

Why Do Good People Become Silent—or Worse—About 9/11?

*Resistance to information that substantially challenges our worldview
is, we find, the rule rather than the exception*

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Part 1: Preface and Introduction



Preface

The following essay is not meant to persuade anyone of the theory that elements within our government were responsible for the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001. Rather, this paper is addressed primarily to the 45% of Americans¹ — and those people in other parts of the world — who already believe a new investigation is needed, as well as those who simply have had their doubts about the official account of 9/11 but have not explored the issue further. This paper is also addressed to psychology professionals and social scientists who may wish to consider the question in the title in greater depth.

Furthermore, this essay should be helpful to anyone who encounters resistance to *any* paradigm-shifting idea about which he or she may be communicating, since the same dynamics and research would apply in most such cases.

This work was not crafted entirely alone. I am grateful to the Writing Team of Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth who suggested I write an article in the first place — thus the seed was planted. Once the seed began germinating, it developed from an article to a very long essay. This work was nurtured by substantial suggestions from Marti Hopper, Ph.D.; Sheila Fabricant Linn, M.Div.; Dennis Linn, M.Div.; Daniel K. Sage, Ph.D.; Dorothy Lorig, M.A.; Earl Staelin, J.D.; Joseph Karuna; Gregg Roberts; John Freedom, C.E.H.P.; Danielle Duperret, Ph.D.; Paul W. Rea, Ph.D.; Tim Gale; Sonia Skakich-Scrima, M.A.; Barrie Zwicker; David Ray Griffin, Ph.D.; Kevin Barrett, Ph.D.; Barbara Honegger; James Braun, B.C.E.; Ken Jenkins; and Richard Forer. I also received invaluable editing help from Dennis McMahon, J.D., and journalist Susan Clay, as well as proofreading assistance from David Laing, M.A., and Nancy Hall. I am profoundly indebted and grateful for their enthusiastic help.

In addition, this work could not have been written without the contributions of numerous people named and quoted in these pages — specifically, their research and their in-depth thought. I have drawn from wherever I found research, credible observations, or inspiration that seemed to apply. Because September 11, 2001, was a major turning point in our nation and our world, with its aftermath resulting (as of this writing) in the murder of nearly two million innocent Muslims and over 9,000 U.S. troops, and the unprecedented loss of civil rights in the U.S. as well as in other countries, I hope others will become inspired to add to this synthesis of research and clinical observation with the aim of furthering awareness of ourselves and our human condition.

If we are alive to the adventure of life, we naturally open our minds while maintaining our ability to keenly discriminate. We learn more about ourselves, we change, we grow, and we become more aware. We gain the courage to say “no” to those who lie, who are deceptive, who would have us cower in fear, and who would have us remain silent on issues of great importance. We then do our part to raise consciousness in others, with the goal of helping further the human dream of creating more free, peaceful, sustainable, and equitable human communities on our beautiful planet.

I hope you enjoy the journey through the ensuing essay parts, a journey toward a heightened awareness of our human proclivities and toward a heightened awareness in answering the question, “Why Do Good People Become Silent — or Worse — About 9/11?”

Introduction

“If what you are saying is true, I don’t want to know!” exclaimed a young male visitor at our 9/11 Truth booth at the Denver People’s Fair. He was referring to the evidence of controlled demolition of the three World Trade Center (WTC) skyscrapers on September 11, 2001.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because if what you are saying is true, I would become very negative. Psychologically, I would go downhill.”

With gratitude, I responded, “Thank you!”

Surprised, he asked, “Why are you thanking me?”

“Because it’s rare to hear such raw truth. Thank you for being so honest.”

Softened by our exchange, the young man chatted with me a while longer before taking his leave. I have never forgotten him; he has likely never forgotten me. We both felt it. Paradoxically, deep truth had been shared.

We who work to educate the public about 9/11 — and about false flag operations,² — are puzzled by the often forceful resistance from our listeners. Yet, many of us in the 9/11 Truth Movement also once vigorously resisted this challenging evidence. We have our own stories to document this.

What drives these antagonistic reactions?

Before attempting to answer that question, I would like to clarify that people who balk at evidence pointing to 9/11 as a false flag are no more mentally healthy or unhealthy than those of us who question the official account. Both groups consist of individuals who span the mental health spectrum.

So, there is no need to pathologize those who currently do not see what is now so clear to us, just as those of us in the 9/11 Truth Movement should not be dismissed and maligned as “conspiracy theorists” — the latter being an obvious defense and a not-so-obvious offense.³

The psychology professionals interviewed in the documentary *9/11: Explosive Evidence — Experts Speak Out* (ESO) by Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth talk about the *human* tendency toward denial in order to avoid the discomfort of cognitive dissonance. They speak compassionately about *all* of us. They indulge in no sophisticated name-calling (a.k.a. diagnosing) — too often a common occurrence among members of this profession. This is indeed refreshing.

In this spirit, and in the spirit of *beginning* a conversation — for we humans are complicated creatures — I will share my thinking as to why many of us defend ourselves from information that is troubling.

History tells us that even scientists, whom we stereotypically view as persons who objectively and open-mindedly look at data rather than at belief to determine reality, often vigorously resist paradigm shifts. Gregor Mendel's experiments and resulting theory of genetic inheritance, for example, was resisted by scientists from the time of its announcement in 1865, and was only rediscovered in 1900 by three other European scientists. In other words, resistance to information that substantially challenges our worldview is, we find, the rule rather than the exception.⁴ Fortunately, change *does* occur, consensus reality *does* shift, sometimes rapidly, sometimes excruciatingly slowly.

To reiterate what I said when interviewed for the film *9/11: Experts Speak Out*: Fear is the emotion that underlies most of the negative reactions toward the facts that 9/11 skeptics bring to light: Fear of receiving information that will turn our world upside down. Fear of being overwhelmed by our own emotions. Fear of psychological deterioration. Fear that our life will have to change. Fear that we'll discover that the world is not a safe place. Fear that our professional reputation will be tarnished, which may cause us to lose our job or a promotion. Fear of being shunned, even banished, by friends and family. Fear that we can no longer trust our "leaders." And fear of looking like a fool for having bought the official account so thoroughly.

This last reason may be true especially for intellectuals who identify strongly with their intellect. None of us, however, like to feel duped. Realizing we have been fooled often threatens our very identity and causes us to feel betrayed.

Carl Sagan knew this when he said,

One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It's simply too painful to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we've been taken. Once you give a charlatan power over you, you almost never get it back.⁵

Social psychologist and scholar Laurie Manwell remembers a professor who summed up human behavior with this statement: "People liked to be liked, they like to be right, and they like to be free — in that order." Thus, most people will give up their need to be right or free if their need to be liked is threatened.⁶

Why is this?

The fear of banishment is surely among the greatest fears we humans harbor, albeit often unconsciously.⁷ We are social creatures. We need others in order to survive, and we need to have a sense of belonging. To have some sense of wholeness and well-being, we need

to feel connected to others, to love and to be loved. This is the reason that ridicule and shaming are such potent strategies used — consciously or unconsciously — to censure those with views that diverge from a culture’s sacred mythology.

A “sacred myth” is a special story, found in every culture that, whether true, untrue, or partially true, tells us who we are and why we are doing what we are doing.⁸

What is our American sacred mythology? Currently, it goes something like this:

We are a truly exceptional nation with exceptional forefathers. We rebelled against tyranny and established a democratic republic, a model that the world has largely accepted and imitated. Our country is the purveyor of individual rights and freedoms around the world and our interventions in other countries are benevolent actions. On September 11, 2001, we were caught off-guard when al Qaeda terrorists, in a sneak attack, similar to that at Pearl Harbor, succeeded in flying commercial airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the most significant wound to our homeland to date. However, true to the American spirit, we immediately rose to the challenge to militarily smite the terrorists, who hate us because of our freedoms. This is why we have an unending Global War on Terror.

Even if we manage to set aside this belief in our current sacred mythology, look at the evidence, and recognize that 9/11 was a false flag event, we may then have to face the fear that, if we dare speak out, we could be the target of severe repercussions from corrupt authorities. As one person told me, “I appreciate everything you all are doing with this 9/11 issue, but I hope you understand, I have children; I can’t get involved with this.”

Fear is an integral part of the human condition; and yet, if we are committed to psycho-spiritual growth, we do not let fear dictate what we do — or do not do. We can be aware of the fear while not letting it rule our lives.

Most of us were traumatized⁹ by watching the horrifying destruction of the Twin Towers, knowing there were thousands of our fellow humans beings killed in that moment. Some of us were deeply shaken once again when we discovered evidence suggesting that 9/11 might be a false flag operation.

Why do some of us embrace the evidence and its implications and become active, while others feel powerless or apathetic in the face of this evidence? And why do still others become defensive and stay defensive — sometimes vehemently?

Why, indeed, upon hearing the facts that contradict the official account of 9/11, do good people become silent, or worse?

What is the difference? How, for example, can some people watch World Trade Center Building 7 (WTC 7)¹⁰ implode and collapse into its own footprint and *not* see what is right in front of them — even when they learn about its near-free-fall acceleration and the other characteristics of controlled demolition? These people may feel compelled to intensify their resistance with intellectually contorted measures to convince themselves and others that this building was not rigged to implode. Then there are those who content themselves with shaming anyone who dares investigate the data and look into the testimony that disproves the official sacred myth.

There is a worldview that is being seriously challenged here. What is it? In essence, it was described well by a journalist whom I met at a street action: “I am aware that our government does bad things, but not *this!* Not those towers! They would not be *that* evil.”

So we assume our government — which is supposed to protect us but sometimes does bad things — would never commit acts *this* heinous. A man said to me during a public presentation, “I find your statement that our government orchestrated 9/11 very disturbing and offensive.”

“I believe I said the evidence trail leads to *elements* within our government, not *the* government,” I replied. He retorted, with great seriousness, “It makes no difference. There is no way you can state this that is going to make me feel any better!”

Many of us unconsciously relate to our government leaders as parental figures on whom we project our (often unmet) needs for a protective parent. We even agree culturally to the term “our founding fathers.”

The disciplines of Western psychology and anthropology have much to offer toward understanding human behavior, but we must remember that these disciplines, as impressive as they are, are ultimately disciplines that belong to our Western culture only. In the East and in some tribal societies, for example, people may call upon the philosophy of the transmigration of souls to explain human behavior; and the Sufis, the mystical branch of Islam, use the nine personality types of the Enneagram to explain our disparate human propensities.

Remember the proverbial five blind men, each touching one part of an elephant? Each man draws a different conclusion as to what the object is, depending on which part he is touching. The result? Five partial and laughably inaccurate descriptions of reality.

The more lenses we look through, therefore, the greater is our capacity to see a clearer — and more multi-dimensional — picture of our human tendencies. Nonetheless, within the overlapping viewpoints of the rich disciplines of Western psychology, anthropology, brain research, and history, we can find several lenses that shed much light on the conundrum of why information that contradicts our worldview is so difficult for us to accept.

Specifically, through the lenses of anthropology, literature, history, and social psychology we will find helpful information in the sections entitled “Diffusion of Innovations,” “Obeying and Believing Authority,” “Doublethink,” “Denial and Cognitive Dissonance,” “Conformity,” “Groupthink,” “Terror Management Theory,” “Systems Justification Theory,” “Signal Detection Theory,” and “Prior Knowledge of State Crimes Against Democracy and Deep Politics.”

Through the lens of clinical psychology we will explore viewpoints described in the sections entitled “Learned Helplessness,” “The Abuse Syndrome,” “Dissociation,” and “Excessive Identification with the U.S.A.”

The two sections on Brain Research provide us with astonishing insights into our human nature.

The sections entitled “American Exceptionalism and Nationalist Faith,” “Government Manipulation and the Big Lie,” “Those Who Lack Conscience and Empathy,” and “The

Role of the Media” contain valuable information from an amalgam of the disciplines of history, social psychology, clinical psychology, and brain research.

The last few sections address how we can communicate about 9/11 evidence more effectively and how we can fulfill our human need for awareness and healing.

Finally, this essay ends with the lament and inspiration of poet Langston Hughes as he asks “Is America Possible?”

Let me emphasize that this paper will be a synthesis of reports on academic research as well as clinical observations. None of the sections will fall neatly into one category or another, but will overlap each other, as is often the case with any rich and complicated subject.

Let’s begin our journey with an anthropological study.

¹“Zogby Poll Finds Over 70 Million Voting Age Americans Support New 9/11 Investigation,” <http://www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20060522022041421>; and “Less Than Half of Americans Satisfied with 9/11 Investigations,” [http://www.rawstory.com/news/2006/Less than half of Americans satisfied 0523.html](http://www.rawstory.com/news/2006/Less_than_half_of_Americans_satisfied_0523.html).

² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_flag_operation.

³ Lance deHaven-Smith, *Conspiracy Theory in America* (University of Texas Press, 2013). DeHaven-Smith analyzes the history of the development of the derogatory nature of the term “conspiracy theory,” tracing it to a CIA memo known as “CIA Dispatch 1035-960,” a propaganda campaign designed to discredit doubters of the Warren Commission’s report. The use of the term “conspiracy theory” as a pejorative subsequently skyrocketed in the media as a way to defame, smear, and ridicule anyone who would dare speak of any crime allegedly committed by the state, intelligence or military services, or speak in contradiction of an official explanation of an important event. In this light, the use of this pejorative term is an offensive tactic to shame and censure, and thus censor the speech of, those who dare question official government accounts. Unfortunately, this propaganda campaign has been exceedingly successful.

⁴ Earl Staelin, J.D., “Resistance to Scientific Innovation: Its Causes and How to Overcome It,” a paper delivered at the Intercept 2001 Conference, July 6–9, 2001, Laughlin, Nevada, sponsored by the Kronia Group. A further insight from Earl Staelin is that most of us also experience psychological inertia when presented with a new theory that we firmly believe is not true, and we must be convinced that it is worth our time to be open to the new theory.

Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

See also <http://www.scribd.com/doc/13481854/Resistance-by-Scientists-to-Scientific-Discovery-Barber-1961>.

⁵ Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (Random House Publishing Group, 1996).

⁶ From Laurie Manwell’s presentation at the Toronto Hearings, Ryerson University, 2011: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_5ZwCpN1jg.

⁷ This is personal observation and interpretation, but is supported by historical accounts. See that even sages of long ago were warned to heed their words in the second paragraph of this article:

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0003_0_01976.html.

⁸ David Ray Griffin, Ph.D., “9/11: The Myth and the Reality,” <http://www.amazon.com/9-11-The-Myth-Reality/dp/B000O0YV7O> and <http://davidraygriffin.com/articles/911-the-myth-and-the-reality>.

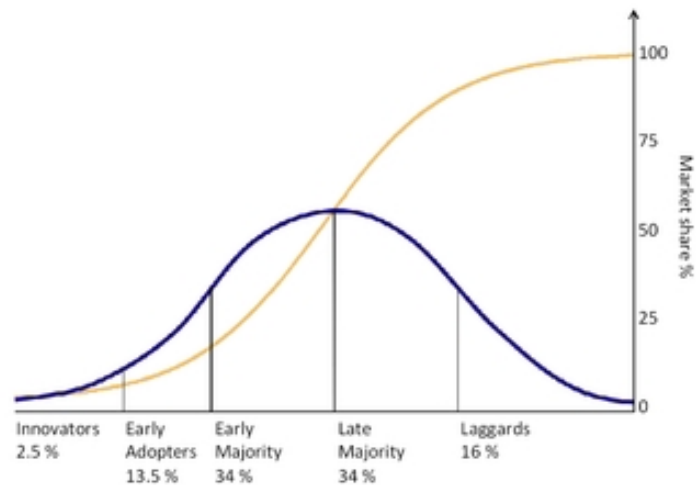
⁹ In this context “trauma” is defined as extreme upset or having one’s internal resources overwhelmed, at least temporarily.

¹⁰ “Solving the Mystery of WTC7,” (with Ed Asner): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZEvA8BCoBw>.

The successful spread of an innovative technology or a new idea reliably hinges on one point: whether or not opinion leaders — the early adopters — vouch for it.

Part 2: Diffusion of Innovations

Anthropologists and rural sociologists have observed that within diverse cultures there consistently can be found groups that vary in their openness to new ideas and technology — groups that fall within a neat bell curve. In each culture, a few adventurous members (only 2.5%) readily adopt innovations. These venturesome folks are called “innovators.”



The opinion leaders (13.5%) come next. Termed "early adopters," they are influential and respected members of society. They listen to the innovators, and then, upon reflection, may change their mind-set and adopt the innovation.

The "early majority" (34%) switch after listening to the influential early adopters.

The "late majority" (also 34%) adopt the new way only because it is practical to do so.

The "laggards" (the last 16%) may never change their minds.

These percentages hold for situations as disparate as the sale of a new technology from Silicon Valley and a new, paradigm-shifting idea for improving the safety of drinking water in a traditional village in Peru. It makes no difference.

This description of how change occurs in societies is called "Diffusion of Innovations."¹ Western businesses are applying this knowledge to determine the best strategy for marketing new technological products.²

The successful spread of an innovative technology or a new idea reliably hinges on one point: whether or not opinion leaders — the early adopters — vouch for it.³ Professionals familiar with the practical application of this theory may be able to offer advice to the 9/11 Truth Movement.

Questions to be raised may include:

- How do we soften the internal psychological barrier to the very disturbing evidence about 9/11, especially when this idea challenges a cultural “sacred myth”?⁴

- How do we bring such a disturbing idea into our public discourse, especially when there are major external barriers?

Many influential people in our society — those who would be seen as early adopters — remain strangely silent about the stunning evidence that clearly shows we have not been told the truth about the attacks of September 11, 2001. Notable exceptions are those prominent citizens listed at [Patriots Question 9/11](#).⁵

Perhaps the most obvious barrier to opening up public discussion about what happened on 9/11 is the corporate-owned media, which is possibly still being infiltrated by a program similar to the [CIA's Operation Mockingbird](#)⁶ — another paradigm-shifting, sacred-myth-destroying reality about which most Americans have yet to learn.

In our Western culture, the mainstream media is clearly an authoritative opinion maker. What we see on television, hear on the radio, or read in newspapers and magazines, and the “spin” about this news, becomes our “reality.” Could this ready acceptance of media pundits’ reporting and opining be a cultural flaw? [Note to readers: Part 21 will discuss the history of the U.S. “press” as well as address in further detail the powerful role of the media in determining why good people become silent, or worse, about 9/11.]

Let’s face it. If, from the beginning, the media had reported on even a fraction of the plethora of details that contradict the official account of 9/11, or had at least expressed suspicion and followed up with honest investigative journalism, then the sacred myth of 9/11 would not have anchored itself in the minds of Americans as well as citizens of other countries. In addition, besides abrogating their journalistic duties, some in the media might very well be considered criminally culpable for aiding and abetting the cover-up of the crimes of 9/11 — mass murder and treason, primarily — and for being accessories after the fact.⁷

Clearly related to our proclivity to trust the influential “early adopters” is our proclivity to trust and follow authority, which we will explore next. Researcher Stanley Milgram’s startling studies of the early 1960s found that humans tend to readily obey orders from a respected authority, even when doing so violates our deepest moral beliefs. Following Milgram’s studies, third-grade teacher Jane Elliott and Stanford social psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducted studies that have expanded our understanding of how deeply we are influenced by authority figures.

¹ Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2003).

² Geoffrey A. Moore, *Crossing the Chasm* (HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2002).

³ From <http://www.stanford.edu/class/sybsys205/Diffusion%20of%20Innovations.htm>.

⁴ For the meaning of the term “sacred myth,” see David Ray Griffin, Ph.D., *9/11: The Myth and the Reality*, DVD at <http://www.amazon.com/9-11-The-Myth-Reality/dp/B000O0YV7O> and transcript of lecture at <http://davidraygriffin.com/articles/911-the-myth-and-the-reality>.

⁵ See <http://patriotsquestion911.com>.

⁶ Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media: How America’s Most Powerful News Media Worked Hand in Glove with the Central Intelligence Agency and Why the Church Committee Covered It Up,” http://carlbernstein.com/magazine_cia_and_media.php. Alex Constantine, *Virtual Government: CIA Mind Control Operations in America* (Feral House, 1997), 35–66. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Mockingbird. William Casey, CIA Director (1981–1987), candidly said, “We’ll know our disinformation program is a success when everything the American public believes is false.”

In a personal e-mail communication to me, Barbara Honegger confirmed that she was the source of this quote, having been in attendance as the then-White House Policy Analyst at the February 1981 meeting in the White House Roosevelt Room with President Reagan and his new cabinet secretaries and agency heads. New CIA Director William Casey spoke these words in response to a question the President put to all of the cabinet secretaries and agency heads: “What are your main goals for your department or agency?” Having worked with radio show host Mae Brussell upon returning to California from the White House, Honegger was also the source for Brussell's second-hand report about Casey’s words. Honegger also said she recalls Casey saying “. . . program is a success . . .,” rather than “. . . program is complete.” For further detail on Honegger's account of this quote, see <http://www.infiniteunknown.net/2015/01/15/did-cia-director-william-casey-really-say-well-know-our-disinformation-program-is-complete-when-everything-the-american-public-believes-is-false>.

⁷ Kristina Borjesson, ed., *Into the Buzzsaw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of a Free Press* (Prometheus Books, 2004). In this anthology, see Dan Rather’s “The Patriot and the Censor’s Necklace: An Interview with BBC Culture Correspondent Madeleine Holt,” on the pressures to avoid asking tough questions; and see Charlotte Dennett’s “The War on Terror and the Great Game for Oil: How the Media Missed the Context.” The entire anthology documents the control, suppression, manipulation, and distortion of information by the news media, which many believe has reached a crisis level. For more about the crisis of credibility of our mainstream media, see Peter Phillips and Mickey Huff’s “Truth Emergency and Media Reform,” <http://www.dailycensored.com/truth-emergency-and-media-reform>.

“The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study. . . .” — Stanley Milgram

Part 3: Obeying and Believing Authority

In his famous 1961 experiment on obedience to authority, Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram set out to answer the question, “Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them all accomplices?”¹

Three people made up each of Milgram’s experiments: the experimenter (the authority); the subject of the experiment (a volunteer who was told that he or she was a “teacher”); and the confederate (a plant, who was thought by the subject to be a “student” or “learner,” but who was actually an actor).

First, the “teacher” (subject of the experiment) was given a sample 45-volt shock. This was done to give the teacher a feeling for the jolts that the “student” (actor) would supposedly be receiving in the early stages of the experiment.

The electroshock generator at the desk of the teacher had 30 switches labeled from 15 to 450 volts. These voltage levels were also labeled “slight shock,” “moderate shock,” “strong shock,” “very strong shock,” “intense shock,” and “extreme intensity shock.” The final, forbidding-sounding labels read “Danger: Severe Shock” and “XXX.”

In a separate room, the learner was strapped to a chair with electrodes. Then the teacher read a list of word pairs to the student, and the student pressed a button to give his answer. If the student’s response was correct, the teacher would go to the next list of word pairs, but if the answer was wrong, the teacher would administer an electric shock to the student.

This pattern continued, with shocks increasing in 15-volt increments for each succeeding incorrect answer. In reality, no electric shocks were actually administered, but pre-recorded sounds of a person in pain were played at certain shock levels. At a higher level of the supposed shocks, the actor banged on the wall separating him from the teacher and complained of his heart condition. At an even higher shock level, all sounds from the student ceased.

Whenever a teacher became concerned and indicated he wanted to stop the experiment, the authority figure issued a pre-determined set of verbal prods, given in this order:

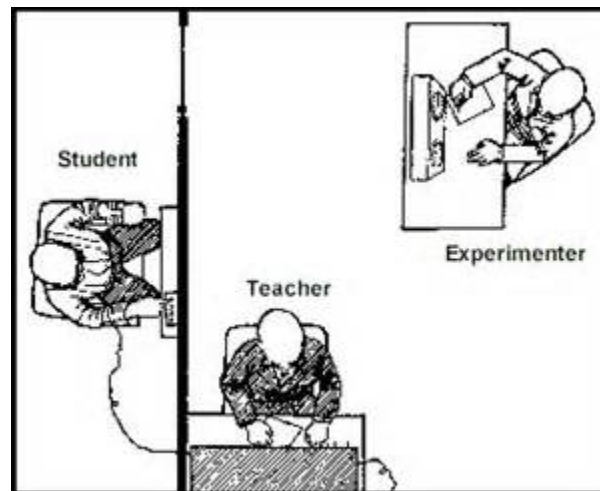
1. Please *continue*.
2. The experiment requires that you *continue*.
3. It is absolutely essential that you *continue*.
4. You have no other choice. You must go on.

If, after the fourth prod, the teacher still indicated a desire to stop, the experiment was halted. Otherwise, it was terminated only after the teacher delivered what he or she thought was the maximum 450-volt shock *three times in succession* to the same student.

Before conducting these experiments, Milgram polled fourteen Yale University senior-year psychology majors, all of whom believed that only a very small fraction of teachers would inflict the maximum voltage. He then informally polled his colleagues, who likewise believed only a small fraction would progress beyond giving a very strong shock. Additionally, forty psychiatrists from a medical school predicted that only one-tenth of one percent of the teachers would progress to the maximum shock level.

So they were surprised, as was Milgram himself, when they learned that approximately *two-thirds* of his subjects willingly, if reluctantly, administered what they *thought* was the maximum — potentially lethal — 450-volt shock to a student.

Illustration 2: The setup of the Milgram experiment



In his article, “The Perils of Obedience,” Milgram summarized the results of his groundbreaking study:

Stark authority was pitted against the subjects’ strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects’ ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation.²

That’s not good news to those of us confronting the lies and abuses of the authority figures in our lives. But a later, modified version of this experiment delivered some hope and insight. Milgram explains:

In one variation, three teachers (two actors and a real subject) administered a test and shocks. When the two actors disobeyed the experimenter and refused to go beyond a certain shock level, thirty-six of forty subjects joined their disobedient peers and refused as well.³

This modified experiment’s lesson for 9/11 skeptics is not difficult to grasp: If we continue pushing through the barriers of our own internal taboos and through the resistance of others, speaking confidently of the truth about 9/11, sticking to solid facts while avoiding speculation, others throughout the world will eventually join us in rejecting the official account of the horrific events of 9/11 — and the even more horrific aftermath of the so-called Global War on Terror.⁴

Another variation on the original experiment is particularly relevant to the challenges we face as we try to raise awareness of the atrocities for which our government is responsible — and consequently, for which we, in the last analysis, are also responsible. Milgram's description and evaluation is potently clear:

I will cite one final variation of the experiment that depicts a dilemma that is more common in everyday life. The subject was not ordered to pull the lever that shocked the victim, but merely to perform a subsidiary task (administering the word-pair test) while another person administered the shock. In this situation, *thirty-seven of forty adults* continued to the highest level of the shock generator. Predictably, they excused their behavior by saying that *the responsibility belonged to the man who actually pulled the switch*. This may illustrate a dangerously typical arrangement in a complex society: *it is easy to ignore responsibility when one is only an intermediate link in a chain of actions*. (Emphasis added.)

The problem of obedience is not wholly psychological. The form and shape of society and the way it is developing have much to do with it. There was a time, perhaps, when people were able to give a fully human response to any situation because they were fully absorbed in it as human beings. But as soon as there was a division of labor things changed. Beyond a certain point, the breaking up of society into people carrying out narrow and very special jobs takes away from the human quality of work and life. A person does not get to see the whole situation but only a small part of it, and is thus unable to act without some kind of overall direction. He yields to authority but in doing so is alienated from his own actions.

Even Eichmann was sickened when he toured the concentration camps, but he had only to sit at a desk and shuffle papers. At the same time the man in the camp who actually dropped Cyclon-b into the gas chambers was able to justify his behavior on the ground that he was only following orders from above. Thus there is a fragmentation of the total human act; no one is confronted with the consequences of his decision to carry out the evil act. The person who assumes responsibility has evaporated. Perhaps this is the most common characteristic of socially organized evil in modern society.⁵

The results of Milgram's original study, and subsequent studies like the one mentioned directly above, can *still* “shock” us a half-century later, as they did the world in the 1960s. For me, an undergraduate student at the time of the 1961 experiment, hearing the fact that two-thirds of average people like me would deliver a potentially lethal shock to a helpless and ill person was disturbing and life-changing. I had been reared by fairly authoritarian parents, so I knew there was the likelihood that I, too, would have followed those orders! From then on, I resolved to never blindly follow authority, but instead to listen to and trust my own inner guide and my conscience.

But do the findings from these studies apply not just to *following* orders, but also to firmly *believing* what an authority tells us? Or do we *follow* orders from a respected authority without necessarily *deeply believing* what this authority proclaims (e.g., that 19 Muslims attacked our country because they hate our freedoms)? Studies subsequent to Milgram's suggest that we humans have a strong tendency to *believe*, as well as *follow*, an authority, especially if our fear is intensified and we already respect that authority. Such was the case when, just after the 9/11 attacks, Americans by and large trusted whatever the leader of their country, President Bush, told them.



Third-grade teacher Jane Elliott

An astonishing social experiment by third-grade teacher Jane Elliott demonstrates our human proclivity to believe a trusted authority — and even to develop our identity based on what this authority tells us about ourselves. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Elliott wanted to help her all-white third-graders in a small town in Iowa to understand prejudice. One day she told them:

Today, the blue-eyed people will be on the bottom and the brown-eyed people on the top. What I mean is that brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed people. They are cleaner than blue-eyed people.

They are more civilized than blue-eyed people. And they are smarter than blue-eyed people.

Brown-eyed children were allowed longer recess time and the use of the bigger playground equipment. They were permitted to be first in line for lunch and second helpings. Elliott instructed the blue-eyed people to not play with brown-eyed people unless asked and to sit in the back of the room. Each brown-eyed child was given a collar to put around the neck of a blue-eyed child. Throughout the day, the teacher reinforced that brown-eyed children were superior and blue-eyed children were inferior.

By lunchtime, the behavior of the children revealed whether they had brown or blue eyes:

The brown-eyed children were happy, alert, having the time of their lives. And they were doing far better work than they had ever done before. The blue-eyed children were miserable. Their posture, their expressions, their entire attitudes were those of defeat. Their classroom work regressed sharply from that of the day before. Inside of an hour or so, they looked and acted as if they were, in fact, inferior. It was shocking.

But even more frightening was the way the brown-eyed children turned on their friends of the day before....⁶

The next day Jane Elliott reversed the experiment, labeling the blue-eyed children as superior; she saw the same results, but in reverse. In conclusion:

At the end of the day, she told her students that this was only an experiment and there was no innate difference between blue-eyed and brown-eyed people. The children took off their collars and hugged one another, looking immensely relieved to be equals and friends again. An interesting aspect of the experiment is how it affected learning.... Once the children realized that their power to learn depended on their belief in themselves, they held on to believing they were smart and didn't let go of it again.⁷

But surely, adults would be able to discern and resist this kind of social pressure and would be immune to it, right? Surely adults would not allow their very identity to be affected by such manipulation, would they?

We shall find out. In a study strikingly similar to third-grade teacher Jane Elliott's, social psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducted his famous Stanford Prison Experiment in the early 1970s. It proves that the assumption we make about adults' immunity to social pressure, though understandable, is for the most part wrong.

Zimbardo and his colleagues used 24 male college students as subjects, dividing them arbitrarily into "guards" and "inmates" within a mock prison. He instructed the "guards" to act in an oppressive way toward the "prisoners," thereby assuming the role of authority figures. Zimbardo himself became an authority figure to *all* of the student subjects, since he both authored the experiment and played the role of prison superintendent.⁸

All students knew this was an experiment, but, to the surprise of everyone — even the experimenters! — the students rapidly internalized their roles as either brutal, sadistic guards or emotionally broken prisoners. Astonishingly, the "prison system" and the subsequent dynamic that developed had such a deleterious effect on the subjects that the study, which was to last a fortnight, was terminated on the sixth day. The only reason it was called to an early halt is that graduate psychology student Christina Maslach — whom Philip Zimbardo was dating and who subsequently became his wife — brought to his attention the unethical conditions of the experiment.⁹



Images from the Stanford experiment
(with thanks to Philip Zimbardo)
Photos of subjects in Stanford Prison Experiment

As with the Milgram and Elliott studies, the Zimbardo experiment demonstrates the human tendency to not only follow authority but also to believe what that authority tells us. This conclusion is all the more astounding given that the parties to his study knew in advance that it was simply an experiment.¹⁰

The Zimbardo and Elliott studies also demonstrate that our very identities are affected by what a person in authority proclaims about us — and that peer pressure powerfully reinforces this tendency. It's no wonder, then, that Milgram's adult subjects, Elliott's third graders, and Zimbardo's college-age students committed atrocities, even in violation of their own cherished moral values.

Zimbardo was called as an expert defense witness at the court-martial of night-shift prison guard Ivan "Chip" Frederick, who was one of the infamous "Abu Ghraib Seven." Based on his experience with the Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo argued in this court case that it was the *situation* that had brought out the aberrant behavior in an otherwise decent person. While the military brass maintained that Frederick and his fellow guards were a few "bad apples" in an otherwise good U.S. Army barrel, Zimbardo contended they were normal, good soldiers in a very, very bad barrel.

Chip Frederick pleaded guilty and received a sentence of eight years in prison; Zimbardo's testimony had little effect on the length of the term. The other guards, also found guilty, received sentences ranging from zero to ten years.

What is the truth about these night-shift guards? Were they a few "bad apples" in a good barrel or was the barrel itself contaminated? Well, the U.S. Army itself has since confirmed that, as of October 2001, there were more than 600 accusations of abuse of detainees. Many more than that number went unreported, including abuse of "ghost detainees" — those unfortunate souls who, under the control of the CIA, were never identified and were often "rendered" to torture states. Many of these victims were

essentially “disappeared.” We can conclude that there had to have been many “ghost abusers” who were never held accountable.

To support his accusation that the barrel, rather than the apples, was toxic, Zimbardo wrote a book, *The Lucifer Effect*, which puts the system itself on trial. In it, he makes the case that the orders, the expectations, and the pressure to torture came from the very top of the chain of command. Zimbardo’s detailed analysis finds Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, Vice President Dick Cheney, and President George W. Bush all guilty.

His conclusion: “This barrel of apples began rotting from the top down.” At the same time, *The Lucifer Effect*’s author also praises the many heroes — the whistle-blowers from the bottom to the top of the military hierarchy, who risked their lives and careers to stand up to, and to stand strong against, the toxic system.¹¹

Why do some people conform to the expectations of the system while others muster the courage to remain true to their principles? Throughout the sections of this essay, there are pointers that answer this question from the perspective of developmental and depth psychology. But to address such an immensely important subject in detail would require a separate work. In the meantime, Zimbardo has begun the exploration from a social psychologist’s viewpoint by declaring that we are all “heroes in waiting” and by offering suggestions on how to resist undesirable social influences.¹²

It is my firm belief that skeptics of any paradigm-shifting, taboo subject who publicly expose lies and naked emperors are heroes who have come out of hiding. I believe this to be also true of 9/11 skeptics. All such skeptics have suffered the ridicule and wrath of those emperors, their minions, and the just plain frightened.

These three studies — Milgram’s study on obedience to authority, Elliott’s “Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes Exercise,” and Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment — demonstrate our human proclivity to trust and obey authority.

Now comes another question: Is this predisposition of humans to depend upon their leaders a trait that is encoded genetically? Evidence appears to support a “yes” answer.

To survive as babies and young children, we automatically look to our parents for confirmation of safety or danger.

Chimpanzees, with whom our genetics match at least 94%,¹³ generally have one or more alpha male leaders in a troop. Often these leaders are chosen by the females.¹⁴ Bonobos, with a genome close to that of the chimpanzees and thus to humans, have a matriarchal system with a female leader.¹⁵ And, of course, human communities have leaders. Thus, the need for a leader, for an authority, appears to be genetically hardwired.

If we have been reared in an authoritarian family and school system, this tendency to rely on authority figures for confirmation of reality is likely reinforced. Conversely, if we are reared in a family, a school system, and a cultural context that rewards critical thinking and respects our individual feelings and needs, the tendency to rely on authority figures is likely weakened.

In American society, many of our officials routinely lie to us and abuse us. Even though the lies and abuse have been well documented, many citizens continue to look to these officials for truth and for security — especially when a frightening incident has taken

place that heightens their anxiety and insecurity. This strong tendency to believe and obey authority, then, is yet another obstacle with which skeptics of the official 9/11 account must contend.

By unquestioningly believing and obeying authority, we develop and perpetuate faulty identities and faulty beliefs. As a result, we make poor decisions — decisions that often hurt ourselves and others. Perpetuating faulty identities and faulty beliefs and making bad decisions can also stem from other human tendencies, which we will examine in our next four sections: Doublethink, Denial and Cognitive Dissonance, Conformity, and Groupthink.

¹ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1974).

² Stanley Milgram, “The Perils of Obedience,” *Harpers Magazine* (1974). Can be accessed at http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/psychology/milgram_perils_authority_1974.html.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The results of a study by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) regarding civilian deaths since 9/11 in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is found at <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/body-count.pdf>. A summary of this study is found at Washington’s Blog: “This investigation comes to the conclusion that the war has, directly or indirectly, killed around 1 million people in Iraq, 220,000 in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan, i.e. a total of around 1.3 million. Not included in this figure are further war zones such as Yemen. The figure is approximately 10 times greater than that of which the public, experts and decision makers are aware of and propagated by the media and major NGOs. And this is only a conservative estimate. **The total number of deaths in the three countries named above could also be in excess of 2 million**, whereas a figure below 1 million is extremely unlikely.” See <http://www.washingtonsblog.com/2015/03/study-physicians-social-responsibility-us-wars-iraq-afghanistan-pakistan-killed-1-3-million-conservative-estimate.html>.

⁵ Milgram, “The Perils of Obedience.”

⁶ Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Mathew Linn, *Healing the Future: Personal Recovery from Societal Wounding* (Paulist Press, 2012) 56–60. William Peters, *A Class Divided: Then and Now*, expanded ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); this book includes an account of Jane Elliott conducting a similar experiment for adult employees of the Iowa Department of Corrections.

Documentary films that also tell this story are *The Eye of the Storm*, ABC News, 1970, distributed in DVD format by Admire Productions, 2004, <http://www.admireentertainment.com>, and *A Class Divided*, by Yale University Films, 1986, presented on *Frontline* and distributed in DVD format by PBS Home Video, www.pbs.org; both programs include study guides for use with groups.

⁷ Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn, *Healing the Future*, 57–58.

⁸ Zimbardo later saw his dual role as a flaw in the experimental design. For an explanation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb4Q20z0T1Q>.

⁹ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008). Also, see <http://www.simplypsychology.org/zimbardo.html>.

¹⁰ See footage of the experiment and interviews years later with Zimbardo, Maslach, and some of the subjects: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb4Q20z0T1Q>.

¹¹ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 324–443.

¹² *Ibid*, 444–488.

¹³ See <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=human-chimp-gene-gap-wide>.

¹⁴ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimpanzee>.

¹⁵ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonobo>.

The concept of doublethink has established itself in our culture, since it aptly — even humorously — describes the capacity of the human mind to readily adapt to any official pronouncement on any subject, such as 9/11, while at the same time being fully aware of evidence that contradicts those official pronouncements!

Part 4: Doublethink



We shall begin this section on the lighter side with George Orwell's brilliant concept of "doublethink," coined in his dystopian novel, *1984*.¹ In *1984*'s not-so-fictional world, doublethink is a word in the Newspeak lexicon. Newspeak, which replaces Oldspeak's "reality control," is a new, politically correct language consisting of a meager vocabulary that has been developed by the powers that be (the High) for the purposes of controlling

the public's worldview and limiting the possibility of independent thought. In other words, by controlling the *words* permitted to exist in the language, the High are able to control the *thoughts* people are allowed to have.

In addition to limiting vocabulary, the High require another thought-control method — doublethink. Citizens must learn the hypnotic skill of *consciously inducing unconsciousness*. This practice enables them to hold two conflicting beliefs at the same time and to call upon each belief as needed, depending on the situation. In so doing, citizens become adept at readily conforming to the vicissitudes of the official platforms of the day.

The reason the High insist on everyone being grounded in doublethink is that, if they are to retain power over the people permanently, the prevailing mental condition in the land must be that of insanity. So citizens must use this subtle process of thought control *on themselves* in order to stay *out* of touch with reality. Paradoxically, they learn to embrace insanity in order to stay sane.

Though the term doublethink is not included in today's official psychological vocabulary, perhaps it should be, given that it's such a common defense mechanism. Regardless, the concept of doublethink has established itself in our culture, since it aptly — even humorously — describes the capacity of the human mind to readily adapt to any official pronouncement on any subject, such as 9/11, while at the same time being fully aware of evidence that contradicts those official pronouncements!

In fact, because doublethink is such a sophisticated form of spontaneous, situational self-censorship, the capacity to employ it is quite a mental feat.

By the way, doublethink is precisely the same as Orwell's "blackwhite," which is the ability to brazenly claim that black is white, or vice versa, in bold-faced contradiction to irrefutable evidence.

Here are a couple of textbook examples of doublethink.

Exasperated with a friend, I declared, "I know you believe that 9/11 was a false flag operation and that we are in the Middle East for natural resources, but you keep speaking of 'the War on Terror' as though it's the real reason we have invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and the real reason we now use drones to kill so-called terrorists. *Why* do you do this?!"

She shot back testily, "Well, we are *surrounded* by the official story. It's *everywhere* — the TV, the newspapers, our teachers and friends at school, at work. What am I to do?!"

Doublethink was her survival strategy — a paradoxical embrace of insanity to stay sane. A while later, I had a similar exchange with a friend who had included in her recent book some words corroborating the official 9/11 myth, which I knew she didn't believe.

Frustrated, I confronted her: "*Why* do you use those words? I know you don't believe them."

With obvious irritation, she replied, "Look, I *know* we were lied to. But my work in the world is very important to me, and if I am to continue it, I can't have my taxes audited!"

My friend was so fearful of retaliation from corrupt authorities that she had adopted the defense of holding both worldviews in mind, vacillating automatically between them as the occasion demanded. Classic doublethink. Thank you, George Orwell!

As these two illustrations make clear, doublethink is the defensive strategy of holding two contradictory beliefs in mind at the same time and switching back and forth between them — rather like a chameleon changing his colors — as circumstances demand.

An alternative defense strategy, which I will explore in the next segment, is the use of denial for the purpose of avoiding cognitive dissonance.

¹George Orwell, *1984* (Harcourt Brace and Company, 1949).
Also see <http://www.orwelltoday.com>.

*"I wouldn't believe that even if it were true!" . . . "You can't expect someone to listen to information that turns their world upside down."
— Responses from two Americans confronted with 9/11 Truth evidence*

Part 5: Denial and Cognitive Dissonance

"I admit that I seriously resist anyone messing with my worldview," a friend remarked to me as she hurried out of the room.

I didn't get an opportunity to acknowledge her honesty at the time. When I mentioned it to her weeks later, she had no recollection of making any such statement.

This friend isn't alone in forgetting her candid response. Some people who resist looking at the 9/11 evidence through any lens other than officialdom's are unable to recall their own spontaneous honest admissions — even minutes later. This forgetfulness, I believe, attests to the depth of their resistance — and the strength of their defense mechanisms — when it comes to the sensitive subject of 9/11.

I recall how another acquaintance fended off the truth by declaring haughtily, "I can think of so many *other* explanations for the 9/11 events you mention." His deflection of the actual evidence I had shared with him was, I think, a defensive attempt to minimize the facts I had presented. Despite his attempt to appear intelligent, he came across as studiously lacking in curiosity and devoid of the spirit of true inquiry.

Then there was the close friend who told me, "Fran, you can't expect someone to listen to information that turns their world upside down." Five minutes later I asked her to repeat what she had said, but she couldn't recall her words and got lost in confabulation.¹

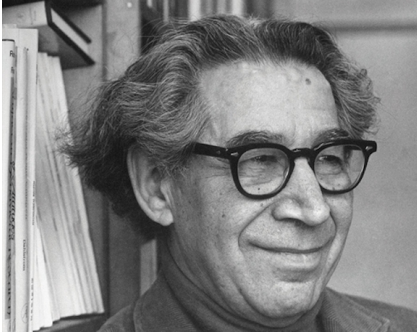
A final example of defensiveness — if not downright *intransigence* — is this revealing statement reported by Richard Gage when he introduced the "Seeking Understanding" section of the film *9/11: Explosive Evidence — Experts Speak Out*: "I wouldn't believe that even if it *were* true!"

All these illustrations go to prove that when we're faced with facts that are too uncomfortable to accept, we reject them outright or we downplay their importance. This defense mechanism is known in psychologists' parlance as "denial."

Humans resort to denial to avoid the anxiety that accompanies cognitive dissonance — that uncomfortable, sometimes disturbing feeling of losing our emotional equilibrium when we are faced with new information that challenges our worldview or when we hold beliefs that contradict known facts. The discomfort motivates us to change our behavior, change our cognition, and/or justify our behavior by acquiring a secondary cognition. This dynamic is common to us all.²

The term "cognitive dissonance" was coined by social psychologist Leon Festinger and his colleagues.³ Festinger infiltrated a small UFO cult,⁴ led by a Chicago housewife Dorothy Martin, who had experimented with automatic writing, also known as channeled

writing. To protect her privacy, Festinger's study gave Martin the alias of "Marion Keech." The members of the cult were informed, through Keech's automatic writing, that a flood would end the world before dawn on December 21, 1954. However, according to Keech's channeled writing, this small group of believers would be rescued from the apocalypse at a specific time by aliens in a flying saucer from a planet named "Clarion."



Leon Festinger

Social psychologists Festinger et al. accurately predicted how the cult members would behave when the aliens did *not* show up. When, at the appointed time, there was no sign of any alien, the cognitive dissonance (tension, fear) created by their challenged belief (a sacred myth⁵ for this small "in" group) was resolved by another automatic-writing message from Keech. It said that God had spared Earth from destruction due to the light spread by this little band of true believers. Thus, a secondary cognition was created to mitigate the cognitive dissonance caused by the disconfirmed belief. As Festinger and his

colleagues predicted, the group initiated intensive proselytizing, rather than responding more logically by reconsidering the validity of the original belief (by changing their cognition) and then acting accordingly (changing their behavior).

The followers of Keech may have been severely psychologically wounded individuals who *needed* to believe they would be saved. Although most of us would not have been swayed by a deluded Keech-type figure, we might well be swayed by another charismatic leader whose manipulative power is subtler or who presents us with a less obvious delusion.

When 9/11 evidence contradicts the official account (a sacred myth of our culture), we observe that some people try to resolve the tension of cognitive dissonance by devising secondary beliefs, as did the Marion Keech followers.

Take, for example, the ardent George W. Bush supporter who assured me that since she could no longer deny the reality of controlled demolition of the three World Trade Center buildings, she had come up with a foolproof explanation for 9/11. "I know how this happened," she announced proudly. "During reconstruction of the [North] tower after the 1993 bombing, explosives were planted in both Twin Towers by members of Bill Clinton's cabal."

But hold on. From the *other* side of the political aisle, a woman offered her analysis with equal confidence: "Obama surely did not know about this 9/11 evidence before he was elected.⁶ Maybe he knows now, but he can't say anything to us. If the country knew the truth about 9/11, there would be chaos. The stock market would plummet. He'd probably *like* to tell us, but he can't."

Devising secondary beliefs in an attempt to reconcile cognitive dissonance isn't at all uncommon. Neither is putting naïve trust in the political party with which we identify and a president for whom we have voted.

Thus, it behooves us, whether we are activists or not, to recognize the importance of becoming genuinely autonomous, psychologically secure humans. This way we are less apt to be vulnerable to denial — the unconscious act of rejecting hard-to-accept facts. We must also cultivate a discerning mind, so that we are able to discriminate between facts and speculation. With genuine autonomy, a discerning mind, and a commitment to discovering truth, we can think and speak knowledgeably when we encounter evidence that supports neither an “official story” nor a charismatic leader's persuasive words. Indeed, autonomy, discernment, and truth-seeking enable us to open — and change — our minds after having been emotionally and intellectually anchored to a previously held official account or worldview.

Holding a radically different opinion from one's otherwise like-minded peers can often take far greater courage than it does to confront the beliefs of people who you *and* your peers perceive as a shared enemy. This is especially so when challenging the sacred myths held by one's peer group. That's because rejection, alienation, and ultimately banishment by those we love and respect is such an intimidating prospect. As we will see in the Asch conformity experiments described next, fear of disapproval or rejection is a key motivating factor of those who yield their own correct perceptions to the wrong answers of their peers.

¹ Confabulation means to fill in gaps in memory by fabrication.

² See http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/cognitive_dissonance.htm and <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/cognitive-dissonance>.

³ Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*, (first published by University of Minnesota Press in 1956, then by Printer & Martin Ltd. in 2008); Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1957).

⁴ Any point of view that resides outside conventional thinking, including the UFO issue, can foster ridicule; this is not my intention here.

⁵ A sacred myth is a belief in any culture, whether completely true, partially true, or not at all true, that tells us who we are and why we do what we do. For further explanation, see David Ray Griffin, Ph.D., "9/11: The Myth and the Reality," <http://www.amazon.com/9-11-The-Myth-Reality/dp/B000O0YV7O> and <http://davidraygriffin.com/articles/911-the-myth-and-the-reality>.

⁶ The late Col. Robert Bowman, who directed the Star Wars program under Presidents Ford and Carter (when it was secret) and who subsequently exposed this program as an offensive threat, not a defensive shield, told several of us 9/11 Truth activists in Denver that he had met with Barack Obama's campaign director during the candidate's 2008 campaign for president. They spoke for more than an hour about the evidence pointing to the official account of 9/11 being untrue.

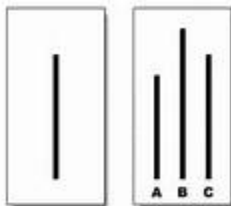
When people think others are turning away from them, they suffer so much that they can be guided or manipulated as easily by their own sensitivity as by a bridle.
— Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann

Part 6: Conformity



Solomon Asch

In the early 1950s, experiments by Solomon Asch of Swarthmore College vividly demonstrated our human proclivity to conform to a group's prevailing view. Several students selected prior to the experiment were instructed to *act* as if they were subjects of the experiment, whereas in reality, they were confederates, or plants. These confederates were all instructed to give the same *wrong* answer in identifying the length of a line on a card. One real and unsuspecting subject then joined the group, and when the experiment was under way, an instructor gave the group the task of matching the length of a line on a card to the correct line among three different sized lines on the same or another card. In 36.8% of cases, the real subjects would yield his or her original right answer and would agree instead to the other participants' unanimous wrong answer.¹



Cards used in the conformity experiments

This brilliant research has clearly shown the power of peer pressure to persuade individuals to conform to the majority. This result was consistent in succeeding experiments unless, in a variation of the experiment, there was one other “partner” (also a confederate), who gave the correct answer *before* the real subject answered. If this one supportive partner was present, the subject acquiesced to the majority opinion only one-fourth as often (less than 10% of the time), showing the power of an ally to provide the courage to remain

independent, although many of the subjects would deny that this partner had any influence on their answers.²

This variation of the experiment shows that the power of the group comes not from its numbers, but from the unanimity of its opposition. When the unanimity of the group is punctured, the group's influence is greatly reduced.

Why did 36.8% of the students conform? Through interviews, it was discovered that sometimes they were convinced that the others were right. This is called “informational conformity.” Others conformed because they were apprehensive that the group would disapprove of them if they were deviant. This became known as “normative conformity.”

Another variation of the experiment had the subject arrive late, and because of this, he or she would be required to write down the answers privately, which resulted in conformity dropping by two-thirds. When the subject could keep his or her answer private, there was, once again, more ability to remain independent.³

The lesson of these experiments will not be lost on 9/11 skeptics and activists. We can see from the polls⁴ and from our personal experiences in approaching others that more and more people are willing to listen to the evidence we present and to speak openly about 9/11 as a false flag event. Indeed, the unanimity of the official account has been well punctured, despite the irresponsible refusal of the corporate-owned media to question the official governmental account.

There are many, nonetheless, who are not yet informed, and who will inevitably find this issue very challenging, so we must keep speaking our truth calmly and rationally about the clear evidence while avoiding speculation, which gives a resistive person an opening for arguing and for dismissing the solid evidence.

In another study illustrating our human tendency to conform, German social scientists in the 1960s and 1970s noticed that during two different elections in which the *intentions* of voters regarding who they would vote for were neck-to-neck, but the *expectations* of which party was actually going to win gradually took on a separate and independent reality. In each case, the party whose supporters were more vocal, enthusiastic, and willing to display their convictions became the party *expected* to win, even though the *intentions* of the voters remained stable, in a dead heat.

In each of the elections, the German citizens' *expectations* of who would win grew week by week. Then, at the last minute, a swing occurred, and enough citizens (in the millions) jumped on the bandwagon of the *expected* winner to give the election to that candidate.

How did this come about? Those who were most convinced that their political party and candidate were the best expressed their views openly; they were convinced that their views would eventually be adopted by nearly everyone. Those who rejected these views felt left out; they withdrew and fell silent. This dynamic made the *expected* winner seem even more popular than this candidate actually was. In a spiraling process, the social pressure encouraged people to proclaim their views or to keep quiet. This process is called the "spiral of silence."⁵

The German researchers found that, in an apparently unconscious process, people quit standing up for the losing candidate about *twelve hours in advance* of when public opinion was announced that support for this candidate had deteriorated.⁶

How do social scientists explain this "bandwagon effect"? Everyone, they say, wants to be on the winning side — to belong *with* the winner. Think of our football games: how buoyant, how elated we feel when "our team" is the winner; how deflated we feel when it is the loser. Whether it be sports teams or political parties, there is a human need to identify with the winner, and to proclaim this identification to others.

When it comes to elections and the spiral of silence, German political scientist Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann insightfully explains:

No one wants to be isolated . . . so isolated that neighbors look the other way when they pass you on the stairs to your apartment, or fellow workers move away, leaving an empty seat next to you. We are only beginning to observe the hundreds of signals that let a person know that he or she is not surrounded by a warm glow of sympathy, but by a ring of avoidance.

Repeated questioning of the same people . . . revealed to us that those who feel they are relatively isolated from others . . . are the ones most likely to participate in a last-minute election swing. Those with weaker self-confidence and less interest in politics are also likely to make a last-minute switch. Because of their low self-esteem, few of these people ever think of being on the winning side or playing the trumpet on top of the bandwagon. “Running with the pack” better describes the situation of those who “go along.” Yet this situation applies, more or less, to all mankind. *When people think others are turning away from them, they suffer so much that they can be guided or manipulated as easily by their own sensitivity as by a bridle. The fear of isolation seems to be the force that sets the spiral of silence in motion.*⁷ (emphasis added)

A friend of mine is fond of using the term “the middle of the bell curve” to illustrate our human tendency to conform to, and blend with, the standards and styles of one’s peers in all ways, including the home we live in, the car we drive, the hairstyle we sport, the clothes we wear, the candidate we support. We want to be respected, and we want to belong to and be liked by our group of friends. To achieve these goals, we believe we must be *like* our friends. We do *not* want to be on the fringe of our group of friends. We want to be seen as “normal.” If we take a minority view on an unpopular issue, we can become afraid that our reputation will be tarnished, that we will not be respected, and that we will be ostracized — at least by friends and colleagues, as family can sometimes be more tolerant.

Skeptics know well this feeling of isolation from simply not believing what our officials have told us about 9/11, but we can especially feel ostracized if we speak up about the evidence which contradicts the official story. We are in a minority on a very emotional issue, one that elicits fear in most people.

A remark by the director of a prominent peace and justice organization illustrates this basic human fear: When I asked if her organization would cosponsor a speaking event with our 9/11 Truth organization, instead of answering me, she spontaneously and energetically asked, “Fran, have you lost a lot of friends due to your work with 9/11?”

In another conversation, as I was telling an acquaintance about my educational work as a skeptic of the official 9/11 story, she immediately lost eye contact with me, drew her

body up and back, and pronounced with a tone of finality and authority, “In *our* family, we believe that 9/11 happened because of incompetence by the government.” I was to understand, it appeared, that her family was intelligent enough not to buy the official story in its entirety, but they had chosen to endorse a respectable alternative analysis that kept them solidly within the center of society. It was clear that there was no room for further discussion.

In these cases, the human social need to remain in the middle of the bell curve, to adhere to social norms in order to keep one’s reputation and respectability intact, trumps evidence, openness, and curiosity — as well as the human need for truth. Of course, there are always exceptions, as the Diffusion of Innovations studies clearly show.

Human societies are, of course, diverse. Some people encourage us to keep our society stable and predictable, while others encourage us to move it forward. If we could find and maintain our human connections — our love and respect for each other — while expressing our divergent views, then we would have a wonderfully stable *and* dynamic society, one capable of manifesting civilization’s highest potential.

It takes individuals who are psychologically secure to consider divergent views open-mindedly and respectfully. Such secure individuals are also more prone to stick to their own opinions if supported by the evidence, in contrast to those who become caught in a spiral of silence, such as those who jumped on the bandwagon in the last moments of the German elections, and unlike the 36.8% of the Asch subjects who abandoned their correct answers in favor of the wrong answers of the majority — in short, unlike those relatively insecure individuals who feel a greater need to be liked than to be free to have their own opinion.

The Milgram, Elliott, Zimbardo, Festinger, and Asch experiments, and Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann’s theory of the spiral of silence all show characteristics of “groupthink,” a subject we shall explore next.

¹Solomon Asch, "Opinions and Social Pressure," *Scientific American* (1955).<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/terrace/w1001/readings/asch.pdf>.

²Ibid. Also see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYIh4MkcfJA&feature=youtu.be>

³Ibid. Also see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYIh4MkcfJA&feature=youtu.be>.

⁴See

http://www.angusreid.com/polls/7210/americans_question_bush_on_9_11_intelligence.

⁵Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion—Our Social Skin*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁶Lance deHaven-Smith, *Conspiracy Theory in America* (University of Texas Press, 2013) (191-192). Professor deHaven-Smith analyzes the history of the development of the derogatory nature of the term "conspiracy theory," tracing it to a CIA propaganda campaign to discredit doubters of the Warren Commission's report. In this light, the use of this pejorative term can also rightly be seen as an offensive tactic to shame, and thus censor, those who question official governmental accounts.

⁷Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence*.