archetypal images, or basic motifs, found in most human myths, symbols, dreams, and desires.
6. PNAC is the Project for a New American Century (http://www.newamericancentury.org/), which commissioned the report "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces, and Resources for a New Century," available at http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf. The report calls for the ability to fight two wars simultaneously ("U.S. armed forces should be shaped by a 'two-major-war' standard"; p. 9), and to achieve such military preeminence, a transforming event is needed, such as a new Pearl

Harbor ("The process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor"; p. 51). For plans to gain military preeminence in the Middle East on a permanent basis and the capacity to provoke war, see also the following sections: "Army: To 'Complete' Europe and Defend the Persian Gulf" (p. 22) and "Air Force: Toward a Global First-Strike Force" (p. 30).

7. Dissociation is the process by which the mind compartmentalizes thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when they become too overwhelming to integrate consciously. This process of mental decompensation, which occurs outside of conscious awareness, is generally considered neither extraordinary nor pathological in itself (Carson, Butcher, & Mineka, 1996).
8. *Narcissistic withdrawal* refers to a person's retreat into an exaggerated sense of self-importance and entitlement in response to information that contradicts his or her self-perceived grandiosity. This retreat is supported by the person's inability to see things from the perspective of other people (Carson et al., 1996).
9. Rationalization is the process by which people defend their actions by creating "good" reasons to justify them, including fabricating explanations to conceal or disguise disreputable motives for their behaviors (Carson et al., 1996).
10. Moral culpability, also referred to as *conscience*, is observed when a person experiences moral anxiety, which arises from one's action (real or perceived) that conflicts with an individual's superego, causing feelings of guilt (Carson et al., 1996).
11. Realism is the opposite of the denial of reality, which is a defensive mechanism that serves to protect a person from an unpleasant reality simply by refusing to acknowledge it (Carson et al., 1996).
12. *Experiential enlightenment* refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through direct experience in contrast to abstract reasoning (Bugental & McBeath, 1995). Here, the transformation requires authentic relationships with oneself and with others (Elliott & Greenberg, 1995).
13. *The New York Times* and CBS News cited by Angus-Reid Global Monitor: "Methodology: Telephone interviews with 983 American adults, conducted from Oct. 5 to Oct. 8, 2006. Margin of error is 4 per cent." See http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/13469.
14. Angus-Reid Global Monitor, Polls and Research, October 14, 2006 (http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view americans_question_bush_on_9_11_intelligence/).
15. According to the Senate of Canada (2006),

> In a society with a truly free press, awkward facts, whether awkward to government or industry or influential individuals, cannot be suppressed. . . . Several witnesses argued that the current system does not reflect the open society that Canada is assumed to be. (p. 46)

It also stated,

> News and information become more useful when its consumers—readers, listeners and viewers—can distinguish between high and low quality reporting and recognize the role

that news can play in a well-functioning democracy. . . . This can only be guaranteed if there is a plurality of owners. . . . It is impossible to have democracy without citizens and impossible to exercise meaningful citizenship without access to news, information, analysis and opinion. (p. 61-65)

16. "Was Press a War 'Enabler'? Two Offer a Nod From Inside," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2008 (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/30/washington/30press.html?fta=y).
17. *Meet the Press*, MSNBC, September 14, 2003 (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3080244/).
18. Dick Cheney said, "If there's a 1% chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response. It's not about our analysis . . . it's about our response." *Time Magazine*, June 19, 2006 (http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1205478,00.html)
19. "The Evolution of John McCain," *CNN Fortune Magazine*, June 23, 2008 (http://money.cnn.com/2008/06/20/magazines/fortune/Evolution_McCain_Whitford.fortune/index.html).
20. "Israelis 'Rehearse Iran Attack,'" BBC World News, June 20, 2008 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7465170.stm); "Israel 'Will Attack Iran' Before new U.S. President Sworn In, John Bolton Predicts," *U.K. Daily Telegraph*, June 24, 2008 (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/2182070/Israel-'will-attack-Iran'-before-new-US-president-sworn-in,-John-Bolton-predicts.html).
21. "Israel 'Will Attack Iran.'"
22. *Meet the Press*, MSNBC, September 14, 2003 (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3080244/).
23. Barack Obama, "A New Strategy for a New World," speech given in Washington, D.C., July 15, 2008. Transcript at http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/07/a_new_strategy_for_a_new_world.html.
24. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on National Security," speech given in Washington, D.C., May 21, 2009. Transcript at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-On-National-Security-5-21-09/.
25. From the March 9, 1954, *See It Now* television broadcast on Senator Joe McCarthy.

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Bio

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