

Self and Nation: A Comparison of Americans' Beliefs Before and After 9/11

Roy J. Eidelson and Mary D. Plummer
*Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict
University of Pennsylvania*

This study compared the responses of Americans surveyed before ($N = 198$) and after ($N = 208$) the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in regard to their beliefs about their personal worlds, their American national group, and their perceptions of the American national group's shared beliefs about itself. Examining the five belief domains highlighted by Eidelson and Eidelson (2003)—that is, vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness—we found that (a) compared to the pre-9/11 sample, post-9/11 respondents reported stronger group-level beliefs or perceptions about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and superiority and a weaker group-level belief or perception about helplessness and (b) at the personal world level, post-9/11 respondents scored higher on beliefs about vulnerability and lower on beliefs about injustice and distrust than their pre-9/11 counterparts.

Over 50 years ago, Asch (1952) emphasized the importance of situating the individual within the group while simultaneously recognizing the individual's crucial contributions to group life. At that time he noted: "No account of group processes can hope to make progress if it fails to find a place both for the initiative of individuals and for the power of groups over them" (p. 258). In the intervening years, much progress has been made in delineating individual-group dynamics and their role in intergroup conflict (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1990; Deutsch, 1973; Ross, 1995; Sherif, 1966; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In a recent analysis of the interplay between the individual and the group, Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) focused on a set of five beliefs that appear to play prominent

Correspondence should be sent to Roy J. Eidelson, Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict, University of Pennsylvania, St. Leonard's Court, Suite 305, 3819-33 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104. E-mail: royeidel@psych.upenn.edu

roles at both the personal and the collective level—beliefs about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness.

Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) proposed that these specific belief domains are especially influential in reference to distress and strife at both the interpersonal and intergroup levels, serving as triggers for or constraints on personal or collective action aimed at altering unsatisfying circumstances. At the same time, these authors posit that these beliefs are likely to be impacted by overt conflict and unfolding events in a pattern of reciprocal influence. Just as certain worldviews (e.g., regarding impending danger, unjust treatment, or malevolent intentions) may make violence against individuals or groups more likely, the onset of hostilities can produce changes in these underlying beliefs and thereby exacerbate or mollify preexisting convictions and alter the character of future interactions.

This study examined differences in the extent to which Americans held these five beliefs before and after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Because we had collected survey data from a sample of Americans (in Philadelphia) in April of 2001 as a first step in the development of self-report scales to measure the beliefs highlighted by Eidelson and Eidelson, the tragic events of 9/11 presented an important and unanticipated opportunity to administer the same preliminary survey instrument to a comparable sample of respondents (in November of 2001, also in Philadelphia) and to assess differences in the responses of these two groups. The former provided their answers at a time of relative stability and calm in regard to U.S. international relations and the latter responded 6 months later, after the deadly terrorists attacks and while the United States was engaged in military action against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

FIVE BELIEF DOMAINS

Detailed descriptions of the five individual-level core beliefs and corresponding group-level collective worldviews are available elsewhere (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). Only brief summaries are provided here.

Vulnerability

The vulnerability belief revolves around a sense of living in harm's way amid constant risk and peril. When adopted in regard to one's personal world, this conviction often produces chronic worry and "catastrophic thinking" characterized by an exaggerated expectation that circumstances will deteriorate dramatically over time (e.g., Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 1985; Burns, 1999; Ellis, 1962). When applied to groups, the individual group member—or the group as a whole—perceives the collective as the potential victim of pervasive and imminent threats. Again, worstcase scenarios may be imagined, nurtured by a real or perceived history of

misery and devastation, including traumatic experiences as the targets of outgroup aggression. Indeed, fears about the future are among the most common causes of ethnic conflicts, often producing spiraling violence (Lake & Rothchild, 1998). One particularly problematic aspect of this perceived collective vulnerability is that it can provide the impetus for a group to act aggressively in an effort to preemptively ensure its own safety (e.g., Jervis, 1978).

Injustice

The injustice belief reflects the perception of being the victim of mistreatment by specific others or by the world at large. When this belief is activated in reference to an individual's personal world, the grievances are often focused on those people perceived to have been the source of betrayal or the cause of disappointment. When the individual's injustice mindset is broadened beyond personal experience to the circumstances of his or her group, the conviction involves the group as victim of unjust treatment. If the belief represents a sufficient consensus within the group it can play an important role in the mobilization of violent insurgencies (e.g., Staub, 1989), especially because shared views of injustice can serve to heighten the identification and allegiance that individuals feel toward the ingroup (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Further contributing to the likelihood of intergroup conflict, perceptions of history often contain subjective distortions that include both self-whitewashing and other-maligning myths (van Evera, 1997).

Distrust

The distrust belief focuses on the presumed hostility and malicious intent of other individuals or other groups. In reference to the individual's personal world, at the extreme this belief is transformed from a predisposition toward suspicion into outright paranoia. In reference to groups, the belief that other groups harbor malevolent intentions toward the ingroup is sufficiently widespread that "dishonest" and "untrustworthy" are considered to be central elements in the universal stereotype of outgroups (Campbell, 1967; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Insko and Schopler (1998; Schopler & Insko, 1992) found empirical evidence for a group schema that leads groups to be significantly more distrustful of and competitive toward each other than are individuals. That is, the very same people approach intergroup interactions differently from the way they approach one-to-one interactions.

Superiority

The superiority belief rests on the conviction of being better than others. When adopted in reference to one's personal world, this belief may take the form of standing above the norms and rules that govern the actions of other people, often leading to expressions of arrogance and harsh judgments of others that create diffi-

culties in interpersonal relationships (e.g., Young, 1999). When the belief is held in regard to the ingroup, it often manifests itself in the perception that the group is morally superior, chosen, entitled, or destined for greatness. Ethnocentrism—the presumed superiority of the ingroup’s culture combined with condemnation of the outgroup as immoral and inferior—appears to be commonplace (e.g., LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sumner, 1906). “Chosenness” is a particularly prominent expression of this belief, often encouraging diametrically opposed viewpoints as to which group is truly entitled to disputed territory or status. Evidence for each side’s claim is often found in selective recountings of group histories which promote further polarization (e.g., van Evera, 1997).

Helplessness

Finally, the helplessness belief refers to a perceived inability to influence or control events and outcomes. The phenomenon of helplessness has been the focus of extensive research, including the work of Seligman and colleagues on learned helplessness, depression, and pessimistic explanatory style (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Buchanan & Seligman, 1995). Even when it does not accurately represent objective reality, this belief tends to be self-perpetuating because it diminishes motivation. For instance, Bandura’s (1977, 1997) analyses of self-efficacy have revealed that individuals less confident of their capabilities tend not to try as hard or as long when pursuing goals and tend not to bounce back as resiliently when their efforts prove unproductive. Similarly, when group members perceive their ingroup to be helpless to alter its circumstances, organized political mobilization is severely constrained. An effective insurgency movement depends on the promise of some reasonable likelihood of success given the risks undertaken (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Homer-Dixon, 1999). Those who participate in a social movement must see their group efforts as capable of righting the wrongs they perceive (Gamson, 1992).

BELIEFS AT THREE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

This study sought to examine the interface between the individual and the group by comparing the strength of these five beliefs before and after 9/11 through self-report surveys administered at two points in time to individuals who identified their national group as “American.” Although Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) emphasized the parallels and distinctions between beliefs in two realms (i.e., the beliefs we hold about our personal worlds and the collective worldviews held by groups), when the focus is shifted to *the individual group member* there are actually *three* potentially important levels to consider when analyzing each belief domain: (a) an individual’s personal beliefs about his or her personal world, (b) this individual’s personal beliefs about his or her group, and (c) this individual’s perceptions of his

or her group's shared beliefs about itself. We examined all three of these levels in this study.

Personal Beliefs About the Personal World

In regard to this first level of analysis, a substantial literature exists in clinical psychology and cognitive-behavioral therapy in particular (e.g., Beck, 1976; Ellis, 1962; Young, 1999) examining the individual's personal beliefs about the world in which he or she lives—distinct from any explicit attention to the person's social identity or group identification. In this context, core beliefs are understood as the relatively stable cognitive patterns—believed to form fairly early in life—that an individual employs to understand a situation, producing regularity in the interpretation of events. Although such core beliefs can contribute to healthy personal adjustment, they can also act as triggers for personal distress and interpersonal difficulties. This is most often the case when beliefs about one's personal world contain problematic and resistant distortions. For example, defensive biases may help the individual maintain his or her self-esteem but they can simultaneously interfere with progress toward important life changes that might curtail conflict with others (e.g., Sherman & Cohen, 2002).

Personal Beliefs About the Ingroup

This second level of analysis focuses on the individual's personal beliefs about a group with which he or she identifies (e.g., a national, ethnic, or religious group). Personal beliefs about ingroup circumstances have been shown to be especially important determinants—more so than self-interest alone—of a person's political attitudes and willingness to take action on behalf of the group (e.g., Kinder, 1998; Runciman, 1966) ranging from voting behavior to militant resistance. It should be noted that the beliefs held by one group member often tend to be shared by others in the group, in part because membership appears to impose some structure on the way that information is processed (e.g., Haslam, 1997). Furthermore, individuals typically seek consensual validation from other ingroup members for the beliefs they hold and they generally prefer to express agreement rather than disagreement with the perceived group consensus (e.g., Haslam, 1997; Noelle-Neumann, 1993). These and other pressures toward conformity tend to become stronger during periods of conflict with other groups (e.g., LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Ross, 2002).

Personal Perceptions of the Ingroup's Shared Beliefs About Itself

Finally, this third level of analysis focuses on the individual group member's perceptions of what the ingroup "as a whole" believes. Communally-shared beliefs

are an essential element of group culture, providing common narratives and frames of reference for understanding the world (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bar-Tal, 1990, 2000; Moscovici, 1988; Ross, 1995, 1997). The collective beliefs of a group exist independent of any specific individual; indeed these shared worldviews typically precede the entry of each member into the community (e.g., Klandermans, 1992). Although these beliefs may be firmly entrenched, they tend to be neither unalterable nor unanimously accepted. Moreover, in any large group there are likely to be divergent perceptions of the group consensus, in part because awareness of group norms and access to group information will vary from one person to another. Individual perceptions of opinion distributions can diverge widely within a group because they are impacted by projective mechanisms, motivational factors, and the cognitive heuristics employed (e.g., Shamir & Shamir, 2000).

PREDICTIONS ABOUT AMERICANS' BELIEFS BEFORE AND AFTER SEPTEMBER 11TH

The precise manner and degree to which beliefs about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness gain or lose prominence in the face of intergroup conflict—at each of these three levels of analysis—are undoubtedly influenced by the nature of the particular conflict and the circumstances and outcomes surrounding it. In this article, we look specifically at the reactions of Americans to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath, in regard to their personal beliefs about their personal worlds, their personal beliefs about their American national group, and their personal perceptions of the American national group's shared beliefs about itself. As indicated by the following summaries of each belief domain in the context of the post-9/11 environment, the heightened salience of these five beliefs seemed readily apparent at both of the group levels of analysis. In particular, the realm of shared beliefs appeared to gain prominence through media coverage of unfolding events and through the major pronouncements and consistent framing by national leaders. In contrast, personal world beliefs seemed likely to be shaped by a somewhat different set of influences, including interactions and comparisons with other fellow ingroup members (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999).

Vulnerability

In the vulnerability domain, we expected that our respondents would report stronger beliefs about post-9/11 dangers at all three levels of analysis. This was a period during which thousands of lives had recently been lost and more were seemingly in jeopardy. As a result, the terrorist attacks appeared to shake the foundations of American convictions of invulnerability and impunity. In his address to a joint ses-

sion of Congress and the American people the week following 9/11, President Bush said: “Our nation has been put on notice: We are not immune from attack.” In addition, the anthrax scare that followed shortly after 9/11 appeared to further amplify perceptions that even at the personal world level there was considerably more risk than previously imagined. An *ABC News/Washington Post* poll conducted a month after 9/11 revealed that over 80% of Americans were at least “somewhat worried” about the possibility that there would be more major terrorist attacks (Public Agenda Online, 2001a). Comparable polls regarding fears for personal safety revealed that significant numbers of Americans were very concerned that they themselves or their family members would be victims of terrorism (e.g., Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, & Provost, 2002).

Injustice

In contrast to the heightened salience of vulnerability at all three levels, we reasoned that injustice beliefs at the different levels of analysis might move in divergent directions after 9/11. Issues of collective injustice and the righting of wrongs quickly came to the forefront of national discourse. On September 13, in his announcement of a national day of prayer and remembrance for the victims of the terrorist attacks, President Bush stated

Justice demands that those who helped or harbored the terrorists be punished—and punished severely. The enormity of their evil demands it. We will use all the resources of the United States and our cooperating friends and allies to pursue those responsible for this evil, until justice is done.

To the extent that individual Americans concurred with this view, their personal beliefs about the ingroup should reflect this conviction. At the same time, however, issues of personal injustice and grievance appeared to recede in salience, at least for many Americans. The outpouring of sympathy and support for the direct victims of the attacks and their families—that is, those who had suffered *more*—was a prominent feature of the weeks immediately following 9/11.

Distrust

A similar divergence between personal world beliefs and beliefs at both group levels of analysis seemed likely in the distrust domain. We expected that the increased group cohesion and strengthened boundaries between ingroup and outgroup that frequently accompany violent conflict (e.g., LeVine & Campbell, 1972; McCauley, 2001) would serve to heighten Americans’ distrust of outgroups after 9/11. Supporting this view, suspicions of immigrants, especially those of Middle Eastern descent, appeared to rise sharply in at least some quarters in the days im-

mediately after the attacks (e.g., Public Agenda Online, 2001b). Yet at the personal world level there were frequent reports of heightened prosociality after 9/11, of Americans treating each other better and expressing a renewed appreciation for family, neighbors, and friends. In short, the pattern suggested here is that increased distrust toward outgroups was countered by increased trust toward fellow ingroup members.

Superiority

Turning to the superiority domain, we anticipated that respondents' group world beliefs—both their personal beliefs about the American national group and their perceptions of the ingroup's shared mindset—would gain strength as claims of American collective moral superiority became an integral part of the nation's call to arms following the terrorist attacks. On the night of 9/11, President Bush addressed the country this way:

A great people has been moved to defend a great nation...America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining... We go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

In the weeks that followed, this narrative of a battle between good and evil included the portrayal of the enemy in subhuman terms, as exemplified by references to "smoking them out of their holes" (President Bush) and "drying up the swamp they live in" (Defense Secretary Rumsfeld). In contrast to such expressions of group superiority, we found little reason to expect that 9/11 and its aftermath would have evoked assertions of personal superiority among American citizens.

Helplessness

Finally, in the helplessness domain we expected that the reports of ongoing U.S. military success in Afghanistan during the post-9/11 period immediately preceding our survey would contribute to a *diminished* sense of group helplessness both in the respondents' beliefs about their national group and in their assessment of the group's shared convictions. Although the 9/11 attacks themselves and the horrors and destruction they wrought were shocking, the reactions that followed were largely dominated by a focus on the country's collective capabilities rather than its frailties. On the night of 9/11 President Bush declared: "Our military is powerful and it is prepared." In a related manner, a *Washington Post* poll in late September (Milbank & Morin, 2001) found that over 80% of Americans were confident that the United States would "capture or kill bin Laden and break up his al Qaeda network" and "reduce the number of terrorist attacks on U.S. targets." We did not necessarily anticipate a similar decline in helplessness at the personal world level. It should be noted,

however, that many Americans reportedly found ways to maintain their sense of personal agency through acts such as donating blood, making financial contributions to relief organizations, stockpiling emergency supplies, and so on.

A Summary of Predictions

At both of the group levels of analysis (i.e., personal beliefs about the ingroup and perceptions of the group's shared beliefs about itself), post-9/11 respondents were expected to hold stronger beliefs than pre-9/11 respondents on all domains except for helplessness, where the opposite relationship was anticipated. Different predictions were made regarding beliefs about the personal world before and after 9/11. Specifically, we expected that respondents would feel more personally vulnerable, less personally mistreated (injustice), and less distrustful post-9/11 than pre-9/11. No differences were anticipated in regard to personal world superiority or personal world helplessness.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Surveys were completed by two samples of prospective jurors, both awaiting possible empaneling at the same large metropolitan municipal courthouse. The first sample completed the questionnaire during the first half of April 2001, the same survey was administered to the second sample during the middle of November 2001. This latter time period was approximately 1 month after American military strikes in Afghanistan had begun, a point at which substantial progress appeared to have been made in defeating the Taliban. In the United States, mid-November was also after the height of the anthrax hysteria.

The same procedure was used during both time frames. Over the course of each collection period, volunteers from among the prospective jurors in a large waiting room were invited to anonymously complete a 15 to 20 min survey, for which each respondent received a candy bar in appreciation of his or her participation. More than half of those present agreed to participate at each session. Only respondents who completed the survey, identified their national group as "American," and identified themselves as either White or Black were included in the data analyses (the very few respondents who identified themselves as neither White nor Black were excluded to simplify the use of racial group as a covariate).

The survey consisted of several parts. First, the respondents were asked to complete a set of items assessing their personal beliefs about their personal world. After completing this section, each respondent was asked to select the national group with which he or she identified. Only two options were provided—a choice be-

tween “American” and “Other.” The next section of the questionnaire asked the respondents about their own personal beliefs about the national group with which they identified. The third set of belief items immediately followed, asking the respondents about their national group’s beliefs about itself. The final sections of the survey included a series of demographic questions and other items not germane to this study.

The sample size of the pre-9/11 group was 198; the size of the post-9/11 group was 208. Both samples were similar on demographic measures with no statistically significant differences between them. The pre-9/11 sample was 59% women and 41% men; the gender distribution in the post-9/11 sample was 63% women and 37% men. The average ages of the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 samples were 40.64 years ($SD = 12.29$) and 41.55 years ($SD = 11.13$), respectively. The racial or ethnic backgrounds were 60% White and 40% Black for the pre-9/11 sample; the corresponding figures for the post-9/11 sample were 62% White and 38% Black. The distribution on highest educational level attained was 15% graduate work, 20% college degree, 31% some college, 33% high school, and 1% did not hold a high school diploma in the pre-9/11 sample; for the post-9/11 sample these percentages were 14% graduate work, 24% college degree, 38% some college, 23% high school, and 1% did not hold a high school diploma. Finally, the family income distribution was 24% less than \$30,000, 57% between \$30,000 and \$75,000, and 19% greater than \$75,000 for the pre-9/11 sample; the corresponding percentages for the post-9/11 sample were 16% less than \$30,000, 64% between \$30,000 and \$75,000, and 20% greater than \$75,000.

Measures

Five belief scales at three levels of analysis. Based on discussions with a group of scholars and students, brief scales were created from a larger initial item pool generated by the authors to reflect the five belief domains. Parallel items were constructed for each of the three levels of analysis. The first level was designed to assess the respondent’s beliefs about his or her personal world distinct from any explicit aspects of the individual’s social identity or group identification. In the survey used here, this first set of items was introduced this way: “Please describe how you think about yourself and the world by rating how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.” The second level assessed the respondent’s personal beliefs about his or her national group. These items were preceded by the instruction: “Please describe how you think about your national group by rating how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements;” each item began with the phrase “I believe that my group.” The third level measured the respondent’s perceptions regarding this same national group’s shared beliefs about itself. This item set was introduced as

TABLE 1
Belief Scale Items Assessing Personal Beliefs About the Group

Vulnerability	I believe my group's safety and security are uncertain.
	I believe that the things that are most important to my group are well protected. (R)
Injustice	I believe other groups are often unfair to my group.
	I believe my group is criticized by other groups more than it should be.
	I believe that my group's efforts often go unrewarded.
Distrust	I believe that other groups are usually honest with my group. (R)
	I believe my group should be suspicious of other groups' intentions.
	I believe that other groups will try to deceive my group if given the chance.
Superiority	I believe my group is superior to other groups in many ways.
	I believe that it is important for my group to do better than other groups.
	I believe my group's contributions to society are more valuable than those of other groups.
Helplessness	I believe that my group is often helpless to improve its circumstances.
	I believe that my group has very little control over its future.

Note. (R) refers to reverse-coded item. Items assessing personal beliefs about the personal world and perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs are not shown.

follows: "Please describe how your national group thinks about itself by rating how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements;" each of the items began with the phrase "My group believes." For example, one of the vulnerability domain items appeared on different pages of the survey in the following three parallel forms: "My safety and security are uncertain," "I believe that my group's safety and security are uncertain," and "My group believes that its safety and security are uncertain."

All items were endorsed on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A respondent's score for each of the 15 belief scales was the average rating of the items measuring that belief at that level of analysis (reverse-coded items were reverse-scored). The injustice, distrust, and superiority scales each had three items. The vulnerability and helplessness scales each had only two items because the third prospective item for each of these scales showed extreme skew and was therefore excluded. All of the items assessing a respondent's personal beliefs about his or her national group are listed in Table 1.¹

¹The full belief scales at all three levels of analysis can be obtained from the first author. In addition, the Individual-Group Belief Inventory (Eidelson, 2003), a more recent version of these scales with substantially stronger psychometric properties, is also available by request from the first author.

RESULTS

Correlations and Cronbach Alphas in the Two Samples

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations and Cronbach alphas for the 15 belief scales for each sample. The pre-9/11 zero-order correlations are above the diagonal and the post-9/11 correlations are below the diagonal. The alphas for each of the 15 belief scales in the pre-9/11 sample can be found in the rightmost column of the table; the corresponding alphas for the post-9/11 sample are located across the bottom row of the table. The Cronbach alphas were adequate in most cases but for some scales, especially the two-item vulnerability and helplessness scales, the reliabilities were disappointingly low.

In general, the correlations between beliefs about the ingroup and perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs tended to be stronger than the correlations between beliefs about the ingroup and beliefs about the personal world. In turn, these latter correlations were stronger than the correlations between beliefs about the personal world and perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs. Also, at each level of analysis most of the belief domains were significantly correlated with each other. The pattern of relationships among the belief scales was largely comparable across the two samples.

Distinguishing Among the Three Levels of Analysis Within Each Sample

A meaningful examination of pre-9/11 versus post-9/11 differences in beliefs at the three levels of analysis depended in part on the respondents having adequately distinguished among these different levels when they completed the surveys. Indirect evidence that this was in fact the case was provided in two separate ways. First, the correlations across the three levels of analysis for each belief domain in each sample were only moderate in magnitude (see Table 2). For example, the single strongest correlation in the pre-9/11 sample was $r = .48$ between personal beliefs about group injustice and perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs about injustice; similarly, the single strongest correlation in the post-9/11 sample was $r = .56$ between personal beliefs about group helplessness and perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs about helplessness. Most correlations across levels were substantially lower than these.

Second, a comparison of mean belief scale scores within each sample revealed that (a) with only one exception, the respondents' scores measuring their perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs were on average significantly higher than their corresponding scores measuring their personal beliefs about the ingroup (this difference in the vulnerability domain was not statistically significant in the pre-9/11 sample) and (b) in all cases, the respondents' scores measur-

TABLE 2
Correlations and Cronbach Alphas for Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11 Samples

<i>Belief Scales</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	α
1. V-Personal World		.30	.20	.03	.18	.28	.01	.18	-.04	.02	.20	-.03	.13	.09	-.00	.48
2. I-Personal World	.13		.48	.25	.33	.30	.27	.28	.10	.24	.11	.20	.10	-.02	.21	.66
3. D-Personal World	.06	.50		.30	.26	.30	.29	.41	.19	.37	.06	.08	.14	-.18	.26	.71
4. S-Personal World	-.15	.16	.28		.11	-.07	.04	.07	.40	.07	-.13	-.01	-.09	.11	-.03	.70
5. H-Personal World	.25	.40	.15	.01		.15	.14	.03	.01	.28	.06	-.00	-.05	-.16	.15	.42
6. V-Person-Group	.31	.19	.14	.01	.17		.22	.41	-.04	.28	.41	.28	.21	-.15	.31	.34
7. I-Person-Group	.06	.21	.26	-.01	.16	.23		.58	.34	.24	.16	.48	.23	-.07	.31	.70
8. D-Person-Group	.10	.14	.35	.11	-.03	.23	.46		.32	.17	.18	.39	.42	.04	.21	.71
9. S-Person-Group	-.09	.06	.16	.27	-.06	-.10	.51	.49		.05	-.20	.24	.05	.30	-.11	.69
10. H-Person-Group	.14	.23	.12	-.02	.34	.20	-.02	-.08	-.15		.24	.11	-.02	-.33	.46	.48
11. V-Shared Group	.14	.16	.02	-.01	.04	.43	.07	.08	-.18	.03		.32	.30	-.12	.43	.31
12. I-Shared Group	-.01	.12	.20	.10	.07	.17	.51	.48	.35	-.02	.15		.52	.27	.23	.71
13. D-Shared Group	-.09	.16	.37	.15	-.12	.09	.19	.47	.25	-.09	.13	.56		.41	.20	.64
14. S-Shared Group	-.11	-.11	-.03	.22	-.18	-.01	-.01	.27	.39	-.14	-.01	.43	.40		-.25	.77
15. H-Shared Group	.09	.21	.17	.08	.31	.21	.06	.05	-.11	.56	.13	.21	.08	-.08		.62
α	.33	.47	.59	.67	.50	.37	.73	.61	.72	.56	.19	.64	.67	.77	.60	

Note. V = Vulnerability; I = Injustice; D = Distrust; S = Superiority; H = Helplessness; Personal World refers to personal beliefs about the personal world; Person-Group refers to personal beliefs about the ingroup; Shared Group refers to perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs about itself. Correlations for the Pre-9/11 Sample (N = 198) are above the diagonal; correlations for the Post-9/11 Sample (N = 208) are below the diagonal. For correlations greater than .14, $p < .05$; for correlations greater than .18, $p < .01$; for correlations greater than .22, $p < .001$. Pre-9/11 Sample alphas are in the rightmost column; Post-9/11 Sample alphas are in the bottom row.

ing their beliefs about the ingroup were on average significantly higher than the corresponding scores measuring their personal beliefs about their personal worlds. In other words, there was a clear “stair step” pattern of increasingly stronger mean endorsement levels as respondents moved from beliefs about the personal world to beliefs about the ingroup to perceptions of the ingroup’s shared beliefs (see Table 3).

Differences in Beliefs Between the Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11 Samples

To test our predictions of how the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 samples would differ, we conducted a series of analyses of covariance with each of the five belief domain scales at each of the three levels of analysis serving as the criterion measure in one analysis (i.e., 15 separate analyses in total). All of the analyses were identical in regard to the predictor variables used: a dummy-coded variable representing the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 samples, using 0 (*pre-9/11*) and 1 (*post-9/11*), and four de-

TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations for the Belief Domain Scales for Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11 Samples

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Pre-9/11 Sample^a</i>		<i>Post-9/11 Sample^b</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Vulnerability				
Personal world	2.54	.89	2.78	.81
Person-group	2.73	.77	3.05	.76
Shared group	2.79	.80	3.18	.79
Injustice				
Personal world	2.49	.84	2.31	.66
Person-group	3.12	.90	3.34	.88
Shared group	3.40	.80	3.62	.71
Distrust				
Personal world	2.69	.82	2.53	.69
Person-group	3.16	.79	3.42	.74
Shared group	3.32	.73	3.52	.71
Superiority				
Personal world	2.52	.79	2.67	.80
Person-group	2.97	.89	3.17	.91
Shared group	3.45	.91	3.69	.85
Helplessness				
Personal world	1.72	.71	1.78	.74
Person-group	2.13	.86	1.93	.74
Shared group	2.38	.88	2.17	.83

Note. Means are adjusted for age, gender, education, and racial group.

^aN = 198. ^bN = 208.

mographic covariates—age, gender, education level, and racial group (Black or White). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the five belief domain measures at each level of analysis. In the summary statistics that follow, the F values represent the tests of group differences after controlling for the four demographic variables.

Vulnerability. As predicted, the post-9/11 respondents scored significantly higher than the pre-9/11 sample in regard to beliefs about personal world vulnerability, $F(1, 394) = 7.70, p = .006$; American national group vulnerability, $F(1, 394) = 18.25, p < .001$; and perceptions of shared national group beliefs about vulnerability, $F(1, 394) = 23.42, p < .001$.

Injustice. Also consistent with our expectations, the post-9/11 sample scored significantly lower than the pre-9/11 sample on personal world injustice beliefs, $F(1, 394) = 5.85, p = .016$, and significantly higher than their pre-9/11 counterparts on personal beliefs about American national group mistreatment (by outgroups), $F(1, 394) = 6.44, p = .012$, and perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs about its victimization, $F(1, 394) = 8.59, p = .004$.

Distrust. A pattern similar to that for the three injustice scales emerged for the distrust scales. The post-9/11 respondents scored significantly lower than the pre-9/11 sample in reference to personal world distrust, $F(1, 394) = 4.64, p = .032$, and significantly higher in regard to personal beliefs about the American national group's need to be distrustful of other groups, $F(1, 394) = 12.01, p < .001$, and perceptions of the ingroup's shared convictions regarding the appropriateness of distrusting outgroups, $F(1, 394) = 7.39, p = .007$.

Superiority. The difference between the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 samples in their personal world superiority scale scores fell just short of statistical significance, $F(1, 394) = 3.54, p = .061$. As expected, at both group levels the post-9/11 respondents scored higher on the superiority scales than did their pre-9/11 counterparts, $F(1, 394) = 4.80, p = .029$, and $F(1, 394) = 8.02, p = .005$, for personal beliefs about American national group superiority and perceptions of shared beliefs about ingroup superiority, respectively.

Helplessness. Finally, the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 samples did not differ in their beliefs about personal world helplessness, $F(1, 394) = 0.69, p = .407$. However, as predicted the two samples differed significantly at both group world levels with the post-9/11 respondents scoring lower in regard to both their personal beliefs about American national group helplessness, $F(1, 394) = 6.74, p = .010$, and their perceptions of the ingroup's shared view of its helplessness, $F(1, 394) = 6.21, p = .013$.

Relationships Between Demographic Covariates and Belief Scales

Table 4 displays the zero-order correlations between the demographic covariates and the belief domain scale scores. We did not make any predictions about these relationships and in general even the statistically significant associations were modest in magnitude. Overall, education and racial group category were the two demographic variables most frequently linked to variation in the respondents' beliefs. In regard to education, the more educated participants reported weaker beliefs about injustice, distrust, and helplessness at the personal world level. They also tended to personally see their American national group as less mistreated and less helpless than did their less educated counterparts. Finally, higher levels of formal education were also associated with perceptions that the group's shared worldview involved heightened convictions of group superiority and diminished convictions of group helplessness.

TABLE 4
Correlations Among Covariates and Belief Domain Scale Scores

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Racial Group</i>
<i>Vulnerability</i>				
Personal world	.08	-.09	.06	-.01
Person-group	-.07	-.07	.08	.14**
Shared group	.02	.05	-.02	.05
<i>Injustice</i>				
Personal world	-.06	-.17**	-.01	.09
Person-group	.07	-.18**	-.06	.22**
Shared group	-.07	.04	.00	.15**
<i>Distrust</i>				
Personal world	-.09	-.17**	-.04	.26**
Person-group	-.03	-.01	-.08	.20**
Shared group	-.11*	.08	.04	.15**
<i>Superiority</i>				
Personal world	-.07	.09	-.11*	.02
Person-group	.02	-.00	-.14**	.03
Shared group	-.14**	.31**	-.07	-.15**
<i>Helplessness</i>				
Personal world	.10*	-.21**	.02	.04
Person-group	.01	-.24**	.11*	.25**
Shared group	-.08	-.20**	.09	.21**

Note. N = 400. Coding for the gender covariate was women = 1 and men = 0. Coding for the Racial Group covariate was Black = 1 and White = 0.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Turning to racial group differences, Black respondents tended to score higher than Whites on personal world distrust and in their personal beliefs about the American national group on all domains except for superiority (where there was no significant difference). At the level of perceptions of the group's shared beliefs about itself, Blacks were again more likely than their White counterparts to see the collective narrative as one of heightened injustice, distrust, and helplessness. However, the opposite pattern was found in the superiority domain, where Whites tended to view this superiority conviction as a stronger component of the American national group's shared worldview than did Blacks.

DISCUSSION

The findings reported here document significant differences—at three levels of analysis—between the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 American samples in the five belief domains highlighted by Eidelson and Eidelson (2003). These two snapshots in time reveal preliminary but potentially important contrasts in belief configurations between a nation engaged in a “war on terrorism” following an enemy attack compared to a citizenry enjoying relative peace and tranquility at home. The key differences between samples suggest that the 9/11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath, including responses at home and abroad, contributed to (a) heightened concerns over personal vulnerability and a lessened focus on matters of personal injustice and personal distrust; (b) increased personal beliefs regarding the ingroup's vulnerability, unjust treatment by outgroups, need to be distrustful, and superiority coupled with a diminished view of the ingroup's helplessness; and (c) altered perceptions of the ingroup's collective or shared mindsets that paralleled the changes in personal beliefs about the ingroup.

These results are broadly consistent with belief changes that might be expected—and perhaps encouraged by leadership through the framing of discourse surrounding specific events and the conflict more generally—as part of a national response to a sudden and unanticipated instance of outgroup aggression. The strengthening of group-level beliefs about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and superiority mesh well with heightened “us versus them” rhetoric and a “circling of the wagons” imperative emphasizing intergroup differences and elevated perceptions of threat. The diminished beliefs about collective helplessness similarly served to facilitate group mobilization and to demonstrate or echo the nation's capability and resiliency—military and otherwise. Had post-9/11 beliefs about group helplessness increased instead, it would have been plausible to suggest that the terror and harm wrought by 9/11 had called into question Americans' confidence in the nation's capacity to confront and control a threatening world and its future prospects, thereby inhibiting their support of and participation in new group initiatives. In this way, the overall pattern we found corresponds well with Eidelson and

Eidelson's depiction of the first four group-level beliefs as typically facilitating and the fifth (helplessness) as usually constraining ingroup mobilization.

At the same time, the weaker beliefs post-9/11 about personal world injustice and distrust—and the resulting wider gap between the strength of these beliefs at the individual level versus the two group levels of analysis—seem likely, at least temporarily, to have beneficially focused group members' attention on collective rather than personal concerns, thereby encouraging a “coming together” in response to the crisis and a readiness to put aside differences in the pursuit of a larger common cause. It is also interesting to note that beliefs about personal superiority were not significantly stronger after 9/11 than before (although the difference did approach statistical significance), even though convictions about the ingroup's superiority were more elevated in the post-9/11 sample at both of the group levels of analysis. Here, one could adopt a similar argument; namely, that narcissistic self-absorption among individual members would also have interfered with ingroup cohesiveness and mobilization.

It should be noted that our findings regarding pre-9/11 versus post-9/11 differences in personal beliefs about the ingroup largely paralleled the results we obtained for personal perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs about itself. This is not especially surprising. It is easy to imagine that members' personal beliefs about the ingroup are influenced by their sense of the group consensus while simultaneously their perceptions of the ingroup's shared beliefs may be impacted by their own personal convictions about the group. However, although not the focus of this study, significant mean differences (as noted earlier) in belief strengths between these two levels (see Table 3), as well as in comparison to personal beliefs about the personal world, suggest dynamics that merit future attention. The stair step pattern in which personal beliefs about the ingroup are stronger than beliefs about the personal world but weaker than perceptions about the ingroup's collective mindsets bears intriguing relationships to findings in other research areas including the person-group discrepancy (e.g., Postmes et al., 1999), pluralistic ignorance (e.g., Prentice & Miller, 1996), false polarization (e.g., Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995), and third-person effects (e.g., Davison, 1983).

Several limitations of this study should be highlighted as cautionary guides. First, our focus was on the responses of one particular group and one predominant event in the life of that group—namely, American national group members before and after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. Moreover, both samples surveyed were drawn from the same location through the same recruitment process. This degree of specificity offers the virtues of added control but it necessarily raises important questions regarding the generalizability of our findings. For example, the relative geographic proximity of the Philadelphia samples to the sites of the terrorist attacks may have made these individuals more responsive to the events of 9/11 than their counterparts in more distant parts of the country. In the same way, it is likely that somewhat different responses to the belief do-

main items would be obtained from individuals living elsewhere under different life circumstances (e.g., conditions of much more protracted intergroup violence between historical adversaries) or from respondents asked about a different reference ingroup (e.g., a different national group to which they belong, or a group constituted on the basis of ethnicity or religion).

We should also note that the “American national group” is perhaps a somewhat nebulous concept, especially in a country recognized for its diverse and multicultural citizenry. In our surveys we did not ask the respondents to describe how they personally construed this very broad group identity categorization, nor did we control for variation in the strength with which individuals identified as Americans in our statistical analyses. Addressing both of these considerations would benefit future research along these lines. However, it is worthy of mention that, in a different study using a similar survey format, Lyubansky and Eidelson (2005) found that a sample of African-Americans tended to give substantially different responses to the belief scale items measuring their personal beliefs about their group when asked about their American national group on the one hand versus their racial group on the other.

It should also be emphasized that the study we conducted was correlational rather than experimental and that it was not a true repeated measure (pre–post) design because the same respondents were not surveyed at two different points in time. Although the samples we used were very similar to each other on the demographic variables measured, it is possible that unmeasured differences between the two groups could account in part for the differences reported here. Also, although demographic covariates were used to reduce the likelihood of spurious effects when comparing the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 samples, the naturalistic basis of this study means that the group differences still cannot be attributed to the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath with full confidence. Although these extraordinary events are certainly the leading contender as the source of differences in the beliefs of Americans between April and November of 2001, it remains possible that other external factors were also contributors to the conflict setting differences we found.

Overall, the statistically significant differences we found in belief strengths were nevertheless only modest or moderate in magnitude, and therefore without replication interpretations of the findings should be made cautiously. There are a variety of plausible explanations for why the predicted differences were not larger. On a practical level, although the brief item scales used here generally proved to be adequate, in some cases internal consistency was lower than would be desirable and these shortcomings may have contributed to limiting the magnitude of the effects found. Future research will therefore benefit from further psychometric development and refinement of scales designed to measure these five belief domains. It should also be noted that the belief domain items at the group world level did not specify a particular target outgroup (e.g., in this particular context, terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda might have been specified). Rather, all items were phrased in

terms of “other groups” more generally. It is possible that this more diffuse focus of the actual items also served to somewhat dilute the strength of association between these belief measures and changes in the conflict setting. It is also important to recognize that deeply held beliefs, by their very nature, are likely to prove resistant to significant short-term change. In this regard, transformations in the strength of these beliefs, when they do in fact occur, may serve to propel and undergird other important outcomes, including perhaps a further cyclical strengthening of group identification and other manifestations of collective mobilization (e.g., Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003).

Taken as a whole, the results reported here demonstrate the value of research investigating the roles of vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness beliefs at three different but interrelated levels of analysis—the individual’s beliefs about his or her personal world, personal beliefs about the ingroup, and perceptions of the ingroup’s shared beliefs about itself. There is much to suggest that a better understanding of the dynamics linking the strength of these beliefs to the presence or absence of intergroup conflict will help to illuminate the nature of the group member’s relationship to his or her ingroup and the relationship of the ingroup to outgroups with which it engages in a peaceful or hostile manner. To the extent that changes in these beliefs are implicated in the precipitation, escalation, and resolution of conflict between groups, the trajectories of these mindsets may have weighty consequences indeed.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Roy J. Eidelson is Executive Director of the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Mary Plummer is a doctoral student in Adult Clinical Psychology at the University of Washington in Seattle. Her current work focuses on the psychological effects of stigma in oppressed communities. Before undertaking her graduate studies, Mary worked at the Solomon Asch Center.

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