



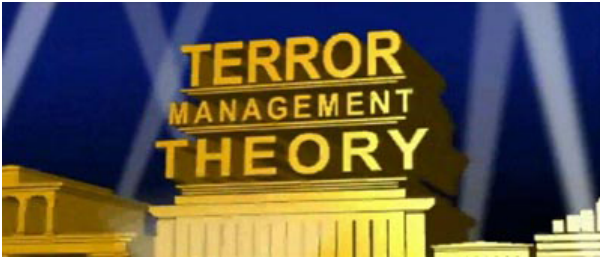
Parts 10 & 11: Terror Management Theory & Systems Justification Theory

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We continue with two overlapping topics.

Part 10: Terror Management Theory



Terror Management Theory postulates that whenever we are introduced to information that reminds us of death — such as simply the *mention* of 9/11 — our anxiety increases, since we are reminded of our *own* inevitable death. This anxiety is called “mortality salience.” Studies show that our behavior immediately becomes more defensive when

we are reminded of death. In turn, we become increasingly insecure. This normally causes us to show increased preference for members of our own group (the “in group”) over out-group members; to show more “consensus bias,” or favoritism toward those who hold beliefs similar to our own; and to develop “compensatory conviction,” an inflated faith in our personal worldview, such as a bias toward our own country and religion.

Therefore, when we skeptics try to educate people about 9/11, we provoke anxiety in our listeners since, unconsciously, we are reminding them of their own death. More defensive behaviors then ensue.

In addition, if our listeners view us as members of a minority group, they usually resist what we are saying — at least initially. If, on the other hand, they view us as members of the majority group, they are more likely to accept our information. In other words, people like to be on the winning side, or in the middle of the bell curve, as we saw in Part 6: Conformity.

As of this writing, skeptics of the official account of 9/11 are generally viewed as holding a minority opinion, but this need not remain the case. The good news is that research shows that information coming from a perceived minority group, although initially resisted, often exerts a hidden or delayed impact. When listeners hear dissenting views repeated, those views become more familiar. Thus, resistant individuals, when interviewed later, often show shifts in favor of the new information.¹

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer intuitively understood this delayed impact when he wrote, All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

Those of us who are doing the difficult work of advancing 9/11 Truth should keep this delayed impact in mind. If we continue to sow the seeds of the idea that we have been lied to about 9/11, they will germinate and grow in time. But let us do our sowing with documented facts, calmness, and compassion. This is the approach most likely to nourish the growth of 9/11 Truth.

Now, we look at Systems Justification Theory, which overlaps Terror Management Theory.

Part 11: Systems Justification Theory

Social psychologists have recognized for some time that, owing to a need for stability and order, people engage in behaviors that reinforce their self-esteem (ego-justification) and that promote a positive image of *the group* with which they identify (group-justification).

Systems Justification Theory goes a step further, postulating that people have an additional motive for maintaining stability and order: They feel the need to defend the status quo of the larger social systems with which they identify (systems-justification). In some cases, this need to justify a social system can trump one's own self-interest and group interest. For example, women who receive less pay for work that is equal to the work of men may justify this inequality by declaring — and believing — that they do not *deserve* equal pay.

In other words, people want to feel good about the cultural systems in which they live. This applies not only to advantaged groups, but also to disadvantaged groups — even when the prevailing cultural system directly opposes the interests of these disadvantaged groups.

When it comes to the challenge of receiving evidence indicating that our government lied to us about 9/11 — and indeed, when this information points toward the culpability of elements within our own government — a person's strong need for normalcy, stability, and order may be triggered. This need can overpower his or her need to know the truth.

As behavioral neuroscientist Laurie Manwell states:

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.²

We all recall the flag waving that began immediately after 9/11. We may also recall Dan Rather's statement to the BBC about journalists' fear of being “necklaced” if they asked hard questions about why the U.S. government was militarily invading Iraq. His statements are an especially clear insight into systems justification to maintain the status quo:

And in some ways the fear is that you will be necklaced here, you will have a flaming tyre [British for “tire”] of lack of patriotism put around your neck. Now it is that fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of the tough questions, and to continue to bore in on the tough questions so often. And again, I am humbled to say, I do not except myself from this criticism.... What we are talking about here — whether one wants to recognize it or not, or call it by its proper name or not — is a form of self-censorship. It starts with a feeling of patriotism within oneself. It carries through with a certain knowledge that the country as a whole — and for all the right reasons — felt and continues to feel this surge of patriotism within themselves. And one finds oneself saying: “I know the right question, but you know what? This is not exactly the right time to ask it”....I worry that patriotism run amok will trample the very values that the country seeks to defend....³

Many skeptics of the official 9/11 account can remember being reviled and chastised as “un-American” for questioning the official story of 9/11 in the first few years after those devastating attacks. Such epithets as “blasphemous!” “nut case!” “unethical!” and “insulting to the families!” were often hurled in anger and ridicule at 9/11 Truth activists, especially in the earlier days of our movement. The most predominant term used to shame and censure the messenger was — and remains — “conspiracy theorist!”⁴

According to Systems Justification Theory, the fear and emotional disequilibrium resulting from the 9/11 and anthrax incidents⁵ stimulated the human need to defend the status-quo worldview of our democratic republic, and to reject — or vehemently attempt to censor — information that conflicted with the official story. It was a fear-filled time for our country. Many citizens, instead of questioning either the official accounts of 9/11 or the ensuing wars, became fervently “patriotic.” They supported the Bush administration’s official account about 9/11 and aligned themselves with the beat of that administration’s war drums.

A curious and disturbing twist to the impulse to “justify” our system was demonstrated by an acquaintance of mine who had finally decided that 9/11 was indeed an “inside job.” He confided to me, “I can see that 9/11 was an inside job, was done by our government. After you look at 20 hours of videos and read a book or two, this becomes obvious. But I think our government *had* to do it. It’s like Pearl Harbor. We *had* to get into World War II because of the Nazis, so the deception [by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration] that caused Pearl Harbor was necessary. With 9/11, the Saudis were getting out of line, and since we need them [for their oil], we had to show them what we could do if *they* got out of line. So by attacking Afghanistan and Iraq, we showed them — and everyone — what could happen to *them* if *they* got out of line.”

Equally surprisingly, another male acquaintance told me quite frankly, “I think we have a great country. As long as my family is fine and we can live the lifestyle we have, the truth is, I don’t really care what happened on 9/11 — even if parts of our government did it.”

The same attitude, although about a different issue, was displayed by a physician acquaintance who supports neoliberal economic policies, including “structural adjustments” — the sale or removal of public assets and resources such as tax-funded health care and education — in order to pay down debts owed to the World Bank or International Monetary Fund. Since the draconian debts incurred by the governmental leaders and owed to these lenders are paid from a combination of workers’ taxes, cuts in social spending, and the sale of national industries and natural resources for pennies on the dollar, such neoliberal policies further impoverish the already economically disadvantaged working classes, resulting in the further enrichment of the few foreign investors in the country.⁶

In other words, these policies further widen the gap between the rich and the poor. I asked this physician, “Don’t you think we can prosper and live well without our prosperity being won upon the backs of others?” Without a moment’s hesitation, without even an apology, he answered, “No, absolutely not.”

Although this frank acknowledgment and support of the brutality of “Empire” can be shocking, surely the same attitude was held by many Roman, British, Dutch, and Spanish citizens who gained, often royally, from their respective country’s imperial exploits in different eras.⁷ Why would Americans of today be any less willfully myopic? Why would we have any less of a sense of entitlement or, for whatever unanalyzed reason, feel any less strongly that we deserve the prosperity brought to us by the weapons of our “Empire”?

Justification of our imperial system may reside, consciously or unconsciously, within the psyches of more Americans than we would like to believe. I suspect that many United States citizens, whether they

have clearly thought about it or not, have the underlying attitude, “Let the boys in the back room do our dirty work for us, but, please, spare me the details — especially of the suffering that the dirty work brings to others. I just want to be able to enjoy my American way of life.”

We are addressing U.S. citizens here, but the attitude of superiority and entitlement can be found in all countries (and individuals) that act imperially. This attitude could well be another source of the “I don’t want to know” syndrome being analyzed in this essay.

We gain some understanding of how dangerous this all-too-human tendency to justify our social system can be when we consider the silence in the 1930s of the “good Germans” who saw their neighbors being forcibly taken away. They had heard about the concentration camps, but would not speak up — justifying to themselves, perhaps, that “our system is essentially good and therefore could not be *that* evil.” This justification, in turn, caused them to rationalize that their governmental leaders must know more than they themselves did, and that their government therefore must be doing what was best for them and the country. In other words, they were justifying their social system and, as a result, trusting the boys in the backroom.⁸

It is this very same tendency to become silent — or worse — that we are attempting to understand here, independently of the historical context.

Looking back on Americans' negative reactions toward 9/11 skeptics, and considering as well how people justify imperial violence to preserve their affluent lifestyle, we may wonder if there is any hope for humanity. Fortunately, though, during certain points in history, such as the women’s suffrage and civil rights movements, consciousness has been observed to rise — perhaps expanding under a society's radar for quite some time, until it finally breaks through an invisible psychological barrier. Then change occurs, often in spite of apparently overwhelming odds.

Even with the corporate-owned media abdicating its responsibility to ask the tough questions about 9/11 and about the ensuing wars, grassroots activists have nevertheless spread knowledge of the evidence that points to a very different accounting of 9/11. The word gets out through books, online articles, DVDs, radio interviews, podcasts, websites, blogs, conferences, academic research papers, and peer-reviewed journals. This 9/11 activism and other events, such as the 2005 leak and publication of the Downing Street memo, have revealed the lies told by the Bush administration. The result has been an erosion of the airtight official story of 9/11 and the executive branch’s other pretexts for war.

According to Systems Justification Theory, when the collective worldview erodes enough, people’s defense of the status quo weakens in response, and there is increasing support for an emerging worldview.⁹

This is borne out by a Scripps Howard poll in 2006, which found that 36% of Americans consider it “very likely” or “somewhat likely” that government officials either allowed the 9/11 attacks to be carried out or carried out the attacks themselves.¹⁰ As Lev Grossman reports in *Time* magazine, “Thirty-six percent adds up to a lot of people. This is not a fringe phenomenon. It is a mainstream political reality.”¹¹

We again see the eroding of the official 9/11 account in an Angus-Reid poll that compared responses in 2002 and 2006: The poll found that in 2002, 21% of Americans believed the government was telling the truth about prior knowledge of the events of 9/11, but in 2006 only 16% believed this.¹² In recalling the *Diffusion of Innovations studies* in [Part 2](#), this 16% brings to mind the “Laggards,” the folks who will never change their attitudes.

Finally, from observation in the field, 9/11 Truth activists report that, while there are still many Americans who know very little about the evidence that we present, there is currently much less hostility toward our attempts to educate the public. In fact, for the last few years at the People’s Fair in Denver, we have noted much curiosity about this issue, as well as profuse gratitude for our persistent educational efforts.

According to Laurie Manwell’s analysis,

...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.¹³

Let’s hope, for the sake of our nation and the world, that this scholar’s analysis is accurate.

In our next installment, we will shift to another theory about why good people become silent about 9/11. The question in [Part 12, Signal Detection Theory](#), will be: “Are they receiving our message, or is there too much noise for them to hear it?”

Endnotes

¹Zakary L. Tormala, Victoria L. DeSensi, and Richard E. Petty, “Resisting Persuasion by Illegitimate Means: A Metacognitive Perspective on Minority Influence,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33 (2007): 354–367; this research was found in:

Laurie Manwell, Ph.D. Candidate, *Behavioural Neuroscience and Toxicology*, University of Guelph, “Faulty Towers of Belief: Part I, Demolishing the Iconic Psychological Barriers to 9/11 Truth,” *Journal of 9/11 Studies*, article [here](#).

Also relevant is Laurie Manwell’s presentation at the 2011 Toronto Hearings, where she addressed Terror Management Theory in the Q&A session [here](#).

²Laurie Manwell, “In Denial of Democracy: Social Psychological Implications for Public Discourse on State Crimes Against Democracy Post-9/11,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no. 6 (February 2010).

³Dan Rather’s statement [here](#).

⁴Lance 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 propaganda campaign to discredit doubters of the Warren Commission’s report.

⁵Graeme MacQueen, *The 2001 Anthrax Deception: The Case for a Domestic Conspiracy* (Clarity Press, September 1, 2014). See interview with Dr. Graeme MacQueen on the anthrax attacks [here](#).

Also, Lance deHaven-Smith records how false flag operations often occur in clusters in his groundbreaking book, *Conspiracy Theory in America* (University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁶John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (Plume, 2005). Perkins's groundbreaking book exposes the realpolitik behind the debt incurred by third-world countries.

⁷For a list of the world's largest empires and their territorial and economic gains, see [here](#).

⁸This discussion brings to mind David Ray Griffin's excellent lecture, "[9/11 and Nationalist Faith](#)"; see transcript [here](#).

⁹J. T. Jost, J Pietrzak, I. Liviatan, A. N. Mandisodza, and J. L. Napier, "System Justification as Conscious and Nonconscious Goal Pursuit," in *Handbook of Motivation Science*, eds. J. Y. Shah and W. L. Gardner (New York: Guilford, 2008), 591–605; this material can be found in Manwell, "In Denial of Democracy."

¹⁰<http://www.911truth.org/articleforprinting.php?story=20060802215417462>

¹¹Lev Grossman, "Why the 9/11 Conspiracies Won't Go Away," *Time*, September 3, 2006; see site [here](http://911review.com/reviews/time/markup/conspiracytheories.html). For a critique of Grossman's article, see <http://911review.com/reviews/time/markup/conspiracytheories.html>.

¹²[Americans Question Bush](#); for more polls, see [here](#).

¹³Manwell, "In Denial of Democracy."

Note: Electronic sources in the endnotes have been archived. If they can no longer be found by a search on the Internet, readers desiring a copy may contact Frances Shure [\[here\]](#).