DISCOURSE AMONG THE TRUTHERS

AND DENIERS OF 9/11:

MOVEMENT-COUNTERMOVEMENT DYNAMICS

AND THE DISCURSIVE FIELD OF

THE 9/11 TRUTH MOVEMENT

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Abstract:  This study is based upon a three year ethnography with the 9/11 Truth Movement involving field work in their online and offline milieus.  In addition, a critical discourse analysis of texts produced by their countermovement antagonists has been employed to highlight movement-countermovement interactional dynamics.  The 9/11 Truth Movement questions the official and commonly agreed upon narrative of how the events of September 11, 2001, occurred.  The questions are posed to the public, public officials, media, themselves, and to their countermovement antagonists.  For posing such questions as, "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11," and asking why the collapse of World Trade Center Building 7 was excluded from *The 9/11 Commission Report*, countermovement antagonists employ the conspiracy label. Terms such as "conspiracy theorists," "conspiracy theories," "conspiracists," and "conspiracism" are regularly used to discredit the 9/11 Truth Movement and its members.  The 9/11 Truth Movement's members and countermovement antagonists recognize the discursive function of the conspiracy label, which is to limit debate and impede critical attention to the movement's empirical claims about the problematic nature of the events of September 11, 2001.  The present study emphasizes the presence of a discursive field in the movement's public problems marketplace that tilts an already unlevel communicative environment further in disfavor of the 9/11 Truth Movement.  Continued use of the conspiracy label to categorize and discredit people who doubt or who ask socially disturbing questions about official stories, like that found in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, undermines ethical treatment of human subjects in the social and behavioral sciences, and it threatens to disrupt communicative actions and the free flow of information necessary for democracies to function.  Unless their empirical claims can be *proven* false, "conspiracy theorist" is nothing less than a derogatory slur used to avoid direct, rigorous assessment of troubling arguments that potentially uncover systemic forms of corruption, domination, and oppression.

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CHAPTER I


INTRODUCTION


In May of 2006, a social movement organization (SMO) within the 9/11 Truth

Movement (911TM) commissioned Zogby International to conduct the first[1] nationally

representative survey to ask U.S. adults about their beliefs regarding a possible cover up

of the actual events of September 11, 2001 (see 9/11Truth.org 2006). The following item

was one of several 9/11Truth.org included in the survey:

> World Trade Center Building 7 is the 47-story skyscraper that was not hit by any
> planes during the September 11th attacks, but still totally collapsed later the
> same day. This collapse was not investigated by the 9/11 Commission. Are you
> aware of this skyscraper's collapse, and if so do you believe that the Commission
> should have also investigated it? Or do you believe that the Commission was
> right to only investigate the collapse of the buildings which were directly hit by
> airplanes?

Forty-three percent of the respondents reported that they were not aware of World

Trade Center Building 7's collapse, thirty-eight percent were unaware of its collapse but

believed the 9/11 Commission should have studied it, and fourteen percent said that

while they were aware of it they believed that it was appropriate that the 9/11

Commission only investigated the buildings directly hit by airplanes. A popular refrain

within the 911TM is, "two planes, three buildings: you do the math," and a recent

campaign by one of its SMO's, ReThink911 (2013), focuses exclusively on this subject by

asking publics the world over, "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11?"

In the year following its first inquisition into the public's knowledge of the third tower to have collapsed on September 11, 2001, 9/11Truth.org (2007) once again commissioned Zogby to include a survey item about this fact:

> World Trade Center Building 7 was the 47-story skyscraper a block away from the Twin Towers that housed the mayor's emergency management center and offices of the SEC, Secret Service and CIA. It was not hit by any airplanes during the September 11th attacks, but still collapsed nearly eight hours later that day. FEMA did not explain this collapse, the 911 Commission ignored it, and the promised official study is now 2 years overdue. Do you think that the 911 Commission was right to concentrate their investigation on the collapse of buildings which were directly hit by airplanes or should they have also investigated the collapse of Building 7?

Currently, I am among the sixty-seven percent of the 2007 poll who believe that the 9/11 Commission should have investigated the collapse of the World Trade Center Building 7. Even though its collapse was eventually given an official investigation (NIST 2008), the 911TM remains unsatisfied with the conclusions (see AE911Truth 2011; Chandler 2012; Griffin 2010a; Ryan 2012). Even though the 911TM has produced several texts taking issue with it, defenders of the official story rely upon NIST's (2008) report when they "debunk" the 911TM's claims (*Popular Mechanics* 2011) and ridicule its members (Kay 2014). From the many other issues upon which the 911TM and its adversaries debate, throughout this dissertation I will focus on this one empirical claim by the 911TM *vis-à-vis* the anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Truscello 2011) that populates its discursive field.

**Truthers and Deniers of 9/11**

Many in the 911TM believe that World Trade Center 7 (WTC 7), or Building 7, is "smoking gun" proof that "9/11 was an inside job," or, at the very least, that the official explanations of the events of September 11, 2001 (see NIST 2008; Zelikow[2] 2004), are incomplete (e.g., see Griffin 2005) or fraudulent (e.g., see Griffin 2010a). Many within the movement also believe that "9/11 is *the* litmus test"[3] in that it defines where one stands in

relation to multiple facets and dimensions of social reality, including relations to our fellow humans, knowledge of history, assumptions about power, and our willingness to be critical and reflexive about what it means to live in the 21st century.  On one side of the test stand so-called "9/11 Truthers," a moniker proudly adopted by some of the 911TM's members, but on the other side of the litmus test the label of "9/11 Truthers," or sometimes just "truthers" or "twoofers," is a pejorative term akin to "conspiracy theorists" or "conspiracists."  In order to stigmatize and discredit the movement, which is a strategy well understood by sociologists (Becker 1963; Ferree 2004; Goffman 1963; Grattet 2011; Husting & Orr 2007), these labels are employed by the 911TM's challengers, whom members of the 911TM sometimes refer to as "Debunkers" or "Deniers"[4] of 9/11 Truth.

In the dramas of social movements (Benford & Hunt 1992) and conspiracy (Wexler & Havers 2002), 9/11 Truthers have cast themselves as protagonists in their public attempts at raising questions about, for example, the collapse of WTC 7 as a missing element from the dominant narrative of "9/11"[5] and the official explanation(s) of the events of September 11, 2001 (hereafter September 11)[6].  9/11 Deniers (e.g., see Aaronovitch 2010; Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Kay 2011; *Popular Mechanics* 2011; Shermer 2011; Taibbi 2008) cast themselves as rational analysts in defense of facts and reality from "conspiracy theorists" or "conspiracists."  The interactional dynamics between these groups, which are the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists, unfold in large part on a discursive stage where language is used in texts and talk to interpolate the public and lambast interlocutors who cross acceptable boundaries of discourse.  (Throughout this dissertation, quotation marks are used to highlight the discursive nature of various signifiers.)  "9/11 Deniers" are cast by some in the 911TM as "dupes," "willfully ignorant," "gatekeepers," "limited hangouts," "sock puppets," "disinfo agents," and "shills," terms that progressively identify those who

attempt to discredit the movement as more and more actively involved in a continuing cover-up of the events of September 11. "9/11 Truthers" are cast by their rivals in the marketplace(s) of ideas as "conspiracy theorists," "conspiracists," "crazies," "loons," "kooks," "paranoiacs," "deranged," and "anti-Semitic," terms that identify those who would disrupt or destroy the current meaning of "9/11" as disputatiously disingenuous and dangerous to the social order.

The term(s) of focus in this dissertation is/are "conspiracy" and variations of it that function as a label (i.e., "conspiracy theorists," "conspiracy theories," "conspiracists," "conspiracism," and somewhat more obscure terms, such as "conspiratorialists" and "conspiratards"). Variants of "conspiracy," when used to designate an individual or group as illegitimate, untruthful, or unworthy of serious or rigorous public attention for other reasons, operate as the conspiracy label (deHaven-Smith 2010; Husting & Orr 2007), and this label is regularly used to stigmatize and discredit the 911TM (e.g., see Kay 2011; Meigs 2006, 2011; *Popular Mechanics* 2006, 2011; also see Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011). The 911TM is acutely and intimately aware of this, and, while they take steps to counteract its use, their adversaries continue to rely upon it as a valuable discursive source of power. Ultimately, the conspiracy label functions as an important symbolic resource for "9/11 Deniers" to cauterize social boundaries between "9/11 Truth" as a discursive act and whatever effects the dominant narrative of "9/11" has had on the 21st century.

Importantly, due to the nature of anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Truscello 2011) the 911TM does not have access to similarly powerful, symbolic resources. The 911TM seek to redefine, or reframe, a dominant narrative of the 21st century, i.e. that the events of September 11 were the result of unwarranted and unexpected attacks on an innocent nation by Usama bin Laden and 19 agents from his Al-Qaida network. In addition

to anti-conspiracy discourse, the dominance of this narrative also acts against the efforts of the 9/11 Truthers. 9/11 Deniers interpret the talk and text (i.e., discourse) of 9/11 Truthers as signs of conspiracism, even when claims are centered on empirical facts based upon forensic evidence analyzed by professionals and experts. Due in part to their activities through street activism, the efforts of the 911TM's many SMO's, and through publications by its intellectual organizers, the 911TM *has already* affected the legitimacy of the dominant narrative, and so it is the task of the 9/11 Deniers to counteract these accomplishments.

Jonathan Kay, one of the 911TM's most proactive antagonists, sees fallout in the recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant narrative of "9/11" as "nothing less than a countercultural rift in the fabric of consensual American reality" (2011:xix), and he is not the only one to see "9/11 Truth" as a main fissure in contemporary U.S. society. As one journalist from *Time Magazine* stated around the time of the first 911Truth.org (2006) Zogby poll, 9/11 Truthers and defenders of the official story of "9/11" inhabit very different worlds:

> Take a look, if you can stand it, at video footage of the World Trade Center collapsing. Your eye will naturally jump to the top of the screen, where huge fountains of dark debris erupt out of the falling towers. But fight your natural instincts. Look farther down, at the stories that haven't collapsed yet.
> In almost every clip you'll see little puffs of dust spurting out from the sides of the towers [see Figure 1]. There are two competing explanations for these puffs of dust: 1) the force of the collapsing upper floors raised the air pressure in the lower ones so dramatically that it actually blew out the windows. And 2) the towers did not collapse from the impact of two Boeing 767s and the ensuing fires. They were destroyed in a planned, controlled demolition. The dust puffs you see on film are the detonations of explosives planted there before the attacks.
> People who believe the second explanation live in a very different world from those who believe the first. (Grossman 2006:na)

While I take issue with how this passage is framed, for example by leaving out any indication that the phrase, "the World Trade Center collapsing," should also refer to WTC 7

in addition to the "falling towers," my overall argument in this dissertation is that this final

observation is true.

*Figure 1.* *Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth Claim "Puff of Dust" During the Collapse of WTC Twin Tower is Pulverized Building Debris, Evidence of Controlled Demolition.*



"*The material being ejected below the collapse front is not merely a 'puff of dust' – it is pulverized building debris*" [italicized in original] (Rocco 2012)[7].

There are those who believe "9/11 was an inside job," they see "puffs of dust" and

interpret them as "pulverized building debris," and they plead with the public to

"investigate 9/11" so that they will come to know these "facts" for themselves. If successful

in their claimsmaking and (re)framing attempts, the 911TM will alter the meaning of

"9/11," potentially instigating a new official investigation with subpoena power (e.g., see

NJ911Aware.org 2013). If policymakers can be convinced to do this, and *if* agents other than

of al-Qaeda are found to have been complicit in carrying out or covering up the events of September 11 (see Ryan 2013), then U.S. law enforcement, prosecution, and other, international parties will be called upon to apprehend, try, judge, and sentence the suspects. *If* reported by mainstream news outlets, the public will likely engage in heated debates about the truth-value of the new claims, investigations, court hearings, etc., and these issues will likely be debated for some time. If those who actively oppose the 911TM's activities are successful, arguing instead that it is the 911TM that is the public's problem, U.S. and other societies will likely proceed on their current trajectories, whatever that might be.

In this discursive bidding contest, the 911TM and its members constitute outsider claimsmakers with relatively less power than the loosely coupled network of insider claimsmakers who act as their countermovement antagonists. Both parties are vying for a monopoly over "9/11" in the marketplace of public problems (Benford & Hunt 2003), but the public will be persuaded not by what is perceived to be the more legitimate argument, but *who* is perceived to be the more legitimate claimant (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway 2006). The discursive field is already tilted in the favor of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists due to the nature of how the official story of "9/11" is accepted as a cultural truism (Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Entman 2004; Snow 2004a). In addition to this, it is the discursive function of the conspiracy label that will likely sway public opinion in favor of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists due to how the label immediately calls into question the legitimacy of a claim via the claimant's status as a "conspiracy theorist" (deHaven-Smith 2013; Husting & Orr 2007). Speculations aside, the discursive field of the 911TM is shrouded in anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Truscello 2011) designed to dissuade rigorous attention to empirical claims that "9/11 was an inside job." 9/11 Deniers claim to have already published works that debunk 9/11 Truth (see *Popular Mechanics* 2006,

2011), yet these works entail counterframing tactics that ultimately deny the public

problems work of the 911TM in efforts to attack its collective character (Benford & Hunt

2003). This dissertation is an investigation into these affairs.

**The Conspiracy Label in the Marketplace of Public Problems**

In this study, I utilize Robert Benford and Scott Hunt's (2003) modification of Joel

Best's (1990, 2008) model of the claimsmaking process in the construction of social problems.

Using one-way arrows to indicate the various audiences or targets that claimsmakers desire

to influence, Best's (1990, 2008) model (reproduced here in Figure 2) depicts the differential

*Figure 2. Claimsmaking by Outsider and Insider Claimsmakers*



(a) Outside Claimsmakers

(b) Inside Claimsmakers
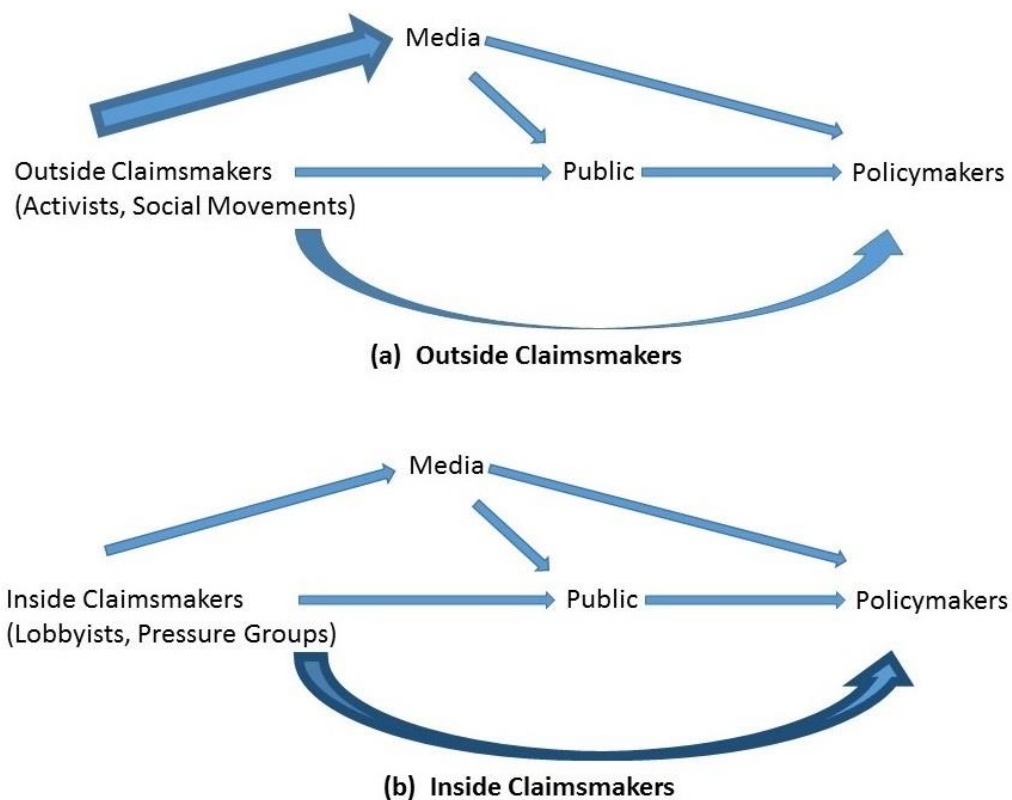
access that insider and outsider claimsmakers have with the public, policy makers, and

media outlets. For outsiders, the bolded line pointing at the media indicates that social

movements rely more heavily upon this social institution than their counterparts due to lower levels of visibility and credibility. Social movements work hard to form positive and culturally congruent messages, or frames, in the minds of the public so they may recruit participants and gain sponsorship of their goals (Benford & Snow 2000; Snow & Benford 1988), but because social movements often seek social change by challenging the status quo and systems of authority (Best 2008; Snow 2004b), and because movement members and activists often hail from and operate outside core social institutions (Snow & Soule 2010), they position themselves as outsiders to the existing social order. Insider claimsmakers are typically credentialed professionals who represent dominant institutional orders. If they are not asked to serve as experts in media coverage of social issues, their direct or indirect ties to media outlets and policymakers gives them easier access to these social actors than outsider claimsmakers.

An example already presented is Grossman's (2006) *Time* article as compared to AE911Truth's Internet-based claimsmaking attempts through the sharing of image-based memes (Figure 1; see also Figure 4 and Figure 12) and blog articles (Rocco 2012). "In general," Best (1990:16) explains, "the advantage belongs to the insiders, the owners of well-established social problems, with ready access to policymakers and the media. Outsiders are at a disadvantage." The dominant narrative of "9/11" was established through framing activities by powerful actors legitimated by core social institutions (Entman 2004) and discourses centered on fear, terrorism, and national security (Altheide 2006; Kellner 2003). The events of September 11 were used to construct a narrative that paved a path for the United States' federal government and military into two wars and numerous military actions (Krebs & Lobasz 2007; Meyer 2009), and this narrative serves as a continuing justification for the growth and dominance of the national security state within the United

States (Connor 2012). Those who publicly challenge this narrative are often met with resistance by those who defend it, and guardians of the dominant paradigm often use their given mediums to explain away claims that '"9/11" is not what it has been made out to be' by recourse to anti-conspiracy discourse and the conspiracy label. By virtue of the status of "9/11" as the official, dominant paradigm, challenging it position's one as an outsider, but defending it elicits few challenges from others who share this interpretation of "9/11;" such is the nature of objectivity and the dominant paradigm (Parenti 1978, 2005, 2007).

At base, competition between the 911TM and its adversaries begins with the claimsmaking process. Figure 2 depicts one representation of the claimsmaking process, but it does not take into account certain complexities of social reality. These complexities have been recognized by Benford and Hunt (2003), and they are discussed at length in their chapter, "Interactional Dynamics in Public Problems Marketplaces." Adjustments that Benford and Hunt (2003) make to Best's (1990, 2008) model can be seen in Figure 3, which is a reproduction of their first of two variations (the second of which is discussed in more detail in the following chapter, see Figure 5). Before discussing their initial modifications, Benford and Hunt emphasize that "Best's model of the public problem marketplace is illuminating and provides a solid foundation for elaborating the interactions that take place in the public problems marketplace" (2003:157). The public problems marketplace is the social arena in which social movements and countermovements struggle for attention, influence, and hegemony over mass media, policymakers, and the public's interpretations of reality. Unlike social problems, which are understood to be accomplishments by claimsmakers at convincing audiences that one or more issues is a problem for society (Best 2008; Spector & Kitsuse 1977), public problems are issues and concerns that are discussed and debated in open, as opposed to closed, public, as opposed to private, social spaces.

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***Figure 3.*** *Modified Public Problems Marketplace Model, Interactions between Claimants*
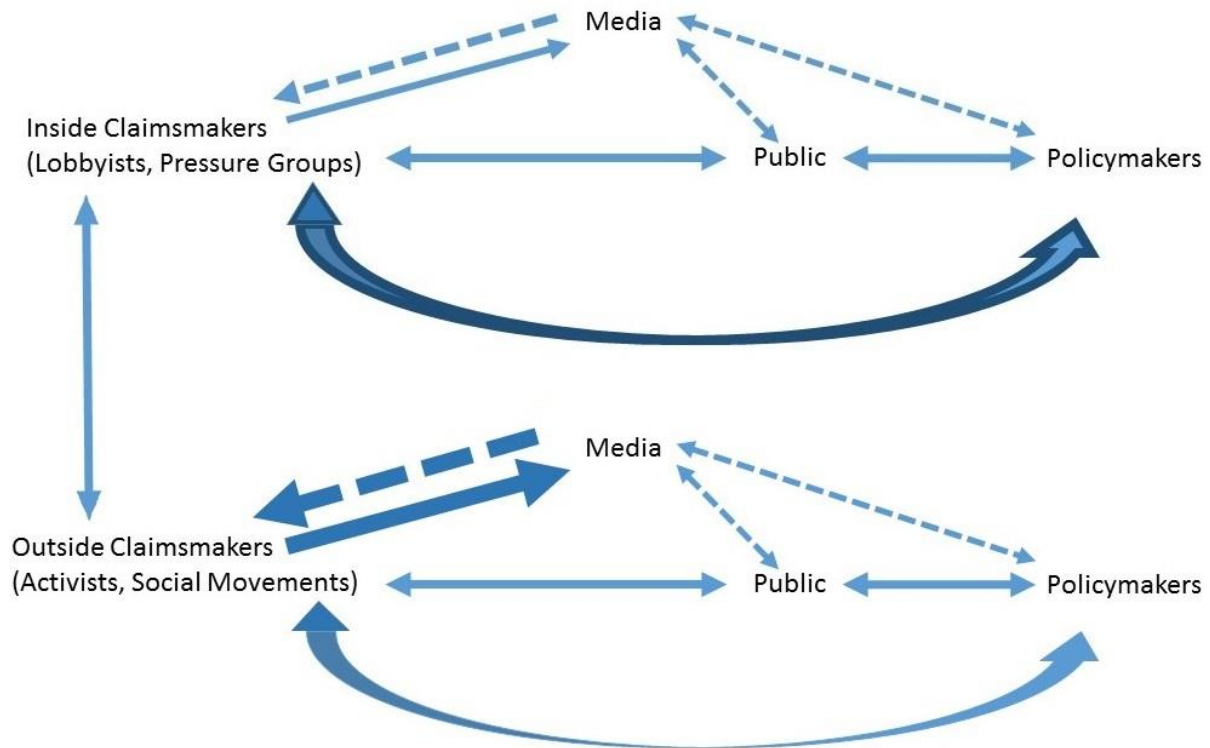


Moreover, the marketplace of public problems is not a scene of one-way streets, but rather it is a carnival, arcade, or galleria where multitudes of social actors interact in multifaceted networks of varying combinations. As we can see from the two figures above, Benford and Hunt's (2003) initial modification retains the overall structure of Best's (1990) model, but key additions make it more isomorphic to social reality, both of which are worth discussing.

First, we see that the same social actors are present in both models, and that the same bolded arrows are retained. Taking up from Best's work (1990), Benford and Hunt (2003) agree that insider and outsider claimsmakers, the public, media, and policymakers comprise the essential social actors on the public problems marketplace. In the U.S., policymakers are typically employed in the legislative branch of government, or they are those people who work closely with it; these include elected officials along with their appointees in various agencies. The social institution of the media, as opposed to "media" referring to journalists,

includes all those groups and organizations involved in disseminating information to the public through technological means.  Finally, the public is roughly interchangeable with civil society, or overlapping spheres of "*dynamic and responsive public discourse between the state, the public sphere consisting of voluntary organizations, and the market sphere concerning private firms and unions*" [italicized in original] (Janoski 1998:12).  In a more complex representation of this model (see Figure 5), Benford and Hunt (2003) represent how civil society is dispersed throughout each claimant domain where constituents of the collective claimsmakers, media, public, and policymakers interact with each other while their respective domains interact as well.  Moreover, this model is dynamic, yet not progressive; i.e., Benford and Hunt (2003) are not depicting the process of claimsmaking formation and contestation, but rather they identify key actors and relationships involved in the public claimsmaking process.

In the logic of these models, we might think of insider claimsmakers as lobbyists, firms, corporations, and other types of pressure groups, and outsider claimsmakers as street activist and collective claimsmakers, or social movements, who oppose the social order sponsored by insiders.  An example related to war and militarism will serve the purpose of a clarifying claimsmaking among insiders and outsiders.  For this particular example, individuals and groups representing the organizations and institutions engaged in the production of bullets, bombs, vessels to transport personnel and weapons, and other technologies (e.g., computer software, body armor, etc.) would make claims that their products are needed for the public good, and, in contemporary industrial societies, these claims would typically be made to the public and policymakers via mass media and lobbying, respectively.  These insider claimsmakers might outright own certain media organizations (e.g., GE's one-time ownership of NBC), and/or run advertisements on 24

hour news networks and other television stations for military recruitment purposes and to display the state of the art in weaponry advancements. The armaments/defense industry regularly has professionals aligned with its interests to serve as expert witnesses in court cases and news stories, and it employs full-time lobbyists to work with policymakers whose campaigns they contribute to. This is in conjunction with the general cultural symbols and practices of militarism found in the action figures and toy guns in shopping centers, the Pentagon sponsored Hollywood movies, the video games that simulate military combat and war time strategies, and the conjoining of militaristic defense and intelligence agencies with national sporting events (for resources on the preceding discussion, see Adams 1981; Carruthers 2000; Der Derian 2009; Jones & Marsh 2011; Kamalipour & Snow 2004; Robb 2004; Schimmel 2012; Stahl 2010; Wilson 2005).

Peace movements resisting a particular war or military action do not only find themselves opposing social actors whose interests are tied to the military, military actions, war, and national defense/security, but they also operate within a cultural environment where militarism shapes values, attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about those dealings, largely in ways that support militaristic tendencies. Operating against a widely shared ideology such as militarism positions one outside of the dominant culture, which makes peace/anti-war movements' efforts all the more complicated when engaged in their specific claimsmaking activities (Falk 2008; Martin & Steuter 2010; Steuter & Wills 2008; Sudbury 2004; Woehrle, Coy & Maney 2008). In order to convince the public, and thereby influence policymakers reliant upon their constituencies in the public domain, that some cause, such as peace/anti-war or anti-militarism, is worth entertaining as a legitimate subject *and* worth adopting as a cause for social change, outsider claimsmakers are reliant upon media to disseminate their views, because while street activism might influence the passerby and

their social networks, media coverage can disseminate the movement's claims to many thousands (upon thousands) more people. Therefore, the relative positions of insider and outsider claimsmakers relates to social structural positions as well as to the issues or causes they advocate.

Secondly, and more to the point of the modifications of Best's (1990, 2008) model, all arrows in Benford & Hunt's (2003) model, except those pointing to and from the media, are replaced with double-ended arrows, indicating two-way social interactions. Claimsmakers do not just make claims and wait to see what happens, they interact with parties who might put forward counterclaims or reframe the original claim. Instead of two-way, double ended arrows, the arrows coming from media have dashed lines that represent secondary claims, indicating that there is no direct access for claimsmakers through this aspect of the model to the other social actors. Media actors can and do reformulate claims as news stories in the agenda setting process, or they might drop the issue altogether (Best 2008). In the case of opposing wars or military actions, media outlets owned or funded by military, defense, and/or security interest groups do not have a material interest in portraying a movement and its frames, and neither do policymakers elected by constituents who subscribe to militarism and/or whose campaign contributions include funds from industries that profit from war, military actions, and/or militarism.

Third, and of most relevance for this dissertation, Benford and Hunt (2003) draw an interaction between both claimsmakers, which is the focal point of this dissertation, and thus it is discussed in further detail in the following chapter. An important point to note, though, is that interactions between insider and outsider collective claimsmakers takes form through movement-countermovement dynamics that are typically discursive in nature (Snow 2004a; Steinberg 1998). Countermovements form in response to the actions and

agendas of social movements, and they tend to primarily exist as loosely coupled networks of individuals from disparate institutional arenas who share interests in opposition to a particular social movement (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). Lastly, Benford and Hunt (2003) recognize the complexity of interactions in their public problems framework, but they also recognize that each actor is composed of constituent actors who interact within each claimant domain. This is represented in a third model, which is presented in the following chapter (see Figure 5) where I discuss theoretical implications of the inclusion of a discursive field for movement-countermovement dynamics. It is worth noting here simply that at the heart of the issue is the complexity of each actor involved in these interactional processes between and among each node in the overall model (Figure 5).

By making claims that threaten to disrupt the status quo or some system of authority (Best 2008; Snow 2004b), social movements often experience repressive tactics and strategies from their adversaries (Boykoff 2007; Earl 2003; Ferree 2004; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996), especially when their claims are contentious (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001). Social forces opposing social movements construct discursive obstructions in attempts to limit what is sayable by social movements and what messages or frames from movements are comprehensible to their targets or audiences (Shriver, Adams & Cable 2013). Oppositional forces can rely upon cultural values, beliefs, and knowledge from an array of social institutions to formulate their retaliatory discourse (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008), and their reframing strategies, which are discursive efforts to dissuade audiences from recognizing or accepting the original message of a social movement, do not necessarily need to follow formal rules of debate, science, or logic (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003). Finally, social movements often become aware of countervailing forces, and they sometimes engage their assailants in

discourse directly (e.g., in debates and correspondence) or indirectly through adapting to the unfolding discursive landscape (Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994; Benford & Hunt 2003).

These issues are exemplified for the 911TM when some of its intellectual organizers and activists interacted with Jonathan Kay for his book and during a live debate. Kay describes the core of his book, *Among the Truthers: A Journey Through America's Growing Conspiracist Underground*, as dealing "primarily (though not exclusively) with *systemic conspiracy theories*, such as 9/11 Truth, since they are far more damaging to the marketplace of ideas [than are conspiracy theories about discrete events]" [emphasis mine] (2011:21). Already we can see Kay's (2011) framing tactic of signaling to his readers that "9/11 Truth" is, ostensibly, not about the events of September 11, but about the entire narrative that explains why they happened and what the appropriate responses should have be and continue to be. So even though key informants, such as Richard Gage and David Ray Griffin, indicated in their interviews with Kay that their primary concerns with 9/11 Truth are closely tied to the official explanation of the events of September 11, Kay's (2011) text is altogether a reframing strategy that attempts to persuade his audience that "9/11 Truth" is about questioning "the operation of whole societies, and often the entire planet" (2011:21).

Throughout his book, Kay employs the conspiracy label as an explanation of his subjects' divergent beliefs about what happened on September 11, and he clearly states at the outset that his "book is not intended as a rebuttal to conspiracists" (2011:20), because those already exist in the form of *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Zelikow 2004), *Debunking 9/11 Myths* (*Popular Mechanics* 2006), and "the National Institute of Standards and Technology's exhaustive *Final Reports of the Federal Building and Fire Investigation of the World Trade Center Disaster*" [italicized in original] (Kay 2011:20). This is why instead of responding to Gage's and Griffin's empirical claims about the events of September 11, he represents their entrance

to and operation with '9/11 Trutherdom' as "sketches of a few typical specimens" in his "typology of the different varieties of conspiracists" (Kay 2011:150). In a debate during an episode of *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, titled "The Truth is Out There" (Paikin 2011), Jonathan Kay was confronted by three of the people he interviewed for his book, Richard Gage, Paul Zarembka, and Barrie Zwicker, all of whom are credentialed professionals and intellectual organizers of the 911TM in their own rights[8]. Each pointed out that Kay (2011) went to great lengths to lump them in with conspiracy theorists generally, such as those who believe the moon landing was a hoax, which is something that they say they do not believe. They further took issue with how Kay (2011) avoided addressing the evidence they put forward in preference of using "all sorts of sly putdowns of all sorts of really good people," as Zwicker commented (see Paikin 2011). Kay accepted Zwicker's charge that his book was condescending toward "Truthers," because, as he states on Paikin's (2011) show, he does not "take the idea of George Bush and Dick Cheney bombing the World Trade Center seriously, and, as a result, [he] has written a book that, by necessity, may appear condescending to those who do."

This is an example of the tactic of problem denial that countermovements use to bypass direct treatment of the claims of social movements (Benford & Hunt 2003), and it is elaborated upon with the theory and data presented in this dissertation. Along with this counterframing tactic, in interacting with members of the 911TM, Kay (2011; Paikin 2011) displays what Husting & Orr (2007) explain is a central feature of the discursive function of the conspiracy label, which is to allow one to go meta by sidestepping empirical claims in favor of the *ad hominem*. Lance deHaven-Smith's (2010, 2013) work on how the conspiracy label shapes interpretations of reality clues us into the fact that it is often used as a rhetorical device to limit recognition of relevant contextual factors when thinking about important

historical events, such as assassinations and terrorist attacks.  Furthermore, an entire anti-conspiracy discourse is known to exist in which the conspiracy label is used to bolster antagonism and derision of people who question official or commonly accepted narratives about historical events (Aistrope 2013; Goshorn 2000; Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011).  As I bring together in the following chapter, literatures on movement-countermovement dynamics and anti-conspiracy discourse explain how the discursive field of the 911TM develops and what it is likely to produce in terms of counterframing and reframing strategies.  Whereas researchers should search out the types of discourse that do or are likely to dominant other social movements' discursive interactions with their countermovements, anti-conspiracy discourse has been proposed to be an important component of the 911TM's activities (Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011).

So thoroughly has anti-conspiracy discourse soaked and penetrated U.S. culture, "given the media attention conspiracy deniers and debunkers attract" (deHaven-Smith 2013:2), that often any counterclaim to those put out or adopted by official sources is treated as just one more example of the pernicious persistence of conspiracy theories (see also Pelkmans & Machold 2011).  As explained by deHaven-Smith,

> [t]his is because most of the criticism directed at conspiracy beliefs is based on sentimentality about America's political leaders and institutions rather than on unbiased reasoning and objective observation.  Most authors who criticize conspiracy theories not only disagree with the theories' factual claims, they find the ideas offensive.  Among the most common conspiracy theories are allegations of U.S. government complicity in terrible crimes against the American people, crimes that include the assassination of President Kennedy and the terrorist attacks of 9/11.  For conspiracy deniers, such allegations constitute outlandish slurs against America's leaders and political institutions, slurs that damage the nation's reputation and may encourage violence against U.S. officials at home and abroad.  (2013:2)

For people who challenge officially sponsored claims about important historical events, such as those people and organizations who constitute the 911TM, the conspiracy label is a

slur that invalidates its arguments and delegitimizes its issuers without due merit of logically consistent and factually substantiated direct rebuttals to its claims specifically.

Kay (2011) is one example of myriad others who employ the repressive tactic of the conspiracy label in their (re)production of anti-conspiracy discourse directed toward the 911TM (see Aaronovitch 2010; Banas & Miller 2013; Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Shermer 2011; Taibbi 2008; Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014), many of whom take issue with the "offensive" or "disturbing" questions raised by the 911TM. As part of the anti-conspiracy discourse its countermovement antagonists produce, this rhetorical device is meant as an attack on the collective character of the 911TM, and this backlash is to be expected when social movements operate to affect social change:

> Social movements frequently face opposition. Movements seek to promote change, and the status quo inevitably has its defenders. The most vigorous defenses usually come from those who have vested interests in the status quo; these opponents benefit from existing social arrangements in ways that would be threatened if the changes promoted by the movement were to occur. (Best 2008:66)

In terms of our focus on movement-countermovement dynamics, Benford and Hunt's (2003) expansion on Best's (1990) work, especially with the addition of concepts like "rhetorical idioms" and "counterrhetorical strategies" (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003:27-33), focuses our attention on interactions between movements and countermovements in a complex social environment. To this model (Figure 5), I add David Snow's (2004a) conception of discursive fields, which can be thought of the communicative environment and symbolic terrain upon or within which movement-countermovement dynamics unfold and are contextualized. For the 911TM, this addition highlights how the conspiracy label performs a discursive function as part of the anti-conspiracy discourse of the 911TM's discursive field(s), which, as Ginna Husting and Martin Orr (2007) describe, is a transpersonal strategy of exclusion.

The 911TM has challenged key texts that produced the official explanations for why and how the events of September 11 occurred and what that meant for U.S. society and its role in the global order (for examples of these claims, see Chandler 2010; Griffin 2005, 2010a; NIST 2008; Ryan 2012; Zelikow 2004). By interchanging "9/11 Truthers" with "conspiracy theorists" or "conspiracists," and "9/11 Truth" with "conspiracy theory" or "conspiracism," the 911TM's countermovement antagonists can avoid dealing with the empirical questions about the events of September 11 and why they were not explained or adequately addressed in the official narrative of "9/11." Countermovement actors representing a diverse array of social institutions can rely upon the cultural practices of their respective institutions (i.e., "institutional logics," see Thornton et al. 2012) when attempting to counteract social movements (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008), but these actors can also access symbolic resources diffuse throughout the cultural landscape of society in a way that social movement actors cannot (Snow 2004a). A journalist writing a book (Aaronovitch 2010; Kay 2011), or a team of researchers publishing peer reviewed articles (e.g., Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham 2010; Wood & Douglas 2013), about the 911TM can use the conspiracy label to explain its members' purported psychological dispositions, but the 911TM's texts and talk cannot perform an analogous semantic tactic because doing so will be interpreted as a further sign of conspiracism (e.g., see Meigs 2006, 2011). This discursive reservoir of symbolic power further tilts the symbolic and social battlegrounds of movement-countermovement interactions in favor of defenders of the status quo, and for the 911TM, due to their efforts to undermine one of, if not *the* guiding narrative of the 21st century, the assortment of oppositional forces they face is not only broad but emboldened by their position on the opposite side of "conspiracy theorists."

To be clear, the 911TM's central claim—that "9/11 was an inside job," meaning that it was a "false flag, domestic terror operation"—*is* contentious. By contentious[9] I mean that the 911TM causes, involves, and is characterized by controversy because its claims lead to arguments, strife, and quarrels. This tautological statement highlights a central position of sociologists of deviancy, i.e. that deviancy is a product of societal reactions and not some inherent quality of those labeled as deviants (Grattet 2011). Members of the 911TM are regularly labeled as "conspiracy theorists," and therefore as disreputable and illegitimate interlocutors, even when they focus almost exclusively on empirical facts of September 11 that call into question the official narrative of "9/11." For example, Richard Gage's work with his SMO, Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth (AE911Truth), is routinely dismissed as mere "conspiracism" (Kay 2011, 2014), even though he and his organization position themselves as primarily only interested in the physical occurrences of September 11 in Manhattan, i.e. the collapse of the *three* World Trade Center towers, WTC 1, 2, and 7. The following is from AE911Truth's (2012) Frequently Asked Question page under the first question, "Who demolished the Twin Towers and Building 7 and why?": "We at AE911Truth are technical and building professionals. We do not speculate about who may have been responsible for destroying these buildings. However, we do point to overwhelming evidence of a cover-up of the crime." Even when the 911TM recruits the types of experts and professionals who usually occupy insider statuses, such as an architect, Richard Gage, and university professors, David Ray Griffin and Paul Zarembka, they are dismissed as conspiracist cranks experiencing midlife crises and exercising debate skills learned while earning tenure (Kay 2011). Thus, insiders are relegated to the outsider claimsmaker status due to the discursive power of the conspiracy label.

The 911TM is supported by peer reviewed research and other professionally published texts when it puts forward claims that the Global War on Terror was prosecuted illegally (Bugliosi 2008; Kramer & Michalowski 2005), and that the narrative of "9/11" was manipulated and exploited by political and media elites to alter U.S. foreign and domestic policy toward its course during the past decade (Altheide 2006; Connor 2012; Entman 2004; Kellner 2003; Krebs & Lobasz 2007; Meyer 2009; Rampton & Stauber 2003). However, in stating that the official explanation by the 9/11 Commission (Zelikow 2004) and other agencies (NIST 2008) of the events of September 11 was distorted with the omission and distortion of facts and evidence that point toward some type of insider complicity in carrying out the attacks (Chandler 2012; Griffin 2005, 2006, 2007a, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2011a; Harrit et al. 2009; Hoffman 2005a; Jones 2006, 2007; Jones et al. 2008; Ryan 2007, 2012; Ryan, Gourley & Jones 2009), under the logic of anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Truscello 2011), this latter group of citations will more easily be considered as a signal of "conspiracism." These sources directly challenge the veracity of the official explanation for the empirical, physical events of September 11, which calls into question the impetus, genesis, and/or foundation to the entire narrative of "9/11."

911TM countermovement antagonists construct and reinforce symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnar 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass & Lamont 2007) around the narrative of "9/11" so tightly that any amount or type of evidence put forward by the 911TM that raises questions about the official account is considered evidence of "conspiracism," or what is more commonly known as "conspiracy theory" (Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011). These boundaries exist as *social mores* in the form of the *taboo*[i] in U.S. culture of questioning

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[i] Social mores contain the ethical generalizations as to how to maintain social welfare, or the well-being of the in-group. Social mores prescribe what paths of action are suitable and not, but an extreme type of social more

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the received narrative of 9/11, as well as of any major event that influences U.S. foreign and domestic policy, and these sanctions are put forward discursively in the form of the conspiracy label (deHaven-Smith 2013; Husting & Orr 2007). The associated ridicule, stigmatization, and silencing that the 911TM's antagonists engage in are to be expected when a radical social movement threatens the status quo (Best 2008; Ferree 2004; Tarrow 1994), but, consistent with how sociologists understand social deviance to be a product of the social construction of reality (Adler & Adler 2000; Becker 1963; Grattet 2011), the designation of the 911TM as an out-group necessitates the involvement of rule makers and rule enforcers. When focused on maintaining the dominant narrative of "9/11," or repairing any damage done to it, these latter groups collectively act as the 911TM's countermovement, and, along with the 911TM, it comes under analysis in this dissertation, because at the meso-level of analysis taken up here it is one of two necessary parties in the terrain of contestation over the meaning of "9/11" that forms the discursive field of the 911TM.

**Sociology, the 9/11 Truth Movement, and its Countermovement**

This study is based upon my ethnographic work with the 911TM. I gathered 51 face-to-face interviews with its members on the 10th and 12th memorials of the events of September 11 in NYC. I have also engaged in an extensive online participant observation with the 911TM Facebook group, fully joining the movement in the meantime. And, finally, I have gathered and analyzed several texts from 911TM countermovement antagonists that

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is the taboo: "The mores necessarily consist, in large part, of taboos, which indicate the things which must not be done" (Sumner 1907:30). Taboos *can be* prescriptive (e.g., in superstitious behaviors like throwing salt over one's shoulder or in making the sign of the Holy cross over one's body), but they are typically restrictive in content. Taboos "contain inhibitions of what will be injurious to the group" (Sumner 1907:31), and in the present case, whether true or not, pleading with the public to "investigate 9/11" because it what official sources have made it out to be is taboo.

reveal how the movement's oppositional forces operate. I do not portray the following

analysis to be an example of *objectivity[ii]* in the sense that it is free of bias. In part, this is due

to the nature of the profession, for value-free sociology has long been known to be

impractical or impossible (Becker 1967; Gouldner 1962, 1968; Gray 1968), but this is also due

to my status as a "9/11 Truther."

Every sociological inquiry necessarily brings with it select epistemological,

axiological, and ideological assumptions that shape which and what types of questions are

asked and how they are answered (Hill 1984). And, just as facts do not 'speak for

themselves' (Lattimore 1932; Tuchman 1972), "[a]ll knowledge of cultural reality, as may be

seen, is always knowledge from particular points of view" (Weber 1949:81). With respect to

the meaning(s) of "9/11," I take up lenses of social constructionism (Berger & Luckman

1963) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969). Meaning is constructed through

interactions, it is mutable, and meaningful symbols have powerful effects on social

interactions and social structures (Dennis & Martin 2005; Musolf 1992). Therefore, "9/11" is

socially constructed, and its meaning has changed and can continue to change over time.

This is an important consideration in terms of social problems work (Best 2008; Spector &

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ii Max Weber's (1949) lengthy essay on the value of objectivity in the social sciences helps us distinguish between the empirical evaluations that are made "independent of all individual contingencies" (85), that are not based upon particular standpoints or cultural systems. "Presuppositionless" (92) statements about "concepts such as 'individualism,' 'imperialism,' 'feudalism,' 'mercantilism,' 'conventional,' etc., and innumerable concepts of like character by means of which we seek thoughtfully and empathically to understand reality constructed substantively by the 'presupposition-free' *description* of some concrete phenomenon" (92) either 'do not exist or are illusory' (93). I would add the ideal-typical construct of "conspiracism" to this list, for it "is a conceptual construct which is neither historical reality nor even the 'true' reality" (Weber 1949:93), these are ideal-types. Ideal-typical constructs abstract to a digestible description of such myriad empirical instances that the ideal-type construction can only serve as a heuristic. With especially complicated constructs, such as "conspiracism," the construct can "be formulated precisely only in the form of an ideal type, since empirically it exists in the minds of an indefinite and constantly changing mass of individuals and assumes in their minds the most multifarious nuances of form and content, clarity and meaning" (98). Therefore, I hold that those who use the term "conspiracism" do not portray objective reality.

Kitsuse 1977) that takes place during the interactions between social movements and their countermovements on the public problems marketplaces (Benford & Hunt 2003). These perspectives shift attention to subjective and rhetorical aspects of the phenomenon under question (i.e., to movement-countermovement dynamics within a discursive field as compared to the societal effects of the 911TM's claims), and it is not without a certain degree of ontological gerrymandering (Woolgar & Pawluch 1985) that I take into account such claims as that WTC 7 is problematic to the official accounts of September 11 or that "9/11 Truth" is equivalent to a type of "systemic conspiracism."

With these theoretical and methodological issues taken into account, what is more of a threat to my objectivity is the fact that I am a member of Scholars for 9/11 Truth & Justice, which is a "group of scholars and supporters endeavoring to address the unanswered questions of the September 11, 2001 attack through scientific research and public education" (STJ911 2007:n.a.). As a sociologist, I seek an integration of sociological perspectives in order to produce greater insights for future research and more discussion for the discipline's practitioners (Buroway 2007), but as an advocate for 9/11 Truth, I want to raise awareness about problematic occurrences during the events of September 11, namely the collapse of WTC Building 7. I discuss further in the third chapter how these factors played out in collecting and reporting data, and it is with no small consideration that I reveal my dual status. How these revelations reflect my ability to analyze the discursive field of the 911TM depends as much upon my sociological abilities at producing meaningful texts as it does on how this text is read.

Certain unavoidable biases will be present in this study due to the practice of sociology, such as that my partisanship will put into question the legitimacy of this study and focus attention toward the "underdog" in the drama between the 911TM and its

countermovement antagonists (Lumsden 2012).  If the reader avoids the genetic fallacy, the

merits of this dissertation will be judged on its content, not the social status of its

source.  My reflexivity as an insider within the 911TM can be viewed as a sign of rigor and

trustworthiness (Koch & Harrington 1998; Rolfe 2006), or, depending on one's standpoint in

relation to "9/11," it can be viewed as a sign of inherent bias and unreliability.  In this

study, I distinguish purported facts about the 911TM that are constructed by their

antagonists from data I have collected by bringing sociological attention to these

phenomena through literature and theoretical analysis within the areas of social movements

and social problems.  Ultimately, my conclusion is, first, that discursive fields are important

factors to take into consideration for how social movements (can) operate within a given

social context, and secondly that the conspiracy label is an illegitimate means for addressing

the 911TM's claims as well as for further use in peer reviewed research to identify research

participants or subjects where their empirical claims have not been or cannot be

demonstrably proven false.

Many of the results of this study will not come as a shock to the line of researchers

who have produced bodies of literature that explain and illustrate how the conspiracy label

functions and how anti-conspiracy discourse operates (see Aistrope 2013; Asadi 2010;

deHaven-Smith 201, 2013; Goshorn 2000; Husting & Orr 2007; Jones 2010, 2012; Pelkmans &

Machold 2011; Truscello 2011; Wexler & Havers 2002), nor will members of the 911TM be

surprised to learn that the conspiracy label is used to avoid rigorous treatment of their

claims.  *If* it is a radical assertion that the 911TM is not a "conspiracist phenomenon" by its

own accord, then somewhat less controversially I demonstrate in this dissertation that the

concept of discursive fields (Snow 2004a), along with the institutional logics (Thornton et al.

2012) of multiple institutional orders (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008), should become part of

the model of interactional dynamics of the public problems marketplaces (Benford & Hunt 2003). In terms of the 911TM, this dissertation is among the first scholarly sources to present data gathered from movement members *and* to have analyzed their claims from a sociological perspective.

Of all the attention paid to the 911TM, only one peer reviewed source is known to exist where a social scientist has interviewed its members. Laura Jones' (2010, 2012) fieldwork with the 911TM in 2006 and 2007 consisted of interviews and participant observation with 911TM members, and it is the basis of the two following definitions of the movement to which I adhere:

> The 9/11 Truth Movement is the umbrella term for a coalition of individuals, based both in the US and abroad, who promote the belief that the US government was to some degree involved in orchestrating the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001…in order to justify a subsequent course of action including the Iraq War and curtailing of civil liberties in the US. (2010:360)

And

> The 9/11 Truth Movement are a particularly multifaceted example of how conspiracy can be practiced in contemporary society, having developed an online presence incorporating hundreds of individual and group websites, discussion forums, Listservs, blogs, Internet radio channels, downloadable films (such as *Loose Change*) and online journals through which conspiratorial imaginaries are circulated, debated and modified. This fluid network is at the same time grounded through particular offline locations, as members of the 9/11 Truth Movement have employed more traditional forms of street protest and staged conference events. (2012:50)

Jones' (2010, 2012) work addresses how conspiracy that is embodied in the everyday practices and discourses of ordinary, non-elites is often treated as illegitimate (i.e. as "conspiracy theory") whereas conspiracy as discussed and embodied by elites is considered geopolitical strategy or nonexistent. As some 911TM countermovement antagonists assert, "[t]here *are* powerful forces that shape our reality. Conspiracies and secret plots *do* take place" (Berlet 2009:43). However, their final analyses are typically that the citizen sleuths

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who attempt to expose *elite* conspiracies are usually mistaken if not disingenuous and dishonest in their allegations (Byford 2011; Olmsted 2011; Sunstein & Vermuele 2009).

As a consortium of individuals and organizations, the 911TM espouses through a variety of means a wide range of claims about how or why "9/11 was an inside job," or why people need to "investigate 9/11." My interests in this dissertation are not with theories about secret plots or the alleged actors in the conspiracy itself, because to focus on those aspects of their claims would be to risk producing an analysis too easily discredited as yet another "conspiracy theory." Rather, I focus on empirically verifiable claims that do not have as a referent an object of analysis that in the end or at base involves human agency or human action, namely the uncontestable fact that WTC Building 7 collapsed in Manhattan at 5:20pm on September 11, 2001. This fact operates as a meaningful actor (Latour 2005) in the network that connects the 911TM's members, that eventually produced its countermovement, and that brings these two groups together to produce a discursive field. The fact itself, and the claims to it, are of importance for this dissertation, not who was ultimately responsible, and therefore we can treat the collapse of WTC 7 as an object in the Latourean sense as opposed to a physical process of motion; however, further consideration is given, and this is necessary in terms of identifying a central claim upon which to focus.

NIST (2008), *Popular Mechanics* (2006, 2011), and others who defend the official explanations for the events of September 11 (e.g., see Shermer 2011), claim that, ultimately, debris from the collapse of the North Tower, WTC Building 1, ignited fires in WTC 7 that eventually "caused steel floor beams and girders to thermally expand, leading to a chain of events that caused a key structural column to fail. The failure of this structural column then initiated a fire-induced progressive collapse of the entire building" (NIST 2011:n.a.). Since the 9/11 Commission (Zelikow 2004), and those who support and defend *The 9/11*

*Commission Report* (e.g., Kay 2011), designate al-Qaida agents as ultimately responsible for the collapse of the Twin Towers, it could be said that human agency is ultimately responsible for the collapse for WTC 7, and this same conclusion can be reached for the 911TM since it claims that WTC 7 collapsed due to a controlled demolition from high grade explosives (e.g., see AE911Truth 2011; Harrit et al. 2009; Jones 2006, 2007; Jones et al. 2008; Ryan et al. 2009). However, regardless of which human agents and actions ultimately caused WTC 7 to collapse, the fact of the matter is that the collapse of WTC 7 occurred several hours after the Twin Towers collapsed, and that fact is often used by the 911TM to initially contest the official accounting for the events of September 11.

During my interviews and participant observation with the 911TM, WTC 7 was very often mentioned as a reason as to why the particular member of the 911TM began questioning "9/11," as to why people should "investigate 9/11" for themselves, and/or as to why what they believe about what happened on September 11 cannot be written off as merely a "conspiracy theory." Members of the 911TM often argue (e.g., see Figure 4) that because there is no prior example of a building collapsing primarily due to fire or structural damage, that further investigation will reveal the collapse of WTC 7 as a "smoking gun that 9/11 was an inside job." 911TM activists use WTC 7 in their repertoires of protest in their online (Figure 4) and offline (Figure 10) activities, and several SMO's within the 911TM have focused their attention almost exclusively on WTC 7, such as ReThink911 (2013a)[10], Remember Building 7 (2011)[11], and New York City Coalition for Accountability Now's (NYC CAN) High-Rise Safety Initiative (2014)[12]. The 911TM has dedicated much effort to exposing this particular fact to the public because, as noted by another research, for many in the movement "it is the patriotic duty of members of the Truth Movement to bring this

***Figure 4.*** *Examples of Internet-based Repertoires of 9/11 Truth and the Participant Observation*
*with the 9/11 Truth Movement Facebook Group*[13]



knowledge to the attention of their fellow citizens, both in America and around the world…" (Jones 2010:367). Therefore, the collapse of WTC 7 makes sociological sense to focus on as a claim because (a) it limits analysis to claims to a physical occurrence rather than to human actions and agency, and (b) it is at the center of the 911TM's claims that "9/11 was an inside job" and/or that the public needs to "investigate 9/11."

Jones' (2010, 2012) work with the 911TM captures and expresses much of what I have observed, and I concur with her definitions listed above, but they are not the only ways to define and approach this movement. Reflecting on his revelation that members of the 911TM "aren't the loners of *X-Files* stereotype…" because he had "long assumed that abnormal theories came from abnormal minds," [italicized in original] Jonathan Kay (2011:6-7) provides an interesting insight after studying the 911TM for three years. "Only a small minority of the Truthers [Kay] encountered seemed out-and-out insane. This should not be surprising: The 9/11 Truth movement is a *socially constructed* conspiracist

phenomenon—cobbled together on the Internet from the contributions of thousands of different people" [italicized in original] (2011:183). That the Internet is an important factor in the rise and successes of the 911TM is not contested in this dissertation, in fact it is one of my criticisms of Benford and Hunt's (2003) model (Figure 5) of the public problems marketplaces. The 911TM *is* a socially constructed phenomenon, to the extent that it is a "conspiracist phenomenon" relies much more on the activities of its countermovement antagonists than upon those of its own members and SMO's. This is clearly shown in Kay's (2010, 2011, 2014) own work.

Among the many contributors to "America's growing conspiracist underground," as Kay states in the subtitle to his book, "[m]ost infamously, there is the 9/11 'Truth movement,' whose members have concluded that the September 11 attacks were actual part of an 'inside job' hatched by ultra-hawkish elements within the U.S. government in order to secure a pretext for war abroad and draconian repression at home" (2011:xxi). "Despite this otherworldly premise," Kay goes on to say,

> the 9/11 Truth movement has become a mass phenomenon in the last ten years, spawning best-selling books, conferences, a pseudo-academic journal, and dozens of heavily surfed websites. A 2006 Scripps Howard poll of over one thousand U.S. citizens found that 36 percent of Americans believe it was either "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that "federal officials either participated in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, or took no action to stop them." About one-sixth of the respondents also agreed it was at least "somewhat likely" that "the collapse of the twin towers in New York was aided by explosives secretly planted in the two buildings." (2011:xxi)

We should notice that like Grossman's (2006) passage above, Kay bears no mention of the collapse of WTC 7 and the 911TM's claims to it. Kay's book is not written to rebut the facts and evidence that have led so many members of U.S. society to 9/11 Truth, but rather he takes to the task of documenting and mending the "countercultural rift in the fabric of consensual American reality, a gaping cognitive hole into which has leaped a wide range of

political paranoiacs previously consigned to the lunatic fringe—Larouchites, UFO nuts, libertarian survivalists, Holocaust deniers, and a thousand other groups besides" (2011:xix).

Taking a somewhat different approach, Matt Taibbi (2008) provides the following negative definition of the 911TM:

> The 9/11 Truth Movement, no matter what its leaders claim, isn't a grassroots phenomenon. It didn't grow out of a local dispute at a factor or in the fields of an avocado plantation. It wasn't a reaction to an injustice suffered by a specific person in some specific place. Instead it was something that a group of people constructed by assembling bits and pieces plucked surgically from the mass-media landscape— TV news reports, newspaper articles, Internet sites. The conspiracy is not something anyone in the movement even claims to have seen with his [sic] own eyes. It is something deduced from the very sources the movement is telling its followers to reject. (p. 236)

Kay (2011) and Taibbi (2008) are similar in several regards: Both are journalists, both have written books antagonistic of the 911TM, and both claim to have spent time interviewing, participating with, and observing movement members. Likewise, neither offers their reader a detailed explanation of the methods they used to gather data about or from the movement, and neither employed a clear theoretical framework to analyze the movement. The 911TM *is* a socially constructed phenomenon, but this arises from the movement's activities as well as what its antagonists produce in discourse about it.

Journalists (Aaronovitch 2010; Grossman 2006; Kay 2011, 2014; Morello 2004; Taibbi 2008), law professors (Sunstein 2014; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009), philosophers (Clarke 2007; Keeley 2007), communication professors (Banas & Miller 2013; Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014), psychologists (Byford 2011; Swami et al. 2010; Wood & Douglas 2013), and other members of the *intelligentsia*[iii], such as members of think tanks (Berlet 2009; Tobin 2007) and

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[iii] The 'socially unattached intelligentsia' is "a relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order" (Mannheim 1936:154)—they are public intellectuals or pundits who do not share in lifestyles centered around working in the service, manufacturing, managerial, or other labor intensive occupations. Although "they are too differentiated to be regarded as single class, there is, however one unifying sociological bond between all groups of intellectuals, namely, education" (155). Intellectuals, which

trade magazines (Chertoff 2005; Meigs 2006; Molé 2006; Shermer 2011), stand in direct opposition to the 911TM, acting as countermovement antagonists in their use of claimsmaking and framing tactics well-known to social movement scholars (Benford & Hunt 2003; Dixon 2008; McCaffrey 2000; Shriver et al. 2013). The operation of social movements tends to bring forward their own countermovements that are either loosely or tightly coupled networks of social actors who oppose the goals, actions, and outcomes of movement activities (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). Social movements typically seek some type of change in society, whether that be a relatively small change in the use of a word or a larger change such as the implementation of a law or social policy (Snow & Soule 2010), and thus their opposition typically defend the status quo or existing state of society (Best 2008).

The 911TM seeks to change the dominant narrative of "9/11," from that of an outside job of Middle Eastern terrorist hijackers to that of an "inside job" of clandestine groups and networks within the U.S. federal government and its agencies, or, at the least, some members argue that it was an "outsourced job" in which the attacks of September 11 were allowed to happen on purpose (for a discussion on this spectrum, see Griffin 2007b; Tarpley 2007). The 911TM's countermovement antagonists are a loosely coupled network of individuals and teams of writers who publish essays, articles, and books, and who appear in media to demonize and discredit the 911TM and its members. In this dissertation, I

Mannheim uses interchangeably with "intelligentsia," are "recruited from an increasingly inclusive area of social life" (156), namely, the educational arena, and, far from being immune to "all those interests with which social life is permeated" (157), intellectuals afford the politico-economic arena, much as the way Mills ([1956] 2000:245-6, 319-325, 329-342) describes it, the 'practical demands' (Mannheim 1936:160) of elites or "an empty glorification of naked interests by means of the tissues of lies spun by apologists" (159-160). Intellectuals face a dilemma as to how they will apply their education and/or intellectual powers, and subservience to elites and/or to institutional orders from which elites derive their power and influence is one application of educational credentials, and "[t]he second way out of the dilemma of the intellectuals consists precisely in becoming aware of their own social position and the mission implicit in it" (160), i.e. to come to a "conscious orientation in society" (160). The intelligentsia I describe here are decidedly the former of the two.

compare claims about the 911TM with statements collected from them during face-to-face interviews and online participant observations, and along with this I highlight direct and indirect interactions between these two groups. I show that although the movement's antagonists position themselves as rational actors (Wexler & Havens 2002) with the scholarly ambition to separate 'fact from conspiracy theory' (*Popular Mechanics* 2011), their tactics and strategies resemble those of anti-peace (Benford & Hunt 2003) and anti-environmental (McCright & Dunlap 2000) countermovements with the intent to disrupt and eradicate the movement (Banas & Miller 2013; Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Kay 2011; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009; Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014).

Many of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists are uninterested in supporting or even seriously interrogating the movement's empirical claims, for example, about the anomalies in the official explanations for the collapse of the three WTC buildings. Their analyses designed to debunk the myths of 9/11 conspiracy theories often rely upon the very reports the 911TM hold in contention, and (social) psychological explanations of where they go wrong in their thinking are inevitably issued to explain why the movement believes the official story of "9/11" is a lie. There *are* those who interrogate the actual empirical claims of movement members (Molé 2006; *Popular Mechanics 2011*; Shermer 2011), but, even after these types of treatments occur, the inquisitor nearly always falls back to some final analysis rooted in (social) psychological explanations of "conspiracy theories." The main problematic in this regard is that the 911TM tends to directly rebut their antagonists (e.g., see Griffin 2007a), but *if* there is a response it tends to continue to employ rhetorical fallacies as part of the counterframing strategy. Often, the final strategy is to psychologize the issue by explaining that while experts (e.g., NIST 2008) have already reached a consensus on the collapse of WTC 7, "conspiracists" view anomalies in the official report as a confirmation of

an ominous conspiracy. "For many conspiracists," as one team of psychologists conclude, "there are two worlds: one real and (mostly) unseen, the other a sinister illusion meant to cover up the truth; and evidence against the latter is evidence for the former" (Wood & Douglas 2013:8).

Regarding the likelihood that "9/11" is not what official sources have made it out to be, many of my research participants make claims first and foremost to the problematic nature of such things as the collapse of WTC Building 7. For the movement as a whole, the salience of this issue can be seen most clearly in the ReThink911 campaign (see ReThink911 2013a). This campaign is designed to spread awareness by plastering posters and billboards in public places of cities throughout the world that ask, "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11?" The importance of WTC 7 for the 911TM can be seen in the work of another SMO within the movement as well. Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth (e.g., see AE911Truth 2011a) currently (June 9, 2013) has the tag for AE911Truth.org, upon a Google search for their organization, as "World Trade Center Building 7 Demolished on 9/11?" A 320 page book by one of the 911TM's most prolific intellectual organizers, David Ray Griffin (2010a), was entirely devoted to investigating *The Mysterious Collapse of World Trade Center 7* through discussing how the official report on it (see NIST 2008) contains factual errors and scientific fraud. And, finally, the contestation of how the collapse of WTC 7 was explained by NIST (2008) was discussed in two chapters (see Chandler 2012; Ryan 2012) of the 911TM's version of *The 9/11 Commission Report*, which is titled *The 9/11 Toronto Report: International Hearings on the Events of September 11, 2001* (see Gourley 2012). One of the 911TM's opponents considers the collapse of WTC 7 to be "the Truthers' strongest card" (Kay 2011:153), and even Kay (2011) and other countermovement antagonists (NIST 2008; *Popular Mechanics*

2011) admit that most architectural and engineering professionals consider it unusual for a steel structure to fully collapse due mostly to fire.

In terms of the substantive merit of this dissertation on the side of the 911TM, how should we interpret situations where, for example, psychologists discount the above claims *a priori*, without even citing one source as to why the collapse of WTC 7 is not problematic, and then *reify*[iv] the symbolic and social boundaries of the conspiracy label with conclusions such as that while "[c]onspiracists [are] less overtly hostile than their conventionalist counterparts, [they do] not appreciate being called conspiracy theorists" (Wood & Douglas 2013:8)?  What are we to make of situations where law professors who propose to disrupt the group through government-sponsored programs claim that 9/11 conspiracy theories are "demonstrably false" (Sunstein & Vermeule 2009:206) without actually demonstrating their falsity or citing a viable source that attempts to do so (see Griffin 2011b; Hagen 2011)?  What are we to make of situations where communications professors propose to inoculate the public against 9/11 conspiracy theories because they are, at base, considered absurd and offensive (Banas & Miller 2013)?  Based upon methodological norms institutionalized within the social sciences, I conclude that the continued use of the conspiracy label within peer reviewed research programs that involve human subjects undermines the respect for human subjects and social justice that should be part of the behavioral and social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Mastroianni & Kahn 2001).  Without first demonstrably *proving* as false the

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[iv] "Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something else that human products—such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man [sic] is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world" [italicized in original] (Berger & Luckmann 1966:89).

911TM's claims of the errant nature of the official story of "9/11" (for these claims, see Gourley 2012; Griffin & Scott 2007; Zarembka 2008), the continued use of the pejorative conspiracy label undermines scientific rigor and ethical treatment of human subjects.

In this dissertation I argue that there is a discursive field that favors tendencies to *not* rigorously interrogate the claims of the 911TM due to the simultaneous presence and functions of the conspiracy label (deHaven-Smith 2010; Husting & Orr 2007) and the hegemony of the "9/11" narrative (Altheide 2006; Entman 2004; Kellner 2003; Krebs & Lobasz 2007). Discursive fields, or the "terrain(s) in which meaning contests occur" (Snow 2004a:402; Spillman 1995: 140-1; Steinberg 1999:748), provide the opportunity structures (Koopmans & Olzak 2004; McCammon et al. 2007) and obstructions (Shriver et al. 2013) that enable and constrain movement and countermovement claimsmaking and framing practices. It is for these reasons that the concept of discursive fields (Snow 2004a) is an important aspect to add to Benford and Hunt's (2003) public problems marketplace framework. In this way, I show that one reason that insider claimsmakers have an upper hand over outsider claimsmakers (Best 1990) is that they are often in a position to draw from institutional and cultural resources (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Thornton et al. 2012), which, in the present case, come to be a self-sealing discursive field that tips the "terrain of contested claims" (Benford & Hunt 2003:160) in their favor. Thus, even when an organization like AE911Truth (2012) claims to only be interested in the empirical evidence of the likely involvement of pre-planted explosives in the collapses of WTC Buildings 1, 2, and 7, its members can be dismissed offhand as conspiracists or conspiracy theorists for no other reason than that they challenge the official explanation of the events of September 11. conspiracists tend to focus on errant data at the expense of some known reality (Byford 2011; Kay 2011; Keeley 2006; Meigs 2006).

**Research Question & The Coming Chapters**

What I am presenting in this introduction is a case for why the 911TM should be of

interest for a *sociological* investigation. Due to this being among the first ethnographies with

the 911TM in the social sciences, there are basic research questions that should be addressed.

These might include the following: Who are or what is the 9/11 Truth Movement? What is

the demography of its constituency, and what spectrum of beliefs and claims are held by its

members? Although texts exist where authors report their experiences with the movement

(Kay 2011; Jones 2010, 2012; Taibbi 2008), no peer reviewed work is known yet to exist that

definitively outlines the breadth and depth of this movement. Existing works that attempt

to define the 911TM are clearly antagonistic, not peer reviewed, and unscientific (Kay 2011;

Taibbi 2008), and, on the other hand, the existing scientifically informed and somewhat

sympathetic works do not analyze the 911TM as a social movement nor in the context of its

antagonists (Jones 2010, 2012). The existing theoretical frameworks within social

movements literature suggest that radical social movements will experience backlash from

countermovements with insider statuses relative to society at large (Armstrong & Bernstein

2008; Benford & Hunt 2003; Ferree 2004; McCright & Dunlap 2000, 2003, 2010, 2011; Shriver

et al. 2013). This leads to the questions of what social forces operate against the 911TM, how

do they operate, and what is it about the 911TM that inspires these social control agents to

mobilize? This, though, is largely a descriptive set of questions, and they do not necessarily

inform sociological theory.

The 911TM and its countermovement antagonists are engaged in a discursive

bidding contest within the marketplace of public problems (Benford & Hunt 2003). This is

to say that while the 911TM seeks to convince U.S. and international publics that "9/11 was

an inside job" (and/but/or that they need to "investigate 9/11"), the 911TM's antagonists

seek to protect the public from such claims by attempting to dismantle the arguments and discredit the movement. It is known that discursive fields, claimsmaking, and framing activities play important roles in whether or not social movements succeed in mobilizing support (Snow & Benford 1988; Best 1990; Snow 2004a), and it is also known that the conspiracy label functions in limiting what topics are permissible to discuss and who is permitted to discuss them (deHaven-Smith 2010; Husting & Orr 2007; Jones 2010). Taking into account the preceding discussion, my research question is as follows: How does the conspiracy label function within the discursive field of the 9/11 Truth Movement?

In the following chapter, I delve into social movements and social problems literature in order to provide a framework for movement-countermovement interactions. I discuss social constructionist orientations to social problems as an epistemological foundation for this study (Best 2008; Spector & Kitsuse 1973, 1977). In this discussion, I present Benford and Hunt's (2003) modified public problems marketplace model that depicts interactions between and among claimants (Figure 5). I modify this model to form my basic unit of analysis for this dissertation (see Figure 9), which is the discursive field produced by the movement-countermovement dynamics between the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists. I integrate Armstrong and Bernstein's (2008) multi-institutional politics approach as a way to highlight the complexity represented by Benford and Hunt's (2003) analysis of the interactional dynamics of the public problems marketplace. I elaborate on the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al. 2012) as it explains the material and symbolic structures of the multiple institutional orders that make up the public problems marketplace, and I add to these frameworks Snow's (2004a) conception of discursive fields to explicitly tie (multi)institutional logics (Armstong & Bernstein 2008; Thornton et al. 2012) to social movements literature. It is the discursive field

that surrounds the multiple institutional spheres from which social actors draw their strategies and legitimacy that provides symbolic power for insider claimsmakers over outsider claimsmakers. Anti-conspiracy discourse within the discursive field of the 911TM facilitates the use of the conspiracy label so often employed by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, and this is a resource not available to the 911TM.

In the third chapter I discuss my data collection techniques along with methodological issues related to each method I have used. This study includes critical ethnographic and critical discourse analyses couched in grounded theory methods, and each method contributes to the data I present in the fourth chapter. My presentation of data is in a narrative format consistent with critical approaches to both ethnographic and discourse methods. Working with the 911TM posed certain methodological issues that I discuss in the following chapter, and these should be kept in mind while reading the data I present. The contentious claims of the 911TM are varied and far-reaching, and I only attempt to deal with very few of them, namely the collapse of Building 7. In the final chapter I discuss what my data mean in light of the literature review I present in the following chapter. My data are discussed in terms of the movement-countermovement interactions as contextualized within the discursive field generated by the conspiracy label. I conclude this dissertation in the final chapter with a discussion of how my data inform Benford and Hunt's (2003) model of interactional dynamics on the public problems marketplace, and I also discuss the limitations of this study and where future research should be directed. Essentially, this is among the pilot studies that have involved members of the 911TM in ethnographic research, and future studies should involve other methods as well as address other claims by the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists.

# CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE & THEORY

Social movements and social problems have a history of being treated in tandem (Bash 1995; Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008; Mauss 1975). Two main perspectives of social problems are the objectivist/realist (Merton 1976) and subjectivist/constructionist traditions (Best 1990; Spector & Kitsuse 1977). Harmful, disruptive, or unjust social conditions considered objectively real under one perspective are considered to be the product of a variety of claims made about those purported conditions under the other. Social movement scholarship contains a variety of perspectives as well (Benford & Snow 2000; Cohen 1985; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2001; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald 1996; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; McCarthy & Zald 1977; Tarrow 1994), with that taken up here tied to the multi-institutional politics approach (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008) and the framing perspective (Benford & Hunt 2000; Johnston & Noakes 2005). Finally, social movements have been treated as collective claimsmakers in the constructionist approach to social problems (Best 2008), and the idea of *public* problems has been articulated in which competing claimsmakers engage in discursive or communicative competitions over the hegemony of a narrative or frame in open, socially accessible arenas (Benford & Hunt 2003).

The literature presented in this chapter outlines the theoretical foundation for my analysis of the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists. In the first section, I address literature on social problems by identifying the nature of the work of collective claimsmakers (i.e. social movements and countermovements) in public problems marketplaces. While social problems are accomplishments of the claimsmaking activities of social actors, a public problems marketplace involves claimsmaking in public domains where various interested parties make claims and counterclaims "out in the open." In the second section, I address the need for a multi-institutional politics approach to studying the 911TM, and then I expound upon what that approach looks like in the literature and what it means for the current topic. This involves a discussion of new social movements, institutional logics, and discursive fields, and these are framed in terms of dramaturgical vernacular of protagonists, antagonists, and audiences (Benford & Hunt 1992). Essentially, it is argued that social movements do not operate in a social vacuum (Benford & Hunt 2003), but because they must compete with adversaries in their attempts to gain access to mass media, garner public support, and influence policymakers, analysts should take into account the social environment within which social movements operate.

**Social Constructionism and the Marketplace of Public Problems**

This section moves from a discussion of the social constructionist approach to social problems to how collective claimsmakers do social problems work in the constructionist context. This bears a central assumption in this dissertation, that social reality is socially constructed, and therefore it is mutable and open to various interpretations by myriad social actors. I close this section with a discussion of framing

processes and how they factor into the social problems work of the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists.

*Social Constructionism & Social Problems*

"Social reality," as Peter Berger (1963) famously stated, "turns out to have many layers of meaning" (Pitt 2010:23; see also Boettke 2010; Grosby 2010)). Social reality is an always-already socially constructed product of the historical and ongoing human interactions imbedded within social institutions and organizations where socialization and association occurs (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Anything that can carry meaning, from the natural environment, to categories of bio-physical human beings, to the collective identities of social movements, can be socially constructed to carry one or more meanings, and typically this is accomplished by powerful actors with political-economic means and motives (Freudenberg 2000; Hunt et al. 1994; Merskin 2004; Muscati 2002; Nathanson 1988; Steuter & Wills 2008, 2011). However, social reality is also socially constructed through the mundane interactions people engage in during our daily routines and rituals (Bourdieu 1980; Knottnerus 2011). Meaning is coherent but always in development, the product of symbolic interactions between social actors, including two or more individuals, groups, organizations, and social institutions (Blumer 1969).

A social constructionist perspective leads us to know that the meaning of anything is not a natural product of physical reality, but that it comes into being through communicative negotiations (Shalin 1991). This means that socially constructed

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phenomena can be *deconstructed*[v] (Culler 1982; Norris 2002), *reconstructed* or *repaired*[vi] (Benford & Hunt 1994; McLeod 2004), and *annihilated* or *obliterated*[vii] (Baudrillard 2008; Feldman 2000). "The 9/11 Truth movement," as one of its opponents has noted, "is a *socially constructed* conspiracist phenomenon," [italicized in original] (2011:183), and this is exemplified in a recent incident. When the "9/11 'truther'" (Hubbuch 2014) and "kook" (Roth 2014), Mr. Matthew Mills, recently interrupted a popular annual ritual in order to combat the *symbolic violence*[viii] of "9/11," his actions, like those of the rest of the 911TM, while meant to redefine the meaning of "9/11," produced a situation where he could be labeled and shown as an example of the deviancy of the movement and its members.

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[v] To deconstruct a text or meaningful practice is to position the intent against its possible functions or effects. Peter Philips and Mickey Huff's (2010) response to Chip Berlet's (2009) essay, "Toxic to Democracy," is one example.

[vi] Individuals and collectivities sometimes experiences threats to their identity, such as when they grow or change due to their own actions, or when they are the target of scrutiny, ridicule, and/or exclusion. They then must (re)formulate their identities in the context of the new situation, combatting threats and building new narratives that posit a new or renewed concept of their character.

[vii] Meaning can cease to exist for a number of reasons. External forces can literally destroy a group or category and 'write it out of history,' and/or commit cultural imperialism to the extent that a population is forced to cease practicing its native or indigenous culture and to adopt the dominant culture. In other respects, meaning changes and is reformulated due to multiple intersections of societal changes that result in a metamorphosis of an authentic object and/or practice into a simulation of that practice, and, finally, a completely fabricated object or practice that has no original referent can take over the meaning of constructed practices and objects.

[viii] "In the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for the monopoly of legitimate *naming* as the official—i.e. explicit and public—imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, agents bring into play the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles, in particular all the power that they possess over the instituted taxonomies, those inscribed in people's minds or in the objective world, such as qualifications. Thus all the symbolic strategies through which agents aim to impose their vision of the divisions of the social world and of their position in that world can be located between two extremes: the insult, that *idios logos* through which an ordinary individual attempts to impose his point of view by taking the risk that a reciprocal insult may ensue, and the *official naming,* a symbolic act of imposition which has on its side all the strength of the collective, of the consensus, of common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the state, that is, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence*" [italicized in original] (Bourdieu 1991:239).

As the classic sociological maxim goes, "if [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas 1929:572).  It is through the social construction process that things—people, groups, (inter)actions, social processes, events, and situations—become meaningful.  However, the process can be, and has often been, used by powerful interests to construct myths and farces (Greisman & Mayes 1977; Hamilton 1996) and to spread ignorance (Proctor 2008) through consciousness lowering activities (Schnaiberg 1994), sometimes with the consequences of war (Altheide 2006; Entman 2004; Kellner 2003) and genocide (Fearon & Laitin 2000; Waller 2007).  Through socially constructing *the definition of a situation[ix]*, things such as the Holocaust and other mass acts of terror only become comprehensible within a universe of shared symbolic codes, beliefs, and narratives (Alexander 2002; Berger 2002).  Along with this, but not to draw an ontological connection between the two (although some have, e.g., see Berlet 2009; Kay 2011), the phenomena of "conspiracy theories" and "conspiracy theorists" are products of vested institutionalized interests that have employed the terms as socio-linguistic *terminating devices[x]* designed and used to discount arguments and discredit their interlocutors through the rhetorical assault of the *ad hominem* alone (deHaven-Smith 2013; Goshorn 2000; Husting & Orr 2007; Truscello 2011).

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[ix] The implication of this phrase is "that there is no one-to-one correspondence between an objectively real world and people's perspectives of that world, that instead something intervenes when events and persons come together, an intervention that makes possible the variety of interpretations which Schutz [1962] calls 'multiple realities.' According to this view, the same events or objects can have different meanings for different people, and the degree or difference will produce comparable differences in behavior" (McHaugh 1968:8). Therefore, "9/11" invokes the idea of Middle Easter, Islamic terrorist threats to the homeland for many, but for others it means something like "an inside job, a self-inflicted wound, a false-flag domestic terror operation," which are two incompatible beliefs about the same event.
[x] "Society provides individuals with *terminating devices* in terms of which they can cut out meaningful objects out of the field of experience. Their meaning does not inhere in things; nor is it ordained by God; rather it is a cultural product of historically situated individuals" [emphasis mine] (Shalin 1991:237).

The meanings of such things as "9/11" and "conspiracy theories" are constructed in top-down (by power structures), bottom-up (emergent norms via everyday interactions), and horizontal (discursive fields) situations, but their meanings also depend upon the knower's *situatedness*[xi]. The implicit and explicit epistemological, axiological, and ideological assumptions a researcher brings to an analysis will shape how such things as "9/11" and "conspiracy theorists/ies" are represented and understood (Hall 1985; Hill 1984). Certain scholars (Swami et al. 2010; Wood & Douglas 2013), journalists (Kay 2011), and other knowledge workers (Berlet 2009; Meigs 2011) claim that those who pose critical questions and alternative accounts of how the events of September 11 transpired are, in reality and by their nature, "conspiracists," "conspiracy theorists," "Truthers." These claims do not arise nor operate within a socio-cultural vacuum, but rather they are part of a process in the social construction of social problems, a process with which sociologists are acutely familiar (Best 1990, 2008; Holstein & Miller 2003; Spector & Kitsuse 1977).

Depending on how it is defined, social problems can be viewed as objectively real and measureable phenomena or as the product of claimsmaking and framing activities, with most contemporary sociologists leaning decidedly toward the latter

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[xi] That a given perspective is always a perspective from somewhere (Weber 1949:81) is to say that the situation(s) an individual occupies affect(s) his or her worldview, beliefs, ideas, perspectives, attitudes, and values. These are conditioned by one's location in social structure, or the social institutions, organizations, networks, groups, and statuses. Thus, situatedness refers to the social positions and situations that affect thinking and behavior. "The situations that give rise to one's situatedness can be counted as outside forces that influence subjectivity and one's view of subjectivity, elements of what is otherwise called determination, ideology, environment, history, discourse, and so on. But they are also open to the sorts of response or reactions that can change one condition into another, act back on the world in the way that has sometimes and traditionally been described as a gesture of freedom or agency. Situations, and the dwelling in situations that is situatedness, then denote a measure of the unstable and indecisive, in descriptive and philosophical terms, at the same time as they signal a measure of comfort and manageability. They are given to us but also open to amendment; we occupy a situation but can move on or imagine moving on to others" (Simpson 2002:20).

position (Best 2008). The objectivist or realist position treats social problems as those conditions that threaten the social order, disrupt social organization, are harmful or injurious to multitudes of people, or that are beliefs and behaviors that are contrary to social values (Merton 1972). One problem with this position is that it is normative, in which case assessments of the appropriate or "functional" order of society are based upon the ideological position of the analyst (Horton 1966). Another issue is that even if the social analyst attempts to account for his or her value-orientation by relying upon replicable statistical indicators of the value-orientations of a particular society to gauge whether or not an issue or event is considered by a popular majority to be a social problem, they have merely traded one set of value-based assumptions for another (Manis 1974). Even when groups of people actually harm and kill "innocents" or bystanders, which some might consider to be clear examples of obvious and objective social problems, powerful actors sometimes use those opportunities to amplify negative attributes of the "evil doers" (Bush 2002; Kramer & Michalowski 2005; Roscigno 2011), avoid problematic occurrences with how the events transpired (Cavender, Jurik & Cohen 1993), and seek to promote and achieve what were previously unattainable or difficult goals (Jenkins 2003).

Fundamentally, social problems are products of collective definitions (Blumer 1971). Social problems can arise from shared beliefs or popular myths held in common by multitudes of individuals, and public interpretations of those social problems can be amplified, exacerbated, and/or ameliorated by knowledge workers (Best 1990, 2008). "The societal definition, and not the objective makeup of a given social condition," Blumer notes,

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> determines whether the condition exists as a social problem. The societal
> definition gives the social problem its nature, lays out how it is to be approached,
> and shapes what is done about it. Alongside these decisive influences, the so-
> called objective existence or makeup of the social problem is very secondary
> indeed. (1971:300)

This is the fundamental importance of concepts like *the definition of the situation* and *social constructionism*, which denote that people can and do collectively define some situations as problematic and others as not, and then an emergent situation is therein produced, or not, based upon those definitions (McHugh 1968; Perinbanayagam 1974; Thomas & Thomas 1928). It is, nevertheless, important to bear in mind that societal elites operating in the seats of powerful organizations within the social institutions of media, military, and policymaking have continuously relied upon the manipulation of information available and disseminated to the public in order to achieve political-economic and militaristic ends (Kamalipour & Snow 2004; Snow 2003), sometimes the death of a nation-state is a result of these types of practices of social constructionism (Parenti 2000; Wilmer 2002).

For a social problem to gain credence with the public it must be legitimated by the institutional orders of "the press, other media of communication, the church, the school, civic organizations, legislative chambers, and the assembly places of officialdom" (Blumer 1971:300). Contemporary U.S. society's interinstitutional system is composed of these and other (e.g., the corporation, the military, science, etc.), interinstitutional orders (Thornton et al. 2012), and social movements operate within, among, and between them in their collective claimsmaking attempts at defining situations as problematic or not (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Benford & Hunt 2003). One more key passage from Blumer highlights the importance of the *legitimation process*

(see Johnson et al. 2006) in the collective identification and articulation of social

problems:

> If a social problem manages to pass through the stages of societal recognition
> and of social legitimation, it enters a new stage in its career. The problem now
> becomes the object of discussion, of controversy, of differing depictions, and of
> diverse claims. Those who seek changes in the area of the problem clash with
> those who endeavor to protect vested interests in the area. Exaggerated claims
> and distorted depictions, subserving vested interests, become commonplace.
> Outsiders, less involved, bring their sentiments and images to bear on their
> framing of the problem. Discussion, advocacy, evaluation, falsification,
> diversionary tactics, and advancing of proposals take place in the media of
> communication, in casual meetings, organized meetings, legislative chambers,
> and committee hearings. All of this constitutes a mobilization of the society for
> action on the social problem. (1971:300-301)

Probably more than any of the other early statements on the social construction of social

problems, this passage depicts what has been discussed and debated in contemporary

conceptions of how collective claimsmakers interact in the market place of public

problems (Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008).

Like Herbert Blumer (1971), John Kitsuse and Malcom Spector's move toward a

constructionist approach to social problems beckons sociologists to treat them as

discursive productions with "critical contingencies that impede or facilitate" (1973:418)

their historical development. Their reformulation of social problems from a realist to a

constructionist orientation treats social problems not as reflected in official statistics of

objectively measured rates of crime, poverty, domestic abuse, or other such issues, but

as "generated and sustained by the activities of complaining groups and institutional

responses to them" (Spector & Kitsuse 1973:158). The claimants, though, do not have

equal access to the legitimacy of societal institutions as, for example, they show in their

representation of how the American Association of Medical Directors of Institutions for

the Feebleminded created a taxonomy of the "feebleminded" in terms of the ordinal

statuses of "morons," "imbeciles," and "idiots" (Spector & Kitsuse 1977). Just as the

definition of the situation and social constructionism produce meaningful and consequential realities, it was these types of institutional constructions that facilitated conditions in which, as related in the book, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, "if people act in a way others cannot readily understand they run the risk of being dismissed as a 'nutter,' a 'loony', 'crazy', 'mad' or even 'mental' (Rogers & Pilgrim 2010:26). Labeling individuals or groups as "conspiracy theorist(s)" serves a similar purpose in that it dismisses interlocutors as unworthy of serious attention and regard (Husting & Orr 2007).

Before moving on, outstanding critiques of the social constructionist orientation to social problems are important to keep in mind for the current analysis. Steve Woolgar and Dorothy Pawluch's (1985) critique of the social constructionist, or definitional perspective, on social problems sparked a lasting controversy, and it is an important aspect to consider when analyzing the social construction of social problems (Best 2003). Essentially, Woolgar and Pawluch's (1985) argument is that constructionists make convincing arguments about why or how a given "fact" is a social construction, but all the while these constructionists engage in ontological gerrymandering. "The successful social problems explanation," explain Woolgar and Pawluch, "depends on making problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimizing the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends" (1985:216). Described by Holstein and Gubrium, Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) "contended that analysts too often invoked social 'conditions' as objective features of the social world that were then used as unproblematic resources for explaining the construction of other social realities — social problems" (2003a:188). Thus, to ontologically gerrymander with a constructionist

argument, one pushes back the boundaries of which facts or social conditions are considered social constructions and which are considered objective or independently valid, and this leads to either the privileging of certain facts or conditions over others or to admitting that the explanatory facts or conditions are social constructions along with the explanandum.

Rebuttals included direct responses that addressed purported confusions in Woolgar and Pawluch's (1985) analysis, with one response highlighting their misreading of constructionist approaches to how definitions arise (Schneider 1985). Another, more radical response claims that their critique of the relativism of the truth-claims of constructionist research misses the point that there are no "truths," that all of social reality is a discursive product of symbolic interactions (Pfohl 1985) — I reject the assumption that there are no capital-T truths in objective, physical reality, but social reality is ontologically different and distinct from physical reality, thus there are certain truths in society that are dependent upon subjectivity and one's position in the social structure (see Bhaskar 2011). Regardless of what is ontologically "real," the ways social problems are defined by various interested claimsmakers (Spector & Kitsuse 1977), and the "language games" of rhetorical and counterrhetorical strategies of claimsmakers (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003), are important factors in the studying the construction of social problems. In light of this, Best suggests a way out is through the "traditional model for qualitative researchers, staying close to the data, and developing grounded theories through analytic induction (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967)" (2003:66).

*Collective Claimsmaking, Movement-Countermovement Dynamics & Public Problems*

In terms of the historical progression or stages of the development of a social problem (Blumer 1971; Kitsuse & Spector 1973; Spector & Kitsuse 1973, 1977), Joel Best

(1990, 2008) has outlined and elaborated in detail how the process unfolds. First, claimsmakers formulate and articulate claims, which is to say that "someone must bring the topic to the attention of others, by making a claim that there is a condition that should be recognized as troubling, that needs to be addressed" (Best 2008:15). For example, news media, citing expert and professional testimony, acted as claimsmakers for a period of time in the 1980's convincing many people that child abductions constituted a real and serious social problem in need of collective solutions, and after a period of time these claims became recognized and treated as signifiers of an actually occurring social problem (Best 1990). The events of September 11 served as the catalyst for elite actors to begin claiming within hours of the attacks, and continue to claim into the present, that the responsible parties were Islamic fundamentalists, Middle Eastern terrorists, and/or Jihadi hijackers working at the behest of Usama bin Laden, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and the al-Qa'ida network (Zelikow 2004). The events served as justifications for impingements upon domestic civil liberties, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and for the Global War on Terror, and these actions, like those of imputing responsibility of the events, were the result of protracted public relations campaigns (Ahmed 2005; Altheide 2006; Entman 2004; Kellner 2003; Snow 2003; Zwicker 2006).

Credible claims from legitimate institutional orders represent one end of the spectrum of claimsmaking activities, but at another extreme "we can imagine a claim that no one finds convincing:"

> picture a man standing on a street corner warning passersby [sic] that invisible, undetectable aliens from planet Zorax have infested the very air that they're breathing. This may be a claim, but if everyone who hears it dismisses or ignores it, it will have no impact. The social problems process requires not only that someone make a claim, but that others react to it. (Best 2008:15)

The acceptance or denial of a claim as indicating a real (actually existing) or unreal (nonexistent) troubling condition is based upon the credibility or legitimacy of the source of the claim, an audience's perceptions of the truth-value of the claim, and how well the claim fits with an audience's background assumptions or the *climate of opinion*[xii]. There also exists a "hierarchy of credibility" (Becker 1967:245), within which social actors lower in social status more experience lower credibility when making claims than do people with relatively higher levels of prestige or regard. Social actors in the dramas of social movements compete for audience interpretations of reality (Benford & Hunt 1992), and a large part of being successful in this work depends upon maintaining a positive or credible collective identity in the public's perception (Hunt et al. 1994). Maintaining a veneer of legitimacy is especially important for social movements when making claims that run counter to some predominantly accepted truth or reality (McAdam et al. 2001). Therefore, the nature of a claim is important to consider in terms of whether or not it might be measured as a serious issue by an audience, but the source of a claim is of importance as well in terms of the fate of a social problems work.

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[xii] In *The Culture Struggle*, Michael Parenti (2005) discusses related notions to what many have referred to as a "climate of opinion," which takes on different meanings depending on which school of thought to which one subscribes (e.g., see Becker 1963:145-6; Coleman 1961; Denham 2005; Smith 1973; Tsfati 2003). For Parenti (2005), the climate of opinion resembles objectivity for those who rarely, if ever, engage in unorthodox, radical, and/or heterodoxic discourse. Aside from the idiosyncratic development of personal opinions and perceptions, "[m]ost of our seemingly personal perceptions are shaped by a variety of things outside ourselves, such as the prevailing culture, the dominant ideology, ethical beliefs, social values and biases, available information, one's position in the social structure, and one's material interests" (126-7). Parenti goes on to say that the "notions and perceptions that fit the prevailing climate of opinion are more likely to be accepted as objective, while those that clash with it are usually seen as beyond the pale and lacking in credibility. So, more often than we realize, we accept or decline an idea, depending on its acceptability within the dominant culture" (127). Thus, a "unanimity of bias" prevails in which people's "background assumptions" come to filter out unorthodox and radical claims from those more in line with what has been presented by "legitimate" sources as factual, true, and/or objective. "Our readiness to accept something as true, or reject it as false, rests less on its argument and evidence and more on how it aligns with the preconceived notions embedded within dominant culture, assumptions we have internalized due to repeated exposure" (Parenti 2005:127). This analysis falls in line with arguments laid out in *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann 1966).

During the claimsmaking stage of the process of constructing a social problem, claimsmakers "argue that a particular troubling condition ought to be recognized as a social problem, and that someone ought to do something about that problem" (Best 2008:18). Best (2008) further points out that claimsmakers are typically thought of as activists and social movements, but he notes that this is not always the case, for experts and professionals (e.g., physicians, scientists, lawyers, professors, journalists, etc.) can also act as claimsmakers. Unlike most activists and social movements, these "insider claimsmakers" can rely upon the legitimacy of their statuses and institutional affiliations, as well as their respective training and expertise in their fields, to formulate, articulate, and propagate claims. As this logic goes, an ordinary or normal person in appearance making a radical claim on street corner is less likely to be believed, or attract attention, than a person donning a doctor's white lab coat or other professional garb, especially if (s)he is serving as an expert witness for news media; an analogy can be carried over for collective claimsmakers. If social actors hold some amount of perceived legitimacy, they are often asked to give expert testimony in news reports and court proceedings, and in consequence they often have direct access to media outlets whereas activists and social movements might only gain intermittent and unattended appearances in select newscasts (Best 2008).

Accordingly, the contestation between insider and outsider claimsmakers is a bidding contest within the social problems marketplace where insiders are at a distinct advantage from the start (Best 1990, 2008; Hilgartner & Bosk 1988). Due to lacking credentials, not having institutional affiliations, deviating from societal norms, and/or to the reception of stigmatizing labels, outsider claimsmakers must work harder than insiders to build their legitimacy in the minds of their audiences. Moreover, because

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they are not regularly called upon to promote mediated agendas, outsider claimsmakers must compete against 'Wall Street, Washington, and Wars' (i.e., dominant news stories) for time and exposure in the mass media in order for their claims to reach broader public audiences. In addition to competing for time during a newscast or for other media exposure, at any given time, myriad claims (e.g., the legal statuses of abortion, marihuana, and the President; wars, genocide, and murder; hunger, poverty, and inequality; etc.) by multiple claimsmakers compete for audience attention as to what should constitute a social problem. The claimsmaking process impacts which issues become viewed as social problems and which are not, and this process is contextualized by various social actors (Best 2008; Blumer 1971). In light of the fact that the events of September 11 transpired nearly fourteen years ago (as of June 13, 2014), with thousands of news stories arising in the meantime, the 911TM must compete with intervening claims to social problems, and this is in addition to the existing anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011) that encourages people to perceive the 911TM as an incredible source of brazenly audacious claims.

It has been taken-for-granted this far that the 911TM makes claims such as that "9/11 was an inside job," which essentially means that (allegedly) social actors within the U.S. federal government had some type of involvement in bringing the events of September 11 to fruition (for the spectrum of these claims, see Griffin 2007b and Tarpley 2007). What is presently of concern is that the 911TM can be represented in the status of an outsider claimsmaker not due to the content of its claims, but by virtue of Best's (2008) model of claimsmaking, the hierarchy of credibility (Becker 1967), and societal reactions to their claims (Becker 1963; Grattet 2011). Thus, if and when counterclaims, or "arguments in direct opposition to the original claims" (Best 2008:50), emerge, especially

if they are presented within legitimated institutional settings (Blumer 1971), we can assume that they arise from insider claimsmakers who will be perceived, at the least, as a more legitimate source than the 911TM.  If claims are put forward in the collective action of social movements, then we can consider that movement to be a collective claimsmaker with an outsider, delegitimated status, and if counterclaims are put forward in the collective efforts of that movement's opponents, then we can consider them as well to be collective claimsmakers in terms of a countermovement that enjoys a legitimated insider status (Dixon 2008; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996).

As collective claimsmakers, social movements can be defined in various ways, such as "collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, partly outside institutional or organizational channels, for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change in such systems, in the organization, society, culture, or world system in which they are embedded" (Snow & Soule 2010:6), and/or as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow 1994:3-4).  The 911TM fits these definitions due to the fact that it is a collectivity composed of individuals and organizations who actively seek to redefine in the public imagination what "9/11" is or was and what happened on September 11.  Its activities directly challenge the authority of the state, state actors, and supporting institutions, such as media and the military, and the sought after change in the definition of "9/11" will likely impact the nature of the relationship between U.S. civil society and its federal government, military, and media.

Of the many consequences of their collective claimsmaking, when social movements challenge systems of authority they invite or invent their own opposition (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Snow 2004b).  Best (2008) argues that the collective

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challenging of a system of authority wrapped in and propping up the status quo is what distinguishes a social movement from its countermovement. Hence, a "'countermovement' is a movement that," simply put, "makes contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original movement" (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996:1631). The 911TM's countermovement is a network of mostly weak associations among individuals, often embedded within central social institutions of media, academia, and government, who support each other, directly or indirectly, in their collective assertion that the 911TM is mostly or completely, empirically or morally, wrong in its claimsmaking activities. In the end, social movements and countermovements attempt to undermine their opponent's positions through direct or indirect confrontation, neutralization of claims, and/or discrediting the oppositional movement's collective identity (Zald & Useem 1987).

Social movements open identity fields for each of the social actors involved in their claimsmaking efforts (Hunt et al. 1994), and this becomes all the more clear when we apply the language of dramaturgical analysis (Benford & Hunt 1992,). While members of social movements tend to think of themselves and their movement as the protagonist, their opponents as antagonists, and the public and bystanders as the audience, countermovements position themselves before the same audiences as the true protagonists and position the social movement as the unwarranted aggressor on the social order. In the drama of social movements, the ultimate competition is over how reality is interpreted by audiences. A social movement enters the stage in Act 2, after initial conditions have been set in the physical and/or social worlds, and it challenges the existing, often dominant narrative of why those conditions exist, how they came about, and what this means for the status and future of society. "Any social movement

of potential political significance will generate opposition" (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996:1630), and this materializes when countermovements develop in attempts to defend the status quo and/or disrupt its challengers' efforts. Thus, while social movement protagonists work to stimulate "audiences to redefine their situations as unjust and mutable so that existing power structures can be altered" (Benford & Hunt 1992:48), countermovement antagonists work to repress challengers, maintain original interpretations, and repair any damage to interpretations brought about by social movement activities.

"Thus," say Benford and Hunt, "problems work entails an emergent drama between protagonists and antagonists as each seeks to establish its definitions of situations and imputations, to rebut and discredit their opponents' claims, and to inspire individuals to either engage in collective action or stand fast and not act upon others' problem claims" (2003:154). This "problems work" takes place in the open public domain where social actors other than the protagonists and antagonists can spectate, speculate, and choose to join in, fall from, or abate the situation. The public domain, composed at any given time of myriad social actors representing and operating by the logics of various institutional orders (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Thornton et al. 2012), is audience to the movement-countermovement dynamics, especially as they unfold in mediated settings (Benford & Hunt 2003). It is only when the countermovement arises to oppose the social change that social movements seek to bring about that a new unit of analysis arises (Benford & Hunt 2003). The discourse that arises among movement-countermovement interactions produces a discursive field that contextualizes, constrains, and provides opportunities for movements and countermovements to engage each other and their audiences (Snow 2004a; Steinberg 1998)

New forms of organizations and institutions that arise during movement-countermovement interactions can serve as units of analysis (Andrews 2002; Rao, Morrill & Zald 2000), but it is the movement-countermovement interaction that comprises the focus of this study.  Movement-countermovement dynamics are affected by institutional arrangements and how culturally-based assumptions can be used as an opportunity for or constraint upon action (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008).  For example, the growth of the Internet facilitated criticisms of religious beliefs and practices and rebuttals from countermovements in ways impractical before it existed (Cowan 2004; Peckham 1998).  Likewise, the availability of or closure to political opportunities in more or less democratic or authoritarian societies shifts the ebbs and flows of movement-countermovement interactions (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Peleg 2000).  At their heart, movement-countermovement interactions involve claims and counterclaims of what should or should not be considered a social problem (Best 2008), and while these can take place in debates and other direct confrontations, they are typically loosely coupled interactions that involve protracted disputes in mediated settings (Rohlinger 2002; Zald & Useem 1987).  The back-and-forth claimsmaking and counter-claimsmaking between movements and countermovements produces its own social reality, one dependent upon interactions between these parties, but this reality can be analyzed on its own terms.

Social movements and their countermovements engage in claimsmaking and framing activities in which they attempt to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the meaning of an issue, event, person, group, or idea (Benford & Hunt 2003). Claims involve the use of rhetorical persuasion based upon the grounds (assertions of facts about a troubling condition), warrants (justifications about what ought to be done), and

conclusions (recommended changes) put forward by claimsmakers (Best 2008), and these mirror the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames that social movements employ to recruit audiences to their causes (Benford & Snow 1988). When claims are put forward by a movement and/or movement activists, countermovements use counterclaims to contest the grounds upon which they are made, and these often take form through "counterrhetorical strategies" (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003:33), which are attempts to reframe the claim and/or claimant as disreputable and unworthy of serious entertainment by audiences. Counterrhetorical strategies, especially in the unsympathetic form that do not entertain the grounds, warrants, or conclusions of claims, move beyond counterclaims by shifting attention away from factual assertions and toward the logical or conceptual clarity of the claim and legitimacy of the claimsmaker. That is to say, countermovements need not rely upon logical consistency, rhetorical clarity, reiterative coherency, or factual bases when formulating their counterclaims. Once counterframed in these ways, movement activists are then obliged to reframe those counterframes as well as the claims they put forward to garner public support in the first place, which necessitates extra efforts on their part to succeed in their actions. This is how contestation occurs in the marketplace of public problems (Benford & Hunt 2003).

What distinguishes a *public* problem from a *social* problem is that while the latter is an accomplishment of one or more claimsmakers, the former helps "focus analytic attention on the interactions between and among collective claimsmakers as they attempt to advance or impede an imputed condition as a 'problem' in public domains" (Benford & Hunt 2003:155; see also Gusfield 1981). We can think of "public" in this regard as similar to the concept of "civil society" (Janoski 1998), which is the collection

of individuals, groups, and organizations who voluntarily interact for recreational, market-based, and otherwise pro-social purpose. Civil society, or the public, is the target of a plethora of claims from a diverse set of claimsmakers, thus there is a "carrying capacity" (Best 1990; Hilgartner & Bosk 1988) to how many claims can be entertained at once. Taking up from Best's (1990, 2008) model of the claimsmaking process (see Figure 2), Benford & Hunt (2003) show how claims directed toward the public are not unidirectional but interactional (see Figure 3). Moreover, not only do the various social actors involved in the claimsmaking process engage in interactions, but each claimant domain (i.e., social movement, countermovement, media, public, and policymakers) is comprised of multiple constituents that engage in interactions as well.

Benford & Hunt (2003) represent this complexity in a modified model of claimsmaking on the public problems marketplace that depicts interactions among *and* between claimants, as is reproduced here in Figure 5. This model portrays a framework

**Figure 5.** *Modified Public Problems Marketplace Model, Interactions Between and Among Claimants*.
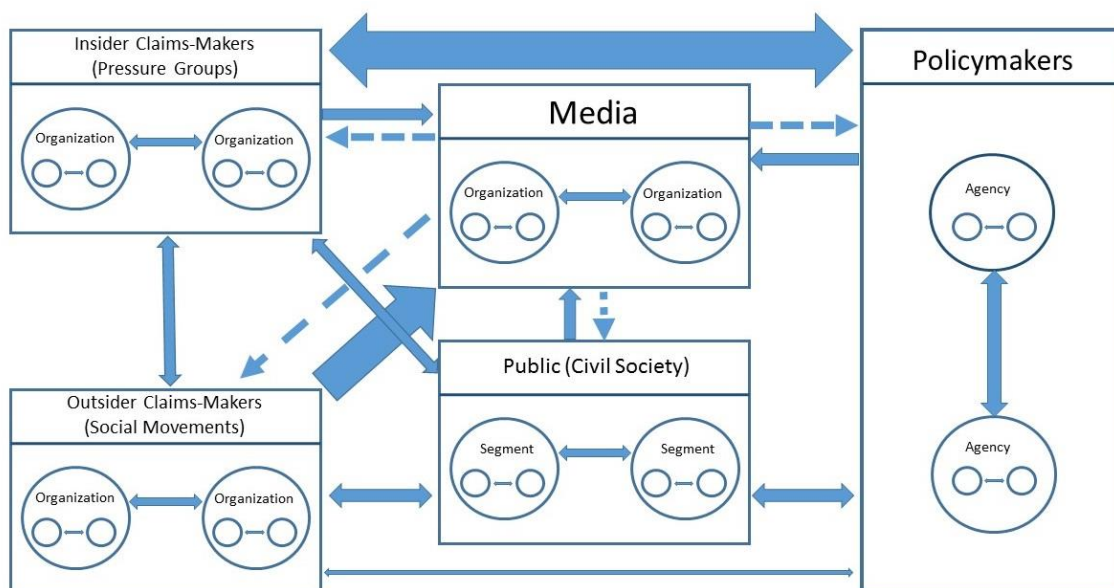
that is "the basis for understanding the complex interactions involved in the emergence of some imputed condition as a public problem" (Benford & Hunt 2003:159). The multiplicity of actors and interactions within each claimant domain brings to attention the existence of multiple institutional settings and actors that constitute society (Thornton et al. 2012) and, thus, with which social movements interact and compete for hegemony over a given discourse (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Snow 2004a). In Figure 5, each box (claimant domain) can contain many more constituents (circles) and interactions (arrows) than shown here. In order to "accurately capture the interactional dynamics between these multiple layers of public problem marketplaces would require a three-dimensional representation" (Benford & Hunt 2003:159). To note, interactional dynamics are typically communicative or discursive in nature, which involves the framing, claimsmaking, reframing, counterclaiming, and/or counterframing activities of social movements and countermovements (Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008).

The focus of this study is on the left-hand portion of Figure 5. It would be particularly difficult to attend to the interactional dynamics of all claimant domains, within or between. The present study is focused on movement-countermovement dynamics among insider and outsider claimsmakers of those who contest and defend the official narrative of "9/11." The reason for this is practical rather than theoretical. My ethnography with the 911TM affords me data to analyze its claimsmaking and framing activities, but rarely do social movements engage in such enterprises without reprisal. In point of fact, the existence of countermovements shape social movement activities because, once counterclaims and counterframes are issued, social movements must reissue claims and reframe counterframes (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). Moreover, the presence of discursive fields within which movement-countermovement dynamics

emerge shapes the discourse, or exchange of communicative interactions, that social movements and their opposition use to engage the public, malign each other, and deflect oppositional tactics and strategies (Snow 2004a).  Thus, as I express below in Figure 9, my focus is particularly on the discursive field of the 911TM.

*Framing and 9/11 Truth*

Of the many practices of social movements, which range from organizing and engaging in street protests to producing texts used to promote their causes, framing activities are key methods of recruiting new members, winning attention of and support from audiences, and deflecting negative attributions from antagonists (Benford & Hunt 1994; Benford & Snow 2000).  Put differently, social movements "frame, or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford 1988:198).  In terms of this, three core tasks are diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing, which work in conjunction with each other to alter interpretations and perceptions of social reality:  "*Diagnostic framing* involves identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality" [italicized in original] (Snow & Benford 1988:200); the "purpose of *prognostic framing* is not only to suggest solutions to the problem but also to identify strategies, tactics, and targets" [italicized in original] (1988:201); and the task or function of mobilizing framing is "the elaboration of a call to arms or *rationale for action* that goes beyond the diagnosis and prognosis" [italicized in original] (1988:202).  Lastly, discursive "fields contain the genres that collective actors can draw upon to construct discursively diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation" (Steinberg 1998:856), thus discursive fields are an important aspect in the consideration of framing practices.

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In their diverse activities, individuals and *SMO's*[xiii] engage in *frame alignment processes*[xiv], which are thought to be "a necessary condition for movement participation" (Snow et al. 1986:464), but when a movement seeks to or must transform a dominant or established frame in order to garner support for their cause, they reframe the meaning of a symbol and/or practice through *keying*[xv] (Benford & Hunt 2003:170; Goffman 1974:43-5; Snow et al. 1986:474). When not considered as a counterrhetorical strategy, keying is similar to reframing in that both are attempts to change or alter the meaning of some given thing. If a social movement is successful in keying, their audience(s) will reinterpret social reality or some aspect of it (Benford & Hunt 1994), and in redefining the situation collective claimsmakers, in effect, challenge the existing social order and (threaten to) replace it with a new or different one (McHugh 1968).

The central claim of the 911TM, that "9/11 was an inside job," is a diagnostic frame, and the call to action found in another central claim, that people need to

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[xiii] An SMO is "a complex, or formal, organization that identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement these goals" (Zald & McCarthy 1987:20). David Snow and Sara Soule (2010) add to this, stating that "[w]hether the SMO is a formal organization or a loose group of associates who come together occasionally, we can think of an SMO as a bounded entity of individuals who have come together because of a shared goal concerning one or more grievances" (151). And along with individual SMO's come social movement industries (SMIs), "the set of social movement organizations that are working toward change in the same basic area" (152); the social movement sector (SMS), which "encompasses all extant social movement organizations, associated with all social movements or issues, in a particular time and place" (153); and the social movement organizational field, which is "that set of organizations that share overlapping constituencies and interests or to which a focal organization is linked, whether this is in a facilitative or antagonistic fashion" (153).
[xiv] This process involves "the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complimentary" (Snow et al. 1986:464).
[xv] Keying can refer to various things within the universe of social movements. In general framing activities, keying "redefines activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework, in terms of another framework, such that they are now 'seen by the participants to be something quite else'" (Snow et al. 1986:474). With regard to movement-countermovement interactions, "keying occurs when movement participants restate claims made by antagonists in such a way as to give them new meanings that subvert or stand in opposition to the ones originally conveyed" (Benford & Hunt 2003:170).

"investigate 9/11," is a prognostic frame.  The former keys "9/11," and the latter directs

people to reconsider what they know to have happened on September 11.  Together,

these act as a motivational frame, because if upon investigation a mole network within

the U.S. government is found to have been complicit or instrumental in the events of

September 11 (e.g., see Tarpley 2007), or, at the least, if people recognize that the

evidence of controlled demolitions in the three WTC buildings points to some type of an

"inside job" (AE911Truth 2011; Chandler 2012; Griffin 2010a; Ryan 2012), then *something*

needs to be done.  Summing this up, one prominent member states with regard to the

events of September 11 that members of the public should "discover and speak the truth:

I would suggest," states Griffin, "that such people should—if they have not done so

already—study about both 9/11 and the American empire to see if they find the claims

made here [Griffin & Scott 2007] about them true.  If they do, then they should do

everything in their power to make others aware of these facts" (Griffin 2007b:17).

The intended consequence of these framing activities is a *transformation of domain-

specific interpretative frames*[xvi] with regard to how the events of September 11 are typically

understood in terms of the narrative of "9/11."  The widely accepted narrative of

"9/11," produced and promoted by U.S. elites and central institutions, has been at the

root of pervasive social transformations in the 21st century, and so reframing "9/11"

would likely lead to a *transformation of global interpretive frames*[xvii].  The change in

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[xvi] "By transformation of domain-specific interpretive frames, [Snow et al. 1986] refer to fairly self-contained but substantial changes in the way a particular domain of life is framed, such that a domain previously taken for granted is reframed as problematic and in need of repair, or a domain seen as normative or acceptable is reframed as an injustice that warrants change" (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford 1986:474).
[xvii] In this type of frame alignment process, "the scope of change is broadened considerably as a new primary framework gains ascendance over others and comes to function as a kind of master frame that interprets events and experiences in a new way" (Snow et al. 1986:475).  A conversion takes place

worldview that can accompany beliefs in conspiracy theories is claimed to be detrimental to individuals, groups, institutions, and society (Abalakina-Paap et al. 1999; Douglas & Sutton 2008; Goertzel 1994; Jolley & Douglas 2014), and so it is the public problems work of 911TM activism that some attempt to frame as an existing and growing social problem (Banas & Miller 2013; Berlet 2009; Kay 2011; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009; Taibbi 2008; Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014). Whereas the 911TM attempts to mobilize the public and transform domain (and global) interpretive frames, a countermovement has formed to oppose those actions. In step, these actors engage in claimsmaking and counter-claimsmaking (Best 2008), framing, counterframing, and reframing process (Benford & Hunt 2003; Snow & Benford 1988) activities. Just as it would be impossible to collect and analyze data from the entire 911TM and from all of its countermovement antagonists, it would be infeasible to utilize the entire repository of analytic concepts that the claimsmaking and framing literatures offer. Those I take up here, as suggested by Benford & Hunt (2003), are the counterframing and reframing strategies movements and countermovements use during their interactions.

The social problems work of social movements regularly elicits countervailing social forces who put forward rhetorical obstacles and barriers to movement activity (Gamson 1988; Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003; Shriver et al. 2013). Of these social forces, some organize, however loosely coupled, into countermovements who operate as agents of social control (Lo 1982; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Mottl 1980). Assuming the 911TM's claims that "9/11 was an inside job" already exist and are contentious, and assuming that a countermovement has formed to oppose those claims, we can focus on rhetorical strategies this countermovement employs to counteract the 911TM's claims, namely its counterframing strategy. This strategy is an effort to "rebut, undermine, or neutralize a

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person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretative framework" (Benford 1987:75), and Benford and Hunt (2003) identify four tactics within the counterframing strategy. The "first three involve attacks on the movement's ideology... [and the] fourth generic counterframe entails attacks on the collective character of the movement or organization advocating change" (Benford & Hunt 2003:162). I will elaborate on two of these, which are problem denial and attacks on collective character.

The easiest way to counterframe a claim is to simply deny that the problem exists or to ignore the claim or (purported) problem altogether. If a social movement claims that X is a social problem or that widely recognized social problem Y is caused by X, a countermovement can rely upon the tactic of problem denial by arguing that X is not a problem or that X does not cause Y. Benford and Hunt elaborate on the tactic of problem denial with the following passage:

> By denying the existence of a problem or denying injury (Sykes and Matza 1957), movement antagonists essentially question a movement's *raison d'être*. If there is no problem then there is no need for a movement. Thus, the identity implications of problem denial are that claimsmakers are ill-informed, irrational, or insincere. [italicized in original] (2003:163)

If a countermovement can convince its audience that a social movement or its members believe in non-existent phenomena, then they (potentially) stop the audience from adopting the movement's frames by painting the movement as unworthy of serious attention. If problem denial does not work, or if it does not pull off the task of impugning the movement's credibility or legitimacy well enough, a countermovement can directly make attacks on the collective character of the social movement.

The collective character of a social movement can be thought of as "a collective identity component that fosters a sense of unity that includes a complex of behavioral, cognitive, and moral traits participants impute to an organization as a whole or to

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particular performance teams" (Hunt 1991:255). Social movements, especially those making claims incongruent with dominant cultural beliefs and values (McAdam et al. 2001), must work hard to fashion a positive identity in the perceptions of its audiences, and because social movements are often composed of multiple SMO's and individuals with a variety of backgrounds and interests, internal threats to a social movement's identity exacerbate external threats (Hunt et al. 1994). If a social movement's identity is perceived as antagonistic toward or counter to dominant cultural values, then it will be more difficult for it to convince its audiences to adopt its frames, thus they must work hard to maintain credibility and relevancy (Benford & Hunt 1994). Countermovements are aware of this, hence

> the most powerful counterframing tactic deployed by antagonists is an attack on the *collective character* of the movement group. Such tactics occur in a variety of everyday life situations, especially in contentious relations or interactions. The ploy, of course, is to discredit the claims of the other by discrediting her/his character (cf. Goffman 1955, 1959, 1963). Thus, any potential persuasive power the other's claims might yield can be undermined by the perception that the claimant is a discredited person (or collectivity). [italicized in original] (Benford & Hunt 2003:166).

The conspiracy label operates in this fashion, allowing its issuer the rhetorically-won moral high ground without resolve to rational discourse or rigorous examination of empirical claims (deHaven-Smith 2010; Husting & Orr 2007; Pelkmans & Machold 2011). In fact, an entire anti-conspiracy discourse exists in which the conspiracy label has been meticulously crafted to serve such a purpose (Goshorn 2000; Truscello 2011).

If social movements do not attempt to counteract or repair the damage wrought by counterframing strategies, especially attacks on their collective character, they run the risks of having their identify discredited and losing the contestation over what should or should not be considered a social problem (Coles 1998; Hunt et al. 1994; Klandermans 1992). Therefore, social movements spend considerable time engaged in reframing

activities, or "collective attempts to respond to the counterframes of movement opponents in ways intended to ward off, contain, limit, or reverse potential damage to the movement's previous claims or attributes" (Benford & Hunt 2003:169). At the extremes, social movements can *ignore* a counterframe outright so they do not lend it credence or more visibility than it already has, or they can *embrace* a counterframe as a sign that the movement's activities are successful enough to warrant such attention. Social movement SMO's and individual members might want to *distance* themselves from particularly troubling counterframes by embracing other counterframes, or they can *key* into a counterframe in an attempt to shift or transform its meaning. Finally, a social movement can engage in *countermaligning,* which is the "fifth and final reframing process employed by movement actors [that] entails rhetorical attacks on antagonists' ideology and identity claims" (Benford & Hunt 2003:174).

Generating their thesis from the work of several social theorists, including Herbert Blumer (1969), William Gamson (1988), and Peter Ibarra and John Kitsuse (1993), Benford and Hunt summarize the social problems work of collective claimsmakers on the public problems marketplace as

> an emergent drama between protagonist and antagonist claimants, [with] each trying to establish their claims, to rebut and discredit their opponents' claims, and to move individuals, organizations, and/or agencies to do or not do something.
>
> The public problems marketplace is a terrain of contested claims. Claims or frames are not merely proffered and then accepted or rejected. Rather, opponents and allies respond to public claims and identity attributions made by claimants, giving new meaning to or even subverting old symbols. (2003:160)

In explaining this, Benford and Hunt note that "insufficient attention" (2003:159) in social movements and social problems literature had been given to Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993) concept of *counterrhetorical strategies*, which is elaborated further by Ibarra and Kitsuse (2003).

"Debunking practices are especially important" for counterrhetorical strategies Ibarra and Kitsuse (2003:26) point out, because counterclaimants often attempt to symbolically block as meaningful some imputed social problem. Ibarra and Kitsuse state the following as one example of a counterrhetorical strategy:

> In using the *counterrhetoric of insincerity*, the counterclaimant suggests or declares that the claimant's characterization is suspect because of a "hidden agenda" on his [or her] part; namely that he [or she] is participating in the social problems process as a means of advancing or guaranteeing his career or as a means of securing or gaining power, status, or wealth. The successful use of this device is premised on the notion that claims forwarded by self-interested parties are by definition or tendency more reflective of the claimants' designs than of what is "best for society." (2003:37).

Another tactic of the counterrhetorical strategy is the counterrhetoric of hysteria, which "characterizes the claimants as members of a social category and then dismisses their claims as 'typical' expressions of [that category]" (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003:38). This latter strategy is encapsulated by counterframing tactics of problem denial and attacks on collective character.

The literature and theory discussed so far posit the existence of a public problems marketplace on which a competition between multiple claimsmakers occurs. The discursive bidding contest takes place between claimants with unequal access to audiences, with insider claimsmakers having higher visibility via media and easier accesses to policymakers than outsider claimsmakers. Insider claimants, or pressure groups, sometimes organize their efforts to undermine those of outsider claimants, or social movements. When social movements challenge the existing social order, or some aspect of it, the collective actions of insider claimsmakers form countermovements that mobilize, typically through the use of counterframing or counterrhetorical strategies designed to block what a social movement is able to effectively communicate to its audience(s). Social movements must respond to these discursive threats if they are to

succeed in their goals of winning public support, altering the meaning of some given thing, and/or changing public policy. What is in need of further elaboration for this dissertation are the complexities of the social and discursive environments within which social movements operate, especially those that specifically pertain to the 9/11 Truth Movement.

**The (Multi)Institutional Logics and Discursive Field of the 9/11 Truth Movement**

The following subsections move through a discussion of different ways to approach the conceptual importance of social movements, how they are contextualized by multi-institutional politics, and how social movements operate within discursive fields. Included in the discussion are new social movements (NSMs) because "NSM theory provides an important corrective to political process approaches by centering inquiry on the nature of domination in society and on the relationship between forms of domination and social movement challenges" (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008:81). This discussion proceeds under the assumption that power is asymmetrically distributed throughout societies, and that those in power tend to physically and symbolically dominate subordinates via ideology, hegemony, and discourse (Stoddart 2007). With regard to the preceding section, social movements, acting as outside claimsmakers, typically have less institutionally afforded legitimacy, and, moreover, the presence of a discursive field lends extra symbolic power to their insider opponents. The final subsections give special attention to the nature of discursive fields, especially those central to the 911TM, namely anti-conspiracy discourse.

*(New) Social Movements & Political Processes*

The classic social movement agenda is rooted in the concepts of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, collective action frames, and repertoires of

contention, and each contains its own independent as well as interacting structural and dynamic, causal and consequential mechanisms in terms of social movement origins, processes, and outcomes (McAdam et al. 2001). For example, political processes approaches (McAdam 1982; see also McAdam, McCarthy & Zald 1996), which were for a period of time "the hegemonic paradigm among social movements analysts" (Goodwin & Jasper 1999:28), theorize the state as the target of, gatekeeper to, and/or repressive force against protests and other forms of dissenting collective action. As an example, taking the state as a major explanatory factor of social movements, McAdam et al. (2001) propose that social movements should be explained in terms of the extent to which agents of the state, organizationally and individually, exercise control within the geographic boundaries of nation-states (i.e., state capacity) and the degree to which the polity is inclusive and representative of the citizenry (i.e., democracy). The political processes approach to studying social movements has powerful explanatory capabilities, but recent correctives to its limited set of deficiencies offer more robust insights for the current project.

Critiquing and extending the political process approach, Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein, citing numerous other critiques that "revolve around the definition and identification of political opportunity, the state-centeredness that marginalizes some social movements, and ignoring or misunderstanding the relationship between culture, identity, and structure in movements" (2008:74), propose a multi-institutional politics approach that expands the conception of power beyond the state and into culture and institutional orders. Power, it should be noted, is a central concept in the study of social movements, and it is thought to be enacted during interactions between social movements, their targets or audiences, and their opposition or antagonists (Benford &

Hunt 1992, 2003). Alongside social institutions like the state and media, culture is a powerful force for social movements that is at once both a constraint and a resource for opportunities (Swidler [1995] 2003; Williams 2004). We might think of culture as the collection of socially transmitted attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and practices that guide and shape the cognition and behavior of social actors (DiMaggio 1997), or, in the context of multiple institutional orders, we might refer to these as "institutional logics," which are "symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defined and technically and materially constrained" unifying sets "of material practices and symbolic constructions…available to organizations and individuals to elaborate" (Friedland & Alford 1991:248-249).

For the 911TM, the most salient example of these issues dates to when the former U.S. President, George W. Bush, along with his administration and a mostly compliant news press, defined in the hours, days, and weeks after the events of September 11, 2001, that they were acts of Jihadi terrorism by the al-Qaeda network. This definition then served as provocation for the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Global War on Terror (Altheide 2006; Connor 2012; Entman 2004; Gershkoff & Kushner 2005; Krebs & Lobasz 2007; Meyer 2009; Zarefsky 2004) and restrictions to U.S. civil liberties, such as through signing into law the so-called USA PATRIOT Act. Social movements are largely defined by and operate within the cultural landscape of their social milieu (Polletta 2008), and so the 911TM has had a difficult struggle in their attempt to reframe "9/11" insofar as the dominant narrative produced by the Bush administration and mainstream news media took firm root in U.S. culture (Connor 2012; Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Krebs & Lobasz 2007). The reinforcement of the narrative of "9/11" among and between multiple

institutional orders does not necessarily affirm its validity or legitimacy, but it does suggest that challengers to the narrative will more easily find enemies than allies.

Some treatments of "9/11" by sociologists and other academics include no references to alternative (i.e., "conspiratorial") accounts of the events of September 11 (Calhoun, Price & Timmer 2002; Denzin & Lincoln 2003), but rather they source knowledge of the events to the official account (Zelikow 2004). One sociologist claiming to have produced "*The* Sociology of Conspiracy" [emphasis mine] (Sternheimer 2007, 2010) cites only Zelikow's (2004) *9/11 Commission Report* as the source that shows why 9/11 conspiracy theories are false, and another sociologist went so far as to use the label "anti-American" for a category of people who have interpretations of the events of September 11 that do not match the official interpretation (Robinson 2005)! While some sociologists have paid critical attention to Zelikow's (2004) final report on the terrorist attacks (e.g., see Hershberg & Moore 2002; Mednicoff 2005; Perrow 2005; Tierney 2005; Vaughan 2006), they do not mention any of the alternative critical appraisals of it that bring attention to the report's factual omissions and distortions suggesting it is part of a fabrication or cover up of the actual circumstances surrounding the events of September 11 (for examples of these assertions, see Ahmed 2005; Griffin 2005). One analysis supporting this trend shows a near unanimous agreement in cultural studies literature that any deviation from or skepticism toward the official story of "9/11" is considered inherently or effectively conspiratorial (Truscello 2011). The state's and mainstream news media's definition of "9/11," then, is diffuse enough to have tilted sociological and academic investigations in its favor and, thus, away from the 911TM's.

In terms of what makes an "official story" just that, David Coady (2006a) simply enough positions official stories or authoritative accounts of historically important

events in opposition to conspiracy theories. For the definition of the latter term, Coady

"recommend[s] the following three-part definition:"

> A conspiracy theory is a proposed explanation of an historical event, in which conspiracy (i.e., agents acting secretly in concert) has a significant causal role. Furthermore, the conspiracy postulated by the proposed explanation must be a conspiracy to bring about the historical event which it purports to explain. Finally, the proposed explanation must conflict with an 'official' explanation of the same historical event. (2006a:117)

No mention of the legal status of the conspiracy is mentioned, but we might assume that

it is implied; if not, then conspiracies are sometimes plainly considered to be secretive or

covert acts planned or engaged in by the concerted actions of tightly or loosely

networked individuals. Regardless of the legal status, Coady (2006a) directs against

treating government as the sole source of authority or legitimacy for the term "official."

Coady explains:

> Both the media and the academy are, in virtue of their power to influence opinion, sources of official stories as well. It is not surprising, therefore, that conspiracy theories tend to be disparaged by representatives of these institutions. It is also not surprising that official stories are unreliable in societies in which the media and other sources of official information are directly controlled by the government. We are surely warranted in thinking that the more diverse the sources of official stories, the more credence those stories deserve. But the fact that the government does not directly control other sources of official stories in contemporary western societies does not mean that these institutions are fully independent of the government. (2006a:126)

Therefore, when the 911TM attempts to reframe the official story of "9/11," it

necessarily calls into question the legitimacy of the social institution of government

because it eventually provided the dominant explanations of how and why the events of

September 11 took place (NIST 2008; Zelikow 2004). However, social institutions that

sponsor the government's explanation then become officiates of this narrative as well,

and thus actors within these institutions have vested interests in protecting that

narrative, less their credibility and legitimacy suffer scrutiny.

From the state-centric political processes approach, social movements have been

defined as "rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage

to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means" (McAdam 1982:20).

McAdam et al. advance this by focusing on contentious politics, by which they mean

"episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when

(a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and

(b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants"

(2001:5). The 911TM can be considered an excluded group for it is regularly at the

receiving end of a most divisive "transpersonal strategy of exclusion" (Husting & Orr

2007), which is the use of the conspiracy label. State actors and agencies within the U.S.

federal government are often included in the claim that "9/11 was an inside job," and if

they can successfully mobilize support to the extent that they achieve their efforts to set

up an independent investigation with subpoena power (e.g., see NJ911Aware.org 2013),

then the 911TM will likely affect the interests of many social actors across a variety of

social institutions. These features make the 911TM a ripe subject for an analysis under

the political processes and contentious politics approaches, but there are other

sociological factors to consider.

While I retain aspects from political processes definitions of social movements in

my analysis, insofar as they fulfill the political aspect of Armstrong and Bernstein's

(2008) multi-institutional *politics* approach, some additional aspects of the 911TM make

it problematic to primarily hold to the political processes framework. For example, the

911TM often claims that the mainstream, corporate media has been complicit in a cover

up of certain events of September 11 (e.g., see Zwicker 2006), and their antagonists hail

from diverse institutional orders, such as government, mass media, academia, and think

tanks.  Moreover, as I have shown above, the discipline of sociology at the least has

overlooked texts produced by the 911TM's intellectual organizers as a viable source of

interpretative schema for understanding "9/11."  Therefore it is useful to include with

the political process approach a model of social movements that is attuned to the

complexities of the distribution of power throughout society's institutional orders, and,

moreover, because culture is a powerful resource and constraining force for social

movements, it should be considered in the analysis of them as well.  This is found in the

multi-institutional politics approach (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008), especially as much

as it relates to Benford and Hunt's (2003) model of the interactions between claimants on

the public problems marketplace that is constituted by multiple parts of civil society

(Janoski 1998).

In addition to studying the nature of social movements, with Armstrong and

Bernstein's multi-institutional politics approach to studying social movements, "the

investigation of the goals and strategies of movements are opportunities for insight into

the nature of domination in contemporary society" (2008:82).  Insofar as this dissertation

is about the 911TM, I assert that it, like previous studies on NSMs (see Crossley 2002),

highlights areas in society where domination and oppression occur.  The multi-

institutional politics approach is predicated on a specific definition of social movements

(Armstrong & Bernstein 2008:84), which is David Snow's definition of them as

> *collective challenges to systems or structures of authority* or, more concretely, as
> *collectivities acting with some degree of organization* (could be formal, hierarchical,
> networked, etc.) *and continuity* (more continuous than crowd or protest events
> but not institutionalized or routinized in the sense of being institutionally
> organizationally calendarized) *primarily outside of institutional or organizational
> channels for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change
> in such systems, in the organization, society, culture or world order of which they are a
> part.* [italicized in original] (2004b:11)

Armstrong and Bernstein's (2008) use of Snow's (2004b) definition is important because Snow (2004b) asserts that social movements often target *systems* or *structures* of authority, which is a way of saying that social movements, especially those with radical grievances, target the logics of institutional orders.

Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) propose that social movements utilize and target both the material and symbolic aspects of overlapping and nested social institutions, which are sometimes reinforcing (e.g., science and education, education and government, government and military) and sometimes contradictory (e.g., science and religion, religion and government, government and markets). We see this in the 911TM's challenge to the meaning of "9/11" in their pursuit of the "Truth" of what actually happened on September 11, 2001. The ubiquity of the narrative of "9/11" in American culture (Denzin & Lincoln 2003), and the effect the narrative has had on U.S. domestic and foreign policy (Altheide 2006; Entman 2004; Kellner 2003), solidifies it as a powerful constraining cultural force for its challengers, and similarly "9/11" serves as a powerful resource for those who defend its legitimacy. The legitimacy of the institutional orders of the state, economy, military, and mass media (along with sectors of academia) are called into question when the 911TM challenges the validity of the 9/11 Commission's (Zelikow 2004) version of "9/11" as a complete and thorough narrative (e.g., see Griffin 2005) and NIST's (2008) final report as a scientifically sound effort to explain the collapse of WTC 7 (e.g., see Griffin 2010a).

Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) encourage social movement analysts to consider how power is distributed throughout institutions such as these. Instead of viewing power as originating or being centered within the state, they view power as distributed throughout a society's institutions and culture, for example, in the ways that

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classificatory systems are constructed and used to define distinctions in bodies,

behaviors, and beliefs.  This, as they note, is a central concern of Michel Foucault's work,

which postulates that social actors are the products of their society's "regime of truth, its

'general politics of truth':"

> that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the
> mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false
> statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and
> procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are
> charged with saying what counts as true.  (1984:73)

Symbols and material practices are anchored in social institutions, and so, for example,

political activity does not only occur if and when the power of the state is utilized,

contested, or threatened, for "political activity concerns both changes in classification

and in allocation, that is, changes in rules and changes in the distribution of resources"

(Armstrong & Bernstein 2008:84-5).  The 911TM not only challenges the narrative

important to the state as an institution, but which myriad others have affirmed as a true.

The 911TM's public claimsmaking and framing activities threaten several logics

of many institutional orders.  Through contesting the meaning of "9/11," the 911TM

calls into question the classification of "terrorists," and in challenging who was actually

responsible for the events of September 11 they threaten to alter perceptions of how

resources have been justly distributed in response to the attacks.  Families and

communities who have lost members to what they believe to have been a legitimate

threat, corporations that have military contracts, and the people deriving their livelihood

and status from the military and law enforcement orders engaged anti-terrorist efforts

might suffer, respectively, symbolic and material damage to their worldviews and

access to resources if the 911TM is successful in its endeavors.  State agents whose

political platforms involve protecting their constituents against terrorist threats are

challenged by the 911TM's activities, as is the legitimacy of intelligence and security agencies that serve the function of protecting U.S. interests in the Global War on Terror. The 911TM threaten to damage, disrupt, or destroy a narrative central to the legitimacy of the guiding logics of several institutional orders, and this is likely to bring out defenders of those institutions who, by virtue of this, become a collective countervailing force to the 911TM. Alliances from insider actors and networks is one feature of the constraining aspects the multi-institutional order that social movements face when challenging core assumptions or logics of society's central institutions (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Snow 2004b).

In this way, and within the multi-institutional politics perspective, social movements like the 911TM challenge *systems* of authority, not just personalities or charismatic authority figures, nor particular organizations or institutions, but rather they challenge institutional arrangements and theories of how those institutions should and do operate. We can find insight into the expected effects when using a definition of social movements as anti-authoritarian mobilized collectivities, in which case Snow (2004b) has

> suggested that structures or systems of authority—be they institutionally, organizationally, or culturally based—function, in a kind of Foucauldian fashion, to coordinate patterns of behavior and orientation, typically among a fairly large number of people, such that the activities, orientations, identities and/or interpretations of one set of actors is subordinated to the directives, mandates, and perspectives and framings of another set of actors (superordinates) or privileged cultural texts, narratives, or codes. The relevance of systems of authority to social movements, as argued, is that they typically are the targets of, and sometimes the inspirational sources for, the challenges mounted by social movements. (p. 13)

Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) bring this out when they cite Dorothy Smith's (1987, 1990, 1999) concept of *relations of ruling*[xviii] and Michel Foucault's conception of micro-level "mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level" (1980:60). As DiMaggio (1997) points out, social institutions provide socio-cultural contexts in which cognitive schemata crystalize meaning though social interactions, but social agents, individually or collectively, can alter those shared mental frameworks. Those social actors at the helms of a society's seats of power tend to work to maintain and change aspects of the social order that benefit their interests (Domhoff 1990; Mills [1956] 2000; Reed 2012; Zald & Lounsbury 2010), and this is accomplished through controlling or influencing ideological aspects of core social institutions responsible for disseminating information (Althusser [1971] 2006; Gramsci 1992; Hall 1985; Stoddart 2007). This is how and why the power elite benefit from educational and media institutions that facilitate the mass cultural effect in society (Mills 2000), and this is why the 911TM's claims affect so many institutional orders and social actors simultaneously.

In the days and months after the events of September 11, political and media elites selected certain interpretations of the actors and motivations for those blamed for the events. These authoritative accounts, legitimated by the institutional orders of the state and mainstream news media, reinforced the narrative while simultaneously

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[xviii] Relations of ruling involve "the social organization of the objectified knowledges…[of] the terms, themes, concepts of the subject and subjectivity, of feeling, emotion, goals, relations, and an object world assembled in textually mediated discourses" (Smith 1990:1). Under patriarchy, these knowledges are constructed by men, under capitalism by capitalists, under White supremacy by Whites, and under imperialism by imperialists (e.g., see hooks 2010), and in each system the "ruling apparatuses are those institutions of administration, management, and professional authority, and of intellectual and cultural discourses, which organize, regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies" (Smith 1990:2).

making dissent appear illegitimate. The 911TM challenges the symbolic violence of "9/11" (that it, naturally, was an outside job), and in doing so the legitimacy of the logics of multiple institutional orders are called into question. For example, if actors and agencies within the federal government harm instead of protect U.S. citizenry, and if actors and agencies of news media cloak instead of reveal those actions, then the guiding logics, and therefore the legitimacy, of those systems are contested. Legitimacy is a product of social processes that must be continuously enacted to create, reinforce, and repair the sense of, belief in, or the conception of a phenomena as acceptable, rational, justified, true, and fair (Johnson et al. 2006). In challenging the official narrative of "9/11," then, the 911TM challenges the everyday relations to the ruling systems of authority that form the sometimes taken-for-granted and sometimes consciously upheld and defended backdrop for families, communities, educational systems, and other such institutional orders in which the received version of how and why the events of September 11 happened serve as un(con)tested assumptions (see Ahmed 2005; Altheide 2006; Entman 2004; Kellner 2003; Zwicker 2006). This brings about another need for a multi-institutional politics perspective when analyzing the 911TM as a social movement, particularly because it operates as an NSM.

While NSMs do not represent a coherent paradigm or theoretical perspective within social movements literature (Pichardo 1997), their relevancy for this study is in how they challenge the logics of multiple institutional orders, or systems of authority (Snow 2004b). The peace/anti-war and environmental movements, for example, challenge multiple institutions, industries, and organizations by, in part, problematizing the logics of the everyday, *taken-for-granted social constructions* (i.e. doxa) that arise as products of advanced capitalism, militarism, and alignments between *common interests*

(i.e. field-level logics) of the corporation and the state (Benford 1993; Gould, Pellow & Schnaiberg 2008; Habermas 1981; Hooks & Smith 2005; Thornton et al. 2012; Woehrle et al. 2008). Challenges to the undergirding logics of society's central institutional orders (Domhoff 2010; Mills 2000) brings about a "legitimation crisis" in which previously unquestioned assumptions (doxa) and privileged interpretations of the current social order or status quo (orthodoxy) come to be contested (unorthodoxy, heterodoxy) (Bourdieu 1977; Habermas 1975). If and when elites with coincidences of interests across interlocking or reinforcing institutional orders are threatened by social movements, they are likely to form, encourage, join, or allow countermovements to oppose the perceived or real aggressions of the movement (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). The developing movement-countermovement interactions take place within a public problems marketplace where each of these collective actors competes for visibility in the mass media, attention of public audiences, and influence over policymakers (Benford & Hunt 2003), and so the involvement of this variety of institutional orders and social actors is made all the more complex when we take into account the assumed or taken-for-granted nature of ruling systems of authority.

Concerning the role of discursive fields for NSMs, Crossley's (2003a) use of Habermasian theories of social movements provides an enlightening example for our purposes. Crossley (2003a) posits that the '*colonization of the lifeworld*'[xix] by the logics of

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[xix] Crossley (2003a) states that what Habermas means by 'the colonization of the lifeworld' "is that the state now permeates ever more areas of our lives, exercising a surveillance and regulatory role. Integral to this is a process of 'juridification', whereby ever more areas of life are becoming subject to legal regulation, and legal regulation itself is ever more internally complex and differentiated. This results in a loss of both freedom and meaning. The cultural narratives and symbolic forms that give existential meaning and ethical direction to our lives are crushed by bureaucratic procedures, which offer no comparable vision or comfort and which simultaneously reduce our room to choose and manoeuvre [sic]. This is compounded by the 'cultural impoverishment' caused by an increased specialization and differentiation of the knowledge and cultural base of society. The basic social processes in which we are

global capitalism and the multinational corporation was the source of protests in the late 1990's against the World Trade Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other such international structures of global (economic) governance. The protestors and activists in the many coalitions of the anti-corporate movement "abandon[ed] the 'strategic rationality' more usual for the consumer role, which focuses the individual only upon the best means for realizing their own selfish desires, and question[ed] the ethics of consumption as it is ordinarily practiced" (298). Continuing, Crossley (2003a) raises an important insight about the nature of NSMs in a multi-institutional context: "[NSMs] raise previously doxic assumptions concerning consumption to the level of discourse, contesting and questioning these assumptions" (294). When NSMs, or social movements generally, challenge the unspoken, unquestioned, taken-for-granted assumptions (doxa) about the legitimacy of interlocking and powerful institutional orders, they threaten the interests of social actors from multiple institutional orders who then have reason to form alliances against the challenging collectivity. NSMs threaten systems of authority because the seek to influence how people understand the roles in contemporary society, which necessarily means that individuals are encouraged to (re)consider their relations with ruling systems of authority and truth regimes.

The concepts of orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and doxa are important for this discussion because the 911TM's claims are often doxic to the dominant discourse about the narrative of "9/11 and the events of September 11 (e.g., see Altheide 2006;

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involved and which impinge upon our lives have become so complex and specialized that it is no longer possible for us to comprehend them fully or to weave them into a coherent narrative. Our conscious grasp upon the social world is thus both incomplete and fragmented" (294).

Birkenstein, Froula & Randell 2010; Calhoun, et al. 2002; Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Entman 2004; Hershberg & Moore 2002; Mednicoff 2005; Perrow 2005; Robinson 2005, 2008; Tierney 2005; Vaughan 2006), but, moreover, what is also doxic is the truth-value of the official explanations for "9/11" and the events of September 11. The 911TM's countermovement antagonists treat its challenging claims as heterodoxy, specifically via the conspiracy label (e.g., Aaronovitch 2010; Banas & Miller 2013; Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Kay 2011; *Popular Mechanics* 2011; Shermer 2011), and these social actors treat the orthodox claims about the events of September 11 (e.g., see NIST 2008; Zelikow 2004) as essentially uncontestable and, therefore, they often go untested and recede into doxic territory. What is almost universally accepted as true in the dominant discourse about "9/11" is that the 911TM's claims have no bearing on it, or, if they are considered worthy of attention, their claims are considered or portrayed as heterodoxic. They *are* heterodoxic, or completely counter to orthodoxy, by virtue of the discursive practices of the 911TM, their countermovement antagonists, bystanders, and those who pay no attention to the movement at all. The parties involved in producing discourse about "9/11" do not have equal say in its narrative, nor do they have equal footing in society, particular in relation to its multiple institutional orders.

*The Multi-Institutional Politics Approach & Institutional Logics*

The multi-institutional politics approach (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008) combines theories of NSMs, "that is, the various movements which emerged in western societies in the wake of the 1960s, including environmentalism, the peace movement, second-wave feminism, animal rights, anti-psychiatry, etc." (Crossley 2002:11), with Pierre

Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of *fields*[xx] and *habitus*[xxi] (for discussions of these concepts see

Crossley 2003b; Sallaz & Zavisca 2007), which Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) hold akin

to Friedland and Alford's (1991) nascent work on *institutional logics*[xxii].  Treating

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of field and Friedland and Alford's (1991) use of social

institutions "as roughly interchangeable" (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008:82), the multi-

institutional politics approach includes *social structural*[xxiii] aspects of society as

analytically central, including the institutional orders of the family, religion, education,

media, science, the state, economy, and military.  Along with these structural aspects,

habitus and institutional logics (i.e., cultural content) are considered to provide and

constrain opportunities for agency or action during social interactions within and across

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[xx] "The concept of fields entails an economic metaphor, and this is enhanced by Bourdieu's conception of 'cultural', 'symbolic' and 'social', as well as economic forms of capital. A field consists of relations hips between different 'positions', with various types of 'resources', economic, symbolic, etc., flowing between them" (Crossley 2003b:59).

[xxi] "The habitus, to borrow a metaphor Bourdieu himself uses, contains the 'genetic information' which both allows and disposes successive generations to reproduce the world they inherit from their parents' generation" (Crossley 2003b:43).

[xxii] "Institutional logics" is defined further below within this chapter, but I will note that Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) are not the only ones to draw a connection between the concepts of habitus, fields, and institutional logics. For example, Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) point out that "[w]hile not part of Friedland and Alford's (1991) chapter, it is noteworthy that important precursors to the institutional logics perspective had been developing with the work on logics and practice (Bourdieu 1977)...," and if we can accept that "'practice', for Bourdieu, is the combined effect of habitus, capital (including the embodied forms of cultural capital...) and field" (Crossley 2003b:44), then we can see the proposed connection.

[xxiii] "Social structure" has been used synonymously with "social organization," with both referring to "social relations of various kinds, their internal processes, their behavioral and institutional issue, and their connectivity and interdependence as emergent systems extended across time and space" (Prendergast & Knottnerus 1994:1). As Prendergast and Knottnerus (1994) discuss, social structure is a complex concept and theoretical approach to sociology, and its definition and use changes from one school of thought to the next. For example, "[i]n anti-reductionist sociology, the concept *structure* refers to temporarily and/or spatially extensive social conditions that to a greater or lesser extent influence actors' forms of thought, decision and actions, and which, depending on the circumstances, may facilitate or constrain actors' capacities to achieve their objectives" (Sibeon 1999:323). We can see the similarities and differences in definitions, but the essential point is that social structures are composed of various sizes of social relationships (e.g., from small, face-to-face groups up to "world systems"), they are relatively stable over time and space, and they provide opportunities and constraints upon social behavior.

those institutional orders.  Due to the nature of the 911TM's claims, their adversaries

arise from media (Kay 2011; Taibbi 2008), academia (Banas & Miller 2013; Sunstein &

Vermeule 2009; Wood & Douglas 2013), trade press (Chertoff 2004; Molé 2006; *Popular*

*Mechanics* 2006, 2011; Shermer 2011), and think tanks (Berlet 2009; Tobin 2007).  When

the 911TM's countermovement antagonists engage in counter-claimsmaking (Best 2008)

and counterframing (Benford & Hunt 2003) activities, they have at their disposal the

logics and legitimacy of those institutional orders as well as the discursive function of

the conspiracy label (Husting & Orr 2007) across those orders, which exists as a field-

level logic (Thornton et al. 2012) in the discursive field (Snow 2004a).

Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) attempt to provide a corrective to the narrow,

slight, or marginal deficiencies of the political process (McAdam 1982) and contentious

politics (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001) approaches by proffering social movement

scholars "theoretical tools with which to investigate the shifting nature of domination

(both material and cultural) in both governmental and nongovernmental institutions

and collective efforts that arise in response to different types of domination" (Armstrong

& Bernstein 2008:82).  One way they do this is by bringing culture back in to the analysis

of social movements "as a powerful, constraining force" (2008:82).  Armstrong and

Bernstein (2008) confer that social institutions are material (practice) and non-material

(symbolic) compositions established by social actors, and that social movements seek

changes in the distribution of both aspects within and between social institutions.  Like

other social movement scholars (Benford & Hunt 1992; Snow 2004b), Armstrong and

Bernstein (2008) see social movement grievances as challenges to how power is

distributed and operates within any one or between any given set of institutional orders,

whether in material (hard power) or non-material forms (soft power), and that these

challenges often bring about a revision to or new definition of what a social institution is (how it is arranged) and/or does (how it operates).

Social movements can target a variety of institutional orders (e.g., the state, the corporation, the military, mass media, education, religion, the family, etc.). Each institutional order is guided by cultural content (i.e. institutional logics) consisting of the norms, beliefs, values, ways of using language, and the meanings attached to socially significant practices that might align or conflict with the logics of reinforcing or competing institutional orders (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton et al. 2012). Social institutions sometimes operate in concert, such as when the power elite use their respective seats of power in the *institutional orders*[xxiv] of the military, the economy, and the government to cooperate in achieving whatever goals align in their "coincidence of interests" (Mills 2000:213, 224, 276, 288). Currently, a power elite operates, when it needs to, largely outside of the public view due to the interrelationship between these

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[xxiv] Mills ([1956] 2000) first uses the term, "institutional orders" at the end of the following lengthy passage:

> There is no longer, on the one hand, an economy, and, on the other hand, a political order containing a military establishment unimportant to politics and to money-making. There is a political economy linked, in a thousand ways, with military institutions and decisions. On each side of the world-split running through central Europe and around the Asiatic rimlands, there is an ever-increasing interlocking of economic, military, and political structures. If there is government intervention in the corporate economy, so is there corporate intervention in the governmental process. In the structural sense, this triangle of power is the source of the interlocking directorate that is most important for the historical structure of the present.
>
> The fact of the interlocking is clearly revealed at each of the points of crisis of modern capitalist society—slump, war, and boom. In each, men of decision are led to an awareness of the interdependence of the major institutional orders. (p. 7-8)

More recent usage of this terminology includes a precise definition: Each institutional order is "defined as a different domain of institutions built around a cornerstone institution that represents the cultural symbols and material practices that govern a commonly recognized area of life" (Thornton et al. 2012:53-4). Therefore, for example, the military order contains the Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, and National Guard, and each of these institutions contain within an overarching military-style form of symbolic norms (e.g., salutes, the use of "Sir" and "Ma'am" to symbolically indicate status, taking an oath based on the U.S. Constitution, etc.) and material expressions of these norms (e.g., wearing service uniforms and the use of service ribbons to indicate status and merit); each sub-institution carries out specific forms of these symbolic and material practices (e.g., generals and admirals carry a similar rank, uniforms differ in style, etc.).

three institutional orders and those of the mainstream mass media and various policy

making groups and think tanks (Akhavan-Majid & Wolf 1991; Domhoff 1990, 2010;

Perrucci & Wysong 2008; Reed 2012; Zald & Lounsbury 2010). From the institutional

logics perspective, Thornton et al. (2012) refer to connections such as these as an

interinstitutional system, and they argue that how power operates, and whether it is

considered legitimate or illegitimate, depends both upon the cognitive and interactional

domains of micro-level phenomena, which is consistent with DiMaggio's (1997)

assessment, as well as with which logics of both institutional orders (meso-level) *and*

institutional fields (macro-level) originate and contextualize enactments of power.

Whereas under the *institutional logics* perspective we treat "an institutional logic

as the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices,

including assumptions, values and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations

provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their

lives and experiences" (Thornton et al. 2012:2), the institutional logics *perspective* (ILP)

> aids researchers interested in questions of how individual and organizational
> actors are influenced by their situation in multiple social locations in an
> interinstitutional system, for example the institutional orders of the family,
> religion, state, market, professions, and corporation. Conceptualized as a
> theoretical model, each institutional order of the interinstitutional system
> distinguishes unique organizing principles, practices, and symbols that influence
> individual and organizational behavior. Institutional logics represent frames of
> reference that condition actors' choices for sense-making, the vocabulary they
> use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity. The principles,
> practices, and symbols of each institutional order differentially shape how
> reasoning takes place and how rationality is perceived and experienced. (p. 2)

The ILP identifies institutional orders that would constitute the public, media, and

policymaker claimant domains of Benford and Hunt's (2003) model of interactional

dynamics on the public problems marketplace (Figure 5). Moreover, the ILP "can point

the way to productive conceptualization of how cultural resources are used for

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mobilization, framing, and institutional change" (Thornton et al. 2012:175), but within this perspective Thornton et al. note that "theoretical integration is needed that examines cross-level effects among activists, their fields, and societal-level logics" (2012:176).

As one component of this theoretical integration, social movements act as "cultural entrepreneurs" (Thornton et al. 2012:107), which are key agents in the initialization or initiation of social change. The interinstitutional system is not a static composite of social spheres, it is rather a dynamic system always in flux due to the constant and ongoing (inter)actions of individuals, groups, and organizations operating within and between social institutions. Cultural entrepreneurs, such as social movements, engage in theorization, framing, and narrative formation, by which they attempt to explain, make comprehensible, and/or render phenomena meaningful *across* institutional orders in new or different ways. Benford and Hunt's (2003) theoretical contribution lies in identifying the targets of cultural entrepreneurs, the complexity of interactions within and between claimants and targets (i.e., institutional orders), and the rhetorical strategies social movements and their antagonists are likely to use when attempting to achieve or oppose social change. One additional component in need of theoretical integration is the existence of discursive fields that shape movement ideologies and framing practices (Snow 2004a), and this is akin to field-level logics discussed under the ILP.

When seeking to bring about or oppose social change, movements and countermovements can rely upon institutional arrangements and logics to inform their rhetorical practices. "Social movements might use one institution as a base from which to challenge others," note Armstrong and Bernstein (2008:87), but the multi-institutional perspective "also suggests that when institutions reinforce each other, change will be

difficult." Institutional logics are sometimes contradictory, which open opportunities for back-and-forth challenges from movements and countermovements, with each relying on the legitimacy and cognitive and social sensemaking schema (frames) of their respective institutional orders. To give themselves more legitimacy, social actors rely upon the logics of multiple institutional orders when possible, especially those that match their audience's or constituencies interpretative schema, and when they do seize upon theories, frames, or narratives from different social institutions, the facilitating medium is the institutional field. Thus, institutional actors can rely on the logics of institutional (discursive) *fields* that transcend any given institution's logics (Thornton et al. 2012).

Empirical examples of these issues can be found in the cases of the 'scientific certainty argumentation methods' employed by some actors in the political arena to undermine or prevent scientifically informed environmental regulations (Freudenberg, Gramling & Davidson 2008). Think tank researchers and politicians dispute the legitimacy of climate scientists' work (McCright 2000, 2003, 2010), and yet another example is found in some religion-based movements' opposition to solely teaching Darwinian evolution in public schools (or at all) in favor of including creationism or Intelligent Design in science curriculums (Forrest & Gross 2004; Scott 2004). Still many more examples can be found in the contestations over the meaning of issues related to ecology, education, health, science, terrorism, and war (Holloway 2008; Mooney 2005; Oreskes & Conway 2010). This is to say, movements and countermovements are (sometimes) able to tap into dominant, societal-level cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms (field-level logics) to reinforce their position and/or undermine their opponents' (Polletta 2008; Snow 2004). Social movements seeking change in society

often threatens a given (set of) institutional order(s), countermovements arise to protect those orders (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996), and, even when movement actors rely upon the logics of science (empiricism and rationalism) and professions (expertise and credentialing), straying too far into the domain of heterodoxic claimsmaking can serve as a basis for countermovements to delegitimize their claims.

**Dangerous Machinery in the Discursive Field of the 911TM**

Social movements' claimsmaking (Best 1990, 2008; Muleahy 1995) and framing (Benford & Hunt 2003; Benford & Snow 1988; Snow 2004a) practices "[are] dialogic and founded in the social process of mediated action or speech communication" (Steinberg 1998), and thus social movements engage in meaning construction in a discursive field consisting of historically contextualized symbolic and material, cultural and structural opportunities and constraints (Snow 2004a; Williams 2004; Shriver et al. 2013; Steinberg 1999). Within the discursive field of the 911TM, elite and organizational deviance in the form of actually existing conspiracies provide discursive opportunities (Jones 2010, 2012), and the existence and use of the conspiracy label is a constraining mechanism (deHaven-Smith 2010, 2013). While some of its members use their expertise and professional stock of knowledge to construct arguments as to why the events of September 11 do not, in fact, match the dominant narrative of "9/11," countermovement antagonists use the conspiracy label to "ridicule questions about documented forewarnings of 9/11 (such as the President's Daily Brief on August 6, 2001, titled 'Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US')" (Husting & Orr 2007:134), let alone allegations that "9/11 was an inside job." This is what we should expect to see when social movements pose radical challenges (Ferree 2004) to systems of authority that threaten elite interests (Shriver et al. 2013).

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Knowledge, and the control there of, is a central source of power for individuals,

organizations, and social institutions, allowing those who construct what is known and

knowable to influence the beliefs and behaviors of those susceptible to that will

(Foucault 1980). Institutional actors throughout U.S. history have employed strategies to

vilify target populations they deem threatening to their interests, and these same

powerful social forces tend to amplify qualities in themselves and others they deem

beneficial to their interests (Roscigno 2011). Concepts such as ideology, hegemony, and

discourse have been used to explain why subordinates submit to their own domination

and oppression, and these same concepts provide explanatory power as to how and why

superordinates go about formulating the symbolic content for interpretative schema that

shapes knowledge and cognitions within (their) subordinates (Stoddart 2007). It is

useful to discuss these concepts because they provide a backdrop to how discursive

fields functions as a constraining force and powerful resource to the 911TM and its

countermovement antagonists, respectively. The discussion in the following subsections

moves from a brief unravelling of hegemony, ideology, and discourse to an elaboration

of the conspiracy label and the discursive field in general.

*Hegemony, Ideology, and Discourse*

Hegemony is interstitial and dispersed, a web of interconnected assumptions

and physical realities that are normal and commonsense, but hegemony is not the

natural byproduct of aggregate symbolic interactions and emergent norms. Whereas the

state and its agents can use coercive force to achieve some desired end, "the institutions

of 'civil society,' such as the Church, schools, the mass media, or the family, are largely

responsible for producing and disseminating hegemonic power" (Stoddart 2007:201, see

also Gramsci 1992). While the prior definition suggests that hegemony *is* produced in

the daily routines and interactions within society, the inclusion of power dynamics provides that "[h]egemony is the assertion of a ruling ideology through cultural power mechanisms in order to dominate and subordinate other groups or classes of people" (Beach 2005). Actually, there are multiple ideologies always-already present when new members of society are socialized in the dominant culture (Johnston [1996] 2002). Each ideology becomes hegemonic to the extent that they are voluntarily adopted and abided by *and* that they reinforce or support hierarchies with asymmetrical allocations of resources (Stoddart 2007). Thus, there are multiple hegemonies in operation within societies (Grewal & Kaplan 1994; Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis 2000).

Like hegemony, ideology is defined in various ways. One scholar has it that "[a]n ideology is a more or less consistent set of beliefs about the nature of the society in which individuals live, and about the proper role of the state in establishing or maintaining that society" (Johnston 2002:13). Defined in this way, statism is a dominant ideology that "involves an enhanced importance of the state apparatus in securing the conditions for the valorization of capital at the expense of exchange relations and/or bourgeois political domination and at the expense of (always indirect) democratic forms of political representations" (Jessop 2007:234). This definition of statism is contextualized by another ideology, Marxism, which uses class as its primary analytic framework, much like feminism uses patriarchy as its primary framework to analyze society. I have moved my social movements analysis away from state-centric models, but statism as an ideological social force suggests that, discursively speaking, the state will be defended when it comes under threat or when it is outright attacked. While these examples highlight the web-like, nebulous nature of ideologies, social realty is also

a contextual factor in what ideologies will be dominant and how they will be contextualized.

Johnston (2002) provides an example of how the ideology of nationalism, or the set of beliefs that position the nation-state as a sovereign, self-determining entity at the primacy of the social world, is contextualized by authoritarian regimes. Johnston stresses that "there is nothing necessarily authoritarian about nationalism" (2002:205). "Nonetheless," he continues,

> nationalism provides a powerful vehicle for authoritarian rulers to employ in justifying their grip on power and in the attempt to secure legitimacy in the eyes of the public. It may be useful to think of nationalism in liberal democracies as a (usually) subordinate element within the broader ideologies of conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. By contrast, in authoritarian regimes, nationalism can become the dominant element in the ideology of the state. To put it another way, in the context of liberal democracies, nationalism is less an ideology than a disposition which may be present or absent within ideologies. In authoritarian systems (and certain other special contexts) nationalism often becomes *the* ideology. [italicized in original] (p. 205)

Ideologies and hegemony encapsulate the mind, leading adherents to use certain analytic schema over others. For example, statism leads people to assume the state is natural and ascendant, nationalism leads people defend their geographic homeland and attack others', racism leads people to discriminate between individuals based upon physical characteristics that take on symbolic meaning developed within classificatory systems, and Marxism leads to analyses of capitalist class power and domination with the assumption that labor is the essence or nature of the human being.

To analyze the origins, functions, and consequences of an ideology is to position oneself as not susceptible to or influenced by it. A Foucauldian critique challenges how it is that ideologies come to influence thought and behavior of others, but not one's self—a natural question from this critique is how it is that "9/11 conspiracy theorists" operate ideologically, but people who subscribe to the Bush administration's narrative of

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"9/11" are not thinking ideologically (deHaven-Smith 2010; Manwell 2010)? In order for power to work via ideologies and, at last, to be hegemonic, it must work its way throughout society in discourse, and thus producing and controlling discourse are simultaneous mechanisms of power. Carrying this discussion further, Stoddart notes that "[t]he regulation of discourse deals with who is allowed to speak on a given topic, as well as which forms of knowledge are subjugated in the production of truth" (2007:205). For Foucault (1980), power operates when knowledge and truths are created to define certain people, behaviors, and beliefs as subordinate and superordinate, but power is also present in the ability to resist truth regimes and the discourses they generate and sustain. These concepts are present in the development and deployment of anti-conspiracy discourse and the conspiracy label.

Labels are ways for one group or category of people to designate another as socially deviant based upon the presumptions from the labeling group about what is acceptable, normal, or moral. This is to say, labels function as normative descriptions, prescriptions, and proscriptions for classifying and categorizing humans as different from normal or socially acceptable people, and these are important components of exclusionary practices of Othering, marginalization, stigmatization, and social distancing (Canales 2000; Hall 1999; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin 2010; Taket et al. 2009). Social agents create rules that others are to abide by, and rule enforcers identify rule breakers, label, and sanction them (Becker 1963). Therefore, deviance is not something inherent in the beliefs or behaviors of individuals, groups, and categories of people, but is a product of societal reactions (Grattet 2011). Insofar as social control agents employ labels that, in effect, stigmatize and discredit their targets, "the labeling process involves the translation of abstract social control ideologies to local situations, which, in turn, is a

process that is contingent upon local practical knowledge and traditions, competing discourses and models available within the environment, and organizational and environmental factors and constraints" (Grattet 2011:197).  Social control ideologies is an important phrase due to how ideology relates to hegemony and discourse, for these factor into the types of discursive social control to which insider collective claimsmakers have access.

The hegemonic discourse of the conspiracy label plays off of the ideologies of nationalism, statism, and professionalism, the latter of which can be thought of as a hegemonic belief system and set of practices that reinforces distinctions between credentialed experts and laypersons (Evetts 2003).  Since governments, considered essential and paternal under the ideology of statism, are often at the center of claims regarded as conspiracy theory, and because governments are often confused or conflated with nation-states and the inhabiting citizenry via the ideology of nationalism, claims of conspiracy can be rhetorically dismissed as misinterpretations of enactments of power and misplacement of faith in an institutional pillar of society.  When producing official narratives, which tend to become dominant, governments should be considered powerful actors alongside other institutions, such as media and academia, and this becomes especially important when attempting to consider the truth-value of any given claim labeled as a "conspiracy theory" (Coady 2006a).

Proffering claims labeled as "conspiracy theories" positions one, no matter the educational or professional status, as intellectually incompetent, and this line of reasoning has its social origins in a popular news press publication by a scholarly professional (Bratich 2008; Fenster 2008).  Since around the time that the distinguished American historian, Richard Hofstadter (1964), penned his article for *Harper's Magazine*,

"The Paranoid Style in American Politics," the use of the conspiracy label has steadily grown in mainstream news and scholarly publications to a point where it appears almost weekly (Husting & Orr 2007). "Indeed," notes one analyst of conspiracy discourse, "the term 'paranoid style' is still regularly deployed by political commentators of all stripes to frame, for instance, the 9/11 Truth Movement, the Tea Party Movement, and…Occupy" (Aistrope 2013:116). Anti-conspiracy discourse and the conspiracy label are hegemonic, yet dependent upon given ideologies (e.g., statism, nationalism, racism, professionalism, etc.), and they are constructed and employed through discourses. Before moving to the topic of discourse and discursive fields, we will examine anti-conspiracy discourse and the conspiracy label in further detail.

*Anti-conspiracy Discourse & The Conspiracy Label*

Husting & Orr's (2007) content analysis of how the terms "conspiracy theory" and "conspiracy theorist" were employed in *The New York Times* and various academic publications is a key source for sociological understanding of how this particular label operates. In their analysis, Husting and Orr focus on one particular function of the conspiracy label, its tendency to shift "the focus of discourse to reframe another's claims as unwarranted or unworthy of full consideration" (2007:129). Elaborating, this team notes that the conspiracy "label functions symbolically, protecting certain decisions and people from question in arenas of political, cultural, and scholarly knowledge construction" (2007:130). Supporting this, Jones' (2010) report on her ethnography with the 911TM positions its members' statements about possible elite conspiracies against elite's statements about using conspiracy as a possible geopolitical strategy. The final analysis is that "knowledge does not have to be proved untrue for it to be labelled 'conspiracy theory'. Instead," Jones notes, "this demarcation appears contingent on the

logic of an insider/outsider binary" (2010:360), where insiders (i.e., elites and their supporters) can speak of conspiracy legitimately where outsiders (i.e., "conspiracy theorists") cannot. In the end, rhetorical devices, like the conspiracy label, used in strategies of exclusion "deflect attention from the claim at hand and shift discourse to the nature of the claimant" (Husting & Orr 2007:130).

Taking issue with the fact that "conspiracy theory" is not a term that is popularly used to theorize about conspiracies engaged in by elites, deHaven-Smith notes that, "[c]onsidered as a label, the phrase *conspiracy theory* does a poor job of characterizing speculations about political intrigue, yet the label remains popular because it functions normatively to protect political elites from mass doubts about their motives and tactics" [italicized in original] (2010:797). "Basically," states deHaven-Smith in a later work on the subject, "the term 'conspiracy theory' is applied pejoratively to allegations of official wrongdoing that have not been substantiated by public officials themselves" (2013:9). deHaven-Smith's work on the subject is revealing of the nature of the conspiracy label, including how it "preempts the normal reasoning of people when they witness a longer-than-usual series of chance events" (2013:190), leading people to compartmentalize political crimes as isolated events and view the political class in terms of deeply divided factions and atomized political actors as opposed to a network of political actors who align, at the least, along a "coincidence of interests" (Mills 2000:213, 224, 276, 288).

In order to suspect political crimes, or crimes involving political actors or payoffs, people would have to deviate from the norms established and enforced through the use of the conspiracy label. "As shown by our speech habits and observation tendencies about assassinations, disputed elections, and terrorist attacks," deHaven-Smith notes, "we are averse to talking about such events as connected in any way"

(2013:19). As a cultural phenomenon, aversion to thinking about political crimes in terms of conspiracy necessitates socialization into the socially constructed confabulation of the conspiracy label. Taking off from this, deHaven-Smith provides a passage with key insights into the discursive origins and functions of the conspiracy label:

> Americans know that voicing suspicions about political elites will make them objects of hostility and derision. The verbal slaps vary, but they are difficult to counter because they usually abuse reason. For example, in using the conspiracy-theory label as a putdown, conspiracy deniers imply that *official accounts* of troubling events are something altogether much more solid than *conspiratorial suspicions*—as if official accounts are in some sense without speculation or presuppositions. In fact, however, conspiracy deniers and debunkers are relying on an unstated theory of their own—a very questionable theory. In the post-WWII era, official investigations have attributed assassinations, election fiascos, defense failures, and other suspicious events to such unpredictable, idiosyncratic forces as lone gunmen, antiquated voting equipment, bureaucratic bumbling, innocent mistakes, and, in the case of 9/11 (to quote the 9/11 Commission, p. 339), a "failure of imagination." In effect, official accounts of suspicious events have answered *conspiracy* theories with *coincidence* theories. [italicized in original] (2013:19-20)

The same cultural climate that allows elites to theorize about using conspiracies while treating elite explanations of troubling events (i.e. political crimes) as authoritative positions claims that those things exist and are problematic for society as illegitimate (deHaven-Smith 2013; Jones 2010).

Husting and Orr provide a key passage that demonstrates the paradoxical or illogical nature of refuting claims about conspiracies by employing the conspiracy label solely because one has made claims about conspiracies. "Because conspiracies do happen," they argue

> this process is a noteworthy preemption of the scholarly and investigative process. "Conspiracy" is a category of law. Indictments for criminal conspiracy are brought and convictions made. Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, and the Enron scandal all led to indictments and convictions on charges of criminal conspiracy. Even so, these events continue to be associated with the phrase conspiracy theory, which gets 135,000 Google hits when combined with Watergate 79,300 combined with Iran-Contra, and 134,000 with Enron. Although one can demonstrate the existence of some conspiracies and disprove the

existence of others, in any given case the decision should turn on systematic study of evidence.  (2007:131)

Even anti-conspiracists, citing the same examples as Watergate and Iran-Contra, agree that conspiracies occur, but they take issue with unwarranted, demonstrably false, and/or dangerous conspiracy theories (e.g., see Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Clarke 2002; Keeley 2006; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009).  Due to the fact that (elite initiated) conspiracies do occur, claims identified as "conspiracy theories" cannot be treated *a priori* as unwarranted (Coady 2006a, 2006b); however, the truth-value of the claims identified as "conspiracy theories" suffer from the social context that powerful actors, institutions, and frames bring to perceptions or interpretations of those claims (Pelkmans & Machold 2011).

Pelkmans and Machold (2011) bring to light the fact that the elite theories of the conspiracy that developed the day of September 11, 2001, survived while alternative accounts were stigmatized.  "The reasons for these different trajectories," they argue, "can be found in the political clout that the different theories could attract, and in the ways in which the theories resonated with popular ideas about the national and international political landscape" (2011:74).  Pelkmans and Machold (2011) depict this in a figure reproduced here in Figure 6, and they explain it as follows:

> The trajectory of a theory depends on its location in a given field of power, as well as on the strength of its claim to truth.  The various ways in which theories of conspiracy are perceived as situated along two axes, the truth-axis and the power-axis can be displayed through a heuristic diagram (see Figure [6]).
>     In the top-half of the diagram we see how theories of conspiracy that are designed by the relatively powerful will be labeled along the truth-axis.  If the claim to truth is strong—for example due to an ability to muster convincing evidence—these theories will be labeled "facts."  If the evidence is debatable this will at most turn the theories into "contested facts."  (p. 74)

Foucault's (1980) truth regimes orient whether a claim will be perceived or interpreted as factually based or merely "conspiracy theory," for when a claim moves too far from

***Figure 6.*** *Theories of Conspiracy in Relation to Truth and Power*
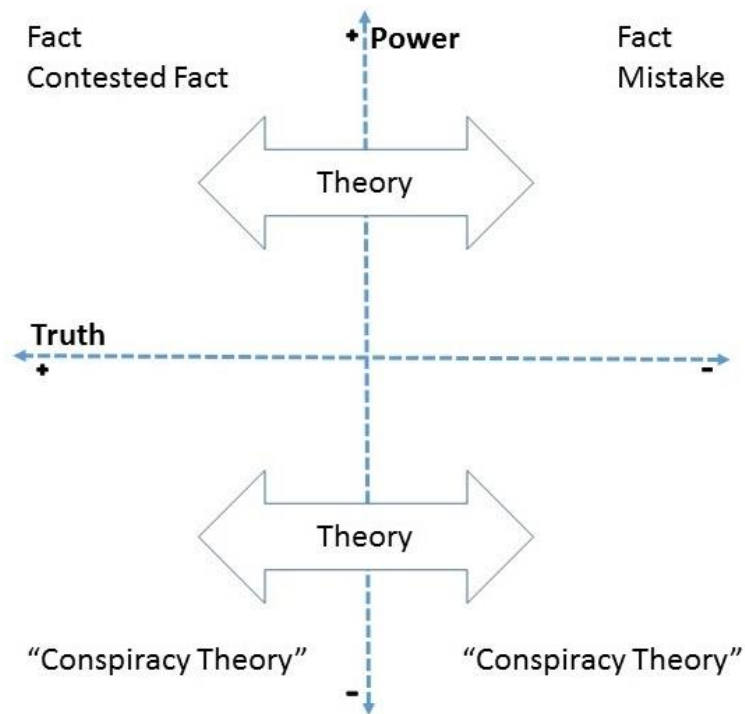


those put forward and circulated by powerful actors they fall outside the commonly accepted boundaries of acceptable discourse.

In terms or troubling events or political crimes, if an explanatory claim that does not align with those of powerful social forces is put forward by laypersons, professionals, or experts, no matter whether the evidence is scientifically informed or illogical and non-empirical, it will likely be considered "conspiracy theory." "A good example of this," remark Pelkmans and Machold (2011:75),

> are the efforts of the 9/11 Truth movement [sic]. Its authors have produced numerous volumes on the faults in the official account, developing a range of potential explanations including knowledge of, but minimal control over, the events of 9/11 (Griffin 2004), to theories that posit full-blown complicity in the events (Meyssan 2002). However, these theories continue to be easily dismissed as conspiracy theories. (p. 75)

These texts are routinely dismissed as "conspiracy theories," even though the claims within are not given rigorous attention by their critiques (e.g., see Kay 2011; *Popular*

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*Mechanics* 2011).  How and why Pelkmans and Machold's (2011) heuristic diagram

functions can be elucidated with Entman's (2004) cascading activation and cultural

congruence models.

Entman's (2004) cascading activation model, reproduced here in Figure 7, depicts

how the Bush administration's framing of the events of September 11 was adopted by

***Figure 7.***  *Cascading Network Activation*
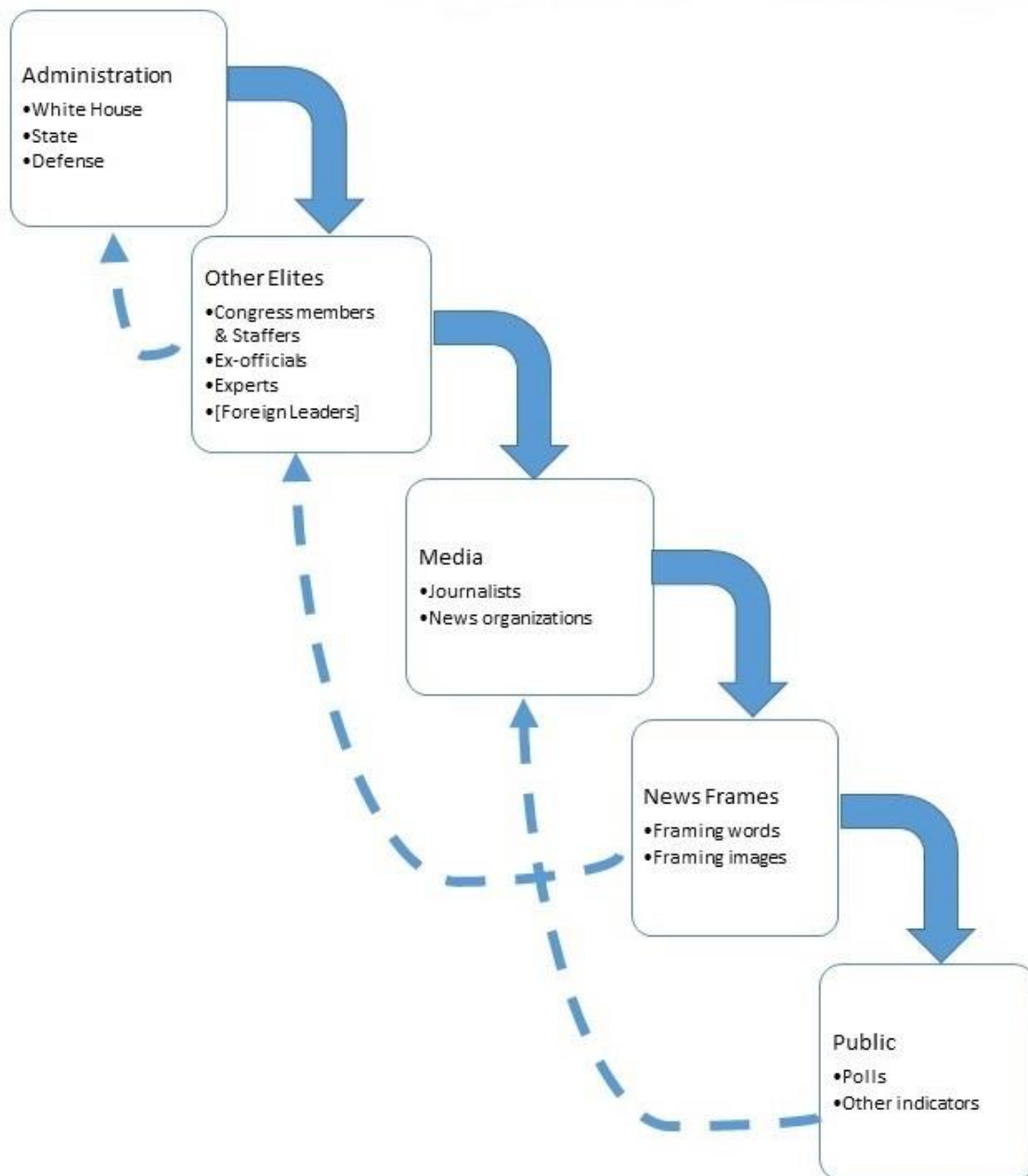
other political elites and policymakers, and then mainstream news media journalists and entire news organizations carried on these frames in their news reports and editorials. The bold arrows cascade down the model, and "each level in the metaphorical cascade also makes its own contribution to the mix and flow (of ideas)" (Entman 2004:10). Entman explains in further detail how this model depicts the development of the official frame of the events of September 11, frames that would eventually develop into a coherent, official narrative (Zelikow 2004):

> All parties to this [cascading activation] process operate under uncertainty and pressure, with mixed motives and varying levels of competence and understanding. All are "cognitive misers" who work in accordance with established mental maps and habits. They are "satisficers" who rarely undertake a comprehensive review of all relevant facts and options before responding. Few political leaders or journalists have the time to do that, and even fewer members of the public have the inclination. The implication of these cognitive limitations is that what passes between levels of the cascade is not comprehensive understanding but highlights packaged into selective, framed communications. As we go down the levels, the flow of information becomes less and less thorough, and increasingly limited to the selected highlights, processed through schemas, and then passed on in ever-cruder form. The farther an idea travels between levels on the cascade, the fainter the traces of the "real" situation are — whether the actual perceptions, goals, and calculations of the president way at the top, or the true mix of public sentiments moving from the bottom back up to policymakers. (p. 12)

The dashed lines moving back up the model indicate, with the metaphor of a cascading waterfall in mind, that much extra work is need to pump a new or alternative frame up the model, and this model is an important heuristic to keep in mind in terms of the social environment within which the 911TM operates.

This model is important to keep in mind for two reasons. First, it supports constructionist assumptions that the narrative of "9/11" was not a natural product of objective news reporting, which means that we can expect aspects of the narrative to be incomplete or false due to opportunistic motivations by vested interests. Secondly, social movements attempting to sway public opinion would be, in effect, combatting the

gravity of the news' and administration's frames, and, insofar as movements' ultimate

goals are to change public policy (Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008), the dynamics of how

difficult it is for the public to change public policy indicate that social movement's

likelihood of success is low, especially if we assume the U.S. is an oligarchy and not a

democracy (Gilens & Page 2014). This is a pillar in my assumption that the 911TM has a

low probability of success in reframing "9/11," but it is one among two others, which is

the institutional legitimation of their antagonists and their access to symbolic power

afforded by anti-conspiracy discourse that is inaccessible to the 911TM.

Since the Bush administration, elites, and news organizations began promoting

the theory that Usama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were responsible for the events of

September 11 soon (within hours) after they occurred, these claims formed a powerful

framing mechanism that shaped cultural assumptions about what happened and what

the appropriate response should have been. Entman further explains that due to the

presence in popular culture of many of the factors involved in the official framing of the

events, which include terrorist hijackers, skyscrapers, firefighters, mayors, etc., "[i]t

required almost no cognitive effort to make the connections promoted by the

administration's frame of the event. Previous information had repeatedly activated

most of the mental pathways connecting similar or identical concepts in the past"

(2004:15).

In his cultural congruence diagram, reproduced here in Figure 8, Entman (2004)

depicts how information presented in news cycles and discussed in the public that is

congruent with the official frames becomes habitually recognized as fact. Information

that is ambiguous or not recognized as officially verified is contested, much in the way

***Figure 8.*** *Cultural Congruence*

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Stimulus:   Congruent....................Ambiguous.......................................................Incongruent
Response:   Habitual              Contested                                                Blocked
                                                                    ⇧
                                                              Tipping Point
```
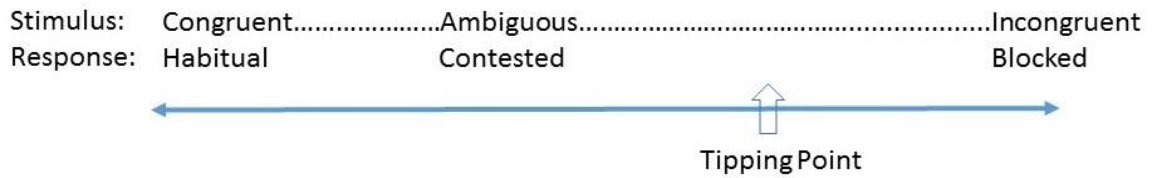
Pelkmans and Machold (2011) explain how claims that have little to no convincing evidence, but which adhere closely to powerful definitions, are considered factually mistaken but not "conspiracy theory." Finally, Entman (2004) explains how information that is incongruent with the dominant definition of the situation surrounding September 11 is altogether blocked from open public discussion and consideration by news organizations as legitimate because it is too unfamiliar, complex, and apparently irrelevant. News media have profit interests motivating them to align with elite definitions, especially when those definitions resonate with commonly held cultural assumptions or resonant frames.

"Responses to incongruent stimuli," as Entman puts it, "rather than spreading along 'logical' paths, cause a kind of mental short circuit, a detour that steers thinking down psychologically comforting pathways" (2004:14). This "mental short circuit" can be explained as cognitive dissonance, "a psychological phenomenon occurring when new ideas or information conflict with previously formed ideologies, accepted beliefs, and corresponding behaviors" (Manwell 2010:854). For many people, new information that contradicts previously established beliefs and behaviors is often rejected without serious contemplation, just as new information that supports or reinforces previously established beliefs and behaviors is accepted without due consideration. Due to the short circuiting nature of the dominant frames of "9/11" and cognitive dissonance, "[w]hen people are confronted with evidence contradicting the U.S. official account of

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9/11, it is unlikely that immediate, prolonged discussion and debate regarding evidence supporting alternative accounts will change people's minds" (Manwell 2010:858).

The 911TM actively works to engage the public in dialogue and debates about 9/11 Truth in attempts to reframe the narrative of "9/11" and supplant the dominant theory of the events of September 11, but therein lies the power of the conspiracy label. As deHaven-Smith put the matter,

> the broad-brush 'conspiracy theory' disparages inquiry and questioning that challenge official accounts of troubling political events in which public officials themselves may have had a hand. Deployed in public discourse to discredit and silence those who express suspicions of elite criminality, the label functions, rhetorically, to shield political elites from public interrogation. (p. 798)

With regard to the variety of interpretations of the events of September 11, insider statuses within contemporary U.S. society arise as a product of how closely one positions him or herself to Zelikow's (2004) *9/11 Commission Report*. If "9/11" recedes from its doxic position as an uncontested historical fact, one need only resort to the conspiracy label when they proffer the orthodoxy of the official story. Satisfactorily and summarily dismissing "conspiracy theorists" as such leaves one to pursue whatever activities were interrupted by the seemingly unwarranted discursive incursion.

Aligning with the conclusions and logic of *The 9/11 Commission Report* is unproblematic and orthodox, and only somewhat threatening to one's status is taking up unorthodox positions by treating the 9/11 Commission and/or its conclusions as problematic, errant, or misleading. In Pelkmans and Machold's (2011) model (Figure 6), this leads one into the territory of contested facts and mistakes, and in Entman's (2004) model (Figure 8), this leads one into the territory of ambiguity but not incongruity. This can be shown when the 9/11 Commission's own chairs, Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, noted that they "were set up to fail" (2007:14) due to the emotional gravity of

the events, the complexity of the U.S. government's response to the events, and the

political context of investigating the U.S. government, military, intelligence agencies, the

FAA, etc. Kean and Hamilton (2007) ultimately conclude that while the final report by

the 9/11 Commission was flawed, the organization had put forth diligent effort under

the circumstances that revealed enough information to conclude that Al Qaida was

ultimately responsible for the surprise attack. It is unorthodox to suggest that the final

report was flawed, but this position escapes perceptions or interpretations of heterodoxy

if and when one accepts the ultimate conclusion that "9/11 was an *outside* job."

Somewhat further down the line in the hierarchy of credibility is the theory that

"9/11" was the result of blowback from U.S. foreign policy (Johnson 2004; Kellner 2001).

Entman (2004) treats this position as past the tipping point of ambiguity and ultimately

incongruent with dominant cultural beliefs. This is in line, for example, with how in the

2008 Republican primary, then-Presidential candidate, Rudolf Giuliani, publicly

chastised his fellow candidate, Ron Paul, for making the "extraordinary statement…that

we invited the attack [of September 11] because we were attacking Iraq," as Giuliani

framed it (iRonPaul.com 2007: 2:45-3:05). However, this represents only one of the two

dominant political parties in the United States, and one of the staunchest ideological

supporters/defenders of the Republican Party, Anne Coulter (2011), claims that the left,

progressives, and/or the Democratic Party are conspiracy theorists for supporting such

conclusions. Lastly, because Entman (2004) completely ignores alternative accounts of

explaining "9/11" that go beyond blowback theories to suggest that agents within the

U.S. government were complicit in carrying out and covering up the actual events of

September 11, we have a further sign that blowback theories constitute unorthodox

statuses relative to the heterodoxic status of 9/11 Truth. That fact that alternative

accounts of September 11, such as those put out by the 911TM, are missing from

Entman's (2004) analysis, is also another sign of the need to broaden social scientific

investigations into what is typically considered taboo intellectual territory.

Taking off from Husting and Orr's (2007) and Pelkmans and Machold's (2011)

analyses, one critical review of cultural studies texts (see Birchall 2006; Bratich 2008;

Dean 2009; Fenster 2008) that directly address the 911TM shows that these rule creators

and enforcers (Becker 1963) "[classify] 9/11 skepticism in one of two ways:"

> by assuming the label "conspiracy theory" applies to all 9/11 skepticism, they
> condemn even demonstrable falsehoods to what Orr and Husting call the "freak
> show" of postmodern American culture; and by focusing on how the theories are
> able to circulate, rather than whether the theories possess any epistemological
> legitimacy, they avoid questions regarding the very definition of conspiracy
> theory." (Truscello 2011:33)

The reference to Husting and Orr's (2007) use of "freak show" comes from the following

paragraph in their article, which is premised on their agreement with cultural studies

analysts who argue that the cultural and socio-political climates in contemporary U.S.

society serve as incubators for delusional paranoia (i.e., "conspiracy theories"):

> Instead of questioning the coherence of "conspiracy theorizing" as a category, or
> pointing to the reframing power of the phrase, these analyses come dangerously
> close to reifying it. Lumping together alien abductees, the *X-Files*, and concerns
> about corporate or political corruption erases distinction between varying
> concerns of conspiracy, treating them all as part of the "freak show" of American
> culture in the postmodern moment. Scholarly analysis must engage the
> micropolitics of the term. While this work on conspiracy has shown us the
> importance of cultural contexts for understanding many different kinds of
> phenomena, it must *also* attend more systematically to the micropolitics of the
> term: its ability to reflexively tarnish identities of widely disparate claimants and
> to place limits on what can be uttered in the public sphere. [italicized in original]
> (p. 143-144)

The micropolitics of the conspiracy label plays out in the discourse produced by its use

in practice and its reification in academia, media, and public discourse, and thus the

conspiracy label defines a hegemonic discourse that leads to taken-for-granted

assumptions about what can be thought in private and talked about in public.

The conspiracy label operates as a mechanism of "boundary maintenance by constructing the stigmatized other and her/his conspiracy theory. The category *conspiracy theory* polices the borders of legitimate versus risible statements, and intellectually competent actors versus paranoiacs" [italicized in original] (Husting & Orr 2007:141). As another sociologist has stated the matter, "[c]onspiracy theory as a convenient rhetorical rebuttal has been culturally constructed as quick refutation of otherwise distasteful, never mind factual ideas" (Asadi 2010:74). Moreover, "the conspiracy theory label is simultaneously a tool for those in control, and an obstacle for those challenging the political status quo" (Pelkmans & Machold 2011:77). As a principle for regulating speech acts about troubling events involving political elites, the conspiracy label "equates intellectual nonconformity with irrationality and seeks to enforce conformity in the name of reason, civility, and democracy" (deHaven-Smith 2013:40). Anti-conspiracy discourse, as referred to by one analyst not cited in the previously discussed research (see Asadi 2010; Husting & Orr 2007; Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011), is "notable for its intolerance of dissenting interpretations, and its self-assignment in the constant policing and disciplining of 'conspiratorial' thinking and paranoid ideas" (Goshorn 2000:9).

Under a dramaturgical analysis, anti-conspiracists position themselves before their audiences as protagonists defending against the irrational aggressions of antagonistic paranoiacs. If we adopt this point of view, "we do not adopt the point of view of the participants in the drama (conspiracy theorists, targets of conspirators, and the public — dupes, the general public, and the true believers). Rather," continue Wexler and Havers (2002:255),

> we take the view of the rational analyst as an objective voice whose directorial assumptions put meaning, motive, and purpose into the plot.
> From the rational analyst's perspective, the plot is simple. The trigger for action and thus the origin of the story rests in the inability of some people to live in a world where problems stem from a complex etiology. (p. 155)

Acting as rational analysts, anti-conspiracists propose to their audiences to have an authoritative and objective analysis of the social world. Conspiracies might occur, but journalists eventually uncover these plots; there are kernels of truth in conspiracy theories, but conspiracy theorists are more often wrong, and potentially dangerous. As part of the anti-conspiracy discourse (Bayat 2006; Goshorn 2000), this point of view forms a threat to communicative action because it closes the marketplace of rational discourse to the exclusion of certain claims and claimants (Habermas 1984). "Variants of the label *conspiracy theorist* become dangerous," argue Husting and Orr [italicized in original] (2007:147).

> The mechanism allows those who use it to sidestep sound scholarly and journalistic practice, avoiding the examination of evidence, often in favor of one of the most important errors in logic and rhetoric—the ad hominem attack. While contest, claim, and counterclaim are vital to public discourse, we must recognize that "democracy is a fragile and delicate thing" (Denzin 2004) [sic] and mechanisms that "define the limits of the sayable must continually be challenged. (p. 147).

As the main component of the 911TM's discursive field, anti-conspiracy discourse has several characteristics that limit the 911TM's ability to engage in unobstructed communicative action, and it has broader implications for the discursive landscape of society in general.

Predating the events of September 11, thus indicating that this analysis has predictive validity, Goshorn's (2000) analysis of cultural studies texts (see Dean 1998; Fenster 1999; Marcus 1999; Melley 2000) revealed the existence of an anti-conspiracy discourse prepared for the existence of the 911TM. First, Goshorn posits the following:

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> There is a debilitating critical problem in accepting the reified terminology that would construct a discourse of "paranoid thinking and conspiracy theory" as it has long been employed by commercial media in both news coverage and fictional forms, by official government spokespersons, and by the few academic scholars who have addressed the area until recently. Only when one realizes how far we have been led along the "paranoia and conspiracy" trail can we see how this represents a sort of discursive capture, or the clever taking in hostage of larger, potentially more disturbing discourses by a smaller, more aggressive but more comforting set of assumptions. The latter, or *anti-conspiracy discourse*, performatively discredits and dismisses the former while simultaneously calming immediate anxieties and displacing latent fears introduced by alleged conspiracy narratives. Psychological explanations here serve purposes of psychological containment. [italicized in original] (2000:8)

Dating back to Richard Hofstadter's (1964) article in *Harper's Magazine*, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," along with Tom Bethell's (1975) editorial in *The Washington Monthly*, "The Quote Circuit," a plethora of articles from psychologists has arisen to define and measure beliefs in "conspiracy theories" (Abalakina-Paap et al. 1999; Brotherton 2013; Brotherton & French 2014; Brotherton, French & Pickering 2013; Darwin, Neave & Holmes 2011; Douglas & Sutton 2011; Goertzel 1994; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham 2010; Van Prooijen & Jostmann 2013; Wood, Douglas & Sutton 2012) and to uncover the social psychological origins and consequences of them (Douglas & Sutton 2008, 2011; Jolley 2013; Jolley & Douglas 2014; Swami 2012; Wood & Douglas 2013). While Bethell's (1975) article generated a research program that inspired scientists and pundits to reify the existence of a psychological process thought to lead to "conspiracy theorizing" (Ebel-Lam et al. 2010; Hugh 2007; Leman & Cinnerella 2007; McCauley & Jacques 1979), Hofstadter's (1964) article generated thousands of citations that continue to regenerate his thesis; for example, of the 1,251 citations of Hofstadter's (1964) article currently (as of June 12, 2014) listed on Google Scholar, the most recent is Jolley and Douglas's (2014) article, which suggests that conspiracy theories are politically and ecologically detrimental.

Goshorn's analysis of anti-conspiracy discourse is instructive in yet another way:

*Anti-conspiracy* discourse, which credits itself with a superior reason untroubled by any paranoia about contemporary events, can be considered as a form of reactionary foundationalism, defensively covering its own implication within a threatened or imploding consensus culture – or that which stands behind the shield of responsible thinking in order to fight off the criticisms of the "irresponsible" others. In the few cases where academic critics have managed to comment on the resurgence of conspiracy theory, it is most typically viewed as a vulgar method employed in the popular understanding of complex problems for those whose analytical skills are "politically impoverished," suffering from "poor" sources of information, while the academic's own perceptions and often less-informed sources remain unexamined. [italicized in original] (2000:11)

Current research agrees with Goshorn's (2000) assessment (see Aistrope 2013; Asadi 2010; deHaven-Smith 2013; Husting & Orr 2007; Jones 2010; Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011; Wexler & Havers 2002), and it has been suggested that anti-conspiracy discourse is not only restrictive for the 911TM but detrimental to society. I am not in this dissertation concerned with any other claimants than the 911TM, its members, and its countermovement antagonists, and I am not interested in claims other than to the empirical realities of September 11 and to the use of the conspiracy label. However, many anti-conspiracists who target the 911TM claim that it is inherently or in effect an anti-Semitic movement (see Aaronovitch 2010; Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Kay 2011; Shermer 2011; see also Phillips & Huff 2010), and due to these types of practices in operation even before the 911TM existed, "there remains an active leftist fear or latent paranoia of being associated with anti-Semitic analyses and paranoid interpretations of internal subversion common to many extreme-right groups" (Goshorn 2000:17).

*Discourse and Discursive Fields in the Context of Multi-Institutional Politics*

The discursive work of the conspiracy label is divisive and derisive, and its continual employment since mid-1960 has led to a communicative landscape, or discursive field, that hinders rational discourse and serious investigation into

catastrophic events like those of September 11 (deHaven-Smith 2010, 2013). The concept of "discursive fields" has two main components. Referring to written or spoken communication based upon reasoning or argument (as opposed to intuition or revelation), the *discursive* aspect entails the claims that are made about the existence or non-existence, legitimacy or illegitimacy, reliability or unreliability, and the general or specific meaning of some person, group, category, place, thing, idea, event, occurrence, process, action, or state of affairs. The *field* component of the term refers to the cultural *terrain*, socio-cultural *environment*, and/or socio-historical *context* within and out of which discourse takes place. "Field," in this case, "is a mesolevel [sic] concept denoting the local social world in which actors are embedded and toward which they orient their actions" (Sallaz & Zavisca 2007:24). "Such fields," states Snow

> emerge or evolve in the course of discussion of and debate about contested issues
> and events, and encompass not only cultural materials (e.g., beliefs, values,
> ideologies, myths and narratives, primary frameworks) of potential relevance,
> but also various sets of actors whose interests are aligned, albeit differentially,
> with the contested issues or events, and who thus have a stake in what is done or
> not done about those issues and events. These various sets of actors include, in
> addition to the social movement in question, one or more countermovements, the
> targets of action or change, the media, and the larger public, which includes
> clusters of individual who may side with the protagonists or antagonists as well
> as those who are indifferent and thus constitute bystanders. (2004a:402)

Upon this field, the drama of the collective claimsmaking by antagonists and protagonists plays in front of multiple audiences with varying levels of interest (Benford & Hunt 1992, 2003).

An important point in the concept of fields is that they are at once dynamic yet structural, fluctuating within parameters (Bourdieu 1977). When applied to discourse, this means that language and communication are static and dynamic, shifting with social contexts and the goals and interests of social actors (van Dijk 2009). Based on his

discussion of the discursive turn in framing issues for social movement scholarship,

Steinberg summarizes his point that he has

> offered a model of discursive repertoires that partially supplants the current theory of framing. Based in dialogism and sociocultural psychology, this model portrays the production of meaning as a dynamic and often conflict-riven process tied to particular socio-historical contexts and patterns of interaction. It depicts the ideological processes of mobilization and action as dynamic discursive processes in which collective actors vie to control the meanings within repertoires of discourse. The instability within discourse itself and the essentially contested character of its meanings both create opportunities for contesting hegemony. (1998:862)

The "current theory of framing" in the study of social movements that Steinberg (1998) refers to is rooted in Snow et al.' (1986) classic article on frame alignment processes and micromobilization, which was one of the earliest studies to elaborate on the concept of framing in the context of social movements research (Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000). Discursive fields are thought to form the backdrop or context within which frames are constructed, articulated, contested, accepted, and/or rejected (Snow 2004a). Therefore, when social movements and countermovements package their claims into meaningful schema, this framing is contextualized, constrained, and provided opportunity within and as a growing part of a discursive field.

In his later work, Steinberg (1999) empirically demonstrates that collective actors can be constrained or aided by the symbolic or cultural structures, i.e. the discursive fields, within which they are obliged to operate. Taking off from Steinberg's work, Snow brings to our attention "that framing processes and contests figure prominently within discursive fields related to social movements and the collective actions with which they are associated" (2004a:402) because the symbols, beliefs, values, ideologies, myths, and narrative that compose the non-material aspects of these fields shape what can be said and meaningfully interpreted. Snow (2004a) relates discursive fields to the

kindred embedding concept of discursive opportunity structures (Koopmans & Olzak 2004), which are the cultural, social, and political contexts that allow a given frame to resonate in a given socio-cultural context (Ferree 2003). Conversely, threatened political elites mobilize, drawing upon their capital (financial, political, social, cultural, and symbolic) to form discursive obstructions for social movements that inhibit their ability to effectively raise public support (Shriver et al. 2013). In the case of the 911TM, "9/11" has already been typified by political and media elites (Altheide 2006; Connor 2012; Entman 2004; Krebs & Lobasz 2007; Meyer 2009) to the extent that it typically induces those who uphold the official narrative to rebuff those who do not as un- or anti-Americans (Robinson 2005, 2008) or as "conspiracy theorists" or "conspiracists" (Berlet 2009; Kay 2011; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009; Taibbi 2008).

Discursive fields, or the "terrain(s) in which meaning contests occur" (Snow 2004a:402; Spillman 1995:140-1; Steinberg 1999:748), relate to what Thornton et al. (2012) call field-level logics. Institutional fields are those face-to-face or mediated social interactions in which symbols and practices are carried out across institutional orders, which is to say that the logics of one order carry over into or are contested by another. For example, institutional fields are active when news outlets reports *for* federal agencies, U.S. Departments, and/or the Pentagon in order to maintain market share and professional legitimacy (e.g., see Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston 2008). However, this example "does not limit the field concept to only the institutional orders of the state, the professions, and market competition, or to a particular level of analysis" (Thornton 2012:62). Field-level logics transcend institutional logics in that the former contain dispersed, societal-level theories, frames, narratives, and practices, or what Thornton et al. call "vocabularies of practice" (2012:149). These "coalesce into a common language

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for sensemaking, decision making, and mobilization around categories of practice"

(2012:149), which provide the common ground upon which social actors can

communicate about present, material and more abstract phenomena. For our purposes,

this means that regardless of the evidence put forward or the credentials or expertise of

the speaker, the conspiracy label operates across institutional contexts to explain deviant

speech acts and their interlocutors without resolve to rational debate and analysis of

empirical claims.

     "Communication and joint attention to field-level practices [are] at the heart of

[Thornton et al.'s (2012)] model of field-level institutional logics," and thus I treat

Snow's (2004a) definition of discursive field as interchangeable with this level of the ILP.

Institutional fields are those symbolic and social terrains in society where human and

organizational actors and agents take one another into account in practices that

materialize the symbolic or ideational components of institutional orders (Thornton et

al. 2012). Institutional logics form when symbolic representations are transferred to

meaningful practices in social contexts, and field-level vocabularies of practice, or

"systems of cultural categories" (Thornton et al. 2012:168), emerge "as social groups

establish shared narratives to both frame and make sense of organizing practices." "One

or, more typically, multiple institutional logics develop at the level of institutional

fields" (Thornton et al. 2012:148), and field-level *vocabularies of practice*[xxv], such as the

conspiracy label, transcend the logics of any given institutional order by providing the

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xxv Thornton et al. (2012) "define vocabularies of practice as systems of labeled categories used by members of a social collective to make sense of and construct organizing practices. For example, 'share price,' 'institutional investors,' 'S.E.C.,' 'auditing,' and 'accountability' are examples of the labeled categories of the vocabulary of corporate governance in the United States" (159).

discursive content of the theories, frames, and narratives that form and are used in the emergence of institutional fields.

Thornton et al. refer to the presumably shared knowledge, beliefs, and suppositions as the "common ground" between social actors, which "makes it possible for a speaker or writer to coordinate what is meant and what the audience understands" (2012:159). While they recognize the complexities of communications processes, they do not cite any literature pertaining to discursive fields or even to discourse[14]. Instead, they build their own theoretical agenda, including how they treat theories, frames, and narratives, which they use with specific reference to field-level logics. These are important to discuss because they constitute the framework of the content of what social movements and countermovements dispute. While Thornton et al. (2012) recognize the complexity of contextualized and cross-level emergence of meaningful practices of communication, at no point do they cite or refer to it as dialogic. "Rather than assuming communication as the sending and receiving of messages whose meanings are evidence and unproblematic," argues Steinberg (1999), the conception of discourse under a dialogic view "offers a model of discourse as a dynamic, conflict-ridden cultural terrain" (748). The ILP is dynamic, and includes the logics of theories, frames, and narratives, but including the concepts of discourse, discursive fields, and dialogism will explicitly tie these components into Thornton et al.'s (2012) explanatory model of society, and, again, Thornton et al.'s (2012) ILP informs Armstrong and Bernstein's (2008) institutional politics approach and Benford and Hunt's (2003) marketplace of public problems.

The most abstract of the symbolic sense-making schema are theories, which "provide general guiding principles and explanations for why and how institutional

structure and practices should operate" (Thornton et al. 2012:152). Theories, such as the theories of government, democracy, the economy, capitalism, the military, war, and conspiracy, provide general assumptions (usually rooted in ideologies) and specific formulations about how societal components should be arranged and what these components should do or look like. Theories are distinguished from institutional logics because theories need not be isomorphic to actually existing institutional orders, they can be ideal typical, such as theories of "free markets" and "democracy." An important point about theories is that as they diffuse widely throughout society, "they become self-fulfilling, increasing the adoption of practices consistent with the theory" (Thornton et al. 2012). Thus, the generation of the conspiracy label in news articles that theorized the existence of a "paranoid style" (Hofstadter 1964) and that conspiracy explanations "are popular because people have an irrational need to explain big and important events with proportionately big and important causes" (McCauley & Jacques 1979:637; see also Bethall 1975) have led to the reification (Berger & Luckmann 1966) of a theory that explains beliefs in conspiracies antagonistically instead of sympathetically.

Theories can be used in different ways, depending on their intended purpose. Whereas scientists, economists, historians, politicians, and laypersons (i.e. non-experts, non-professionals) use theories to explain how society and its constituents operate, cultural entrepreneurs, or those who attempt to change or control society (see Becker 1963), engage in *theorization*:

> Theorization is engaged in by cultural entrepreneurs' use of stories and rhetorical strategies to expose or ameliorate contradictions and to manipulate moral and pragmatic legitimacy through cultural symbols. The goal of theorization is to obtain resources and mobilize support, justify possible solutions and new courses of action, and translate interests to often-diverse constituents. (Thornton et al. 2012:110)

The theorization of "conspiracy theories" by anti-conspiracists nearly always positions

them as implausible, unfounded, unverified, unproven, unwarranted, and untrue

(Goshorn 2000; Husting & Orr 2007; Truscello 2011). This is problematic, in the first

place, because the labeling of a belief as "conspiracy theory" or a person as a

"conspiracy theorist" is a product of ant-conspiracy discourse that has the inherent

drawback of being ideological (i.e., unscientific) and irrational (i.e. based upon the *ad*

*hominem*). Moreover, the push by anti-conspiracists to dismiss certain beliefs because

they have been or can be labeled as "conspiracy theories" poses the risk of committing a

Type-II error, which is retaining the assumption that an event was not the result of a

conspiracy when it actually was (for discussions on this, see Coady 2006a, 2006b; Bayat

2006; Buenting & Taylor 2011; Pelkmans & Machold 2011).

As sense-making schema within institutional orders and fields, theories purport

to explain a given arrangement of social reality, however, theories exist in tandem with

other vocabularies of practice, narratives and frames. "*Narratives* give meaning to

specific actors, events, and practices, whereas frames are general symbolic constructions,

applicable across a wide variety of practices and social actors" [italicized in original]

(155). In this dissertation, I have referred to the "narrative of '9/11'" with some

reflection, for there were specific events on September 11, 2001, that actually occurred in

objective, capital-R reality—to note, I reject strict constructivist and strong relativist

positions, but I do not claim that I or any single individual possesses complete

knowledge of the events of September 11 (see Bhaskar 2011). There are competing

theories for how and why the events of September 11 occurred, and the events are now

referred to as "9/11," which is a word or term used to refer to an entire narrative of the

events of September 11, the surrounding circumstances, and to the consequences. This

narrative developed, in a general sociological sense, like all other narratives, "in the process of social interaction as a result of processes of cognition, communication and negotiation" (Thornton et al. 2012:155). Narratives take their form from actors with interests rooted in the logics of one or more given institutional orders (e.g., profit, power, prestige, etc.). As actors will generally rely upon institutional logics and vocabularies of practice to formulate and/or iterate a narrative, social movements will attempt to frame a narrative in a given way so as to achieve movement goals (Snow & Benford 1988), and these practices are accomplished through the construction and articulation of coherent theories that explain how social things do and/or should operate.

For social movements, we might think of these field-level logics of the discursive field as "repertoires of contention," in political processes language (McAdam et al. 2001:137), or they can be conceived of as "scripts" and "interpretations," in dramaturgical language (Benford & Hunt 1992:38, 47). These social stocks of knowledge guide movements in how to communicate between members, to audiences, and with antagonists when they protest, recruit new members, confront their opposition, and seek or oppose social change in other ways. Since field-level logics also provide cultural material for the opposition to social movements, culture at this interinstitutional level is both enabling and constraining. Social movements attempt to pull members of the public into their discursive fields through the use of framing techniques, with the goals of reframing a narrative and, in the end, replacing an extant theory, but countermovements attempt to counteract these efforts. Whereas social movement's and their members tend to be perceived as social outsiders, countermovements tend to represent insider-claimsmakers who can rely upon the legitimacy of institutional orders

under attack by social movements, making their counter-claimsmaking and counterframing efforts all that more effective (Benford & Hunt 2003; Thornton et al. 2012). The discursive field of the 911TM, though, contains the conspiracy label and anti-conspiracy discourse generally, which tilts the field in the favor of the movement's countermovement antagonists.

**Synthesis**

Benford and Hunt's (2003) model of interactional dynamics on the public problems market place between and among claimants (see Figure 5) does not account for the roles that multi-institutional politics (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008) and field level logics (Thornton et al. 2012), or discursive fields (Snow 2004a), play in shaping, constraining, and opening opportunities for counterframing and reframing strategies employed by countermovements and social movements. Presented in Figure 9 is the left hand section of Benford and Hunt's (2003) model depicting interactions between and among insider (countermovements) and outsider (social movements) collective claimsmakers. Both claimant domains have been placed within a circle to indicate the presence of a discursive field. This is not meant to imply that there is only one discursive field, nor that discursive fields only apply to movement-countermovement dynamics within the larger model of public problems. It is plausible and likely that each possible unit of analysis (i.e. from one to all claimant domains and all combinations of their interactions, including constituents of each domain) from Figure 5 has one or more discursive fields that shape, constrain, and open opportunities for discourse for those claimants. For example, there are discourses within claimant domains and at least one produced between claimants. However, when taking into account the cultural myths, values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, and other practices that these claimants can utilize in

***Figure 9.*** *Movement-Countermovement Dynamics within a Discursive Field*
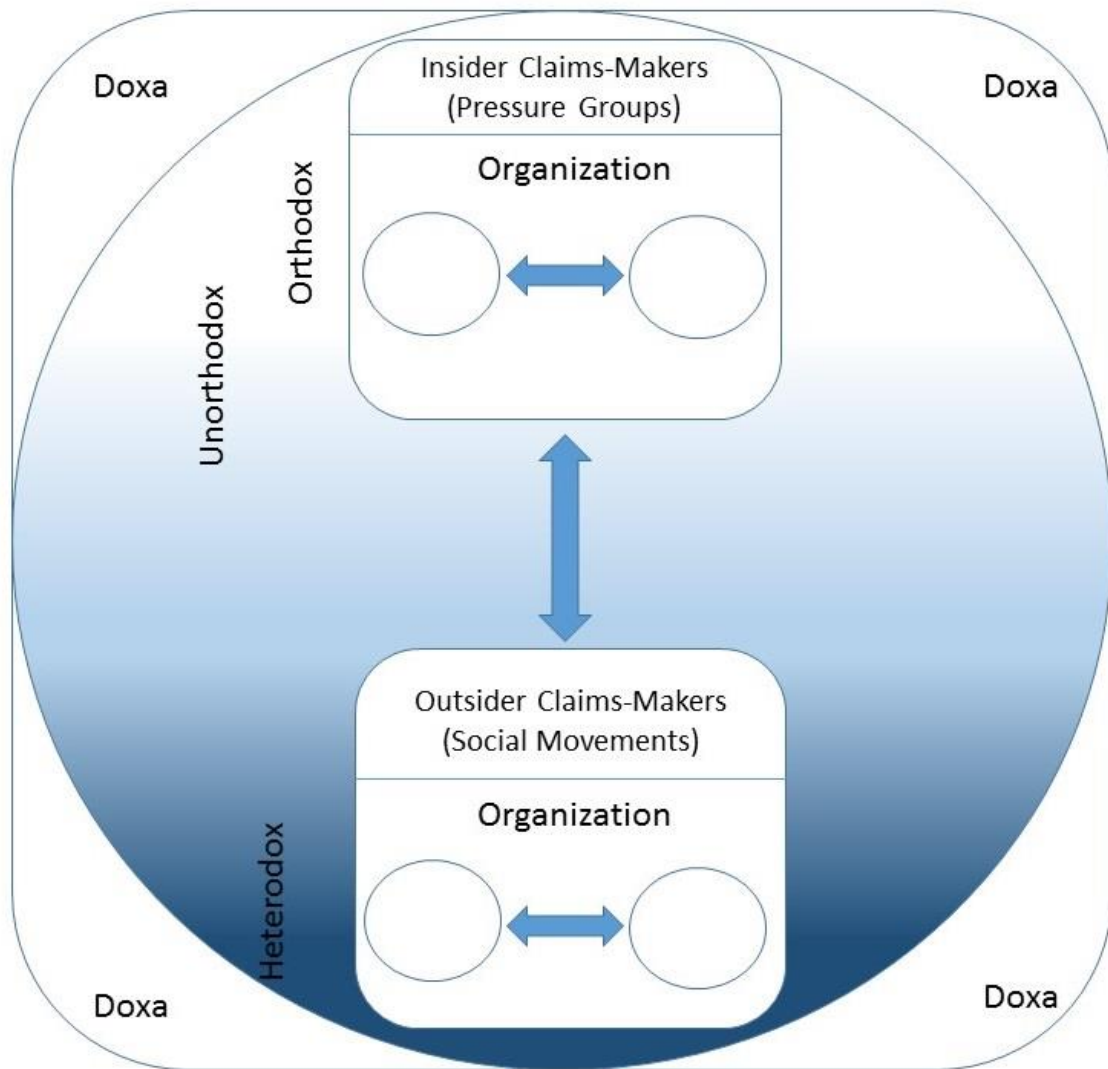


their interactions, we expand our notion of discourse (talk and texts) produced between and among claimants to the level of a discursive field (the total collection of talk and texts in context of broader socio-cultural and socio-historical factors).

For this sociological pilot study with the 911TM, and with the initial proposition of the analytic utility of discursive fields within a multi-institutional public problems marketplace, as it might more broadly be stated, I have simplified the analysis in this dissertation.  This simplification is designed to highlight the existence of the discursive

field as a part of movement-countermovement dynamics so we can see what its nature is likely to look like for social movements generally. The unit of analysis for this dissertation is the discursive field itself, and thus our focus is on discourse *among* both claimant domains, not between them. Discourse is the product of competition through communication between two or more parties over the meaning of some given thing. The goal is to gain hegemonic dominance through framing claims in ways that are ideologically coherent and resonant with audiences. Claims can range from orthodox, to unorthodox, to heterodox, depending not on the truth-value of the claim, but its ideological value, along with the credibility of the claimant, in the perception or interpretations of audiences. Gaining hegemonic control over a narrative or discourse would likely transfer a previously heterodox or unorthodox claim up the hierarchy of credibility, thus establishing it in a position of dominance and as a likely target for discursive assault.

Insiders, having formed into a countermovement, use and defend orthodox, and sometimes unorthodox, claims in attempts to defend the status quo and extant ruling systems of authority. Outsiders, coalesced into social movements, often seek some type of social change that works against the status quo and/or the interests of ruling authorities, and this is often the case in NSM challenges to relations of ruling (Smith 1990), truth regimes (Foucault 1980), and field-level logics of the interinstitutional system (Thornton et al. 2012). As collective claimsmakers, each of these claimants form discourses around how best to achieve their goals, and as competing claimants in the public problems marketplace, each set of actors employs rhetorical and counterrhetorical strategies to the degree necessary to achieve those objectives (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003). In doing so, the actors draw upon culturally resonant scripts or frames that produce and

are contextualized by the emergent discursive field (Benford & Snow 2000; Steinberg 1998). While not existing *sui generis*, discursive fields are a social reality that can be parsed into their component parts, dynamics, and trajectories.

The shaded area of Figure 9 indicates the dynamic nature of discursive fields, which are "inherently partly disorderly or fuzzy, since the actual structuring of meaning is done *in use*" [sic] (Steinberg 1998:856). Like Pelkmans and Machold's (2011) model of theories of conspiracy (Figure 6) and Entman's (2004) diagram of cultural congruence (Figure 8), the shaded area indicates that a tipping point exists in terms of the perceived or interpreted credibility of a claim. However, claims are issued, rebutted, reformulated and reissued, etc. etc. etc., both in real time interactions and asynchronously across texts, and the perceived or interpreted truth-value of a claim depends on one's standpoint in relation to ruling systems of authority; as Pelkmans and Machold (2011) discuss, conspiracy theories are measured in proximity to power, not truth. Unlike Pelkmans and Machold (2011), and Entman (2004), I posit not distinct cutoff point or clear demarcation of where or when a claim will transfer from orthodoxy, to unorthodoxy, to heterodoxy. Similar to how Best's (1990, 2008) and Benford and Hunt's (2003) models of claimsmaking do not represent a process, but rather designate stakeholders and relationships, the gradient in Figure 9 represents the dynamic and dialogic nature of anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Snow 2004a; Steinberg 1998; Truscello 2011).

Social movements seek social change, sometimes threatening multiple institutional orders in the process. When actors representing multiple institutions come to defend threatened interests of their respective positions against a given social movement, their aggregated actions form into a countermovement opposition. When such a diverse array of institutions are represented, a social movement will likely receive

counterclaims and counterframes rooted in the politics of multiple social institutions (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Thornton et al. 2012). Regardless of the logics that inform counterclaims or counterframes, countermovements can draw symbolic power from dominant cultural resources, such as, in the case of the 911TM, the conspiracy label. In this regard, the discursive field within which the 911TM operates is poised against their efforts, especially due to the gravity of the dominance of the commonly accepted narrative of "9/11" (Altheide 2006; Entman 2004). Anti-conspiracy discourse colors as "conspiracy theory" what members of the 911TM have to say to their audiences, whether issued by a scientifically informed, and credentialed professional or uttered by a street activist with imperceptible amounts of expertise. Due to the " discursive capture, or the clever taking in hostage of larger, potentially more disturbing discourses by a smaller, more aggressive but more comforting set of assumptions" (Goshorn 2000:8), that anti-conspiracy discourse performs, what the 911TM says *is* heterodoxic; but such is the nature of how "conspiracy theory" operates in relation to truth and power in contemporary U.S. society (Pelkmans & Machold 2011).

Before proceeding to the next chapter, it should be mentioned that doxa, or the implicitly accepted, unconsciously defended, unstated assumptions, and/or what are sometimes plainly "unknown unknowns," does not necessarily refer to unreferenced or uncited information. Problem denial and ignoring are tactics movements and countermovements use to frame, counterframe, and reframe claims (Benford & Hunt 2003); if something goes unmentioned, it is not necessarily a sign that hegemony, ideology, or the powers of discourse are or have, in effect, positioned some piece of information as doxic. For example, defending the orthodoxy of the official story of "9/11" does not entail citing Zelikow's (2004) 9/11 Commission Report because of the

widely shared assumption of its authoritativeness. Not citing this report in defense of the orthodox narrative of "9/11" positions it as doxic, but when it comes into conscious discourse, and when it is used to defend the dominant narrative, it enters the discursive field becomes as part of the orthodoxy. Doxic cultural ideations can be drawn upon for orthodox, unorthodox, or heterodoxic claims; it is the discursive buffer between the meso-level of discursive fields and the more macro-levels of the logics dispersed among the interinstitutional system. Thus, is a vital nature of discursive fields highlighted, i.e., they are products of conscious, known communicative (inter)actions and contestations.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Data for this project were gathered from three sources, face-to-face interviews with street activists in two sessions, an extended online participant observation, and texts in the formats of books, news articles, journal articles, and video archives. Face-to-face interviews were collected on September 11, 2011 and 2013, in from members of the 911TM gathered for street rallies in Manhattan, NY. Interviews and field notes were recorded with a voice recorder, and interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes. The online participant observation took place with "The 9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook group over a year starting in 2012. I made posts open to the entire group, I commented on certain posts, and I observed certain posts and comments that I "liked." Texts from countermovement antagonists were collected incrementally throughout this project's development as they were mentioned by participants, observed in online discussions, and discovered during literature reviews for this dissertation. Like data from interviews and the online participant observation, I reduced the population of texts to exemplars that highlight anti-conspiracy discourse within the discursive field of the 911TM. Methodologically, studying the 911TM and its discursive field brings about certain methodological concerns that are worth meditating over before moving into a nuanced discussions of data gathering and analysis.

**Methodological Considerations**

Methodologically, this project combines grounded theory methods with critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis. In terms of grounded theory, I posed an open-ended question for each activist in 2011 at the outset of our interviews, I asked clarifying and probing questions, and then I used responses from participants to generate questions for subsequent participants. My participant observation with the 911TM Facebook group in 2012 was partially built on my 2011 interviews, and, while data produced from it contributed to questions for my 2013 interviews, it also stands alone as one third of my data collection efforts with the 911TM. In 2013, I opened interviews with the same type of open-ended question format as in 2011, but I was much more purposive in my endeavors to produce data about key issues I had discovered during my engagements with the movement since 2011. Finally, in order to include countermovement antagonists in this study, I collected texts from social actors who have explicitly targeted or attempted to refute or debunk claims from the 911TM. I use these texts to show the counter-claimsmaking and counterframing activities that position the 911TM as an incredible site of polemic interlocution.

I have used grounded theory data collection methods to allow the members of the 911TM to "speak for themselves as agents of social change" (Denzin & Lincoln 2011:249), but as compared to attempting to build a novel theory that explains the 911TM from the ground up, my study gravitates toward critical ethnographic research methods in three ways. First, I have framed my research in the theoretical lenses of social movements and social problems literature (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008), which precludes the analytic neutrality of formal grounded *theory* (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Secondly, my focus is on the entire cultural group of the

911TM and their interactions with the public and their antagonists, which positions the study in more of an ethnographic approach than a grounded theory approach that would be focused on the specific beliefs and behaviors of a theoretically selected sample. Lastly, as a member of the 911TM, I have taken an advocacy position, which means that analytic neutrality in my choice of questions to ask, topics to focus on, and the way I portray the data was and is not adhered to. What is presented is an insider's sociological perspective on the 911TM in terms of discursive obstacles placed in its way.

Grounded theory methods date to Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss's ([1967] 2012) book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, and have since taken off into a variety of approaches ranging from formal, objectivist methods (Corbin & Strauss 2008) to the constructivist approach that "not only theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation" (Charmaz 2006:130). While I am not here formulating a theory of the 911TM from the ground up, for this study we should keep in mind that both the 911TM and their antagonists present their own interpretations of the narrative of "9/11" and explanations of the events of September 11, but that my own (re)presentation and analysis of these facts are interpretations from just one standpoint. My goal for this study, as is the goal generally for grounded theory methods, has been to provide an explanation of the 911TM that is rooted in their own words and texts, in which case I avoided entering the field with prefabricated, structured interview questions based on theoretically-informed categories. Rather, I wanted data to emerge from the movement in its own terms (Glaser 1978).

Of the different approaches to and strategies within grounded theory (Kelle 2007), my own approach to gathering data falls most closely to Glaser's (1978), which,

like the basic questions that inform the sociological perspective (Berger 1963) and the sociological imagination (Mills [1959] 2000), is essentially guided by the broad question of what is going on with the phenomena at hand? The way I approached this in real time with movement members was to pose an open-ended question, "What brings you to ground zero today?" I then pursued clarification questions with participants, and I used prior interviews to inform subsequent ones. This comes close to what Dick (2007) describes as the convergent interviewing process in grounded theory studies, which is a dialectic technique that probes the agreements and disagreements between interviewees, and then it moves toward an emergent theory of action through comparing responses. The types of memo writing, coding, and constant comparison techniques that inform most grounded theory methods (Holton 2007; Kelle 2007) were not used in 2011 or 2013 because interviews were collected in quick succession, making note writing impractical, and my purposive as opposed to theoretical sampling techniques (Morse 2007) also brought me closer to ethnographic research than a true grounded theory process.

My intensive, unstructured interviewing strategies have brought me close to some of the most active members of the 911TM, allowing me to dig deep into finding out, for example, what motivates some people within the movement to travel across the entire continental United States in order to spend one day in protest at the September 11 memorial services at "ground zero." My overall strategy has also led me to uncover what drives some of the movement's members to engage in the daily routine of posting, discussing, and debating issues in the "9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook group, and in both situations I have recorded the thoughts, beliefs, stories, narratives, and theories of members of the 911TM as they exist in their natural state. All along, I have treated members of the 911TM as indigenous knowledge workers (Birchall 2006; Denzin 2007;

Jones 2010), and so my motivations to help them further build self-determination and empowerment in the face of powerful countervailing forces detracted from my ability to build a theory that can be read as value-neutral, objective, and analytically disinterested in the outcome, but that has not been my goal. As much as I wanted movement members to provide data for which I had no previous theoretical category in mind, I did choose certain questions over others because my intention with the movement had been one of critical inquiry, which does not attempt "to produce a more 'valid' categorization but to avoid objectifying and misrepresenting research subjects" (Gibson 2007:450).

In tandem with performing grounded theory methodologies to collect my data, I have treated this project as an exercise in critical ethnography (Madison 2012). It has been noted that grounded theory and ethnography are useful to use in tandem when the practicalities of an investigation call for the strengths each offers researchers in the field (Timmermans & Tavory 2007). In the sites of my data collection with the 911TM, both in Manhattan and on Facebook, my participants were (and still are) part of groups who interact on a regular basis, sharing language, attitudes, values, and beliefs unique to the subculture of 9/11 Truth. Ethnographic research involves immersing one's self in the day-to-day lives of participants in order to uncover and elucidate the meaningful behaviors of a (sub)cultural unit, which includes their use of language, their social interactions, their construction and uses of artifacts, as well as their engagement in daily routines and rituals (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994; Williams 2011). In the early part of the 20th century, Robert Park (1925), for instance, encouraged his students and other sociologists to remove themselves from their offices and to go out and explore real-time social interactions as part of their data gathering techniques, which I did, but now in the 21st century researchers can do just that without having to remove ourselves from our

desks and computers (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012). Following movement members around Manhattan, like following thread posts on Facebook, allowed me access to the lived reality of movement members, and, as a movement member myself, I was often able to satisfy my needs as both a researcher by observing what was going on with my participants along with my desires as a movement member to affiliate with others engaged in attempts to disrupt the hegemony of the narrative of "9/11."

As compared to formulating categories from my data by continuously going back to the field and sampling for theoretical purposes, as is the prescription for a grounded theory study (Charmaz 2006; Corbin & Struass 2008), I began to concern myself with how and why the 911TM operates within a social environment largely hostile or unsympathetic to its beliefs and behaviors. Naturalistic inquiries (Denzin 1971), such as this one, involve engaging with participants in social settings where behaviors are authentically performed (as compared to behaviors that occur in a controlled, laboratory setting), and while I can say that this occurred in both 2011 and 2013 in Manhattan, my participant observation with the 911TM Facebook group is squarely within the camp of ethnographic research. My participant observation moves this study beyond the scope of grounded theory methodologies because it was during this time that I began to impose issues and concerns that I had as a researcher and as a member of the movement. For the most part, as I began to invest myself more heavily in the movement and treat it as a primary source of my scholarly work, I began to find myriad countervailing sources that, upon my own and other movement members' scrutiny, socially construct the movement and many of its beliefs in a way that delegitimizes otherwise credible claims from movement members, such that the exclusion of the collapse of WTC 7 from *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Zelikow 2004) is a

clear indication that members of the U.S. government and major news media engaged in a cover up of the events of September 11.

As compared to realist ethnography, which is typically written in the third person in attempts to portray participants in an uninterested voice without the researcher's standpoint taken into account (Van Maanen 1988), my approach is that of critical ethnography. "Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain…" [italicized in original] (Madison 2012:5), and in this case I treat members of the 911TM as the recipients of undue labeling and stigmatization through the use of the conspiracy label by the movement's countermovement antagonists. Critical ethnography diverges from realist and positivist-oriented programs in that the researcher acknowledges his or her position or orientation toward the subject matter with the intention to take a stance on a social issue, and (s)he also engages in emancipatory practices, which entail certain kinds of rigor that are sometimes unnecessary in positivistic qualitative research. For example, Patti Lather (1986) develops the concept of catalytic validity, which is the effort of the researcher to develop self-understanding and self-determination in participants that can help move them to better work against injustices. Many of my posts in the 911TM Facebook group were made with the intention to inform as well as elicit responses; while many of my posts were made in regard to my need to clarify issues movement members brought to light in the field in Manhattan, at other times my goal was to alert the movement to the workings of their countermovement antagonists and to gain insight into movement members' knowledge and interpretations of their opponents. These efforts, though, were largely based upon what movement members had already told me, and so I rarely, if ever, exposed the 911TM to new information.

In such a light, I have gathered interviews with and observations of movement members that allow us to understand how it operates as compared to how its opposition claims it operates, and it is through this type of intention on my part that I have deployed qualitative methods for critical social purposes (Cannella & Lincoln 2009). In line with this, Madison describes how critical ethnographers seek change for the groups for which they advocate:

> The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and obscure operations of power and control. Therefore, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from "what is" to "what could be." [italicized in original] (2012:5)

Therefore, the critical components of this project are designed to counter certain narratives constructed by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists about the movement. In describing the circumstances and procedures of my data collection below, I provide the necessary methodological insight into the origins of statements that I position against discourse of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, and in revealing my alignment with the 911TM I expect caution from readers skeptical of we who challenge the received narrative of "9/11" and contest the official explanation of the events of September 11.

In order to ascertain the arguments of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, I have engaged in a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of texts they have produced (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2003). Sociological discourse analysis is often concerned with how organizational and institutional structures facilitate, delimit, and produce styles and content of discourse, as well as how discourse is produced by and produces selves and social interactions (Grimshaw 2003; Heller 2004). CDA bridges the

gaps between the use of language in verbal and written interactions at the micro-level of social reality with the power imbalances and inequalities inherent within macro-levels where, for example, media outlets and scholarly communities produce texts about subjects. It is the job of CDA to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions that allow various forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, etc.) to go unnoticed, unchallenged, or unfettered within various social institutions (e.g., media, politics, military, science, corporations, etc.) (Linde 2003; van Dijk 2003). Especially when applied to the social institution of media, which is inclusive of audiovisual and print news, books, magazines, journals, Internet blogs, and entire websites, CDA is used to uncover how language is used to frame an issue, person, or category of people, and the data can be in the form of texts that include, for example, an entire book or news channel down to how a particular fragment of discourse takes form (Cotter 2003).

One major issue that should be addressed before concluding is the influence of my position with regard to how my data have been selected. Interviews and participant observations are considered "researcher-instigated data." Whereas the existence of these data depends on the efforts of a researcher to elicit participation from human subjects, "naturally occurring data" are collected unobtrusively and "constitute specimens of the topic of research" (Peräkylä 2005:869-70). Often times, researchers are interested in the content of interviews, such as the arguments made about a particular issue or how meaning is constructed, but naturally occurring data *are* the very empirical phenomena in which a researcher is interested. Researcher-instigated and naturally occurring forms of data exist on a continuum, with the polls separated by the degree to which the researcher influences what data are produced and collected. Data collected through interviews with the 911TM in Manhattan and participation with their online

forum on Facebook would not exist without *my* questions and efforts, which entails

certain methodological considerations as to how my situatedness and standpoint affect

the data I have gathered (Kincheloe & McLaren 2005; Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis 2002).

Naturally occurring data, such as the texts of the 911TM's countermovement

antagonists, exist as cultural artifacts in their own right and only needed to be identified

as a category and collected for analysis, which introduces different methodological

issues than are present in researcher-instigated data (Lynch 2002; Speer 2002).

Data that are "contrived" (Speer 2002), "researcher-instigated" (Peräkylä 2005),

or "naturally organized" (Lynch 2002) are a consequence of a researcher's efforts to

collect, organize, interpret, and report information collected from and/or about other

human beings, social interactions, social artifacts, and social situations.  Thus, for these

types of data, there is always a component of the researcher's point of view present at

some point in the research process.  Data presented in this project reflect my position as

a white, heterosexual, middle class, U.S. American male (among other statuses,

including my age, political affiliations, religious affiliation, etc.), as well as those of a

sociologist and member of the 911TM.  My initial venture to collect interviews in 2011

was inspired by a sense of professional and personal curiosity about what (other)

members of the 911TM would say about their lived practices.  As I continued asking

questions to and receiving answers from movement members, in concert with reading

texts from their/our countermovement antagonists, I found it necessary to take an

explicit position with relation to the movement, to the narrative of "9/11," and the

official explanation of the events of September 11.  Therefore, this project provides

insight into the interworking of a radical social movement, an analysis of its interactions

with its most active opponents, and a report from a movement member who has

employed critical sociological methods to explain the state of a new social movement that challenges a narrative central to the operation of power and domination at the beginning of the 21st century.

What should be considered methodologically weakest of my methods is the identification and selection of texts to analyze from the 911TM's countermovement. Intellectual organizers within the 911TM are aware of the collective efforts of its countervailing social forces (e.g., see deHaven-Smith 2013), and so 9/11 Deniers is not a contrived category of data and neither are their texts. When attempting to provide a coherent representation of the discursive field of the 911TM, I had not personnel or professional interests in representing either it or its countermovement in neutral terms. This logic can be read to bleed over into my selection and presentation of texts. I made no attempts to systematically collect or analyze these texts, but rather I selectively pulled quotes and passages that highlight the existence and operation of the 911TM's discursive field from exemplars of its countermovement. I discuss this issue in further detail below, but it is worthwhile to explicitly state that this study is not a systematic analysis of the content of the 911TM's claims and frames nor is it for the counterclaims and counterframes of its countermovement. This study simply shows that discursive fields are important factors to consider when analyzing movement-countermovement dynamics.

Ethnographic, grounded theory, and discourse analysis methods diverge and coverage in how analysts decontextualize, or code and interpret, and recontextualize data in efforts to interpret and represent data from samples as descriptive and explanatory of some given phenomenon (Alldred 1998; Starks & Trinidad 2007). These methods have been employed in a way that triangulates on data necessary to answer the

research questions of how the conspiracy label functions within the discursive field of the 911TM. In further detail below, I discuss the procedures for each of the three data collection techniques or methods I employed, as well as further methodological issues for each approach that concern this study.

**Face-to-Face with the 9/11 Truth Movement**

On September 11, 2011 and 2013, in Manhattan, NY, I audio recorded face-to-face interviews with 911TM activists. On both occasions I used snowball and convenience techniques to recruit participants from their street rallies, which are public demonstrations that involve advocacy or protest without the use of violence (e.g., terrorism would not count) or noncooperation (e.g., strikes and boycotts would not count) (McPhail & Wohlstein's 1984). From 10 a.m. until about 4 p.m. on September 11, 2011, I collected 20 interviews with members of the 911TM at or around the intersection of Fulton St. and Broadway, across from St. Paul's Chapel, in Manhattan, which is approximately two blocks away from the WTC complex. After the rally, movement members at this site began to disperse and decide where to move to next (I was among them while they deliberated), and I offered to share a cab ride with one member to their next location. I collected this person's interview on our way to Times Square, and I collected one more interview in this new site before traveling with this person to the Unitarian Church of All Souls on Lexington and East 80th St, which is on the Upper-East Side. After the premiere screening of *9/11: Explosive Evidence, Experts Speak Out* by AE911Truth (see ae911truth 2012) at the Unitarian Church, I traveled by subway with my Times Square interviewee to an after party they became aware of that was occurring at a tea shop called The Yippie Cafe on 9 Bleeker in Greenwich Village. I collected seven

more interviews at this site until about 2 a.m., and this concluded my interviews for 2011.

In 2011, my sampling of 911TM activists began while en route to "ground zero," or the location of where memorial services were enacted to pay homage to the impact of airliners and the deaths of thousands of people at the WTC complex precisely ten years prior. Police-enforced roadblocks had formed a perimeter several blocks away from ground zero, and, while walking toward where I suspected there to be people engaged in memorial service and rallying activities, I found a lone member of the 911TM wearing a movement-related t-shirt reading "9/11 Truth Now." This person, carrying a sign on a wooden handle about eight feet tall with the words, "Investigate 9/11. Honor the fallen by relentless pursuit of the truth," was my first interview from the 911TM. While interviewing this person we were joined by a bystander who invited themselves to join our conversation, indicating that they had flown in from Singapore to join the 911TM in its activities for the day. I asked if either person knew of any gatherings of the movement, and it was suggested that I follow the first person toward the WTC complex, which is where I located a gathering of approximately 75 activists.

This rally was located in front of the Chase bank at the corner of Fulton St. and Broadway across from St. Paul's Chapel, where 9/11 memorial services were taking place. Barricades lined the sidewalks, helmeted police officers were directing pedestrians and traffic, and upon my entrance to this location I noted several activists holding a red banner with yellow lettering reading, "The Bush Regime Engineered 9/11." Another large poster held by activists read, "Revolt! Against the U.S. Gov. Traitors" (see Figure 10). Several smaller signs referencing the Remember Building 7

campaign and AE911Truth's analysis of WTC 7 were on display by various individuals.

*Figure 10.*  *9/11 Truth Movement Signs of Protest at "Ground Zero," September 11, 2011.*



On my way to cross the street, I could hear one person shouting, "This is not about 9/11! This is about today, about the lies alive today!"

After being approved by a police officer to cross to the activists' side of the street, I began collecting interviews at this site by identifying people wearing and/or holding 911TM-related artifacts.  Several interviews took place in this fashion, with me approaching a person wearing a t-shirt and/or holding a sign related to the movement, but I eventually interviewed people not clearly indicated as part of the rally but whose presence was longer stayed then the continuous stream of pedestrians.  Most of these bystanders were not part of the movement, but they indicated they were curious about

the movement's activities before or upon their arrival at the scene. Although my sampling techniques cannot be said to be representative of the 911TM as a whole, I did interview a significant portion of those in attendance at the rallies and after party, which amounted to 31 total in 2011, and I attempted to vary my selections based on movement signifiers (types of artifacts) as well as by race, gender, and age.

Two years passed, during which time I engaged in an online participant observation with the 911TM, and on September 11, 2013, I traveled back to Manhattan to interview movement members gathered for "a rally at ReThink911's towering Times Square billboard at 5:20pm—exactly 12 years to the minute since Building 7 fell" (ReThink911 2013b). The ReThink911 rally was held within barricades on West 47th St., a side street just off Times Square and 7th Avenue. This street conference included several celebrity speakers from within the movement who spoke to between 100 and 150 people. Starting at about 4:45 p.m., I collected 10 interviews until the rally ended at about 7 p.m. I used data from my 2011 interviews and online participant observations to inform my non-standardized interview questions in 2013. I was also interested in the significance of the ReThink911 campaign and if movement members believed it was a sign of success for 9/11 Truth and/or the 911TM, and so questions for several participants were directed at those affairs. I was in the middle of an interview while the event ended, and my interviewee asked a passerby to take a photo of the two of us. This impromptu photographer was holding a sign reading, "RememberBuilding7.org," and so I requested and was obliged with an interview. Our exchange took place while I followed this person to a small crowd of 911TM members engaged in street activism in the middle of Times Square just a few dozen yards away.

About 20 911TM activists had skipped the ReThink911 after party/ies, having instead continued to practice one of the movement's main goals, which is to get people to "investigate 9/11," a slogan that appears on several 911TM artifacts. These activists' efforts included a large display of about a dozen poster boards placed on the ground near a busy walkway (see Figure 11). I did not take the time to document in detail the

*Figure 11.* *9/11 Truth Movement Street Activism on Times Square, September 11, 2013.*
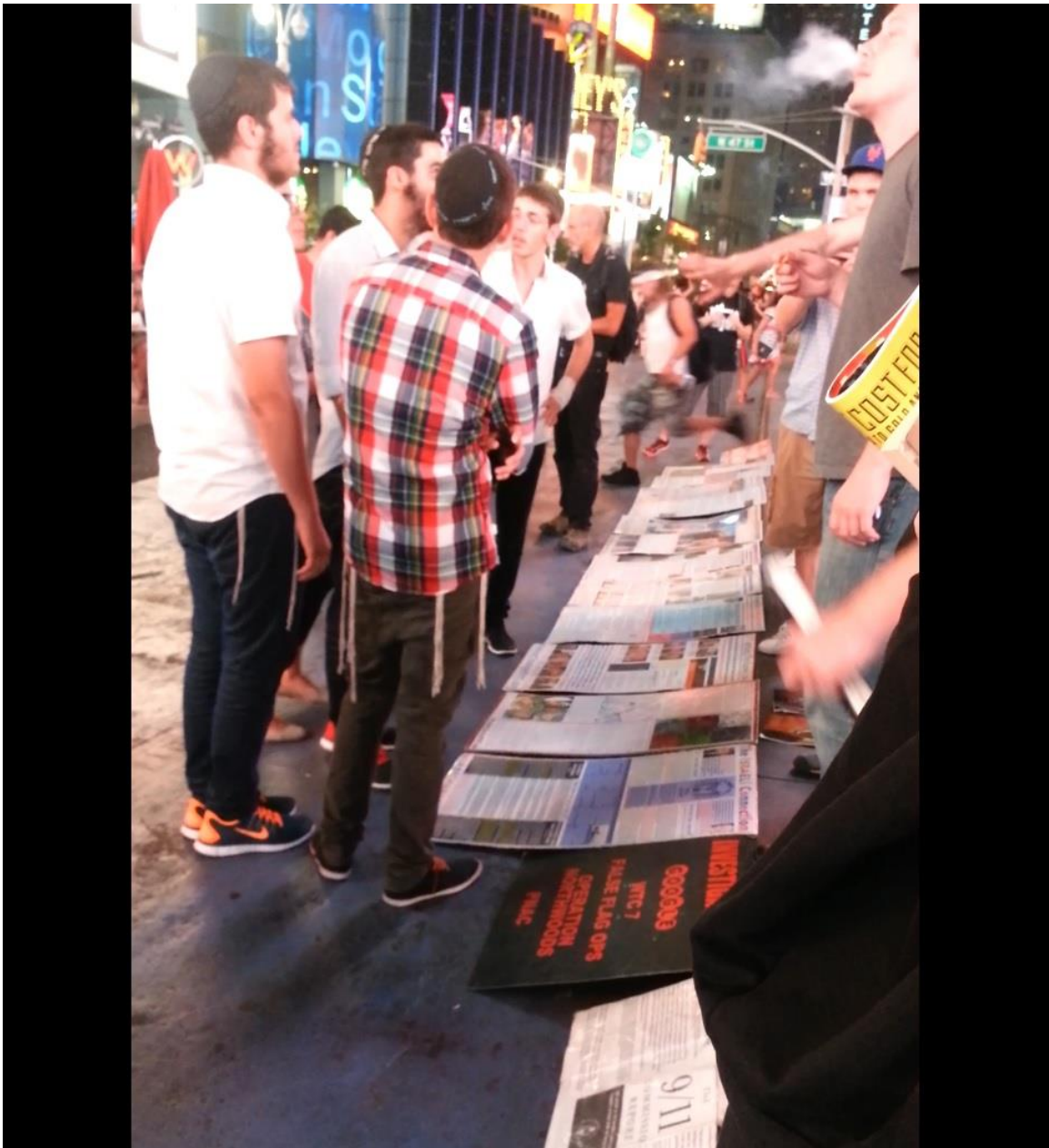
text-based information, but the pictures on the poster boards included photographs of the WTC complex, WTC 7, and images of the miniscule red/gray chips found in the dust of all three collapsed WTC buildings, which is claimed to be indicative of the use of nanothermite purportedly used to demolish the skyscrapers (Harrit et al. 2009). Several of the activists engaged passing pedestrians in conversations, all of which seemed amicable except for two incidences I noticed that involved raised voices, shouting, and body gestures that indicated aggravation and/or exacerbation on the part of the public (e.g., pacing, pointing, waving and flailing arms, etc.). I collected nine more interviews with movement members at this second site until we dispersed together at about 11 p.m. In all, I audio recorded 20 face-to-face interviews from my two sites in 2013.

Recruiting participants for interviews was a fairly straight forward process. On both occasions members of the movement used conventional tactics from the repertoires of contention typically employed by social movements (McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow 1994; Taylor & Van Dyke 2004; Tilly 2004). These included synchronized chanting of slogans (e.g., "9/11 was an inside job!"), carrying signs and banners with slogans (e.g., "Investigate 9/11") and pictures (e.g., of the Twin Towers and WTC 7), wearing t-shirts with slogans and pictures (e.g., a hand gestured peace sign in the form of a silhouette of WTC 1, 2 & 7 with the tag line "9/11 Truth for Peace"), distributing literature in the form of pamphlets and DVD's, engaging the passerby in demonstration-related verbal interactions, hosting speakers on platforms with amplified audio, and marches with many of the same techniques. By virtue of these types of public displays, it was clear to me who was engaged in 911TM-related activism, and this is how I identified potential participants that I knew to be part of the 911TM. In both 2011 and 2013, two movement members offered to help me with recruiting participants after our interviews, which

indicated that while I had tried to remain detached from insider politics with movement members, I had in some way given off the impression that my interviews were worthwhile enough for them to volunteer these services. Four people from 2011 and two from 2013 were recruited via other movement members.

While most of my interviewees in 2011 were white and male U.S. Americans, which seemed to be the demographic majority in attendance, I interviewed one person from Singapore, another from Vietnam, two from Great Britain, one from France, one African American, four females, and people ranging from 18 years of age up to their late 60's to early 70's. Domestically, movement members were typically from the NYC area, but California, Texas, Oklahoma (not including myself), Illinois, and Pennsylvania were represented in the sample as well. In 2013, I interviewed four females and two Hispanics, but other demographic information was not noted, which adds to the selection biases inherent in such sampling techniques (Walgrave & Verhulst 2011). Based upon comments offered after presentations I have given on the topic of the 911TM, a key deficiency of this study is that I have not been interested in the demographics of the movement, nor have I documented with intention the political affiliations and ideologies of movement members.

Whereas the movement itself can be viewed as a politically left-oriented mobilization against the "Bush Regime," as was clearly indicated in at least one of the protest signs in 2011, and whereas it has been treated as a primarily Democratic (Taibbi 2008) or progressive-liberal (Coulter 2011) phenomena, it should be noted that these analyses represent the 911TM's antagonists, and it remains an empirical question as to the movement's demographic composition. Jones (2012), for instance, notes a strong libertarian stream within the 911TM, but recognizes that the movement is not easily

defined by conventional political labels.  Assessments by some of the its countermovement antagonists propose that the 911TM's members' political affiliations and ideologies range from traditional Republican-Democratic (Berlet 2009) to less traditional forms, such as radical feminism and Marxism (Kay 2011), but, again, these remain empirical questions to be answered with systematic research methods.

If participants offered their party affiliation or political ideology during interviews, it was recorded, but only as part of the emerging data that movement members offered during interviews.  Many members, for example, indicated that they had been "Bush supporters" before they discovered 9/11 Truth, and other people indicated that they knew they had been lied to about the Iraq war by the Bush administration and that is what led them to investigate the origins of the War on Terror.  Movement members did not seem to be interested in discussing conventional politics, though, and so I did not pursue that line of questioning in detail.  If a particular topic or issue seemed to be important to a movement member, I would trace a line of questions out for the particular topic or issue, and if and when a particular line of questions seemed to elicit repetition in or no responses, I would ask a participant about statements made in prior interviews or to clarify a statement made previously in their own interview.  Thus, conventional, Republican-Democratic, progressive-conservative politics were not discussed at any great length during my 2011 or 2013 interviews.

All interviews in 2011 began with a phrase equivalent to "What brings you to ground zero today?"  Small variations of this, such as, "The only question I have is…," and, "I just have one question today, and that is…," were added to my basic research question, but after answering the initial question most participants were willing to entertain further questions.  In 2011, the questions I asked were based upon what people

were saying to me, the signs they were carrying or information they were speaking about, or information that I had gathered in prior interviews. Even though I had gained information about such things as WTC 7 prior to my interviews, I probed such issues and information with movement members in order to record multiple interpretations of it. These questions were typically posed with a statement such as "…and what is WTC 7," "what is the significance of WTC 7," or "could you tell me more about WTC 7?" While I continued these types of grounded interviewing methods in 2013, I was primarily interested in the ReThink911 campaign, if members believed the movement to be effective or successful, and about information and issues I had learned while engaged in my online participant observation of the "9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook group.

On both occasions, several movement members stated that they enjoyed my interview questions, and, in conjunction with the fact that some movement members offered to help me recruit more participants *after* their own interviews, I believe that I "present[ed] a caring and concerned attitude, expressed within a well-planned and encouraging format" (Holstein & Gubrium 2003b:10). Insofar as my interview questions were "well-planned," I had actually intended in 2011 to formulate a grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967) in which my initial question would be open-ended to the extent that it would allow the participant free range within which to explain their motivations for their activities on that day. As compared, for example, to opening my interviews with questions about why they joined the movement or who they believed was truly responsible for the events of September 11, or leading them to that question or directing them toward some other prefabricated topic, my opening question was at once specific to their behaviors that day and it could also be perceived as a general question about their beliefs because. This opening question inspired a general set of responses about

members' involvement with the movement and beliefs about the events of September 11 with no clear pattern emerging other than that encouraging fellow citizens to "investigate 9/11" and bringing out the "Truth" of what happened on September 11 were driving factors in participation.

Interviews from 2011 ranged from 33 seconds to 32 minutes, with interviews increasing in length as the day progressed. The shortest interview I gathered, which was the eighth interview I collected from the 911TM, proceeded as follows:

I:      The one question I have is what brings you to ground zero today?

P[1]:   Nine eleven truth!

I:      Nine eleven truth?

P[1]:   That's it, man.

I:      And what is…

P[1]:   Too many unanswered questions; I don't believe the official story!

I:      Is there anything else that you feel is important to add, that people might want to know about?

P[1]:   Yeah, how do three towers fall straight down in one day? You can convince me one tower can. You might be able to convince me that two towers can, but you'll never convince me of three: It's a mathematical impossibility. They fell straight down through the path of most resistance.

I:      Is there anything else?

P[1]:   [shakes head, walks away]

In the last two lines you will notice that I concluded this interview with an open-ended question about whether or not the participant had anything else they would like to add. I concluded all interviews with this technique to, as much as possible, gather data that was based upon what my participants, individually and collectively, had to offer as compared to what I intended, encouraged, or influenced them to say. In several instances this technique extended the interview for several minutes. As I gathered more

data, I had more questions from previous interviews, but my own sense is that interviews increased in length latter in the day because movement members were stimulated from the day's events.

Interviews from 2013 were on average much longer than in 2011. The shortest was 43 seconds, but the longest was one hour twelve minutes. Many of the interviews lasted around 20 minutes, and two were about 45 minutes in length. I attribute this to the fact that I had spent time analyzing my first set of interviews in addition to engaging in an online participant observation with the 911TM, and so I had several questions that, although I had not specifically formulated them beforehand, I believed I would be able to work into my line of questions. I was also much more prepared to confront certain topics, such as the theory/ies that no airliners were actually hijacked and/or crashed into the Twin Towers, Pentagon, and/or the Shanksville, PA field (i.e. the so-called "no planner theory/ies), and the theory/ies that "Jews," "Israelis," the "Mossad," "Zionists," and/or "neoconservatives" were behind the attacks—these theories vary depending on their source, and they are not accepted in part or totally by all members of the 911TM. In this way, my 2013 interviews were less grounded than the first set, although I did continue to employ the open-ended opening and closing question techniques with each participant. On several occasions I *was* prepared to ask pointed questions about content discussed on the "9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook group.

"The aim of the interviewer," Holstein and Gubrium say, "is to derive, as objectively as possible, the respondent's *own* opinions of the subject matter in question, information that the respondent will readily offer and elaborate when the circumstances are conducive to his or her doing so and the proper methods are applied" [italicized in original] (2003b:10). In terms of objectivity, several of my participants asked about my

own beliefs of what happened on September 11, and this indicates that I had asked questions in a way that often led respondents to express their own subjectivity without me leading them to a given conclusion or response. If participants felt the need to ask about my beliefs, then this is a good indication that I did not let on during my interview what my beliefs were. Grounded interview questions should be designed to "explore and examine research participants' concerns and then further develop questions around those concerns" (Charmaz 2003:312), and this was accomplished by posing open-ended opening and closing questions as well as using my participants' responses to inform questions for subsequent participants.

As part of a group with a collective identity and shared experiences, it can be expected that individuals would likely have similar stories about their awakening to 9/11 Truth and about their interactions with others in attempting to get them to investigate 9/11. As one example, when one member noted that their beliefs and activities related to the 911TM caused them physical, psychological, and social distress, I began asking other participants if they experienced something similar. Drawn from the end of an interview, here is how this exchange typically proceeded:

I:      One person I interviewed earlier mentioned that when they were going through their awakening, or when they first learned [the truth about 9/11] that they actually felt physically ill; they couldn't eat, they couldn't sleep. Did you feel any physical differences or changes?

P2:    Honestly, I would say yes. I felt a lot of anxiety, and I'm not a very anxious person, I'm usually a very even-tempered type of guy, and I remember when this stuff was first presented to me to the point where I couldn't deny it anymore, I got very anxious. I mean, I felt afraid. I felt like pacing, and calling people and like, "Do you know this stuff! Do you know this stuff!" I mean just, you know, I *couldn't believe it*! You know? So, yes, I would say that I definitely experienced some physical anxiety as a result of learning the truth about nine eleven.

I:      At this point I can't think of any more questions directly, unless you have something that you think is important that you would like to add?

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P2:     No, sir.

The interview techniques I employed in 2011 and 2013 resulted in many lengthy interviews that provided much rich and detailed information about the 911TM and its members.  As Jones (2010, 2012) points out of the movement, though, the 911TM has a strong online presence in addition to its offline activities, and members' online behaviors were explored with my participant observation of the "9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook group.

**Observing and Participating with the 9/11 Truth Movement Facebook Group**

While face-to-face interviews allow researchers to respond in real time to participants' statements and body language, gathering data online has many benefits. The need to share the same physical time and space with participants is eliminated with online research, which reduces many costs to researchers and opens the potential variety of participants to nearly anybody across the planet with an Internet connection (Mann & Stewart 2004).  Email, SMS texting, chat rooms, message boards, and social networking sites comprise much of the online world where qualitative researchers can pursue data, and these data can be gathered through secondary and primary content analysis, discourse analysis, interviewing, focus groups, and, as I have engaged in, participant observation (Boellstorff et al. 2012).  Extending to more than a year, I engaged in a participant observation with the "9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook group where I observed ongoing interactions, posed questions, and responded to group members. Several opportunities and challenges came about during this phase of my research, including discovering several people with whom and issues with which I was previously unacquainted.

Whereas face-to-face interviews involve standardized and non-standardized interview formats, such as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured questions that one or more interviewers ask directly to one or more interviewees, "participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:1). In the context of online participant observations, the researcher "plays with" (Boellstorff et al. 2012:69) virtual communities in ways that are more difficult or impossible in the offline world. For example, whereas I could only travel to Manhattan twice due to budgetary and time constraints, I could easily and regularly connect with members of the 911TM online. While in Manhattan, I could not participate in the rallies as I was busy collecting as much data as possible before needing to fly home to attend to my courses on each of the following two days. When online, though, unless I indicated that the reason I was participating was for research purposes, which I did from time to time in accordance with IRB standards, I appeared as just another active member in the group.

Where there are benefits to online as compared to offline research there are also costs. In the case of this study, I was sometimes apprehensive about what types of content I was willing to share in the online, public Facebook forum, and this poses certain methodological constraints that field notes and audio recordings do not. What is posted on Facebook will potentially remain in the open public record indefinitely, and so I had to consider what potential employers, colleagues, and other social agents might find if they researched me for future employment, collaborations, and other aspects of my professional life. This affected what types of questions I was willing to ask, the ways

that I posed certain questions, and which posts by members I would comment on and how I would comment. Social, political, and economic constraints are obstacles for certain sociological studies, and the 911TM is a case in point.

Insofar as participant observations involve two interrelated components, researches can note the flows and patterns of interactions, the presence or absence of dominant and sub-cultural behaviors, and ask clarifying and explanatory questions if and when they need further insight from participants. "The analysis of existing online community conversations and other Internet discourse combines options that are both naturalistic and unobtrusive" (Kozinets 2010:56), and, whereas the unobtrusive methods, such as content and discourse analyses, require sampling techniques that account for many factors, including sampling times of the day when users are more or less active and capturing message posts that are both representative and unique, participating in online forums with active users, such as Facebook groups, often involves a snowball type of sampling method (Baltar & Brunet 2012; Bhuta 2012). Some posts that I made received no responses while others were the catalyst for nearly one hundred comments, and so during my participant observation it was difficult to know the types of posts and comments other users would reply to or "like." I varied times of day, content, and styles of posts in order to produce responses from my participants.

I have had a Facebook account since 2006, and I considered myself at the time to be a regular user, checking my account multiple times a day to interact with Facebook friends and groups. Typically, people join Facebook in order to connect and network with friends, family, and acquaintances, and users consume and share (i.e. post) to the Facebook wall entertaining and informative text-based messages, images, and links to websites and webpages (Cheung, Cheu & Lee 2011). An individual's Facebook wall is a

collective forum that displays posts from those individuals, groups, and pages with whom they are networked, and by joining Facebook groups and pages users can network and interact with people who share common interests.  For the possible types of responses users can make to posts, or to comments within posts, a "like" on Facebook is a quick and convenient way to show approval or acknowledgement of another person's post or comment, and/or one might reply to a post or another comment with a short acronym (e.g., "lol," or laughing out loud), an emoticon (e.g., ☺, ☹, etc.), a link to a website or webpage, or they can range from phrases or sentences and up to lengthy paragraphs that include any and all of the above response ranges.  Facebook groups harbor between 2 members and millions, and the "9/11 Truth Movement" group currently (as of July 14th, 2014) has 38,761 members.

As I have been interested in "9/11," the events of September 11, and the 911TM since about the spring of 2008, and because I had already traveled across the country to interview 911TM members face-to-face, I decided to join the 911TM Facebook group late in 2011.  Initially, I had joined to satisfy my personal and professional curiosities about the movement and its member's beliefs, but I was also interested to find others willing to discuss alternative accounts of the events of September 11.  Eventually, after about five months of interacting with people in the group, I requested and received IRB approval to study it as part of my research with the 911TM.  In attempting to uncover and understand how members of the 911TM interpret "9/11" and how they describe the events of September 11, I began to think of how the activities of the 911TM Facebook group were part of the social movement's contemporary repertoires of contention, much like protests, rallies, petitions, and street activism are in the offline world.  My participation fed into this, and I began to take my role as a participant researcher more

seriously.  If the Facebook forum served as an actual outlet for real or authentic activism of the 911TM, then my participation in group discussions would mean that I too was engaging in cyberactivism (Carty & Onyett 2006), which meant for me that I might as well take further steps toward authenticating my dual positions as researcher and member of the 911TM.

At about the same time that I began considering applying for IRB approval for my online participant observation, in April of 2012, I also applied for membership to Scholars for 9/11 Truth & Justice (see STJ911 n.d.).  Upon acceptance to STJ911, I considered myself a full-fledged member of the 911TM, which poses certain questions about my ability to be objective in my research about a movement of which I am a part. Sociology is a discipline with a diverse internal division of labor (Burawoy 2007), and I have taken it as my task to bring to sociologists and other professionals in the academy and broader public awareness about a social movement that calls attention to a growing fissure in contemporary society.  Sociologists often advocate, implicitly if not explicitly, for values (e.g., social justice and economic equality) and the political rights and social welfare of disadvantaged categories of people, and this can raise "the suspicion that we are biased in favor of the subordinate parties in an apolitical arrangement when we tell the story from their point of view" (Becker 1967:241).  As stated above, this project is designed to facilitate discussion about the 911TM and its claims, and my participation with them had been intended to raise issues within the group that would eventually allow me to work toward their empowerment.

In parsing out how it is that sociological analyses can be considered credible in light of the fact that "[w]e can never avoid taking sides" (Becker 1967:245), Becker refers to a "hierarchy of credibility" implicit in societies, institutions, and organizations that

have ranked positions.   This is to say that in nearly all social situations a pecking order

of believability works as a background assumption that tacitly informs laypersons and

professionals alike from whom and of what types of information are more trustworthy

and reliable than others.   Of importance here is Becker's reasoning of how this hierarchy

affects the creditability of sociological analyses of subordinate groups when these

groups are often considered less dependable in knowledge construction than

superordinate groups, especially experts in the professions:

> The hierarchy of credibility is a feature of society whose existence we cannot
> deny, even if we disagree with its injunction to believe the man [sic] at the top.
> When we acquire sufficient sympathy with subordinates to see things from their
> perspective, we know that we are flying in the face of what "everyone knows."
> The knowledge gives us pause and causes us to share, however briefly, the doubt
> of our colleagues.  (1967:243)

When "taking sides," we are urged to acknowledge our position, and we should make

known that our reflexivity does not gives us jurisdiction over the beliefs and behaviors

of those who we have not studied.   In the case of this dissertation, I have studied the

911TM from within, as one of its members *and* as a professional sociologist.  My online

participant observation arose from my dual roles as researcher and movement member,

therefore, my interactions as a member of the 911TM can discredit my participation as a

sociologist.

As a partisan on the matter of 9/11 Truth, I can only ask, like those within the

movement (e.g., see Griffin 2007b), that my readers investigate the claims of the 911TM,

particularly those related to WTC 7, or I ask that you retain any judgment and

evaluation of the 911TM's *and* its countermovement antagonists' claims.  I will present in

the following chapter claims and counterclaims of the 911TM and its countermovement

antagonists, and my intent is to show that it is later group who relies upon rhetorical

fallacies and half-truths when attempting to repair damage done by the 911TM to the official narrative of "9/11." As a partisan, then, I expect my claims, as much as they are claims from within the movement *and* by a sociologist, to be scrutinized and held in suspicion of bias, but we should all be aware that biases can be a result of reliance upon the hierarchy of credibility as much as they are upon the implicit or explicit considerations of the researcher.

Responding to Becker's (1967) article, "Whose Side are We On," Alvin Gouldner (1968) takes issue with Becker's willingness to take a certain "standpoint, a kind of *underdog* position" [italicized in original] (104). Gouldner (1968) urges sociologists to continue to study and defend, when necessary, the underdog position, but because it can be continuously questioned as to whether one researcher's underdog is another's "overdog," we are called to clarify upon what grounds we have made our commitments. "The essential point about the underdog," Gouldner states (1968:105), "is that he [or her] suffers, and that his [or her] suffering is naked and visible;" however, one constant issue raised by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists is that they are harmful to society because, if they are not primarily composed of anti-Semitic bigots, their movement invites and nurtures such bigotry (Berlet 2009; Kay 2011). There are, it should be noted, those within the movement who have been labeled as anti-Semitic (e.g., see Anti-Defamation League 2011; Bollyn 2012; Ry Dawson 2013), and the 911TM Facebook group has recognized this to the extent that they have allotted Friday's as the only day of the week that such issues as "Jews," "Zionists," "Israel," and the "Mossad" can be discussed. They call it "Zio Fridays," and I first learned about it when I unwittingly broke this rule, among others.

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Early on in my endeavors at my online participant observation with the 911TM, I made a few preliminary posts, for instance, asking "What does 'inside job' mean to you?" and another regarding then recent claims about "9/11 debunking" (see RedHerring 2012), but I had little success in eliciting responses (these two posts had no likes or replies). Some of my posts were the catalyst for dozens of comments, but most resolved to zero to very few replies or likes. One post in particular highlights many of the issues I have discussed above, and it is here reproduced in full just as it is displayed on the Facebook group wall:

> Richard G Ellefritz → 9/11 Truth Movement
> December 19, 2012 ·
>
> I didn't see this in the Top 9/11 Docs file, what do you all think? Seems pretty legit to me: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_fp5kaVYhk
>
>> *9/11 Conspiracy Solved: Names, Connections, & Details Exposed!*
>> Was 9/11 really an Inside Job? After reviewing this documentary, and checking the evidence, I think the answer will be clear to you. http://www.alienscientis... youtube.com
>
> Like · 2 Comment · 5 Share · 0
>   Ken Doc and [one other] like this.
>
> Richard G Ellefritz: He uses the terms "hijackers" and "flight 93," and I know there some who don't believe there were actually hijackers or that flight 93 crashed into the Pentagon, so that could be a matter of contention.
>   December 19, 2012 at 6:14pm · Like
>
> Richard G Ellefritz: One other thing I thought might bother (some) people in this forum is the lack of attention to Israel, yes/no?
>   December 19, 2012 at 9:49pm · Like
>
> Ken Doc: First off Rich..... that doc is great just way above most peoples heads.
>   Secondly, we here have something called ZFD (Zio Fridays) that we devote time to exposing the Israeli involvement to 911 each and every Friday.
> Guess you must take Fridays off, lol
>   December 19, 2012 at 10:15pm · Like
>
> Ken Doc: Oh yea, it's "Flight 77" that people have a hard time believing hit the Pentagon.
>   December 19, 2012 at 10:16pm · Like

Richard G Ellefritz: Yeah, I thought to myself afterwords that I typed in the wrong flight number, but I left it just to be honest. As far as ZFD, I'll await a response to my second comment above tomorrow, then.
December 20, 2012 at 1:07pm · Like

Before discussing how this exchange exemplifies some of the complications of doing an online participant observation with the 911TM, I will point out that Ken Doc has given me explicit permission to use his name in full. In fact, after I initially announced my intention to study the group, Doc replied directly after with the statement, "Do it up Rich. I do this publicly for a reason. Lol." Doc is one of the key administrators and most active members of the 911TM Facebook group, and, as an example of the admiration he often receives from group members, one member stated in reply to one of my posts that "ken doc is a fine representative for most of us" [sic].

My initial post above was in regard to a video on YouTube titled, "9/11 Conspiracy Solved: Names, Connections, & Details Exposed!" AlienScientist (2012), aka Jeremy Rys, constructed the film based upon the works of intellectual organizers within the movement, which he cites in the description of his YouTube video. These figures include such works as Michael Ruppert's (2004) *Crossing the Rubicon*, Mark Gaffney's (2012) *Black 9/11*, various articles by Kevin Ryan (e.g., Ryan 2009; Ryan et al. 2009)[15], and James Corbett's (2010) blog post, "A Guide to 9/11 Whistleblowers." Like *Black 9/11* and Kevin Ryan's book, *Another Nineteen*, in which Jeremy Rys is given "a debt of gratitude" (2013:5), "9/11 Conspiracy Solved" provides an extensive account of names, networks, historical trajectories, geopolitical and economic means and motives of individuals and organizations believed to be responsible for the events of September 11. Therefore, a methodological consideration we need to take into account is how the hierarchy of credibility plays into the reader's assumption about the truth-value of these accounts if

(s)he is not familiar with them. Statements I make that seem to or actually uphold claims made by the 911TM are based upon the type of insider knowledge that I used when engaging in my participant observation and interviews. My position as an insider provided me with a type of access that other sociologists, academics, and professionals would not have if and when they study the movement from outsider statuses relative to the 911TM. This makes my study both unique in its ability to report about the movement from within as well as biased, especially as could be judged by countermovement antagonists.

As the practice of reflexivity is considered a common and expected component of qualitative research (Finlay 2002), I expect that revealing my insider status with the movement will be taken as a sign of trustworthiness as opposed to a detriment to my credibility. Making known my status is intended to convey mutual recognition of how my situatedness as both participant and observer affects the types of data I have collected and report in this dissertation. Like the voices of the "boy racers" studied by Karen Lumsden, who picked up on the works of Becker (1967) and Gouldner (1968), the 911TM are "socially situated as the 'underdogs' in terms of the silencing of their voices and the privileging of the voices of the 'outside' groups in public discourse(s)…" (2012:7). Also like the "boy racers" of Lumsden's study, members of the 911TM are "largely aware of their marginal position within society and their labeling by 'outside' groups" (2012:12). Unlike Lumsden's (2012) initial assumptions about "boy racers," I entered the field with the assumption that the 911TM *was not* problematic or disruptive to society. However, like her reflexive outcomes, my own values and beliefs have been impacted and shaped by the interactions I have had with the 911TM as a movement insider and as a sociologist studying the group.

If we look back to the example of my participant observation with the 911TM Facebook group given above, I will point out some issues that I experienced that affected my sense of self as participant and observer of the group. First, my intent with this post was to entice a discussion about the completeness or incompleteness of AlienScientist's (2012) YouTube video with, for example, his use of the term "hijackers." Prior to this post, I had posted a question asking anybody in the group to "provide any good, detailed work on the hijackers," and the one person to reply queried, "The 'hijackers'? You mean the patsies who were set up to look like hijackers?" Along with this, I was aware of Dean T. Hartwell's (2011) book, *Planes Without Passengers: The Faked Hijacking of 9/11*, and therefore I believed that interrogating a densely packed YouTube video claiming to have solved the 9/11 conspiracy could best be served by asking about the use of language pertaining to key issues of concern to (some) members of the 911TM. You will notice that Doc cited the reason that it was not on his list of "Top 10 9/11 Docs" (see Doc 2012) is that it is "just way above most peoples heads" [sic], therefore it is reasonable to infer that this movement organizer for the 911TM Facebook group recognizes the importance of framing with respect to reducing the complexity of information in order to frame 9/11 Truth in a coherent and resonant way for the public (Benford 2000).

Part of the problem with writing about the content discussed by the 911TM is that there is so much information about the narrative of "9/11" and the events of September 11 that the 911TM have discussed and debated. It can become very difficult to not confuse a name, date, time, or rationale, and this can be seen where Doc corrected my reference to Flight 93, which allegedly was crashed into a field in Shanksville, PA, as opposed to Flight 77, which allegedly hit the Pentagon. My request to my readers is to

suspend judgment about the truth-value of claims about "9/11" and the events of

September 11 due to the facts that Zelikow's (2004) official report is incomplete (Ahmed

2005; Griffin 2006)—if not for the mere fact that it did not reference WTC 7—and that the

reports in MSM often include omissions, distortions, and fabrications as well (Zwicker

2006). Much of the information presented by the 911TM that is discussed in the

following chapter has been tailored for an audience not thoroughly steeped in its

discourse, which introduces certain methodological concerns in relation to how well I

have represented the breadth and depth of their concerns.

With this said, we can look to my second comment in my post, one in which I

inquire as to whether AlienScientist (2012) should have referenced or interrogated

possible Israeli connections to the events of September 11. Like my inquiry into the

hijackers, I brought up Israel because it is a matter that I have found to be important to

the 911TM. In a post prior to the one concerning "9/11 Conspiracy Solved," I had

inquired about Noam Chomsky's 'discussion of 9/11 conspiracy theorists' (see

RPShedrow 2011), in which he dismisses alternative accounts of September 11 as not

scientifically supported and irrelevant in any case. I had posed the following question:

"If you were watching this with Prof. Chomsky, or if you were going to write him about

it, what would you say to him? There are about a dozen issues he brings up, one being

the idea of left-gatekeepers, so take your pick," and two respondents brought up Israel.

Whereas, for example, Jeremy Rys, who has given explicit permission to use his name in

full, replied by saying that he "would tell Chomsky that his ignorance of 9/11 and

failure to do any honest research into the attacks is the largest mistake of his intellectual

career," another member replied with the statement that "When people understand who

did 911 - Chomsky's done. This clown also leads his followers to believe it's the US who

is waving Israeli's tail. The tribe always lead and control dissent" [sic]. One member replied directly to this person, with the statement, "@[member] > the plotters don't define themselves by nationality > Israel to them is expendable > thus homeland security in America > the pernicious and well crafted victim narrative used to shield their operations" [sic]. These responses deserve some consideration for content, but, more importantly, for methodological considerations of doing an online participant observation with the 911TM.

First, I will note that many of the members' responses were "on topic," as the group often encourages its members to be, because they answered my question pertaining to what they would say to Chomsky. Of the 19 accrued comments, most respondents answered my question directly or indirectly, but some members went "off topic" in that they seemed much more interested in criticizing Chomsky and his position on "9/11" than discussing what they would say to him. We can see this in terms of the member who seemed to want Chomsky to deal directly with alleged Israeli involvement in the events, and another member's criticism of that comment. One methodological issue that I have with this exchange, among many other comments and posts within the group, is that I do not have an adequate understanding of the role that certain members of the 911TM claim "Zionists," "Israel," the "Mossad," and/or "the Jews" (depending on who you ask) allegedly had in the events of September 11 to be able to accurately judge whether or not they are truly on topic or not. Nor am I familiar enough with online vernacular to the extent that I believe I can adequately decode the use of the ">" signifier in the reply to the comment of interest.

When dealing with claims made about a major and well-known historical event, especially one of such significance to contemporary U.S. history, we should be cautious

to not immediately accept or dismiss a claim as true or false due to how its content is consonant or dissonant with one or more dominant interpretations. As deHaven-Smith (2013) goes to lengths to point out, the conspiracy concept is employed to achieve consensus at the expense of rationality and empirical validity. To be dismissive of a claim because it does not fit squarely within our background assumptions would put us in the position of having already decided what is real and what is not amidst the various claimsmaking activities of our groups of interest, and this is anathema to how social constructionists typically approach the study of claimsmaking (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003). The content of claims *is* considered by some social constructionists to be a relevant factor in social constructionist analyses of social problems (Best 2003, 2008). To decide which claims are true and which are false *a priori* is to ontologically gerrymander a preferred or assumed reality (Woolgar & Pawluch 1985), and therefore we would be positioning one group higher or lower than another within the hierarchy of credibility (Becker 1967).

The fact that the 911TM Facebook group has designated Fridays as "Zio Fridays" is an indicator of both the importance of "Israeli," "Mossad," and/or "Zionist" components of their counter-narrative of "9/11," but it is also an indicator that they do not want this component to override other factors in explaining what they believe happened on September 11. This much was revealed to me in a one-on-one phone interview with Ken Doc. The fact that I have consciously chosen *not* to address the 911TM's beliefs and claims about these issues in the current project is due to the fact that I am unfamiliar with their histories, trajectories, key actors, and other factors of which I am aware that I am ignorant. My methodological concern here is that one audience, the 911TM, could read my account as incomplete, and possibly even interpret it as an intentional cover-up of the complicity of these groups of people. While this could

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potentially make future expeditions to gather data from the movement problematic if and when this report becomes known within the movement, other audiences, such as the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, might read any mention of these groups without a direct defense of their innocence as an implication of my anti-Semitism, which makes pursuing any and all avenues of discourse within the movement problematic.

Laura Jones (2010, 2012) work with the 911TM shows that this concern is not unique to me. As part of her fieldwork with the movement, which comprises the only known peer reviewed, qualitative study of this group, Jones reports that within 10 minutes of beginning an interview with a member of the movement, Sofia 'Smallstorm,' who had written, narrated, and produced the Internet-based documentary, *9/11 Mysteries* (see Citizens for 9/11 Truth 2010), "the interview veered into 'conspiracy theorist' stereotypes of right-wing anti-Semitism and one-world government as Sofia had told [Jones] of her belief that Israel were ultimately behind the demolition of the twin towers on 9/11" [sic] (2010:365). Continuing, Jones reports that "[she] had considered prematurely ending [their] encounter, however, as the interview progressed, Sofia began to talk more personally about her own involvement in the 9/11 Truth campaign and how she saw the making of the film *9/11 Mysteries* as an absolute imperative and calling in her life…" (2010:365). While it is difficult to know whether I completely share Jones' (2010) sentiments that guided her to consider ending the interview prematurely, I share Jones' disposition.

In her own words, here is how Jones reflects upon her interview with Sofia:

During the interview with Sofia I had felt uncomfortable at times but also something else, disappointment perhaps? I think, with hindsight, I had wanted members of the 9/11 Truth movement to avoid these kinds of negative stereotypes and instead to represent something 'different', and more positive, in their engagement with conspiracy theory. This would have allowed me to write

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about them as 'progressive activists' focused on challenging the unpopular Bush administration through a re-imagined form of conspiratorial critique. But, of course, people are complex and contradictory and do not easily conform to 'researchers' expectations of their potential 'subjects'. (2010:365)

To some degree, I share these thoughts and feelings. Early on in my own research into "9/11" and the events of September 11, I was much more concerned with the collapse of WTC 7 and other empirical anomalies (e.g., the lack of video footage and pictures of flights 77 and 93) than I was with the potential or probable actors other than Al Qaeda Jihadists, but nor was I as interested in the 911TM as a social movement and how it operates in the public problems marketplace as I am currently. From various claimsmakers at the beginning of my research, I was made utterly aware that the Bush administration, PNAC, and neoconservatives were blamed as the true perpetrators, but I was only vaguely aware that *some* members of the 911TM also or ultimately conclude(d) that "Jews," "Israelis," the "Mossad," and/or "Zionists" were, depending on who you talk to, culpable, responsible, complicit, or willing beneficiaries. It was not until my online participant observation with the 911TM that I began to become more sensitive to this particular topic.

In my 2011 interviews, none of my interviewees discussed these types of things, and so I had no reason to ask questions that Jones (2010) and countermovement antagonists (Berlet 2009; Kay 2011) view as the stereotypical right-wing anti-Semitism of conspiracy theorists. However, after spending some time on the 911TM Facebook group, I became painfully aware that, in fact, these issues are of importance to some members of the group. To this extent I will note that early on in my participant observation I was unaware of "Zio Fridays," thus I was sanctioned by Ken Doc, a group administrator, for breaking this rule. I did not continuously attempt to draw out this

(these?) issue(s) within the Facebook group. First, as stated above, I am largely unfamiliar with the academic discipline of Jewish Studies (e.g., see Faculty of the Heinrich-Heine-University Dusseldorf 2014), and therefore I would only be able to ask questions based upon the stereotypes *of* conspiracy theorists as portrayed by their antagonists (Berlet 2009; Kay 2011) or, as is more suitable to the grounded approach I have taken, I would only be able to ask clarification and explanatory questions to movement members, which I did attempt on a few occasions because of the importance of the issue(s) to the group.

My first post in the 911TM Facebook group, on February 1, 2012, consisted of an internal poll asking, "Do you consider yourself a member of the 9/11 Truth Movement?" As a component of the basic questions about the 911TM, I was curious to know if people joined the group because they were already in the movement, if they were in the group but not in the offline movement, and other related questions, but only fourteen people of the more than 36,000 members at the time affirmed their status in the movement and no discussion took place, which is what I was aiming for in all of my posts. For my second post, on February 17, 2012, I asked the group about an issue that I was, and still am, concerned with in terms of methodological implications for studying the 911TM. In a commentary for the *National Post*, titled "University of Lethbridge Pays Student $7,714 to Pursue 9/11 Conspiracy Theories," Jonathan Kay (2010) complained that the Canadian government and a Canadian professor had crossed acceptable boundaries of what should be considered permissible to study in the university setting. Kay (2010) states that Anthony Hall, a professor of globalization studies at the University of Lethbridge, who "seems to be using his post at Lethbridge as a training ground for 9/11 Trutherdom," is free to believe what he likes "as long as he keeps it out

of the classroom." Kay (2010) included a hyperlink to "out of the classroom," which takes readers to Hall's page on RateMyProfessors.com, a website where students (and anyone else) can post feedback about their professors. This is a form of academic censorship that complicates the scientific study of social reality in that it poses a chilling effect for researchers interested in engaging in critical studies involving marginalized groups because certain lines of inquiry, bodies of evidence, and sets of interpretative rationale can and will be viewed as inappropriate or unacceptable with certain academic and broader audiences (Gendzier 2010; McClennen 2010; Williams 2010).

As somebody pursuing both the same profession and "Trutherdom" with which journalists like Jonathan Kay (2010, 2011) have taken issue, I bring these issues to light because discussing the 911TM and some of their relatively more radical claims seems to pose a risk to my professional livelihood. Aware of this during my online participant observation, I asked 911TM Facebook group members the following questions about Kay's (2010) article: "What are your thoughts on this article? What does it mean when academics are attacked for thinking and questioning freely? Is this just a matter of free speech vs. free press? How do you think this might affect new academics who want to study the issues of 9/11 under a different paradigm than the dominant one?" I received two responses from one of the group's members. One was a link to a debate between Kay and intellectual organizers in the movement (eddieleaks.org 2011; see also Paikin 2011), and the other was the statement that the *National Post* is the "mossad times of Canada" [sic]. While I had to spend some time reviewing the link to Steve Paikin's (2011) roundtable debate between Jonathan Kay and Richard Gage, Paul Zarembka, and Barry Zwicker, all intellectual organizers within the 911TM, which I later posted a

question about on March 26, 2013, I did not respond to the statement about the "mossad times of Canada."

The methodological implication here is that ethnographic work often involves learning about a subculture, and the researcher's cultural biases, including our ignorance of the idioms and vernacular used by a subculture, can preclude our ability to pick up on what are initially meaningless statements or phrases. When unfamiliar with such things, ethnographers should ask clarifying questions that help us understand issues and interpretations from the point of view of our participants, but in the case here I became afraid of associating myself online with statements that could potentially end with me being labeled "anti-Semitic." This leads to a methodologically serious reason I did not respond: I did not then attempt to uncover more data from this 911TM Facebook group member due to social forces (e.g., Berlet 2009; Kay 2011) who actively attempt to stigmatize members of the 911TM, and "conspiracists" generally, as either anti-Semitic or accepting and/or enabling of anti-Semitism.

Highly aware that unless I or another party deleted my posts, I was then and still am ambivalent as to how the information I have posted online with the 911TM Facebook group will affect my career. Due to how anti-conspiracists like Chip Berlet (2009) and Jonathan Kay (2010, 2011) have ridiculed and stigmatized progressive university professors as anti-Semitics even though those professors do not hold such beliefs themselves, and who sometimes even produce literature combatting such prejudices, an informal boundary has been constructed for people who attempt to study the 911TM (for this critique see Phillips & Huff 2010). As a social scientist, I expect to be able to study any group and any information from that group, and as this has been a grounded, qualitative research project, I have ultimately tried to allow the 911TM to speak for itself.

However, I self-censored in some cases due to the fear of reprisal from sources external and internal to my profession. In some cases, I did not ask follow up questions where I desired further clarification, and in other cases, such as when asking if the 911TM believed that "Israel," as a topic, should have been included in AlienScientist's (2012) YouTube video, I posed the question in such a way that I believed it to be of geopolitical relevance as opposed to one based upon religion and ethnicity. Therefore, data from my online participant observation are necessarily incomplete due to my standpoint (i.e. as a professional desiring a career devoid of undeserved negative attention), my situatedness (i.e. as a sociologist with very limited knowledge about certain topics), and to what my personal and professional interests with the 911TM originated as and developed into.

It is problematic, methodologically speaking, that certain lines of question are off limits for some researchers (Kelly 2011), or that some researchers feel the need to cut their interviews short due to perceived "right-winged anti-Semitism" of their participants (Jones 2010:365). The question becomes one of how well our data can represent the 911TM, or any group that has a radical analysis of society, if there are some questions that are likely to be sanctioned or, if they are pursued, that they must be treated as a highly sensitive subject matter as opposed to data that is to be allowed to emerge and *then* theoretically explained (i.e., deciding what a statement is or means *before* it is analyzed and placed in its theoretical context prejudices what can and will be known about our social world).

In all, I made 36 posts within the 911TM Facebook group, and I commented on 39 posts by other members. I was interested in why people joined the movement, the online group, how they interpret "9/11," how they explain the events of September 11, and how they understand their position within the movement and its relation to

countervailing forces.  Very often I did not receive expected responses to the questions

and information that I posted, but my experiences with the 911TM Facebook groups was

ultimately fruitful because I was able to better understand the variety of positions and

interpretations that members of the movement have and use in their everyday

interactions online.  These experiences informed questions that I was able to ask my

participants in 2013, and I was able to get other members' interpretations of another set

of social actors who are necessary to include for a study such as this, which are the

911TM's countermovement antagonists.

**Digging into the Discourse of the 9/11 Truth Movement's Countermovement Antagonists**

I have so far discussed data collection procedures and methodological issues

concerning my face-to-face interviews and participant observation with the 911TM.  By

including in this project discourse from texts produced by the 911TM's

countermovement antagonists, this project expands to include a critical discourse

analysis (van Dijk 2003) in the form of what Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (2008) term a

compositional study.  A compositional study gives implicit or, more often, explicit

recognition to the socially fractured state of society, split along intersecting lines of race,

class, gender, age, ability, and ethnicity.  Compositional studies takes these factors into

account while providing the historical roots of the formation of those categories.  In-

group coherence and solidarity can be the product of hegemonic discourse, and so

compositional "methods enables us to search explicitly for variety, dissent within,

outliers who stand (by 'choice' or otherwise) at the dejected or radical margins, those

who deny category membership, and those who challenge the existence of categories at

all" (Fine & Weis 2008:90).  For compositional studies, data from in-groups can be

collected in several ways, from ethnographic work to nationally representative surveys, but data collection methods must also be used to gather data about the social forces that define or position those in-groups as seemingly coherent, naturally formed categories.

The compositional aspect of this study takes form in the use of interviews and participant observations with the 911TM positioned against oppositional discourse found within texts produced by their adversaries. Discourse analysis is a multi-disciplinary strategy of making visible and explicit the often taken-for-granted communication that takes place in talk and texts. Data are derived from a variety of sources, including researcher instigated interviews and focus groups to naturally occurring texts in the forms of recorded conversations, letters, emails, articles in magazines and journals, books, Internet blogs, and so on. The talk and texts are analyzed with many techniques, ranging from positivistic, theory driven coding strategies to constructivist and grounded methods that work with data to accumulate a general representation of the interlocutors and the symbolic world they construct through communicative interaction (Heller 2003; Phillips & Hardy 2002; Potter 2004). With its concern for explaining social problems, the ideological aspects of language, and how language is used to construct and maintain relations of power and dominance, CDA treats texts, or sounds, sights, sentences, and gestures produced in written and recorded forms, as pathways to understanding the nature of oppressive hierarchies (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter 2000).

The method of collecting texts from the 911TM's countermovement antagonists was generated during my ethnography with the 911TM. During my research, movement members' references to antagonists and my own discovery of countervailing forces through literature reviews produced several names and texts that I have

integrated into this study. In one of my earliest, and most heavily commented (68 in total), posts that I made to the 911TM Facebook group, I had asked the group why it is that public intellectuals like Christopher Hitchens and Bill Maher, who are generally critical of central institutions, "buy into the official story of the events of 9/11, even when they're critical other aspects of the official story (i.e. that it was totally unexpected, that the War on Terror was necessary, etc.)?" Of the many responses, several group members named other people they believe to be critical social analysts in many aspects, except when it comes to the narrative of "9/11" and the events of September 11. The list produced by 911TM Facebook group members is as follows: Randi Rhodes, Norman Goldman, Thom Hartmann, Julian Assange, Greg Palast, Glenn Greenwald, Matt Taibbi, Bill Moyers, and John Stuart. These journalists, independent investigators, and comedians were described by the members as "left gate keepers," 'disinformation agents,' 'misinformation agents,' "trolls," and "limited hangouts," and one member commented, "Here's a good takedown of the aforementioned gatekeepers," with a link to David Ray Griffin's (2010b) article, "Left-Leaning Despisers of the 9/11 Truth Movement: Do You Really Believe in Miracles?"

It is safe to say that members of the 911TM are aware that they have many opponents, but, unlike some of them, I will maintain a general label for the 911TM's opposition as countermovement antagonists so as not to impute motives and intentions not stated in their texts. During my graduate studies and research with the 911TM, I had been developing an interest in the discursive opportunities and obstructions of the 911TM (see asdimd 2012), and so I took special notice of when members pointed out opponents to the movement. One such instance was when a member referred to Griffin's (2010b) article, which is "An Open Letter to Terry Allen, Noam Chomsky,

Alexander Cockburn, David Corn, Chris Hayes, George Monbiot, Matthew Rothschild, and Matt Taibbi," all of whom, like the list in the above paragraph, have in some way directed antagonism toward the 911TM. Griffin is known to directly confront opposition to the movement, such as in his debates with Matt Taibbi (see Taibbi & Griffin 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) and his direct responses to *Popular Mechanics* (Griffin 2007a) and Cass Sunstein (Griffin 2011b). Other movement members keyed me into debates between intellectual organizers within the movement and who I would come to recognize as key antagonists within the 911TM's countermovement.

As discussed above, one member referenced a discussion between intellectual organizers of the 911TM and their opposition on Steve Paikin's (2011) show, *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, which included Jonathan Kay, on the one hand, and Barrie Zwicker, Paul Zarembka, and Richard Gage, on the other. Jonathan Kay (2010, 2011, 2014), who has written vehemently against the 911TM, was also the center of discussion on the 911TM Facebook group when he debated (see Kay & Tarpley 2014) one-on-one with Webster Griffin Tarpley (2007). Again the topic of the 911TM Facebook group, Jonathan Kay was backed by an ally, Ted Rall, in his debate (see Truthloader 2013) with AlienScientist (2012) and Neils Harrit (Harrit et al. 2009). Responding to a post I made about Michael Shermer's efforts to undermine the 911TM (see Skeptic Magazine 2013), one respondent pointed out that he had previously debated (see 911research.wtc7.net 20087) Kevin Ryan (2007, 2009), and others in this same post made known that others in the 911TM (see Hoffman 2005b; Talboo 2010) had responded to Shermer's (2005) essay in *Scientific American* and his 2009 article on Trueslant.com.

It is clear that the 911TM is not only aware of their opposition, but that they regularly interact with them in discursive arenas ranging from face-to-face debates to

textual rebuttals and rejoinders.  Along with my theoretical rationale (Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008; Snow 2004a), this provides the impetus for my inclusion of texts produced by key countermovement antagonists of the 911TM.  These include entire books directed at the 911TM by Jonathan Kay (2011) and *Popular Mechanics* (2011), as well as books by David Aaronovitch (2010) and Jovan Byford (2011) that give a significant amount of attention to the 911TM and its claims among other groups and issues.  I have also included peer reviewed journal articles (Swami et al. 2010; Wood & Douglas 2013), as well as materials in other formats, such as Carol Morello's (2004) news article and James Meigs' (2006) essay (see Table 1).  These exemplars are pulled from a larger list of those anti-conspiracists who have produced texts that directly or indirectly challenge the 911TM's legitimacy, but cited here is only a small example of that larger corpus (Bale 2007; Banas & Miller 2013; Barkun 2006; Bartlett & Miller 2011; Berlet 2009; Birchall 2006; Bratich 2008; Brotherton 2013; Brotherton & French 2014; Brotherton, French & Pickering 2013; Buenting & Taylor 2010; Clarke 2007; Coady 2006c; Darwin, Neave & Holmes 2011; Douglas & Sutton 2008, 2011; Ebel-Lam et al. 2010; Fenster 2008; Goertzel 2011; Goshorn 2006; Jolley 2013; Jolley & Douglas 2014; Knight 2002, 2008; Lantian 2013; Lee 2011; Leman & Cinnirella 2007; Mole 2006; NIST 2011; Oliver & Wood 2012; Olmsted 2011; Parish & Parker 2001; Prasad et al. 2009; Sampson 2010; Shermer 2011; Soukup 2008; Stempel, Hargrove & Stempel 2007; Sternheimer 2007, 2010; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009; Swami 2012; Swami et al. 2011; Taibbi 2008; Thresher-Andrews 2013; Van Prooijen & Jostmann 2013; Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014; Wood et al. 2012).  Multiple institutional orders are represented in the texts listed above, including government agencies, news media, popular and trade presses, academia, and think tanks.  In Table 1, I display the types of texts and their sources that I analyze in the

following chapter.   The categorizations and selections are not necessarily reflective of some objective reality, but rather they are designed to provide a loose organization to show institutional structure within the insider claimant domain of the 911TM's countermovement.   Therefore, while these data are naturally occurring, their selection and organization is contrived (Speer 2002).

*Table 1.  Exemplar Texts from the 9/11 Truth Movement's Countermovement Antagonists*

| Category | Title | Citation |
|---|---|---|
| News Journalists | *Voodoo Histories:  The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History.* | Aaronovitch (2010) |
| | *Among the Truthers:  A Journey through America's Growing Conspiracist Underground.* | Kay (2011) |
| | "One Man's Unorthodox Ideas About the 9/11 Attack on the Pentagon Go Global in a Flash. Welcome to the Internet, Where Conspiracy Theories Flourish." | Morello (2004) |
| Trade Journalists | *Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories Can't Stand Up to the Facts* | *Popular Mechanics* (2006) |
| | "The Conspiracy Industry." | Meigs (2006) |
| | *The Believing Brain:  From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies* | Shermer (2011) |
| Academics | *Conspiracy Theories:  A Critical Introduction* | Byford (2011) |
| | "Unanswered Questions:  A Preliminary Investigation of Personality and Individual Difference Predictors of 9/11 Conspiracist Beliefs." | Swami et al. (2010) |
| | "'What About Building 7?'  A Social Psychological Study of Online Discussion of 9/11 Conspiracy Theories." | Wood & Douglas (2013) |

Sampling texts for discourse analysis is often purposive due to researchers' needs to gain theoretical insight into a particular phenomenon (Phillips & Hardy 2002). Like Glaeser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory methods, theoretical sampling is used in discourse analysis to target the object(s) of interest. In terms of selecting texts to analyze, "the question of what and how much to sample depends largely on the object of study, but researchers can try to capture 'important' texts" (Phillips & Hardy 2002:73). The exemplars I have chosen are not necessarily representative of the larger body of anti-conspiracists' texts, but these texts are significant nonetheless for they present common lines of analysis (e.g., Aaronovitch 2010; Byford 2011; Meigs 2006; Morello 2004), scientific reification of the conspiracy label (Swami et al. 2010; Wood & Douglas 2013), and are in some cases book-length analyses of the 911TM (Kay 2011) and its claims (*Popular Mechanics* 2006). Of the many debates that have taken place between the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists, I use Jonathan Kay's debate with Richard Gage, Paul Zarembka, and Barrie Zwicker on *The Agenda with Steve Paikin* (Paikin 2011) because it was referenced to me during my participant observation, and because Jonathan Kay is an exemplar countermovement antagonist by the fact that he produced an entire book directed at the 911TM. For similar reasons, I selected the debate on Democracy Now! (2006) between the filmmakers of *Loose Change* and editors of *Popular Mechanics'* (2006, 2011) book due to the exemplar status of *Popular Mechanics* as a countermovement antagonist and the prevalence of references to *Loose Change* by the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists.

**Presentation of Data and Plan of Analysis**

While transcribing interviews from Manhattan and reviewing posts with the 911TM Facebook group, I made notes about recurring topics and themes. In addition to

these, I kept in mind when organizing my data the theoretical implications of the interactional dynamics of the public problems marketplace (Benford & Hunt 2003), the discursive function of the conspiracy label (Husting & Orr 2007) in the discursive fields (Snow 2004a) and multi-institutional politics (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008) of the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists. Data are presented in a narrative format, highlighting the interactions between and among the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists. I focus on statements made about the 911TM by its countermovement antagonists and how the 911TM responds to those claims and framing techniques. I position statements from my participants gleaned from my interviews and participant observations against statements derived from texts of countermovement antagonists by keying in on one main line of reasoning used by countermovement antagonists, which is that the 911TM are "just asking questions" (Aaronovitch 2010; Byford 2011; Meigs 2006; Morello 2004). Along with my focus on this one analytic category imposed by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, I focus exclusively on empirical claims about WTC 7 as well as references to the conspiracy label.

The data presented show, express, and highlight discourse among the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists, and I also provide critical analysis throughout my discussion. Presenting discourse among the Truthers and Deniers of "9/11" has sociological features in that I present data that highlight or outline the presence of a discursive field within movement-countermovement dynamics. It has *critical* sociological aspects in that I make efforts to work toward emancipatory knowledge production for the 911TM (Ali 2002; Humphries 2000), and it has aspects of my status as a member of the 911TM in that I make employ certain assumptions and representations that align with its interests over those of its countermovement. I describe how I arrived

at the data I present, and I include a discussion of why it is important to bring into the narrative I construct. What is presented has been selected to demonstrate one possible stream of talk or line of reasoning based around central claims by the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists. This narrative represents interactions that occur within the insider and outsider claimant domains, as well as between them, and together this discourse among the Truthers and Deniers of "9/11" form the discursive field of the 911TM.

CHAPTER IV


DISCOURSE AMONG THE TRUTHERS AND DENIERS OF 9/11

Having originally planned a slightly different structure to this dissertation, I

requested comments from movement members in the 911TM Facebook group that they

wished to express to the public via my own work.  My request, in part, was as follows:

"I would like to open chapter 2 with quotes from members of this social movement

about what woke you up, why you joined, and/or what motivates you to do what you

do with this [Facebook] group and 'out there' in the offline world."  I found one of these

comments to be an insightful declaration of what many of my participants view as their

*raison d'être* within the 911TM, which is reproduced here, verbatim and in full.  The

following passage is from a quite active member of the group, one Arlyntha J. Love, who

has requested I use her offline name in full as opposed to her Facebook handle, Lyrantha

Jen L:

> We're not here to get famous. Were people in the civil rights movement
> searching for fame? It's a cause, and we're simply the people who believe in it -
> that the government lied to the public and the world about their level of
> knowledge of and potential involvement in the attacks and what actually
> happened. We want the truth. We want people to be held accountable where
> necessary, and so far, no one has been. In the grief over the worst attack in the US
> since Pearl Harbor, our own leadership was opposed to even investigating this
> attack and instead insisted on feeding us a story. Everyone in leadership seemed
> to have known who did it and how and why, very quickly, and yet told us that
> the incompetence in the intelligence community was so ubiquitous, that "no one
> envisioned flying planes into buildings" was seemingly an acceptable excuse.

The burden of finding the truth has been placed onto the public to learn that in the months and years prior to the attacks, there actually had been scenarios of jets being used as weapons and crashed into targets, including the World Trade Center and Pentagon in drills and exercises by NORAD. And then we learned that information gathered by a SOCOM intelligence unit called Able Danger, had it not been suppressed by lawyers and bureaucrats in the Defense Department and FBI, could have led to Muhammed Atta's arrest before these events; but instead, this information was ordered destroyed by officials in the Pentagon - an amount of information equal to about 2.5 terabytes of data on the movements of Atta and his terrorist cell's activities. The FBI repeatedly denied being made aware of alleged hijackers who had stayed in Shreveport, Louisiana and were reported by a man named David Graham in 2000. The President and Vice President at the time testified in secret behind closed doors, and weren't under oath, so there's no record of what they knew, how soon they knew it, what they did.

It's riddled in mystery that all of these anomalies in addition to many others were not being investigated, were left to the public to find through digging of news articles and unanswered Freedom of Information Act requests. And then anyone who fell into a dissent of the 9/11 Commission Report's narrative of the attacks and saw a cover-up, was ridiculed and dismissed as being out of their wits. What kind of nation has this become where daring to question government, after a massive cover-up in the preventable deaths of some 3,000 people, is shunned and silenced from the top of Capitol Hill, to the corridors of the Justice Department, to even our children's classrooms?

I think many people have some general idea of what the truth about the attacks may be; but even if we had it rolled out to us tomorrow in a blue binder, what next? And then what? The prospects are alarming for everyone, to say the least.

July 19, 2013 at 1:26am · Like · 2

Ms. Love's question at the end is one she posed directly to the group later that same day:

Lyrantha Jen L→9/11 Truth Movement
July 19, 2013 ·

This is a question I've thought about and think the movement needs to also address. Consider the truth about the attacks, who was involved, who did what, how and when, was given to us tomorrow in a binder, in an announcement, in confession, in breaking news - however you could imagine. And then what? What happens next? Why is there so much trust from many people that the system would suddenly be swept of corruption and be renewed somehow and in our favor?

What is the endgame for the truth movement now that we are coming to terms with the reality that we will not get the justice that we seek, that the victims of the attacks and subsequent wars will not get the justice deserved. What are the prospects of the movement today considering these factors?

One commenter replied, "Damn good question LJL. It's just fantasy and very unrealistic too think that everything would be right in the world and that most Truthers would get what they want after prosecution of the main characters of this event when the ruling 1% still will have control of what goes on in our lives......" [sic], and Ken Doc said, "It's probably the most difficult question to answer. We know, they know we know and they aren;t doing a damn thing about it except trying to discredit us" [sic].

**Just Asking Questions?**

Members of the 911TM are often scrutinized for "just asking questions." So popular is this criticism that in the Afterword to *Popular Mechanics'* (2006, 2011) book, *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, which is held by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists to be a definitive account of why most or all of the 911TM's beliefs about "9/11" and September 11 are erroneous (e..g., see Kay 2011; Shermer 2011), James Meigs commented that a "common refrain in conspiracy circles is the claim that 'We're just asking questions'[16]" (2006:92, 2011:122). Among the earliest[17] to make such an observation was Carol Morello (2004), a staff writer for *The Washington Post*. Morello's (2004) article, "One Man's Unorthodox Ideas About the 9/11 Attack on the Pentagon Go Global in a Flash. Welcome to the Internet, Where Conspiracy Theories Flourish," is also among the earliest to use the phrase, "9/11 Truth Movement," in which he employs it in reference to 'David Ray Griffin being an unlikely recruit to the then nascent movement.' Referring to "a growing number of Web sites, books and videos contending that something other than a commercial airliner hit the Pentagon," Morello (2004:na) claims that "[m]ost make their case through the selective use of photographs and eyewitness accounts reported during the confusion of the first hours after the attack. They say they don't know what really happened to American Airlines Flight 77 and don't offer other explanations. The

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doubters say they are *just asking questions* that have not been answered satisfactorily"

[emphasis mine].  Several other countermovement antagonists have taken an issue with

the 911TM questioning the official story of "9/11" and the events of September 11.

*The Construction of an Analytic Category*

After researching "the dozen major conspiracy theories that form the body of

[his] book, [David Aaronovitch] began to see that they shared certain characteristics that

ensured their widespread propagation" (2010:10).  Third in his list of the seven 'ties that

bind all conspiracy theories' is the heading, "Just Asking Questions," of which the body

is reproduced here in full:

> Since 2001, a primary technique employed by more respectable conspiracists has
> been the advocation of the "It's not a theory" theory.  The theorist is just asking
> certain *disturbing* questions because of a desire to seek out truth, and the reader is
> supposedly left to make up his or her mind.  *The questions asked, of course, only*
> *make sense if the questioner really believes that there is indeed a secret conspiracy.*
> [emphasis mine] (p. 12)

In a 2009 adaption for Australia's *Inquirer* of his 2010 book, *Voodoo Histories:  The Role of*

*the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History*, Aaronovitch can be seen working out

this line of thought when he states that, in addition to 'conspiracists who portray

themselves as heroes and skeptics,'

> there is the *violent innocence* of much conspiracism, in which the theorist is
> ``only asking questions'' about the official version of the truth and doesn't go so
> far as to have a theory themselves, other than it is impossible that John F.
> Kennedy was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald alone, or that the moon landing
> happened in the way the world imagined, or that al-Qa'ida terrorists hijacked
> four planes. ``I'm not saying he wasn't born in Hawaii,'' argue sophisticated
> ``birthers'' of Obama, ``all I'm saying is why won't he produce his birth
> certificate?'' [emphasis mine] (Aaronovitch 2009)

Aaronovitch even uses this as a way to label movement members, noting in particular

one "leading 'disturbing question' figure on the edges of the 9/11 Truth movement"

(2009).  Just as it did not originate with him, this "just asking questions" analytic

category imposed by anti-conspiracists onto the 911TM does not stop with Aaronovitch either.

In his 'critical analysis of conspiracy theories,' Jovan Byford explains "what David Aaronovitch (2008) [sic] calls *'it's not a theory' theory*'" [italicized in original] (2011:90) by stating that "[t]his is where a conspiracy theory is articulated in the form of a question. Rather than purporting to have all the answers, the writer 'merely' poses a set of questions, hinting at some hidden 'truth' that is yet to be uncovered or demonstrated" (90). Citing Brian Keeley's (1999) article, "Of Conspiracy Theories," Byford notes that "the rhetoric of just asking questions" is usually directed at "an official explanation, which is perceived to be the product of deception and which the writer sets out to undermine and cast doubt on" (2011:90-1). Although he provides no direct in-text citation (a reference is included in his bibliography), and although he mistakenly includes in his text a backslash in 911Truth.org's web address, Byford cites the 14 questions posed by 911Truth.org's (2010) pamphlet as one example of how the 911TM engage in this rhetorical strategy, which he states is not all together unwarranted in the case of "*real* conspiracies" [emphasis mine] like "the Watergate affair" (91). "However," says Byford, "in the case of conspiracy *theories*, the rhetoric of 'just asking questions' and calls for 'open dialogue' or 'independent inquiry' are for the most part disingenuous" [emphasis mine] (2011:91).

According to this countermovement antagonist, the disingenuous nature of the inquiry involves four facets or dimensions (he does not specify). These qualities include the rhetorical fallacy of "moving the goal posts" (Byford 2011:91) by bringing in more and more purported facts and questions; "a form of agenda setting" where non- or anti-conspiracists are expected to entertain 'disturbing questions;' the notion that asking

questions "simply obscures the mountain of 'errant data' hidden in the conspiracy theorists [sic] own back yard;" and, ultimately, that such inquiries "also serve the purpose of placing the ball in the corner of the dissenters" (2011:92). "By posing a set of questions," Byford continues, "conspiracy theorists throw the gauntlet in to the face of the sceptics [sic] and challenge *them* to disprove that a conspiracy exists" [italicized in original] (2011:92).

Byford (2011) provides a clear example of this line of reasoning directed at the 911TM. "The 9/11 conspiracy theorists," he asserts,

> claim that the official account of the attacks never produced an answer *to what they deem to be a key question*, namely why George W. Bush, who was visiting a Florida school at the time, continued 'reading about a goat' to a classroom of children, even after he was told that the first of the towers had been hit. By asking questions which point to such 'errant data', conspiracy theorists present their own alternative account as a more 'complete' and therefore better explanation. [emphasis mine] (2011:92)

Byford does not explain what he means by "errant data," he does not say why this information can be considered as such, and his index lists page 92 as the only page where the term appears in his book. Since Byford (2011) cites Keeley (2006), we will assume that he is taking up the term "errant data" to mean either "(a) unaccounted-for data; [or] (b) contradictory data," as Keeley (2006:52) defines it. Lastly, and more pointed to the content of the 911TM's claims, although the question Byford (2011) cites *has* arisen from time to time in my experience with the 911TM, this has not been a central question for most of the people I interviewed and with whom I interacted online.

If we look to the document from which Byford draws his main examples of the "rhetoric [that] underpins 9/11 conspiracy theories," which is from the "website 9/11Truth.org [that] contains a downloadable 'factsheet' that poses 14 questions everyone should ask about the attacks on New York and Washington" (2011:91), we see

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that Byford does not represent an accurate description 911Truth.org's (2010) question

pertaining to President Bush's time in the Florida classroom.  The actual question reads

as follows:  "Why did George Bush enter a Florida school at 9am when a plane had been

hijacked at 8:31 and the first tower was hit at 8:46, then continue reading about a goat

after the second tower was hit at 9:03?"  According to *The Terror Timeline* (Thompson

2004:345) and *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Zelikow 2004:5), the first plane was actually

known to be hijacked at "8:21," 10 minutes earlier than claimed in 911Truth.org's (2010)

pamphlet.  Regardless of this error, *The 9/11 Commission Report* makes mention of George

Bush's statement that he believed "the incident must have been caused by pilot error"

(Zelikow 2004:35), but it does not say why *he chose* to remain in the classroom.

If *The 9/11 Commission Report* does not account for George Bush's behavior in the

classroom, the errant data is unaccounted for, which is in line with what Byford (2011)

suggests 911Truth.org's (2010) pamphlet implies.  However, if the assumption on the

part of the 911TM is that the Secret Service should have escorted Bush from the

classroom with or without his permission, then the errant data is contradictory.  As

stated abvoe, this question resides at the less popular and extreme ends of the 911TM's

questions about "9/11" and September 11, but the question of Bush's behavior in the

classroom the morning of September 11, 2001, is asked by the 911TM nonetheless.

Because the tactic of "just asking questions" is proposed to be an important component

of the 911TM due it its imputed status as being composed of "9/11 conspiracy theorists"

(Byford 2011:92), and because this particular question has been identified as an exemplar

of the 911TM's question, it is therefore important to interrogate further.

*Digging Deeper in to Disingenuous Claims*

For one example on a variation of this question, Griffin opens his book, *9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press*, with the question, "How long did George Bush remain in the classroom" (2008b:2), and he reframes the question in his conclusion of the chapter as, "Why was the president allowed to linger a full half-hour at the school after it was known that America was, as Card put it, 'under attack'?" (2008b:10). Summarizing the implications of this question, Griffin states the following:

> This question was of great concern to families of the 9/11 victims. One of the central questions raised by the Family Steering Committee for the 9/11 Commission—as Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, the chair and vice-chair of the Commission admit—was: "Why was President Bush permitted by the Secret Service to remain in the Sarasota elementary school where he was reading to children?" Kean and Hamilton's 9/11 Commission, however, provided no answer. Its only response to this question was to say: "The Secret Service told us they were anxious to move the President to a safer location, but did not think it imperative for him to run out the door." [Zelikow 2004:39]. That response implied that the president's options were limited to (a) running out the door or (b) remaining at the school another half hour. But there was a third option: The Secret Service could have simply walked the president out of the room, put him in the limo, and whisked him away. (2008b:10)

The Family Steering Committee formulated hundreds of questions for each agency of the federal government they believed to be responsible for national defense (911IndependentCommission.org 2003a), with just one of those question stated as, "What plan of action caused you [George W. Bush] to remain seated after Andrew Card informed you that a second airliner had hit the second tower of the World Trade Center and America was clearly under attack? Approximately how long did you remain in the classroom after Card's message?" (911IndependentCommission.org 2003b). As opposed to notifying his readers about the dozens of other questions entertained by credentialed experts, and as compared to informing his audience that many of these questions originated with families of the victims of the attacks, Byford (2011) cites one question of

fourteen from one SMO within the 911TM that operates solely on the Internet.  With this in mind, *I* will pose questions of my own:  Why has Jovan Byford (2011) misrepresented the nature of 911Truth.org's (2010) question, why has he ignored David Ray Griffin's (2008b) work in this capacity, why did he not mention the Family Steering Committee, and why did he select this particular question instead of one of the more empirically-based questions on 911Truth.org's (2010) list, such as those pertaining to the collapse of the WTC buildings?

To answer my question I will simply state that Jovan Byford (2011) operates as a countermovement antagonist to the 911TM.  He has no interest in maintaining their legitimacy, and he states this fairly clearly.  In the final section of Byford's conclusion to his book, "Combating conspiracy theories" (2011:152), Byford provides insight into his aspirations for the future of the 911TM.

> Society should be able to go about its business without having to respond to real or anticipated challenges from conspiracy theorists, *especially as the latter operate according to standards of evidence and proof that can never be met.*  As we have seen in previous chapters, *an essential feature of the conspiracy theory is the continuous shifting of goalposts and the constant demand for new evidence*, in an endless and insatiable spiral of suspicion and mistrust of official sources.  As Philip Zelikow, executive director of the government sponsored 9/11 Commission argued in 2004, one should avoid at all costs engaging in an endless game of 'Wack-a-mole' with conspiracy theorists, as the incessant stream of challenges and questions popping up all over the place, [sic] makes it a game that can never be won (Morello, 2004). *What is more, engaging conspiracy theorists in debate imbues their views with legitimacy: it presents conspiracy theories as a valid (even if not normative) stance in a matter of public controversy and an opinion that deserves to be heard.  Doing so only increases the likelihood of conspiracy theories being accepted as a view that cannot, or should not, be rejected outright.*  [emphasis mine] (p. 153)

This passage is in need of attention because it indicates several features of anti-conspiracy discourse that Byford (2011) relies upon and implements.

In light of the fact that Byford (2011) has directed these assertions to a complex, multi-faceted social movement, a citation to a news article antagonistic toward the

group (i.e. Morello 2004) and a peer reviewed article on "AIDS denialism" (Byford 2011:91; see Smith & Novella 2007) do not provide adequate justification to address the beliefs and argumentations by the 911TM's tens of thousands of members and dozens of SMO's *about the empirical reality of the events of September 11*. Byford's (2011) tendency to cite 911Truth.org, David Ray Griffin's works, and citations to only a few other sources does not indicate that he has systematically collected adequate data to generalize to the entire 911TM. In addition to this, Byford (2011) relies on the logic of anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000; Truscello 2011) to link the 911TM with people who believe in conspiracy theories about unrelated issues, such as "AIDS denialism."

For example he links the two in one instance by stating that "[i]n the case of conspiracy theories that claim to be about science or expertise, such as those promoted by AIDS denialists or the 9/11 Truth Movement…" (2011:80), and he also states, that

> when exponents of the 9/11 Truth movement started to pose question about the causes of the attacks, they were also not exercising some intrinsic aversion towards 'complex causal schema', but were drawing on an established tradition of explanation and a pattern set by responses to Pearl Harbour, the 1995 Oklahoma bombing and other events from the past that 9/11 was compared to for different reasons. This opens the possibility that conspiracy theories are not the product of individual information processing, but one of a number of available 'collectively (ideologically) conditioned patters of misinterpretations' (Ichheiser, 1943:145) that people can draw on as they attempt to make sense of events in the world. Put differently, it is not the (biased) process of attribution that generates conspiracy theories; rather, the extreme form of personal attribution is constituted within a particular, conspiracy-based, shared social explanation (see Edwards and Potter, 1992). (p. 138)

To the point that this is part of the anti-conspiracy discourse that functions to obfuscate the claims of the 911TM, Byford's (2011) argument is that a common thread ("just a theory" theory, or "just asking questions") runs through *all* "conspiracy theories," hence AIDS denialists and members of the 911TM operate by the same strategies and tactics. Moreover, Byford's (2011) reasoning is that the 911TM began questioning the events of

September 11, not for the reasons they state, but due to a pre-established "conspiracy-based, shared social explanation." Finally, by citing the executive director of the 9/11 Commission and main author of its report, Philip Zelikow (2004), Byford relies upon a clearly antagonistic character for his rhetorical strategy of appealing to authority as to why (a) all 911TM members are conspiracy theorists and (b) why they should not be worthy of serious debate or attention otherwise.

**Questioning 9/11, WTC 7, and the Conspiracy Label**

The countermovement antagonists discussed thus far have not actually obtained data from the 911TM via interviews or surveys of "conspiracy theorists," nor from any other primary data source other than a few texts apparently chosen without analytic or theoretical pretenses. Instead, their information about the 911TM comes from literature on it and its members and from its intellectual organizers' texts, but this is not to say they are all together wrong when they claim that the 911TM employs questions about the official story as one of its main tactics. Of the earliest sources to question the official story was Eric Hufschmid (2002) in his book, *Painful Questions: An Analysis of the September 11th Attack*; in 2004 David Ray Griffin published his much criticized (Aaronovitch 2010) debut into the movement with *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions About 9/11 and the Bush Administration*; the following year, Rowland Morgan and Ian Henshall (2005) produced a title called, *9/11 Revealed: The Unanswered Questions*; and Steven Jones has couched his work in this rhetorical style with his 2006 article, "What Accounts for the Molten Metal Observed on 9/11/2001?" and his 2007 book chapter, "Why Indeed Did the World Trade Center Buildings Collapse?" This theme has also made its way into the scholarly canon that attempts to explain conspiracy theories, with one study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* titled, "'What About Building 7?'"

(Wood & Douglas 2013), and another article in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* titled, "Unanswered Questions" (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham 2010). Both of these articles are worthy of a brief discussion for they represent much of the anti-conspiracy discourse produced by psychologists on the nature of "conspiracy theories," specifically those attributed to the 911TM.

*Constructing and Keying the Conspiracy Label*

Academics have revealed the discursive function of the conspiracy label (deHaven-Smith 2013; Goshorn 2000; Husting & Orr 2007; Manwell 2010), largely supporting Wood and Douglas's findings that 'conspiracists dismiss the conspiracy label' "as needlessly loaded and derogatory, consistent with [other] recent scholarly characterizations (Bratich, 2008)" (2013:7). Also in support of Wood and Douglas's (2013) findings, one member of the 911TM I interviewed in 2011 stated that employing the conspiracy label is "easy, it helps people sleep at night knowing that they can label somebody like [himself] as a 'conspiracy theorist'." Later in the interview, this person described that when they discuss their beliefs about "9/11" with people who do not share them, they normally bring up "Building Seven," and from this the following exchange took place:

I: And what is "Building Seven?"

P3: Building Seven is a forty seven story skyscraper that fell at 5:20 in the afternoon of 9/11 at nearly free fall speed, and it looks like—fifteen hundred architects and engineers have said that it looks like an implosion, a controlled demolition of the building. And that's what I say to them, "do you know about Building Seven?" Ten years later, people don't know about it, and I say that is, is ridiculous that you don't know about such a tragedy.

I: Why should people know about Building Seven?

P3: Because it just adds to, it adds to my credibility, because people can write me off as a "conspiracy theorist," but when people start taking me

seriously—"okay, I want some concrete evidence," go look at Building Seven, you can see for yourself. And it really is the smoking gun.

I:      You've mentioned that term, "conspiracy theorist," a couple times. What does that word mean to you?

P3:     That word is a label, it's words, it's a combination of words to put…

I:      Or that term, "conspiracy theorist"…

P3:     Yeah, it's just, whatever the definition of the word is, I don't care, it's just another label for me. I'm just a kid who's asking questions, and you shouldn't treat me with such a hostile nature, because, like I said, there's a lot of hostility here. It's just another label. I just want the truth. You can call me a "Truther," you can call me this, you can call me that, I don't call myself anything. I'm just my name, [NAME WITHHELD], that's what I am. I'm not anything else.

I:      Do you think the terms "conspiracy theorist" and "Truther" are used more as a negativism in the larger society and mass media, or are they just describing a certain type of person neutrally?

P3:     Without a doubt they are using that as a negative. It's just "conspiracy theorist," and then they'll show—the way they do this on the news is where they'll show a conspiracy theorist, like the word, and then they'll show a picture of a crazy guy, and they'll be like, "hmmm, what do you think?" And they don't really out and out say it. They definitely use it as "crazy person." So, that's basically what they want to say, but they're just a little bit nicer about it.

I:      Okay, is there anything else that you think is important that people might want to know about?

P3:     That we aren't here to spit on the graves of the dead. That we want justice for them, and I'm sure if they were here today and they watched those buildings come down—if nobody was in those buildings—they'd be like, "what the hell just happened to my office, and what just happened to where I worked and where I put all my time and energy into?" We're not here to spit on the graves of the dead. We're here to honor and respect them, and we're here to bring out the truth.

Like many in the 911TM, this person tends to focus on concrete, empirical phenomena related to September 11, but when discussing this with the public they are often confronted with the conspiracy label, which they know is a label used to discredit and stigmatize them and their message. Wood and Douglas's (2013) study supports these findings, but their disrespect for their human subjects is shown when they continue to

employ the conspiracy label to name their non-conventionalist ("pro-conspiracy theory") commenters that they analyzed on news websites (discussed below).

Many anti-conspiracists (Berlet 2009; Byford 2011; Kay 2011; Shermer 2011; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009) recognize that real conspiracies do in fact exist, but they distinguish between "real conspiracies" and "conspiracy theories" by attributing psychological and social psychological origins to the latter. "To understand the psychological origins of conspiracy theories," notes one psychologist (Brotherton 2013:9), "we first need to be clear about what we mean by 'conspiracy theory'." Brotherton defines a "conspiracy theory as an unverified claim of conspiracy which is not the most plausible account of an event or situation, and with sensationalistic subject matter or implications" (2013:9). Other psychologists propose other definitions, such as that a "conspiracy theory is defined as a proposed plot by powerful people or organizations working together in secret to accomplish some (usually sinister) goal (Coady, 2006a; Douglas & Sutton, 2008; Goertzel, 1994)" (Wood et al. 2012:1), that conspiracy theories are "defined as allegations that powerful people or organizations are plotting together in secret to achieve sinister ends through deception of the public (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Wood et al. 2012)" (Wood & Douglas 2013:1), and that "[c]onspiracy theories can be described as attempts to explain the ultimate causes of events as secret plots by powerful forces rather than as overt activities or accidents (McCauley & Jacques, 1979)" (Jolley & Douglas 2014:35).

Michael Shermer, an avid anti-conspiracist who used "the 9/11 truthers…as a case study in how to test the validity of a conspiracy theory" (2011:211), notes that the "term *conspiracy theory* is often used derisively to indicate that someone's explanation for an event is highly improbable or even on the lunatic fringe, and that those who proffer

such theories are most probably crackpots" [italicized in original] (2011:208). As

Shermer (2011) makes clear, anti-conspiracists use the term "conspiracy theory" as a

way to indicate that an interlocutor is discreditable (Goffman 1963), and the constructed

stigma associated with the beliefs espoused by those labeled "conspiracy theorists" is

known by sociologists to function discursively as a 'transpersonal strategy of exclusion'

(Husting & Orr 2007)—this much is known by the 911TM as well.

On the 911TM Facebook group, Ken Doc posted a photo (see Figure 12) and a

link to a YouTube video (StormCloudsGathering 2013) that both contest the use of the

term "conspiracy theorist," and on that same day one member of the group responded

with the following comment, reproduced here verbatim and in full:

> The most recent study was published on July 8th by psychologists Michael J.
> Wood and Karen M. Douglas of the University of Kent (UK). Entitled "What
> about Building 7? A social psychological study of online discussion of 9/11
> conspiracy theories," the study compared "conspiracist" (pro-conspiracy theory)
> and "conventionalist" (anti-conspiracy) comments at news websites.
>
> The authors were surprised to discover that it is now more conventional to leave
> so-called conspiracist comments than conventionalist ones: "Of the 2174
> comments collected, 1459 were coded as conspiracist and 715 as conventionalist."
> In other words, among people who comment on news articles, those who
> disbelieve government accounts of such events as 9/11 and the JFK assassination
> outnumber believers by more than two to one. That means it is the pro-
> conspiracy commenters who are expressing what is now the conventional
> wisdom, while the anti-conspiracy commenters are becoming a small,
> beleaguered minority.
>
> http://sgtreport.com/.../new-studies-conspiracy.../
>
> April 18 at 4:15pm · Like · 3

This is the exact same text that appears on the webpage of the accompanying

abbreviated web link. The link takes one to SGTReport.com (2014), who links to

ZenGardner.com (2014) as their source, and who in turn links to PressTV.com where it is

revealed that the original author is Kevin Barrett (2014), who has authored the 9/11

Truth books *Truth Jihad: My Epic Struggle Against the 9/11 Big Lie* (Barrett 2007) and

*Questioning the War on Terror: A Primer for Obama Voters* (Barrett 2009).

***Figure 12.*** *Keying of the Conspiracy Label*
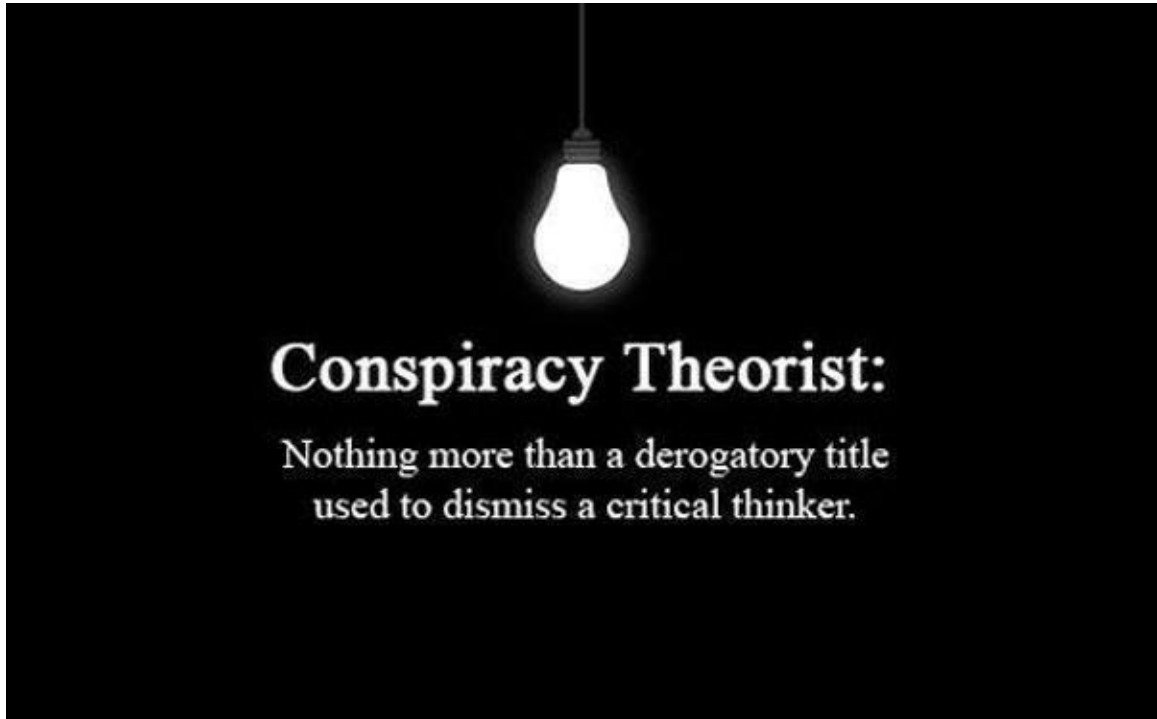


Barrett's (2014) article expands on the contestation of the use of the conspiracy

label, citing several academic sources that have taken up the challenge of combating its

symbolic violence. These references include Lance de-Haven-Smith's (2013) *Conspiracy*

*Theory in America*, an article by Laurie Manwell (2010) that appeared in an edition of

*American Behavioral Scientist* that deHaven-Smith edited, and cited as well is Ginna

Husting and Martin Orr's (2007) article, "Dangerous Machinery: 'Conspiracy Theorist'

as a Transpersonal Strategy of Exclusion." Barrett's (2014) main point is that it is

documented that the conspiracy label is used by anti-conspiracists as an irrational and

antagonistic argumentation method, and that it is those who are targeted with the

conspiracy label, especially those within the 911TM as Wood and Douglas (2013) found, who more often rely upon empirical and rational argumentation methods.

I pointed out with a comment to the 911TM Facebook group member that in Wood and Douglas's (2013) conclusion "they say that 'conspiracists don't like to be called conspiracy theorists,' but throughout the article they use such language to name their subjects." To this, the commenter replied with the following (reproduced verbatim and in full):

> It's possible that Wood & Douglas continued to use the term "conspiracy theorist" so that people reading the article would not be confused about the particular group of people under discussion. They could have used the term "conspiracy investigators," a more accurate description which is less derogatory, but I doubt that would have put the message across in the same way. Terminology aside, the overall message is positive and confirms what many of us believe - that we are not the crazy ones ☺
>
> April 19 at 7:00am · Like

Again, Wood and Douglas's (2013) findings are confirmed, but to my current point, I responded with the following, which failed to elicit a response other than Ken Doc's link to an essay titled, "33 Conspiracy Theories that Turned Out to be True" (Elinoff 2010):

> From their Abstract: "We examined a large sample of conspiracist (pro-conspiracy-theory) and conventionalist (anti-conspiracy-theory) comments on news websites in order to investigate the relative importance of promoting alternative explanations vs. rejecting conventional explanations for events. ... The data also indicate that conspiracists were largely unwilling to apply the "conspiracy theory" label to their own beliefs and objected when others did so, lending support to the long-held suggestion that conspiracy belief carries a social stigma. "
>
> They could have continued to use the "pro-" and "anti-" language, but instead they elected to use the term "conspiracists," which was developed and used by Daniel Pipes [1997], Chip Berlet [2009], and others to denote a form of conspiracy theorists who tend to be bigots (See Goshorn 2000 "Strategies of Deterrence and Frames of Containment"). As you point out, [NAME WITHELD], they could have used any of a variety of terms to describe those posting conventional views and those posting "conspiracy theories," but their use of a term that their subjects reject subverts the "respect for persons" requirement established in the Belmont Report's guidelines for protecting human subjects: "Respect for persons involves a recognition of the personal dignity and autonomy of individuals, and special protection of those persons with diminished autonomy."

"Terminology aside, the overall message is positive and confirms what many of us believe - that we are not the crazy ones," but this is in not, in fact, what Wood and Douglas are saying in there paper! They cloak their statements in an objective-sounding voice, but their definition of conspiracy theories at the beginning indicates they view these beliefs as irrational and paranoid, which is not very comforting from a scientific or ethical standpoint, especially one from within the movement. Give us an example of how their article is positive, confirming what many of us believe. ☺

April 19 at 9:29am · Like

The fact remains that Wood and Douglas (2013) refused to acquiesce to their research subjects' preferences of not being labeled as "conspiracy theorists," but their article also fits with the pattern of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists' eagerness to frame the movement's questions as a sure sign of "conspiracism," even though movement members often proffer empirical claims to support or preface those questions.

*Reifying the Conspiracy Label*

Wood and Douglas (2013) derived the preface of their title, "'What about Building 7?'" from a recurring and prominent question posed by the 911TM, and this they gathered from comments left on news articles relating to "9/11" on four mainstream news websites (ABC, CNN, the *Independent*, and the *Daily Mail*). "Conspiracist comments were identified as any that either directly put forward a conspiratorial account of the events of 9/11, in whole or in part;… [or] that otherwise favorably referenced common tropes of the 9/11 Truth Movement and its associated body of arguments, *such as cryptic allusions* to the fate of World Trade Center (WTC) Building 7…" [emphasis mine] (2013:4). "Therefore," they go on to say,

a comment on an article about a new book on 9/11 reading "Does the book explain how WTC7 imploded from fire, how a single passport was found intact within hours, how Bin Laden was in the American hospital in Dubai weeks before, how fighter jets were diverted 1000s of miles away, how NORAD was ordered to stand down… " was coded as conspiracist. *While this comment does not directly allege conspiracy, it refers obliquely to many common 9/11 conspiracist arguments and seems clearly intended to raise doubt regarding conventional explanations of 9/11.* [emphasis mine] (Wood & Douglas 2013:4)

The *questions* raised by the commenter *can be*, and indeed they should be, read as an intention to raise doubt about the official story of 9/11, but we see here the pattern that raising questions about "9/11" and the events of September 11 brings about the conspiracy label with no attempt to answer or refute the questions. This is ironic in light of Wood and Douglas's findings of "disdain for the term among conspiracists" (2013:7). "Conspiracists," they found, "did not appreciate being called conspiracy theorists" (2013:8), and my data show that one reason for this, as discussed by Husting and Orr (2007), is that the label is used in a way that allows its issuer to avoid addressing empirical claims.

Like many academic papers (Alvesson & Sandberg 2011), Wood and Douglas (2013) present their research article as one that fills in gaps of prior literature on the subject. They cite many sources, including five citations of Swami et al.'s (2010) study, "Unanswered Questions." Swami et al.'s (2010) "Preliminary Investigation of Personality and Individual Difference Predictors of 9/11 Conspiracist Beliefs" is an attempt to expand "the dearth of empirical research on the psychological factors associated with [conspiracist] beliefs" (2010:749). Swami et al. generalize from their study of 257 men and women "representative of the British population" (2010:752) the general identity of "the 9/11 conspiratorial individual as a believer of other conspiracy theories, exposed to 9/11 conspiracist ideas, politically cynical, agreeable, defiant of authority, supportive of democratic practice and *inquisitive*" [emphasis mine] (760). In explaining this last finding, Swami et al. (2010) state that "intellectual curiosity, and active imagination, and a proclivity for new ideas may result in greater exposure to conspiracist ideas, which in turn enhance *monological belief systems*" [emphasis mine]

(759).  The monological belief system[xxvi] is a component of what anti-conspiracists term the "conspiracist worldview," which is summarized by Wood and Douglas as "a belief system conducive to conspiracy beliefs in general (e.g., Goertzel, 1994; Swami et al., 2010; Wood et al. 2012)" (2013:1).  Rather than debunking the actual claims of so-called conspiracy theorists, most anti-conspiracists analyze the "conspiracist worldview" in order to further delegitimize it.

As made known in the previous chapter, a host of behavioral and social scientists, along with journalists, philosophers, and humanists, have already in the 21[st] century published many texts that attempt to explain conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists (Aaronovitch 2010; Bale 2007; Banas & Miller 2013; Barkun 2006; Bartlett & Miller 2011; Berlet 2009; Birchall 2006; Bratich 2008; Brotherton 2013; Brotherton & French 2014; Brotherton, French & Pickering 2013; Buenting & Taylor 2010; Byford 2011; Clarke 2007; Coady 2006c; Darwin, Neave & Holmes 2011; Douglas & Sutton 2008, 2011; Ebel-Lam et al. 2010; Fenster 2008; Goertzel 2011; Jolley 2013; Jolley & Douglas 2014; Kay 2011; Knight 2002, 2008; Lantian 2013; Lee 2011; Leman & Cinnirella 2007; Oliver & Wood 2012; Olmsted 2011; Parish & Parker 2001; Prasad et al. 2009; Sampson 2010; Shermer 2011; Soukup 2008; Stempel, Hargrove & Stempel 2007; Sternheimer 2007, 2010; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009; Swami 2012; Swami et al. 2010, 2011; Taibbi 2008; Thresher-Andrews 2013; Van Prooijen & Jostmann 2013; Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014; Wood 2013; Wood & Doulas 2013; Wood, Douglas & Sutton 2012).  The hegemonic, anti-

---

[xxvi] Michael Wood, Karen Douglas, and Robbie Sutton (2012) have made use of the concept of "monological belief systems" in their work, and they provide a general description: "Over time, the view of the world as a place ruled by conspiracies can lead to conspiracy becoming the default explanation for any given event—a unitary, closed-off worldview in which beliefs come together in a mutually supportive network known as a *monological belief system* (Clarke, 2002; Goertzel, 1994; Swami et al., 2010, 2011)" [italicized in original] (1).

conspiracist discourse (Goshorn 2000; Husting & Orr 2007; Truscello 2011) that arises

from such texts explains that the questions and ensuing answers that the type of people

who join the 911TM (i.e. "conspiracists" and/or "conspiracy theorists") have about

"9/11" and September 11 arise from heuristic mistakes, reliance on errant and fortuitous

data, closed or isolated social networks, social psychological needs to inflate self-esteem

and explain a complex world with simplistic justifications, and a deep distrust of

authority, especially government sources. Together, these compose the "conspiracist

worldview." From this corpus, researchers like Wood and Douglas (2013) and Swami et

al. (2010) are able to authoritatively cite the existence of a "monological belief system" at

the center of the "conspiracist worldview," and then they can reify (Berger & Luckmann

1966) such constructs with their own studies.

    Wood and Douglas (2013), for example, cite the disputed and unscientific work

(discussed below) of one self-acknowledge countermovement antagonist to the 911TM

to guide their rationale for explaining its member's debating tactics, which can be found

in the following passage from their conclusion:

> The 9/11 Truth Movement is, by and large, a movement of converts—most
> "Truthers," at some point, became convinced that their previous belief in the
> official story was wrong (Kay, 2011). Therefore, in debating with those who hold
> the positions they previously held, they might repeat the arguments that first
> caused them to doubt the conventional narrative and shaped their subsequent
> thinking accordingly. On the other hand, the actual content that the discussions
> centered upon was often highly technical, and many arguments were unlikely to
> have been generated entirely by the people doing the commenting. While some
> commenters made intuitive judgments about the physics of crashing airplanes
> and collapsing buildings, many others relied on arguments advanced in websites
> or documentaries devoted to either advancing or debunking 9/11 conspiracy
> theories. With the amount of information to choose from, however, the
> arguments commenters chose to put forward may still reveal useful information
> about their own decision-making. (p. 8)

Examples given below from my interviews and participant observations can be read to

confirm that "Truthers" converted from a belief in the official story of "9/11" by

witnessing information about the actual events of September 11 that contradicted their previously held beliefs. The issue, though, is with the "conspiracist worldview" and how it is advanced against the interests of the 911TM in light of the fact that many of their claims are about empirical observations of September 11 that contradict the official narrative of "9/11" (e.g., the collapse of WTC 7).

**Johnathan Kay: An Exemplar Case of Anti-conspiracy Discourse**

An active countermovement antagonist who also puts forward the claim that "most Truthers prefer to focus on *questions*" [italicized in original] is Jonathan Kay (2011:66), whose book, *Among the Truthers: A Journey Through America's Growing Conspiracist Underground*, presents the culmination of three years that he spent "interviewing Truthers, reading their literature, attending their events, and surfing their discussion forums" (xxiii). I will come back to how he approaches the issue of "just asking questions," but first I will highlight a 'typification of Truthers' he provides that seems to at once reinforce yet move beyond Swami et al.'s (2010) description of "the 9/11 conspiratorial individual." In a chapter titled, "Why They Believe: A Psychological Field Guide to Conspiracists," Kay "offers readers a typology of the different varieties of conspiracist [sic], along with sketches of a few typical specimens," and he notes that "[t]he organizing principle in this chapter is not the type of conspiracy theory being embraced, but rather the underlying psychological function that conspiracism performs for the affected individual" (2011:150). Like the rest of the chapters in his book, "Why They Believe" is not about countering or debunking the claims put forward by his "specimens," but rather it is about explaining the "psychological and religious roots [of conspiracism]" (Kay 2011:19).

The 'variety of conspiracist' most notable for my purposes is that of the 'conspiracist crank,' because it is through the works of these intellectual organizers within the 911TM that its other member often come to and promote 9/11 Truth, as Wood and Douglas (2013) note. "As a conspiracist," Kay (2011:190) asserts,

> the crank's defining feature is an acute, inveterately restless, furiously contrarian intelligence. Many cranks have an Asperger's-like obsession with arithmetic, flowcharts, maps, and lengthy data lists. Like [Ignatius] Donnelly, they are unable to take any expert's word on even the most technical subject. The crank can be satisfied only once he [sic] has personally established the truth of his theories using nothing but primary sources and the rules of logic.
>     What drives cranks on an emotional level isn't the substance of their theories: Many of the Truther cranks I've interviewed—including David Ray Griffin, Barrie Zwicker, and Paul Zarembka, all discussed in this book—treated the issue of 9/11 Truth in large part as a debating exercise, and seemed curiously detached from the profoundly disturbing implications that flow from their claims. What cranks truly crave is the exhilarating sense of independence, control, and superiority that come from declaring oneself a self-sufficient intellectual force. Conspiracism is a natural outlet for this craving since conspiracy theories always exist in opposition to some received truth that enjoys the blessing of experts, and because the associated claims are regarded as daring and controversial. (p. 190)

"Typically," Kay goes on to note, "the crank is a math teacher, computer scientist, chess player, or investigative journalist—careers in which the mind is trained to tease complex patterns out of empirical data" (2011:191). With a description like this, and because he presents his book as a 'serious attempt at understanding conspiracism,' one might expect Kay (2011) to back up these claims with quotes, observations, or other forms of data from the people he interviewed and studied for his book, but he provides scant evidence to support these assertions, as was discussed in one critical review (Bauer 2012).

As his first example of a "crank conspiracist" from the 911TM, Kay recounts his interview with Barrie Zwicker, "an amiable crank who became Canada's leading 9/11

Truther in the aftermath of a long career as a mainstream journalist" (2011:191). As reported in *Among the Truthers*, Zwicker requested a quid pro quo for his interview, where he would interview Kay "about [his] *nonbelief* in Trutherdom" [italicized in original] (Kay 2011:191). Kay states that during their interview Zwicker would "hit buttons on a chess clock to regulate our usage of time—making sure we each questioned the other for exactly the same number of minutes. For reasons that seem obvious to me from such experiences," he concludes, "there are no crank women, only crank men" (2011:191). To this point, Zwicker took the opportunity on *The Agenda with Steven Paikin* (Paikin 2011; see also The Agenda with Steve Paikin 2011) to say that Kay had 'lied about him personally,' particularly noting that he 'does not own a chess clock,' and that Kay's (2011) book-length representation of the 911TM and its members could be summed up with one word, "condescension."

*Jonathan Kay's Agenda*

In an early effort to participate with the 911TM Facebook group, I posted Jonathan Kay's (2010) editorial on a Master's student, Joshua Blakeney, and his major professor, Anthony J. Hall. The article holds in contention Blakeney earning a scholarship in the amount of "$7,714 to pursue his conspiracy theory that the 9/11 attacks were staged by Washington." Kay's (2010) closing question to his readers was, "Does anyone else see a problem with that?" Taking my grievances with his article to the 911TM, my questions to the 911TM Facebook group were as follows: "What are your thoughts on this article? What does it mean when academics are attacked for thinking and questioning freely? Is this just a matter of free speech vs. free press? How do you think this might affect new academics who want to study the issues of 9/11 under a different paradigm than the dominant one?" No substantive answers were

given, but one active member in the community replied in a comment with a solitary

link (see eddielinks.org 2011) to a webpage containing a YouTube video (see The

Agenda with Steve Paikin 2011) titled, "The Truth is Out There" (Paikin 2011).

A little more than a year later, I shared the same episode (Paikin 2011) with the

911TM Facebook group in the hopes that they could help me answer a specific question

about it. What follows is the thread on the 911TM Facebook group that I posted

regarding Paikin's (2011) episode, "The Truth is Out There," as well as material from

that episode that highlights interactions between the 911TM's intellectual organizers and

one of the movements most active countermovement antagonists:

> Richard G Ellefritz➜9/11 Truth Movement
>
> March 26, 2013 ·
>
> Something bothers me very much about Jonathan Kay's reply to Steve Paikin's question here, but I can't quite put my finger on it. Does Barry Zwicker have it right in his initial response? http://youtu.be/aewTJUQs1LQ?t=12m11s
>
> The Agenda With Steve Paikin - 9/11 Truthers Versus Skeptic Jonathan Kay
>
> Mirrored from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHbZi80IBNU http://www.youtube.com/user/AgendaStevePaikin
>
> youtube.com|By muskduh
>
> Like · 0 · Share · Comments · 4

The question by Paikin and answer by Kay to which I referred in my post is reproduced

here:

> *Steve Paikin:* John, as we listen to this conversation here, you know, people watching this at home might think there's nothing particularly crazy sounding about what anybody's saying. They seem like perfectly reasonable, intelligent people. What concerns you about what you're seeing here? (12:11-12:25)
>
> *Johnathan Kay:* What concerns me is the idea that you have intelligent people, all well-educated, who are suggesting, or who are receptive to the idea, that teams of hundreds of CIA agents spent months boring holes into columns inside the World Trade Center—WTC One, Two, and Seven; did this in an office building that has what, fifty, sixty, seventy thousand people there every day? Brought in

tons of explosives, then, murdered thousands of people—all done in secret—with no one realizing this for ten years; all as a pretext to attack Afghanistan and Iraq, despite the fact that they then allege that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. So this complete *fantasy*—and that is being taken seriously by, not only by the intelligent people on this panel, but millions of intelligent Americans and Canadians. It disturbs me that so many people inhabit a world of fantasy. (12:26-13:23)

Kay's statements in this passage were perplexing to me because I too had spent several years studying the 911TM, "9/11," and the events of September 11. I was wondering who the source was for his theories about the "teams of hundreds of CIA agents [who] spent months boring holes into columns," about why it is a necessity these agents would be viewed suspiciously by the tens of thousands of occupants, and why he assumes that the 911TM's activities in the years after the attacks meant that 'no one realized this for ten years.'

These questions arise partly from my own research into the events of September 11, but participants in my research with the 911TM also brought to my mind these criticisms of Kay's statement. The following, for example, is my first interview with a member of the 911TM in 2011, and it highlights how one person in the movement describes a possible process in planting explosives in the Twin Towers:

I:     The only question that I have is, what brings you to ground zero today?

P4:    Well, I've been—are you, this is going now {referring to the voice recorder}?

I:     Yeah

P4:    Okay, so, uh, yes: Well I've been coming for a few years, truth be told, and there are a number of aspects to 9/11—the events of 9/11 are, say "suspect," they don't add up to me. It's important because that's the cause for the wars, the violations of civil liberties, and it's important for me to be here to learn more and to just express concern about those issues.

I:     And you're expressing concern through holding your sign?

P4:    Yeah, yeah.

I:      It says, "9/11 Truth Now."

P⁴:     Yes.

I:      And, then your t-shirt, which says, "Investigate 9/11. Honor the fallen by relentless pursuit of the truth."

P⁴:     Right.

I:      Okay.

P⁴:     Yup. So, to me, it's just as now, it invites to me a lot of discussion, which I enjoy. What else? And to learn more, and to be enlightened, edified by it.

I:      So you come down here to learn, and not necessarily to teach other people?

P⁴:     Well, I do enjoy the discussions, because I've heard other things from other people. Like I came last year, there was a forum at INN media, and people were like, "How could the buildings been loaded with explosives?" And the guy came forward, he said, "I used to work down here," he says, "before, when I would come to the towers beforehand, there were guards around the elevator towers, and it turns out there was a large renovation project going on." That ties into another architect who said, "We believe the explosives were planted in the elevator shafts. That way, no one would really know about the way the buildings come apart." So things like that I learn more and more.

I:      Right, can I ask you a question about that?

P⁴:     Sure.

I:      Are the elevator shafts around the core columns, or near them?

P⁴:     I believe there's a perimeter column, then there's the interior, and I believe they're inside. So you could go work inside there, and no one would necessarily know…

I:      Right, and you would have access to that.

P⁴:     Right. There was this big project. I mean, here we go with speculation, but apparently one of the former presidents' cousin was part of the board of this. I mean, that's more…

I:      His brother and his cousin were. {Referring to G.W. Bush}

P⁴:     Yeah, yeah, so uh.

I:      In terms of the security of the World Trade Center.

P⁴:     Exactly, Securacom.

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I:      So, you believe that the World Trade Centers were demolished with explosives?

P4:     Probably.  What I really, ultimately hope is a fair trial.  Put suspects on trial because then the conspiracy theories wouldn't be theories anymore, they would be admitted evidence, and we would know more of the truth with subpoena power.  Just like Martin Luther King—I don't know if you're familiar, but in ninety nine, James Earl Ray was acquitted, essentially, and by a case that proved him innocent of the crime.  So the official record now, you know, differs from the truth and the trial.

Our interview concluded soon thereafter when another person invited themselves into our conversation (discussed below).  Another member I interviewed in 2011 told me that they had worked at the WTC, and that 'it was common to see all sorts of contract workers in and out of those buildings every day.'  As we can see from the above statements, it does not necessarily follow that Kay's assertions accurately represent claims by the 911TM about how they believe demolition material was planted in the three WTC buildings.  One intellectual organizers even claimed *before* Kay (2011) published his book that demolition material was likely planted just days or weeks before the hijackings, which allegedly provided the cover for the demolition operation (Lindauer 2010)[18].

Here I provide the entire rest of the thread of the post I made regarding the exchange of interest on "The Truth is Out There" on *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*:

Ken Doc:  I'm listening to this in full right now..... very non bias interview on TVO.

   March 26, 2013 at 4:45pm · Like ·1

Ken Doc:  As for your question Rich..... I'd have to say that Kay likes to use Strawman arguments mixed in with Occams Razor. Kay ignores the SCIENTIFIC process and resorts to name calling instead of denunking the evidence.

   March 26, 2013 at 4:46pm · Like ·1

Ken Doc:  He also lumps all conspiracy theorists into one category.  He does this for EVERY SINGLE debate he does.

The second half of this interview is making me mad because he continues to use the same tactic over and over again.

March 26, 2013 at 5:09pm · Like · 2

Richard G Ellefritz: I can see that too. I'll look for his other interviews.

If Kay doesn't want to get into the facts, evidence, and science of what the experts of the 9/11 Truth Movement say, experts like Richard Gage, Paul Zarembka, Barry Zwicker and others (D.R. Griffin), then where did he imagine the 'CIA drilling holes in the steel for weeks' scenario coming from? It seems like in order to avoid grappling with the actual questions brought up by these 'well educated intellectuals', he just imagines his own scenario. Or, is there somebody out there saying that the CIA was drilling holes in steel for weeks? Susan Lindauer has said something like the FBI finding out that there was going to be a terrorist attack, and then planting explosives very quickly in order to heighten the shock of terrorism, but even if this is where Kay is getting HIS scenario, I haven't seen very many people in the 9/11 Truth Movement overall support this idea.

I think, along with those things you point out Ken, that this is a very weak point in Jonathan's argument: If he doesn't want to get into the details of how the buildings were demolished by explosives, then where did he get this scenario? If it came from a non-expert in the 9/11 Truth Movement, then this is just a further example of him avoiding their actual statements and questions. If he made it up, then it just goes to show that he's really not interested in the factual or evidence-based claims, but rather in demonizing the 9/11 truthers through repetition and a slipshod handling of facts.

Demonization, scapegoating, 'slipshod handling of facts', repetition, guilt by association and circular reasoning: These are the tactics that James Meigs of Popular Mechanics says that conspiracy theorists use, but I see them as the tactics that people like Jonathan Kay, Michael Shermer and James Meigs use when trying to label the 9/11 Truth Movement as just a bunch of paranoid and crazy conspiracy theorists.

March 27, 2013 at 9:54am · Like

Nobody responded to or "liked" my final comment, which I stand by (excluding the typos) as an analysis of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, but Ken Doc's statements are in line with Barrie Zwicker's from the episode.

The second part of my question in the original post was about Zwicker's reply to Kay, which was that Kay

is just stating as bald assertion that it's inconceivable that those things you described—and I don't subscribe to all of them, or things like that—could have happened. That's just your bald assertion. In your book, you spend three

quarters of one page—that's page twenty, under the heading "Caveats": "This book is not intended as a rebuttal to conspiracists." In other words, you're saying 'I'm not going to deal with evidence in this book.' (13:30-13:55)

To this last statement by Zwicker, Kay said "that book has been written in 2005 by *Popular Mechanics*" (13:55-13:57). Kay avoids addressing empirical claims about the events of September 11 by stating that "[t]hose seeking a point-by-point rebuttal to the claims of the 9/11 Truth movement already have several fine resources at their disposal. In particular," Kay (2011:20) recommends

> the 2006 book *Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories Can't Stand up to the Facts*, authored by the editors of *Popular Mechanics* magazine; Mark Roberts' *Links for 9/11 Research*; the websites 911 Myths, Debunking 911, and the blog *Screw Loose Change*. Readers who wish to devote more time to the issue might also consider reading the *Final Report of the 9-11 Commission*, released in 2004; Lawrence Wright's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2006 account of the history of 9/11, *The Looming Tower*; and, for those who share [Kay's] interest in technical material, the National Institute of Standards and Technology's exhaustive *Final Reports of the Federal Building and Fire Investigation of the World Trade Center Disaster* (a twenty-million-dollar effort that took three years to produce, and drew on the efforts of three hundred staff and external experts).

Intellectual organizers within the 911TM take issue with Jonathan Kay's avoidance of addressing empirical claims about September 11, and as well they take issue with his use of the conspiracy label. I address that issue above and further below, but I will state briefly a pattern that the 911TM's countermovement antagonists have in addressing and avoiding the movement's empirical claims.

Whereas several of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists do not even cite one source that refutes their claims (e.g., see Banas & Miller 2013; Douglas & Sutton 2011; Stempel et al. 2007; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009; Swami et al. 2010; Wood & Douglas 2013; Wood et al. 2012), Kay (2011) is not the only anti-conspiracist to cite the very reports contested by the 911TM (e.g., see Chandler 2012; Griffin 2010a; Ryan 2012) to show why it is true that they 'live in a fantasy universe.' For instance, Jeffrey Bale

'distinguishes between bogus conspiracy theories and genuine conspiratorial politics' by pitting "what has become a veritable cottage industry of recent books suggesting that someone other than al-Qā'ida was behind the 9/11 attacks" (2007:45-6, n. 1) against what he promotes as the definitive account of the attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Karen Sternheimer's (2007, 2010) "Sociology of Conspiracy" also treats the 9/11 Commission's report as the authority on the 9/11 attacks even though it has been thoroughly interrogated and debunked by members of the 911TM (see Griffin 2005). And, while they do not cite *any* of David Ray Griffin's works, especially his 2007 book, *Debunking 9/11 Debunking: An Answer to* Popular Mechanics *and Other Defenders of the Official Conspiracy Theory*, Warner and Neville-Shepard say that "[they] believe the evidence in *Popular Mechanics* presents a thorough refutation of the truther conspiracy" (2014:12).

The opening of the episode, "The Truth is Out There," shows how experts and professionals within the 911TM proceed with their reframing activities when responding directly to claims by their countermovement antagonists. After interviewing Jonathan Kay alone, Paikin begins the second part of the episode[19] with the following:

> *Steve Paikin:* And joining us now on the debate: In San Francisco, California, Richard Gage, founder of Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth. And, with us here in studio, Barrie Zwicker, producer of *The Great Conspiracy: The 9/11 News Special You Never Saw*, and author of *Towers of Deception*; Paul Zarembka, editor: *The Hidden History of 9/11*. And we welcome back Jonathan Kay, author of *Among the Truthers*. Okay gentlemen, I wanna start by having Richard first, and then you two gentlemen here in the studio, tell me one thing—'cause we don't wanna do the whole program on this—but tell me one thing you heard in the interview I just did with John Kay that you want to either address, set the record straight, confront, whatever. Richard, go ahead, you first.
>
> *Richard Gage*: Indeed. This individual prefers to characterize us as conspiracy theorists, but the fifteen hundred architects and engineers that I represent— Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth at AE911Truth.org— don't have any conspiracy theories. What we have is scientific, forensic evidence found at the, in the debris piles of World Trade Centers One, Two, and Seven that is clear

evidence of explosive demolition of all three of these buildings. And we don't have this person talking about this evidence; he just prefers to call us names. We're talking about the destruction of, for instance, of World Trade Center Seven: A forty-seven story skyscraper that drops cleanly, suddenly, uniformly, symmetrically at free-fall acceleration, straight down into its own footprint in the exact manner of a classic controlled demolition. Why are we not talking about that evidence which has caused so great of concern to the hundreds of—fifteen hundred architects and engineers? And there's explosives found in the World Trade Center dust in a, documented in a peer reviewed paper. We need to be talking about this, not defending ourselves against, uh, being called, uh, having a "middle-aged crisis," as Jonathan, in his book, refers to us as. (0:45-2:11)

*Steve Paikin:* Richard, thank you. Paul, what one thing would you like to tackle here?

*Paul Zarembka*: Well, the main thing that went through the whole interview, I thought, was he was doing a psychoanalysis of *us*—and he knows me from, what, an hour or two—and it's impossible to learn another human being in that short period of time. So I assert that it's absolutely impossible for him to know my psychology. It's as simple as that.

*Steve Paikin*: He's lumping you in with?

*Paul Zarembka*: With "Truthers," with a capital T. All of us are alleged to be the same, it makes absolutely no sense. For example, even—I'm gonna be frank— even your introduction, when you talk about moon landing [sic] and stuff like that, I've never been interested in any of those other topics. The only serious topic where the word "conspiracy" applies that I've seriously investigated is 9/11, and it applies to George Bush. George Bush has a 9/11 conspiracy theory. (2:13-3:05)

To note, for much of his psychoanalysis of these particular "conspiracist cranks," Kay relies on "James Bennett, one of the cocreators of the well-traveled anti-Truther blog *Screw Loose Change*" [sic, italicized in original] (2011:192), and "Phil Molé, a Chicago-based freelance writer and veteran debunker who investigated the 9/11 Truth movement for a 2006 article in *Skeptic* magazine" [italicized in original] (2011:192). In the end, Kay's analysis is the application of the "conspiracist worldview" produced by the body of anti-conspiracist literature noted above.

Barrie Zwicker's response to Steve Paikin's (2011) opening question highlights the problem with the application of the "conspiracist worldview":

*Steve Paikin:* Barrie Zwicker, what one thing do you want to deal with in the John Kay interview?

*Barrie Zwicker*: Well, one thing is that he said that we, "Truthers" — and it's true that we're all lumped together with the moon hoax people and little green people and all sorts of people who believe strange things. *It's severely dehumanizing of those of us who are thoughtful and who respect evidence.* He said that the hard kernel is that we distrust all authorities. *That's completely untrue in my case.* There's lots of authorities that I respect. We were just talking before this show about politicians. I think most of 'em do a darn good job, I respect them. So I really find that his demeanor in the interview is very similar to the book that you've written, John, which is really a profound — I'm going to hold back here — *it's a profoundly dishonest book that consists of a farrago of vast omissions, especially omissions about any evidence about the subject ostensibly you deal with, which you then replace with nasty name calling and innuendo and all sorts of sly putdowns of all sorts of really good people.* And actually, when I finished the book — you know, there's a, um, there's a way of approaching the truth, many ways, and one of them is that you ask yourself, or you are asked, "what's the first word that comes into your mind after you see this sculpture or whatever," and the big word that comes into my mind after reading your book is *condescension* on your part. [emphasis mine] (3:40-5:14)

After reading this statement, one might be able to understand Zwicker's point later in the episode when he tells Johnathan Kay that during their interview for the book, Zwicker "wanted to keep track of [his] time so [he] didn't talk too much and have a chance to hear [Kay] when [he] asked [Kay] a question" (Paikin 2011: 15:20-15:40) Kay, reporting in his book that Zwicker was "[o]ne of the oddest interviews" (2011:191) he conducted, interpreted the interview as a sign that, in some cases, "cranks are high functioning intellectuals frustrated by a menial profession" (2011:191), or that "many come to their crankdom in middle age, or at the end of their working lives, as they are casting about for some project to occupy their hyperactive minds" (2011:191).

Zwicker's extended comment above ends the "Truthers'" opening remarks on *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, and after he announces that the book can be summed up with the word "condescension," Paikin asks for Kay's rebuttal:

*Johnathan Kay:* In a way, that's a fair criticism. I don't take the idea of George Bush and Dick Cheney bombing the World Trade Center seriously, and as a result I have written a book that, by necessity, may appear condescending to

those who do.  My book is a *serious* attempt to explain why so many intelligent people—and I credit everyone on this panel with being intelligent—why they believe things that I think are plainly irrational.  And, by the way, I'd like to say that the *Wall Street Journal* had a review of my book on Saturday, and one of the proudest things I, for me, about that review was that they said that I painted a fairly affectionate portrait of conspiracy theorists, and that I do not mock them—and the book was not written in a tone of mockery….  [emphasis mine] (5:17-5:55)

Incidentally, the particular *Wall Street Journal* review Kay referred to states that, "[r]eporting without mockery, Mr. Kay has a knack for making even the *silliest conspiracist* sound sympathetic" [emphasis mine] (Bunch 2011), and this was among the many reviewers who found that the only fault with Kay's (2011) work was that it too one-sidedly blamed liberal academia for the growth of conspiracism of the 21st century (Ceren 2011; Pitt 2011; Roberts 2011; Singal 2011).  Among the more critical reviews of his book (Cole 2011; Flynn 2011; Schneider 2011), one critic asserts that Kay's (2011) "treatment of several subjects is unwarrantedly brief and misleading—perhaps because he regards Wikipedia entries as reliable, comparable to Snopes ([see Kay 2011] p. 241)," and this same reviewer also "found flawed logic and factual mistakes galore" (Bauer 2012:177) along with a "lack of evidence- or logic-based argument in [Kay's 2011] book…" (2012:178).

*Jonathan Kay's Use of Anti-conspiracy Analytic Categories*

Returning to the anti-conspiracist analysis of the "it's not a theory theory" (Aaronovitch 2010; Byford 2011), here is how Kay (2011) presents his analysis of the "just asking questions" factor that is present within the 911TM:

Following in the tradition of Bertrand Russell's famous essay about JFK, most Truthers prefer to focus on *questions*.  Among the "10 reasons for starting a new 9/11 investigation" listed on the leaflets they distribute at Ground Zero, for instance, are such entries as, "What force pulverized most of the concrete and office material of the Twin Towers into dust, and was able to eject steel beams into buildings over 400 feet away?" and, "Why was there no mention in the 9/11 Commission Report of WTC Building 7?"  [italicized in original] (p. 66)

No data is given to show that "Truthers" consciously or knowingly model their behavior after Russell's (1964) essay, but in Paul Zarembka's (2008) edited volume, *The Hidden History of 9-11*, David Ray Griffin (2008c) *has* followed in Bertrand Russell's (1964) footsteps with a brief essay, unmentioned by Kay (2011), which is titled, "Sixteen Reasons to Question the Official Story About 9-11." For my purposes in this dissertation, Griffin (2008c) addresses WTC 7 in three of the sixteen points, which are reproduced here:

> 12. The official explanation of the destruction of the Twin Towers and WTC 7 contradicts all prior history with regard to steel-frame high-rise buildings: that they have never collapsed for any reason other than being brought down by explosives in the procedure known as controlled demolition.

> 13. Firefighters, emergency medical workers, police officers, city officials, WTC employees, and television and print journalists reported explosions going off in the Twin Towers and WTC 7.

> 15. The National Institute of Standards and Technology has repeatedly postponed its report on the collapse of WTC 7, which perfectly exemplifies the standard features of a classic controlled implosion and has been identified as such by numerous experts. (p. xviii)

To note, Kay (2011) reproduced the entire list of Bertrand Russell's (1964) "16 Questions on the Assassination," and the questions from the 911TM he presents above are those that I have found to be more central to many of the movement's members than the one provided by Byford (2011) from 911Truth.org's (2010) list. Moreover, as I have also attended their events, I believe I came away with the very same pamphlet that Kay (2011) acquired, plus another (each are included in Appendix A). Before, moving to that discussion, I will reveal one last feature of *Among the Truthers* that highlights the ongoing discussions.

Jonathan Kay presents his book as a field guide to 'America's conspiracist underground,' because, as he states in the preface, "[y]ou can't defeat the

Enlightenment's enemies unless you understand them. And that is the project that [he] asks [his] readers to embark on as they read [his] book" (2011:xiii). In further prefacing his book, he describes how, "in Chapter 5 — [his] field guide to the different breeds of conspiracy theorist — people come to their paranoias for all sorts of complicated reasons…[b]ut [that] they are all bound together by one increasingly common trait: They have spun out of rationality's ever-weakening gravitational pull, and into mutually impenetrable Manichean fantasy universes of their own construction" (2011:xx). This 'mutually impenetrable fantasy universe' is reminiscent of the "monological belief system" and "conspiracist worldview" that psychologists propose guide beliefs in 9/11 conspiracy theories (Wood et al. 2012; Wood & Douglas 2013). "Conspiracy theories, the subject of [Kay's] book" (2011:xix), are put to the wayside in Chapter 5, "Why They Believe." "Much of this book," as Kay (2011:xx) states, "is devoted to the task of exploring those fantasy universes and delving into the minds of those who create them — an inquiry that is a critical first step in defending the rationalist tradition."

"For some Truthers," Kay (2011:xxi) asserts, "including many of those [he] interviewed for this book, the idea that elements within the Bush administration used self-inflicted mass murder as a launching pad for geopolitical adventurism has become a full-time, all-consuming obsession." In Chapter 5, Kay "profile[s] the characteristics of those who don't [resist the lure conspiracism]" (2011:150), and his first "specimen" is Richard Gage, "a balding, mild-mannered, middle-aged architect who heads up a California-based group called Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth" (2011:152). As reported in the book, Gage's "singular focus — laboriously examined in a six-hundred-slide PowerPoint presentation he trots out at every opportunity — is the precise sequence

of events leading to the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings" (2011:152). "In

one particularly effective segment during his stump presentation," Kay (2011) reports,

> Gage puts up shots of the localized fires that broke out in the lower floors of
> WTC Building 7 hours before it collapsed. Seconds later, he shows footage of
> Beijing's Mandarin Oriental hotel—which suffered an epic top-to-bottom
> conflagration in 2009, yet remained standing. It's a cinematic juxtaposition that
> plays to the Truthers' strongest card: Even many architects and structural
> engineers who've never heard of Richard Gage will concede that the collapse of
> WTC 7, a fairly typical 1980's-era structure located about a football field away
> from WTC 1, was unusual. (p. 153)

In his profile, Kay employs slights and ridicule in his assessment of the "Truther

Extraordinaire," Richard Gage, who "seems curiously upbeat" (2011:155) for a 'nutbar'

'going through a midlife crisis,' but curiously absent is any attention to the empirical

claims about the 'unusual collapse of WTC 7.'

Kay has a "master's degree in metallurgical engineering" (2011:7), but his

defense of rationalism and goal of explaining conspiracy theories and their believers

helps him avoid entangling with "notebooks full of esoteric debating points about

avionics, building demolition, NORAD flight-tracking procedures, and a dozen other

scattered subjects" (2011:66), such as addressing how office fires caused WTC 7 to

collapse symmetrically with a sudden onset in less than seven seconds. Kay reasons that

grappling with these kinds of claims makes it "difficult to put together a coherent

narrative [of the Truthers]" (2011:66). Within his constructed narrative of the 911TM,

Kay retells Richard Gage's revelation in March of 2006 when he first heard on the radio

"David Ray Griffin, a retired Claremont School of Theology professor who's since

become a full-time 9/11 Truth activist" (2011:154). Kay continues with Gage's account:

> "Griffin was logical and methodical—almost grandfatherly," Gage remembers.
> "He was talking about the 118 [World Trade Center] first-responders—
> information that had just come out in 2005—who said they'd heard explosions
> and flashes of light, beams dripping with molten metal, all amid the collapse of
> 80,000 tons of structural steel. It hit me like a two-by-four. How come I'd never

> *heard* of any of this?  I was shocked.  I had to pull my car to the side of the road to absorb it all.  I knew I'd be late for the meeting.  But I didn't care."
>     Within days, Gage was proselytizing the Truth to everyone who would listen—his family, his friends, even his architectural colleagues at the Walnut Creek firm of Akol & Yoshii. [italicized in original] (p. 154)

Once again, as we can see in the quotes from Kay's (2011) interview, Richard Gage presents empirical claims as to his interests in 9/11 Truth, but Kay, for reasons stated, does not have an interest in addressing or rebutting those claims with his own arguments.

The Index of Kay's (2011) book shows that Richard Gage is discussed on pages xxi-xxii, 100, 104, 105, 151-155, 159, and 211, and within those pages Gage is quoted on pages 100, 152, 154, and 155.  The same does not hold for Gage's guide to 9/11 Truth, David Ray Griffin.  Griffin is shown in the Index of Kay's book to appear on pages 6, 49-50, 91, 104, 119, 154, 190, 193, and 230, but even though Kay states that "[d]uring [their] interview [in Griffin's Seattle home], [Griffin] spoke to [Kay] for three hours straight — and seemed prepared to speak for hours more had [Kay] not gotten up to leave" (2011:193), Kay (2011) provides no quotations from their three hour interview nor from any of Griffin's books.  Kay describes Griffin as "a superstar Truther" (2011:6), "probably the most influential Truther alive" (2011:49), and he notes that this person who "wrote even more books [than a prominent JFK-era conspiracist] in the space of just five years, all of them based in large part on material he found while surfing the Internet" (2011:230), "has written [since 2004] no fewer than eleven books, in which he methodically examines virtually every minute of the 9/11 timeline" (2011:193).  Excluding quotations from Griffin's interview and books is, in effect, a way of silencing him, and it is a curious approach to providing one's readers with a trustworthy 'field guide to Trutherdom.'

Kay references two of Griffin's books, with his 2004 title, *The New Pearl Harbor*,

described as "what would become a foundational text of the Truther movement"

(2011:119).  Instead of reviewing, critiquing, quoting, or interrogating this "foundational

text" of the group he is studying,  Kay turns back to constructing his narrative by

describing how "Truthers have constructed not only an alternative vision of modern

American history, but also an alternative vision of American itself" (2011:120).  Kay is

most revealing of the content of Griffin's work when discussing his 2008 title, *9/11*

*Contradictions:  An Open Letter to Congress and the Press*, and this is to say only that it

"includes these chapters:"

1. How long did George Bush remain in the classroom?
2. When did Dick Cheney enter the underground bunker?
3. Was Cheney observed confirming a stand-down order?
4. Did Cheney observe the land-all-planes order?
5. When did Cheney issue shoot down authorization?
6. Where was General Richard Myers?
7. Where was Donald Rumsfeld?
8. Did Ted Olson receive calls from Barbara Olson?
9. When was the military alerted about Flight 11?
10. When was the military alerted about Flight 175?
11. When was the military alerted about Flight 77?
12. When was the military alerted about Flight 93?
13. Could the military have shot down Flight 93?  (2011:194)

Griffin's (2008b) book, *9/11 Contradictions*, actually consists of 25 chapters, each of which

is titled with a question about "9/11" or the events of September 11, of which Kay (2011)

selected only the first 13.  Absent of discussing content from the chapters, readers might

be left with the impression that they lack substance, rigor, and legitimacy, which is to

say that they are merely "questions" produced from the "hyperactive mind" of a

"conspiracist crank."

**The 9/11 Truth Movement:  Questioning Conspiracies, Answering with WTC 7**

As stated earlier in this chapter, certainly the 911TM does have questions about "9/11" and September 11.  "Ten Reasons Why You Should Question 9/11," the pamphlet Kay (2011) describes above, was handed to me by an anonymous member of the street rally across from St. Paul's Church that I attended in 2011, as was another pamphlet, "Why You Should Support a New 911 Investigation!"  Both of these pamphlets, included in Appendix A, contain essentially the same information.  Unlike 911Truth.org's (2010) "Connecting the Dots:  Unanswered Questions" pamphlet that Byford (2011) highlights, both of those that I acquired unfold to five separate pages of factual information about the events of September 11 that support the 911TM's adherence to questioning the official story of "9/11."  In my experience with the movement, members often do have questions, but rarely are they merely rhetorical.

*Questioning Conspiracies or WTC 7?*

As described in the previous chapter, my shortest interview in 2011 came from a member of the 911TM whose motivation for attending the rally at ground zero was because there were "[t]oo many unanswered questions," and that people need to ask themselves, "how do three towers fall straight down in one day?"  Continuing, this person said, "You can convince me one tower can.  You might be able to convince me that two towers can, but you'll never convince me of three:  It's a mathematical impossibility.  They fell straight down through the path of most resistance."  This point was iterated in several interviews and on the 911TM Facebook group.  I had asked members of the Facebook group about which documentary woke them up to 9/11 Truth, with one person commenting with the following:  "What woke me up to 9/11 was listening on the radio and hearing the second tower fell. 1 tower maybe, 2 no way. I

don't remember when I found out about building 7, but it was shortly after. That absolutely sealed the deal. Everything since has only reinforced my convictions" [sic].

During the 2011 rally, I purchased a button with the statement, "2Planes-3BLDGS=911WTF?" This arithmetical interrogative typifies what many in the movement believe to be the essential question of "9/11," hence ReThink911's campaign is about asking the public, "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11?" One member I interviewed in 2013 pointed out, though, "even among the 9/11 Truthers, none of us agree with each other a hundred percent. Most of us agree with each other ninety, ninety five." This person related that, from their perspective, there were "*two* smoking guns of 9/11" [emphasis mine], the missing footage and indicators of a plane crash at the Pentagon and, secondly, the collapse of WTC 7. Another part of this same interview was more revealing of the questions the 911TM has about "9/11" and September 11.

During this interview, which occurred just before the ReThink911 rally began, I asked what, if any, evidence could be presented that would change their mind about "9/11," to which they responded by repeatedly asking questions about both events they believe to be the "two smoking guns of 9/11." After this, the following exchange took place:

I:        Would you say there are just too many questions?

P5:     Oh yeah. There's uh, Shanksville, you know I never talk about Shanksville because I just don't know what to say. It's just I, I sit with my mouth wide open that people, um, I guess Shanksville, Flight 93 should be a smoking gun because, if you look at the footage of where the plane supposedly crashed, to me, it looks like someone took a backhoe, dug a hole, made it look like plane crash. There's no plane, and the official story says the plane buried itself. I, I'd like to know when in history that's ever happened before. Why were there no bodies? The coroner left because there wasn't a drop of blood. I mean, where's the, where's the, you know one guy said it looked like someone just dumped a bunch of scrap metal in there to make it look like a plane. It doesn't add up. You know you got to look at other cases where planes have

crashed, and then compare it to, well, why didn't this happen, why didn't that? That's when you go to the Pentagon, you know, there's no skid marks on the lawn, there's no, uh, you know those engines were made of titanium. They wouldn't have just vaporized. You know, I, I…I barely passed chemistry when I was in high school by the skin of my teeth, but I understood enough about the periodic table to, to know that jet fuel would not burn at such a rate that it would melt titanium or steel, you know. Uh, yeah, I mean, there's a lot of questions…

I:      So why the focus on World Trade Center Seven with the ReThink911 campaign?

P5:     I think for most people, that's the ultimate smoking gun. For me it's the number two smoking gun. For me, once I saw the Pentagon then I knew something was not right, and then Building Seven just confirmed my beliefs. You know? So when you look at those two, and if you consider things like Flight 93 at Shanksville a smoking gun, if you consider NORAD a smoking gun, okay great, like I said, the average person may not understand those things. But, all you have to do is look, and, you know, I can't tell you how many people I've talk that never heard of Building Seven. "What do you mean Building Seven? No, only the two towers fell." You know? [laughs] And it's like, "Really?" I can remember on 9/11 hearing about Building Seven falling down. I had no reason not to believe the official story at the time, so I just assumed it was debris and, okay, it's going to happen. I mean, I'm not a physicist, I'm not an engineer, how would I know? It wasn't until this information was presented to me through documentaries. [end of statement]

I asked which documentaries he was referring to, and I was told that *Loose Change, 2nd Edition* was the catalyst to this person investigating the events of September 11. While this film has been a pathway to 9/11 Truth for many in the movement, other documentaries are currently considered to be of more value to spreading 9/11 Truth.

On July 6, 2013, I submitted a poll to the 911TM Facebook group asking, "If a documentary or film woke you up to 9/11 truth, which one was most responsible?" (For these results, see Appendix B) The top response was *Loose Change,* which is nearly always brought up if a documentary is mentioned by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists[20]. However, of Ken Doc's (2012) "Top 10 9/11 Docs" on the 911TM Facebook group, which generated 95 likes and 169 comments to date (July 4th, 2014), various editions of *Loose Change* are mentioned as 'other notable documentaries,' but it is

*9/11: Explosive Evidence - Experts Speak Out* that tops the list at number one.  On a post to

the 911TM Facebook group asking its members if they "started off with the theory that

the Bush administration, Neocons from PNAC, the Mossad, or other agents planned

9/11 and then started looking for evidence to support your pre-drawn conclusion," Ken

Doc stated that he "personally never started off thinking it was an 'inside job'. [He]

watched *Loose Change* in 2005 and [his] first priority was to prove it wrong."  Doc

proceeded to share a link to a thread asking members, "[w]hat first tipped you to the

fact the official 9/11 storyline was untrue?"  In that thread's comments, *Loose Change* and

WTC 7 were frequently cited as the impetus of why members began to disbelieve in the

official story of "9/11," both which are empirical catalysts for change in beliefs about

what happened on September 11.

As Richard Gage, founder of AE911Truth, remarked on Steve Paikin's (2011)

show, he and "the fifteen hundred architects and engineers that [he] represent[s]…don't

have any conspiracy theories.  What [they] have is scientific, forensic evidence."  The

collapse of the three WTC buildings on September 11 is analyzed in detail by

credentialed experts and professionals in AE911Truth's documentary, *Explosive Evidence*

(see ae911truth 2012), which had a premier screening that I was invited to attend in

NYC's Upper East Side in 2011.  At time mark 5:36 of the version cited here, a scene

begins with the refrain, "How do 2 planes bring down 3 skyscrapers?"  The

documentary proceeds to explain the collapse of the official story according to the

'smoking gun evidence that is WTC 7' as alleged by the 911TM.  Narrating, Richard

Gage states the following:

> The new World Trade Center Building 7 looms above the site of its original.
> Building 7 was a 47-story high rise not hit by an airplane, yet it was the third
> modern steel framed skyscraper to collapse rapidly and symmetrically on 9/11.

It was a football field away from the North Tower, and sustained minor damage from falling debris. Building 7's precipitous collapse was blamed on normal office fires. (5:49−6:21)

While the public can watch engineers, architects, and physicists on YouTube describe why NIST's (2008) report cannot explain why Building 7 collapsed "rapidly and symmetrically on 9/11" (ae911truth 2012: 6:09), members of the movement take the issue to the streets. In 2011, several people carried signs and banners and donned shirts and hats meant to inform the public about the collapse of the third tower, and in 2013 ReThink911's campaign is almost exclusively focused on this excluded fact from Zelikow's (2004) *9/11 Commission Report*.

One person I interviewed at ground zero in 2011, who flew to New York from Chicago to try to "educate people about the evidence that's been presented over the last ten years so they can see for themselves what really happened because the official story just doesn't add up," described to me what they believe to be "*the* smoking gun of 9/11." This participant was among many others holding signs at the 2011 rally, with their sign reading, "WTC 7 Free fall collapse. Did you know?" Upon observing this, I asked during our interview, "What is the significance of Building Seven?" To this, I was presented with the following response:

P[6]:     The significance of Building 7 is they wanna say jet fuel caused the towers to fall. I don't agree with that analysis, but we'll give 'em the benefit of doubt, they say jet fuel caused them to fall. Building 7 was a 47 story building that wasn't hit by a plane, and thus no jet fuel, but still collapsed at free fall speed. There's federal buildings in there, or federal offices of like the FBI, the SEC, Secret Service; it was Giuliani's fallout bunker, there was FEMA in there. It collapsed at freefall speed, and it didn't get mentioned once in the official report! Why!? It's a very important…Uh, a 30..This would've been the tallest building in 32 states in America; it falls at freefall speed at 5:20 in the afternoon in lower Manhattan, but they don't mention it in the official report? *It's things like that that make people question.* Like most people you ask, like we say, "Two buildings took out three planes!" Like, "What? How is that even possible!?" And then you learn that the BBC predicted—they said that it,

BBC reported the collapse actually happening 20 minutes before it did happen. It was in the background while she was reporting it. Things like that. These are why we need a new investigation. [emphasis mine]

The above statement was made about seven and a half minutes into an interview, and about four hours after the rally began. I can only imagine this person meant to say, "Two planes took out three buildings," but that they said the opposite due to fatigue. In any regard, the question of the collapse of WTC 7 has been popular for members of the 911TM, one that was taken to great lengths in the culmination of the 2013 ReThink911 campaign.

*Rethinking 9/11 through the Third Tower*

In 2013, ReThink911.org (2013a) commissioned YouGov Plc to conduct a nationally representative online survey, and they included a similar item that 911Truth.org (2006, 2007) had asked in its Zogby polls. ReThink911.org's (2013a) question reads as follows: "In addition to the Twin Towers, a third skyscraper in the World Trade Center complex collapsed on 9/11. Were you aware of this before today?" Prior to the spring of 2008, I would have been one among the forty-six percent counted in the YouGov Plc poll who said they were not aware of this fact, and upon learning about it I began to question "9/11" and investigate what happened on September 11, just as has been described by many others within the 911TM. Like many others in the movement, I have asked questions about the security failures, the flight paths, the destruction of the towers, and other empirical questions of the events of September 11, but as a sociologist my line of questions changed from asking these types of questions to asking questions to and about the 911TM. Due to the efforts of people like Sooty Mangabey, who has given permission to use his name, and others who promoted the ReThink911 campaign within the 911TM Facebook group, in 2013 I eventually found

myself back in Manhattan asking questions to key members of the campaign, such as

Mike Figa, who has also given me permission to use his name in this study.

On September 5th, 2013, Figa's interview aired on the Internet-based radio show,

"9/11 Free Fall" (I was listening based upon a post promoting the interview to the

911TM Facebook group), in which Figa describes to the host, Andrew Steele, his role in

the ReThink911 campaign. Only partially reproduced here, this interview highlights

how and why Figa and others at the head of the ReThink911 campaign pose the question

displayed on posters and billboards throughout the world, "Did you know a third tower

fell on 9/11?" Here is a key exchange that highlights how members of the 911TM

interact with and counteract their countermovement's public campaigns:

> *Steele*: You're listening to this on Thursday night on No Lies Radio. As of September 1st, we have signs up on taxi cabs. If you go to AE911Truth's Facebook page you'll see there's a picture of various activists, including Pamela Senzee, who's played a large part in this ReThink911 campaign too, standing in front of a taxicab with a sign on the top of it, asking viewers "Do you know about the third tower that fell on 9/11?" So, I mean, that's great. I guess I want to ask you, how did you come up with this? I mean, this is a monumental thing. It sounds like something people kind of just fantasize about: "You know, I wish we could just get Building Seven up on a billboard, on taxicabs. Wouldn't it be great if the world just switched around and did that?" You actually made it happen! How do you pursue a campaign like this? How do you take that first step?
>
> *Figa*: Yeah, actually I'll—not to give undue attention to this particular person, but Pamela Geller—you probably know that she's Islamophobic, a talking head, let's say—she did a few add campaigns, one of which was on the New York City metro system, which had a picture of the second plane impact, which I also thought was pretty distasteful. I mean, we're talking people dying instantly. And she had a quote from the Quran—and I mean, of course, all these books you can take a random quote and it won't sound so good—so she had this campaign, multiple campaigns, but they were rumored or reported to be around ten thousand dollars. So, I was like, 'if she can put this on the New York City metro to foster bigotry *and* support the lie,' I was like, 'well, we should do our own campaign.' So that was how it started. So [laughs] I hope she hears about this, but she definitely inspired a much, much bigger campaign than her various campaigns that were here and also in San Francisco. So that's it. And then we just moved it forward from there, and it turned into an anniversary event that really expanded. And that's it. So we have one metro, there's I think now 12 cities, and there are some unofficial cities as well, some people doing stuff

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independently around the world. I'm working with people in Bethlehem, actually, so they're going to be up there in Bethlehem, where I actually lived for two months—and in some other cities. So it really grew. But the one metro we do have is San Francisco, the Bart metro system, and that is already up. I'm not sure if they're all up, but they even put them up early. So yeah, but the center piece to the campaign would be an over fifty foot billboard in Times Square. And we, I was actually quite surprised. A lot of advertisers, let's say, or middlemen, turned us down, but we also got approvals, and we're quite pleased to get those approvals. So on September third they should be installing the billboard in Times Square, and it will be an event on September eleventh itself, which is a Wednesday, coming up pretty soon, depending on which this airs, and we would like everyone to get themselves out there, and to get their friends in New York City to go to Times Square. And we'll have some speakers, and we'll be doing some sort of event which is still being planned in the final stages.

Inspired by movement opposition, the 911TM's efforts to bring one of their central questions to publics around the world was met through the ReThink911 campaign.

Just the day before this interview aired, I had booked my flight for a 17 hour stay in Manhattan so that I could interview the people in attendance at the 2013 Rethink911 rally in Times Square, and Mike Figa was among those who I interviewed. Volunteering his time at a merchandise table, much as he volunteers his time for the campaign generally, 'loosing thousands of dollars in the process,' Figa related that the campaign was "covered in *The New York Times*, *Russia Today*, *Time Magazine*," and that along with "a lot of donations from around the world, a lot of small donations," the ReThink911 campaign has been successful in spreading awareness about the third tower that collapsed on September 11. During my interview with Figa, I recorded Richard Gage, AIA and the founder of AE911Truth, on my voice recorder in the background speaking on stage, encouraging those gathered for the rally to make donations at the merchandise table Figa was attending. Donations would be exchanged for a DVD from AE911Truth, material that Figa described as "the best information out there, scientifically sound information, which talks about the controlled demolition of all three towers."

To summarize, the ReThink911 campaign is an effort by the 911TM to raise a central question in the minds of the global public: "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11?" For the 911TM, the collapse of the third tower is a "smoking gun of 9/11," indicating that "9/11 was an inside job," and the 911TM believes it has scientifically based, forensic evidence to support these claims to publics around the world. There are many other outwardly directed questions by the 911TM, as exhibited by 911Truth.org's (2010) pamphlet discussed by Byford (2011), the one Kay (2011) highlights, along with a similar one I acquired in 2011, all three of which discuss WTC 7 among several other empirical issues regarding September 11. As one of my interviewees made clear, WTC 7 is one among other "smoking gun" clues that "9/11 was an inside job," but because the ReThink911 campaign made WTC 7 its main question for the public, and because the issue appears in nearly every member's account of why they "investigate 9/11," I will continue treat it as a special case in the proceeding section of this chapter.

**Debunking and Denying 9/11 Truth by Default**

At this point, it is safe to say that WTC Building 7 is considered a central aspect of why the 911TM considers the official story of "9/11" to be a lie, at worst, or incomplete, at best. For many in the 911TM, the collapse of WTC 7 indicates that "9/11 was an inside job," and for others, due to its absence in the official story (Zelikow 2004) and unscientific treatment in NIST's (2008) report (see Chandler 2012; Griffin 2010a, 2013; Ryan 2012), WTC 7 indicates that people should "investigate 9/11" for themselves, because "there are just too many unanswered questions." Jonathan Kay's (2011) deference to *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) book, *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, on such questions as 'the unusual collapse of WTC 7' (Kay 2011:153), and his and others' (Warner & Neville-Shepard 2014) reliance on *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) book as their reasoning behind *why*

members of the 911TM *are* "conspiracy theorists," indicates that it is worthwhile to pay close attention to this work in particular[21].

*Enter the Conspiracist Crank Extraordinaire*

As discussed above, my first interview was interrupted by a bystander, and as I attempted to keep all of my interviews dyadic, here is how this person (P7) broached the "conversation" between myself and the other person I was interviewing at the time (P4):

P7:    I've read all the books by David Ray Griffin, yeah…

I:    A second gentleman has entered the conversation, and I'm just going to start off with the same question:  What brings you to ground zero today?

P7:    Well, I'm from Singapore actually, and I've read about, you know, the nine one one inside job.  And I read three of David Ray Griffin's books.

I:    Which books were those?

P7:    *The New Pearl Harbor*, *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited*, and finally, uh, nine one one omission report, uh, distortions and omissions.  I'm going to get a hold a few more of his books within the next few weeks.

I:    So you're from Singapore, you read David Ray Griffin's books, and that's why you're here at ground zero today?

P7:    Yeah, I'm here to actually try to join the nine one one truth movement for the protest march, but I could not get in to pass beyond the barricade so that's all I could do today.  So, I'm glad I saw you [P4] standing with this sign here.

P4:    Yeah, we just got in our self with all the [garbled recording]

P7:    Oh, okay.

P4:    Yeah, so…

I:    Is there a 9/11 Truth Movement in Singapore?

P7:    Uh, no, there isn't actually.  Most of my friends, when I tell them about the evidence that I've read, they don't believe it, they say "it's just conspiracy theory" and all that, but people who say that have not actually read, you know, the material.

P4:    The people, people who use the term "conspiracy theory" aren't familiar with…

P7:     Yeah, they just want to push the thing aside and say "it's a conspiracy theory,"

P4:     Right…

P7:     Actually, if you examine all the evidence that has been dug up by all the investigators, I mean it's just…[noise interruption from passing vehicles]…I think it's overwhelming evidence showing, you know, these people who are not—I mean very, very highly qualified people: Richard Gage, the architect from San Francisco Bay, I guess, yeah, and many others who have dug up so much evidence to show for sure that this is an inside job, yeah.  The buildings couldn't have come down just based on the fire, yeah.

I:      Based on fire and…

P7:     Structural damage due to fire is the official story, yeah, mmhmm.

I:      And, so you mentioned, uh, that your friends will use the term "conspiracy theory" or "theorist…"

P7:     Yeah…

I:      How does it make you feel when they say that?

P7:     Well, umm….

I:      Because you mentioned that they haven't reviewed the evidence, do you want them to review the evidence, or…?

P7:     I talk to many of them, you know, like based on the books I have read, and some of them, yeah, they gotta give it, you know, like some thought. But most of them will just push it aside, and say "it's conspiracy theory." I think people are just lazy to [sic] examine the evidence, and I think it's just too scary to know that the U.S. government would actually be involved in bringing down the towers and creating a pretext for war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I:      That's interesting that you say that; do you think that people think it's too scary to examine the evidence?

P7:     Most Americans are just too afraid to believe that, you know, that, to imagine that the U.S. government is prepared to do such a thing—such a terrible thing—and such a great sacrifice of lives, and yeah.  So, I think a lot of them are too afraid to even entertain the thought, and that's why they, they rather just brush it aside as conspiracy theory.

P4:     I would agree.

This interview highlights the disdain for the conspiracy label that Wood and Douglas

(2013) highlight in their study, and it also shows the recognition by movement members

that the label is employed in order to avoid dealing with empirical claims, as Husting and Orr's (2007) study concludes.  Moreover, it shows that David Ray Griffin and Richard Gage's work with the 911TM are important to movement members.

The third book that the person from Singapore referred to was Griffin's (2005) book, *The 9/11 Commission Report:  Omissions and Distortions*, in which he argues that "an examination is surely in order because, regardless of one's opinion about its historical accuracy, *The 9/11 Commission Report* is one of the most important documents ever produced in the United States" (2005:1).  As another example of his work, Griffin's (2010a) book, *The Mysterious Collapse of World Trade Center 7:  Why the Official Report about 9/11 is Unscientific and False*, is a 269 page indictment of NIST's (2008) report on the collapse of each of the three WTC towers.  Griffin ultimately concludes that "NIST's report on WTC7 is not, as we have seen, merely 'unscientific' in a loose sense of that term.  Rather, its authors have committed scientific fraud in the strict sense by ignoring, falsifying, and fabricating evidence" [italics in original] (2010a:245).  David Ray Griffin is noted by countermovement antagonists to be among the most recognized and prolific members of the 911TM (see Kay 2011), and his work is inspirational for many of the people I interviewed, as is shown in the interview above.  As one of the most prolific intellectuals organizers of the 911TM (Griffin 2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Griffin and Scott 2007; Griffin 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011), I will focus on how his work is treated by *Popular Mechanics* (2006, 2011).

*Enter the Rational Analysts, Defenders of the Official Story*

*Debunking 9/11 Myths* is a self-described "in-depth investigation by *Popular Mechanics*" (2006:front cover), and it is described by Senator John McCain, who authored the Forward of the 1st edition, as standing "for an old-fashioned approach to facts.  It

relies," says Sen. McCain, "on reporting, evidence, and eyewitnesses, *and rejects*

speculation, falsehoods, and *conspiracy*" [emphasis mine] (2006:xv). This book

progresses with a series of discursive moments projected to the reader as Claim vs. Fact,

where a claim by one or more representatives of "9/11 conspiracy theorists" is

presented and then is rebutted with quotes and reports from experts interviewed for the

book. For example, here is how *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) first edition addresses WTC 7

(reproduced in full, verbatim):

> **CLAIM**: Seven hours after the two towers fell, WTC 7 collapsed. The 47-story
> building housed offices for the Secret Service and CIA, among others—and was
> therefore, conspiracists say, a repository of secrets and evidence that needed to
> be destroyed. "Many researchers believe that shadowy elements within the
> agencies housed in WTC 7 are prime suspects in this sprawling
> conspiracy….[sic] If they are correct, Building 7 was literally a nest of suspicious
> activity and its remaining intact may well have been a catastrophe for those who
> were counting on its destruction," writes Jeremy Baker on the Web site
> www.serendipity.il.
> How did these "shadowy elements" engineer the collapse? As with the
> Twin Towers, conspiracy theorists see evidence of a controlled demolition.
> According to the Web site www.911review.org, "The video clearly shows that it
> was not a collapse subsequent to a fire, but rather a controlled demolition:
> Amongst the Internet investigators, the jury is in on this one." (p. 53)

Clearly, the conspiracy label is employed with the phrase, "conspiracists say," and while

Jeremy Baker is an active member of the 911TM (e.g., see his blog at Baker 2014), there is

no statement throughout the book as to why his, or another claimant, should be

considered a representative for the movement. Moreover, aside from only leading to a

homepage and not to the specific quote, the URL provided for Baker's quote leads to a

currently non-existent webpage, and it is similarly unclear why it, or any other webpage

provided, should be considered representative of the movement. Sociologically, these

are poor methods for rigorously gathering "claims" from the 911TM (although, *Popular*

*Mechanics* only claim to counterclaim "9/11 conspiracy theorists," not the movement),

and this should be kept in mind considering the vast amount of esteem or regard given to the book.

In an interview for *The History Channel*'s documentary, "The 9/11 Conspiracies: Fact or Fiction," which is "[b]ased in large part on a breakthrough exposé by Popular Mechanics" [sic] (History.com 2014:n.a.), Michael Shermer, whose 2011 book, *The Believing Brain*, treats "9/11 truthers…as a case study in how to test the validity of a conspiracy theory" (2011:211), stated the following about *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) methods of analysis:

> I think what *Popular Mechanics* did with the 9/11 conspiracy theory was just about one of the best things ever done in the history of skepticism. That is *exactly* how it should be done because that's the level at which these people are dealing with, the little factoids. Here's the claim, here's the answer, here's the claim, here's the answer. By the end, they got nothing to stand on: *Boom*, end of story. [emphasis in original] (costell123 2013:12:38-12:57)

In fact, Shermer (2011) appreciated *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) approach so much that he emulated the style by positioning the "9/11 truthers'" claims against rebuttals from demolition professionals'. As another example of regard for this work, in a segment titled, "Crackpot conspiracy theories enjoy mainstreaming by right," Rachel Maddow (2013), holding up a copy of *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) book and a copy of *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (Jacobson & Colón 2006), said that *Debunking 9/11 Myths* is one of the "two of the best things ever published about the 9/11 attacks." Along with the many citations to it as the authoritative account of why "9/11 conspiracy theorists" are wrong, it is safe to say that *Debunking 9/11 Myths* is considered by anti-conspiracists and opponents of the 911TM as a seminal and authoritative work that upholds its namesake.

In describing their approach to evaluating the claims of "9/11 conspiracy theorists," the editors of *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, David Dunbar and Brad Reagan, state in the book's introduction that "[t]he magazine assembled a team of reporters and researchers and *methodically* began to analyze the most common factual claims made by conspiracy theorists—assertions that are at the root of the majority of 9/11 alternative scenarios" [emphasis mine] (2011:xxi). In fact, there is no evidence in either version of *Popular Mechanics'* (2006, 2011) book that scientific methods were used to gather claims from the 911TM or others who offer alternative theories about what occurred on September 11, 2001. Their citations of the web addresses from which they pull quotes they paint as representative claims only lead to the homepages of websites, some of which are clearly not dedicated to skepticism toward the official narrative of "9/11." This text is promoted and endorsed as an example of science, but it can be more accurately described as one of many texts with the discursive field of anti-conspiracy discourse.

For example, here is a reproduction of one way the team at *Popular Mechanics* represents a "claim" by "conspiracists" about WTC 7:

> **CLAIM:** The collapse of the buildings left an estimated 1.8 million tons of concrete, steel, and other debris at the World Trade Center site. Much of it was cleared quickly, however, and the minimal amount of wreckage of WTC 7 available for later investigation has generated speculation. Some conspiracists point to the fast removal of debris as evidence of a government cover-up. "The columns were in pieces big enough to ship in a dump truck, which is what happened," writes one truther at www.debate.org. "The WTC wreckage was shipped overseas to china [sic] before any experts could even examine. Would experts not want to analyze the three biggest structural failures in the history of the world?" (*Popular Mechanics* 2011:85)

It is unclear why one anonymous "truther" from a website not directly related to 9/11 skepticism should serve as a model statement for those who contest the official narrative of "9/11." Moreover, using the conspiracy label, in this case in the form of

"conspiracists," likely biases readers in disfavor of these claims, which is a further indication of the disingenuous way *Popular Mechanics* (2006, 2011) addresses the claims of the 911TM.  If *Popular Mechanics'* (2006, 2011) audiences are not familiar enough with the breadth and depth of existing research that challenges the dominant narrative of "9/11" with empirical facts, or if such research is considered illegitimate or untrustworthy due to anti-conspiracy discourse, then *Popular Mechanics* (2006, 2011) can be said to be anti-scientific since they engage in agnotological (Proctor 2008) or consciousness lowering activities (Schnaiberg 1994) via recourse to the conspiracy label and for other methodologically lacking features of their work.

*9/11 Debunkers Debunk 9/11 Debunking*

In the introduction to *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, authored by David Dunbar and Brad Reagan, no methodology is described for how the magazine's "team of reporters and researchers…methodically began to analyze the most common factual claims made by conspiracy theorists—assertions that are at the root of the majority of 9/11 alternative scenarios" (2006:xix), nor is this methodology discussed anywhere else in either of the book's editions.  They state that the book is not designed to retell what happened on September 11, 2001, but instead their "book aims *only to answer the* questions *raised by conspiracy theorists themselves*" [italicized in original, emphasis mine] (Dunbar & Reagan 2006:xx).  The 1st edition is divided into four chapters with twenty claims, and the 2nd edition contains five chapters with twenty five claims; "World Trade Center Building 7" is the additional chapter in the second addition, whereas in the first addition it was only treated as one claim, "WTC 7:  Fire and Debris Damage."  Although there is no methodological justification presented for why the phrasing of this claim should be considered representative of how "9/11 conspiracy theorists" claim the collapse of WTC

7 is indicative of a conspiracy, most members of the 911TM believe that WTC 7 is a "smoking gun of 9/11," but only some of my data reported above confirm that some members of the 911TM are suspicious of the building's tenets.

*Popular Mechanics* (2006) formulate their responses to each "CLAIM" with a "FACT," and the basis of the "FACT" they use to respond to the "CLAIM" about WTC 7 is a draft version of the NIST (2008) report that Griffin (2010a) refutes. In their first edition, *Popular Mechanics* relies on Shyam Sunder, "acting deputy director, lead investigator, Building and Fire Research Laboratory, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)" (2006:112), for much of their analysis of *why* WTC 7 collapsed. In closing their CLAIM, *Popular Mechanics* notes that "there were a number of fuel tanks located throughout the building that may have supplied fuel to the fires for up to seven hours," that "the tanks ultimately contributed to the building's demise," and that "it appears the fires worked in conjunction with the damage from debris to weaken the building's structure, but NIST has not yet determined whether one or the other was the primary instigator to the collapse [of WTC 7]" (2006:56). In a lengthy list of frequently asked questions about the collapse of WTC 7, NIST would later state that 'fires being fed from fuel oil systems in WTC 7' "could not have been sustained long enough, could not have generated sufficient heat to weaken critical interior columns, and/or would have produced large amounts of visible smoke from the lower floors, which were not observed" (2011:n.p.).

Here is how *Popular Mechanics'* 2nd edition of *Debunking 9/11 Myths* treats the collapse of WTC 7, as well as NIST's and Griffin's explanations:

> NIST's final analysis, of course, differs from what the agency first suggested to
> *Popular Mechanics* in 2004. Two years earlier, FEMA first hypothesized in its
> World Trade Center Building Performance Study that WTC 7 collapsed almost

exclusively due to the fires; the conspiracy movement seized on this assertion, noting that there were no other examples of large fire-protected steel buildings collapsing because of fire alone. When NIST's final report agreed that, "This was the first known instance of the total collapse of a tall building primarily due to fires," conspiracists pounced again. At www.globalresearch.ca, David Ray Griffin wrote, "If NIST did engage in fraudulent science, this would not be particularly surprising. NIST is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce. During the years it was writing its World Trade Center reports, therefore, it was an agency of the Bush-Cheney administration."

Sunder prefers to focus on the evidence gathered by an investigative team that included 13 NIST investigators, 59 technical staffers, 15 special experts and consultants, contractors from the private sector, and a 10-person advisory committee of college professors, independent architects, and directors of energy and hazards research centers who provided technical advice. "The public should really recognize the science is really behind what we have said," Sunder concluded. "The obvious stares you in the face." (2011:71)

The second edition of *Debunking 9/11 Myths* was published a year after Griffin's (2010a) book, *The Mysterious Collapse of World Trade Center 7*, which is almost entirely dedicated to the NIST (2008) report on the collapses of WTC Buildings 1, 2 and 7. *Popular Mechanics'* (2011) index shows that Griffin is cited on pages x, xi-xii, xiv, 22, 35-36, 44 (Griffin is actually referenced on page 42, he is not mentioned on page 44), and page 71[22]. Comparatively, Griffin is indexed on pages 22 and 35-36 in the 1st edition, which in both instances include citations to his 2004 book, *A New Pearl Harbor*. In *Popular Mechanics* second edition of *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, with an entire chapter that "includes new findings on World Trade Center Building 7" (2011:front cover), Griffin's (2010a) work that challenges NIST's (2008) report goes unmentioned and, therefore, unrefuted. Instead, they focused on Griffin's ([2009] 2013) Internet article, using it as an exemplar of "conspiracists [who] pounced again" when NIST final report recanted initial conclusions about WTC 7's collapse; and even then they pluck a quote out of context.

While they never mention Griffin's (2010a) book, his 2007a book, *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*, is cited in the 2nd edition of *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, but just once. James Meigs (2006, 2011), editor-in-chief of *Popular Mechanics*, authored the Afterword of each

edition, which goes unchanged in the 2nd edition, and, taking Sen. John McCain's (2006) place, he authored the Forward of the 2nd edition. Therefore, I will reference Meigs solely in reference to these sections of the books. In the opening sentences of his Forward, Meigs discusses the "flood of criticisms and accusations from those supporting [inside job] theories" (2011:ix) about *Popular Mechanics*' 2005 magazine article, "9/11: Debunking the Myths" (Chertoff 2005), and reproduced here in full context is what Meigs (2011) has to say about Griffin and his work:

> A team of *Popular Mechanics* reporters and editors then started work on a far more detailed book-length version of the report. By the time the first edition of this book was published in the summer of 2006, the 9/11 conspiracy furor was reaching a tipping point. The flurry of books on the topic had grown into an avalanche, with certain writers, such as former Claremont School of Theology professor David Ray Griffin, building a thriving cottage industry around the topic. Conspiracy fans had, with Orwellian overtones, taken to calling themselves "the 9/11 Truth Movement," or simply "truthers." (p. x)
> …[some text omitted]
>     *Popular Mechanics*' 9/11 project represented one of the relatively few attempts by mainstream journalists to grapple seriously with the conspiracy theory claims. So it was telling that most conspiracy theorists—who are eager to repeat any shred of mainstream reporting they believe bolsters their claims—quickly decided that *Popular Mechanics* too was part of the conspiracy. In their minds, all our research could therefore be rejected *a priori*. We had run head on into a worldview that some experts call "conspiracism." It is a mindset that insists on reaching a predetermined conclusion regardless of what information is presented. Any facts that don't fit the conspiracy paradigm need to be explained away. Since 2004, leading 9/11 theorist David Ray Griffin has written seven books and edited two others on the subject of 9/11. He devoted a chapter in his book, *Debunking 9/11 Debunking: An Answer to Popular Mechanics and Other Defenders of the Official Conspiracy Theory*, to explain why, in his view, the 9/11 reporting by *Popular Mechanics* and other mainstream journalists is invalid.
>     Griffin's book devotes many pages to the idea that *Popular Mechanics* and our parent company, the Hearst Corporation, are somehow implicated in the vast conspiracy he sees behind 9/11. He digs up centuries old controversies and finds tenuous links between the magazine's staff and various government officials. But he never explains how a magazine—much less a major corporation—could possibly convince its employees to help cover up the most notorious mass murder in our nation's history. *Popular Mechanics* has close to 30 editorial staffers and dozens of freelance contributors. Does Griffin imagine that whenever we hire new editors I bring them into a secret bunker and initiate them into an ultraclandestine society for world domination? Why wouldn't such prospective employees run screaming from our building? In the years since we began our work on 9/11 conspiracy theories, a number of our staffers have moved on to other jobs. What would stop them from revealing a conspiracy that,

> if true, would be one of the biggest journalistic scoops in history? Did we swear them all to secrecy? As with so many conspiracy claims, the whole elaborate fantasy becomes practically laughable on close examination.
>
> On the one hand, it's understandable that many journalists saw these overheated theories as being too marginal to take seriously. But on the other, it is unfortunate that so few media outlets bothered to address the many clearly erroneous claims of the conspiracy set. Their reluctance to enter the fray gave conspiracy theorists access to uncontested ground. As this book documents, many conspiracy claims rely on snippets of material from mainstream media outlets. As a rule, these snippets have been quoted wildly out of context or reflect minor errors…. [italicized in original] (p. xi-xii)

To note, I stopped the last sentence above in order to take it out of context. The rest of the sentence is "in initial reports that were later superseded by more accurate reporting" (Meigs 2011:xii).

We will take notice of several things in the two passages reproduced above. First, there are no citations or references other than to *Popular Mechanics'*, FEMA's, NIST's, and Griffin's works (this is not true of the Foreword in general, but we are only discussing here *Popular Mechanics'* treatment of Griffin). This shows that Meigs (2011) is aware of the contention between *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) work (and its reliance upon official sources) and Griffin's (2007a). Meigs presents Griffin as an adherent to the worldview of "conspiracism," as a leading "9/11 theorist" (as if "theorist" is a itself pejorative term), as a producer of "overheated theories," and as a "former Claremont School of Theology professor" (i.e., not an expert in anything but theology). Mixing these types of descriptions of Griffin is a common tactic among countermovement antagonists (e.g., see Aaronovitch 2010; Byford 2011; Kay 2011). If all "9/11 theories" are "overheated," and if they develop from "a worldview that some experts call 'conspiracism'," then Meigs might be correct when he claims that along "with so many conspiracy claims, the whole elaborate fantasy becomes practically laughable on close examination." As discussed, though, *Popular Mechanics'* (2006, 2011) "close

examination" uses only selective sources and quotes to frame for their audience the perspective of 9/11 Truth through the lenses of 9/11 Deniers.

The problem with this is that Meigs has fallen into his own trap:  He defines a hypothetical situation in which he suggests Griffin has an unwarranted conspiracy theory (Keeley 2006) about the relation between the Hearst Corporation, *Popular Mechanics*, and Meigs himself.  However, upon combing through Griffin's (2007a) book, *Debunking 9/11 Debunking*—and, this was not easy to find because Meigs offers no page citations—there is no record, or few explicit indications, of Griffin (2007a) suggesting that Meigs personally engages in the type of conspiratorial professional socialization that Meigs is so keen to suggest would be the key way that *Popular Mechanics* would "initiate [new hires] into an ultraclandestine society for world domination."  This is known as the straw man fallacy, a rhetorical move where one purposefully misrepresents their opponents' argument so as to easily knock it down.  Like Peter Philips and Mickey Huff's (2010) critique of Chip Berlet's (2009) anticonspiracist work, which Meigs (2006) cites as an authoritative source on conspiracism, Meigs (2006) uses many of the same tactics to discredit the 911TM that he proposes they use in constructing their claims.  In line with this, by posing such questions that Griffin (2007a) actually does not ask, maybe it does 'take one to know one' (Douglas and Sutton 2011).

If we could take the last statement from the extended passage above to mean that Meigs (2011) does not endorse the use of taking "snippets of material" that are "quoted wildly out of context," then we might turn the question to why, instead of devoting a line by line criticism of Griffin's (2007a) response to *Popular Mechanics*, Meigs instead conjures a hypothetical conspiracy theory imputed to Griffin.  In line with this, and as can be seen in the passage above (6.5), *Popular Mechanics* (2011) quotes a line from

Griffin's ([2009] 2013) article that has almost nothing to do with the article's topic, which is about the collapse of Building 7 and NIST's (2008) report on it. Griffin's ([2009] 2013) article cited by *Popular Mechanics* (2011) is not easy to find because they do not cite its title specifically, and, like the vast majority of websites they cite, they only include a URL to the homepage of the website on which Griffin's ([2009] 2013) article is published, but after plugging their quote into GlobalResearch.ca's search engine, I produced Griffin's (2013) article, "9/11 Truth: The Mysterious Collapse of WTC Seven."

Had *Popular Mechanics* (2011) not taken Griffin's ([2009] 2013) statements out of context, they might have presented the following:

> With regard to the question of science: Far from being supported by good science, NIST's report repeatedly makes its case by resorting to scientific fraud.
>
> Before going into details, let me point out that, if NIST did engage in fraudulent science, this would not be particularly surprising. NIST is an agency of the US Department of Commerce. During the years it was writing its World Trade Center reports, therefore, it was an agency of the Bush-Cheney administration. In 2004, the Union of Concerned Scientists put out a document charging this administration with "distortion of scientific knowledge for partisan political ends." By the end of the Bush administration, this document had been signed by over 15,000 scientists, including 52 Nobel Laureates and 63 recipients of the National Medal of Science.

We can see with this extended quotation that Griffin (2013) was saying that because NIST was functioning as an agency of the Bush-Cheney administration, and that because this administration had been indicted for its distortion of scientific knowledge (e.g., the Bush-Cheney administration is well known for their anti-science approach to climate change McCright & Dunlap 2010, 2011), that, by association, NIST should be suspect of engaging in scientific fraud in the first place. This is to say, NIST's legitimacy should be called into question. In this way, *Popular Mechanics* (2011) do the very thing that Meigs (2011), in his remarks in the Foreword and Afterword of the 2nd edition of the book, holds in such abhorrence when made by "conspiracy theorists." If *Popular Mechanics*

(2011) are so concerned with approaching their debunking efforts from the scientific perspective, then why would they not be concerned with the claims of the Union of Concerned Scientists as Griffin ([2009] 2013) was discussing when he made the statement that they (mis)quoted? This is not meant to be a question left unanswered intentionally, but I do not have adequate data to say specifically what their intentions were, and to impute intention or motive is beyond the scope of the task at hand, which is providing examples of contentious claims and counterframes within the discursive field of the 911TM.

*Exemplary Use of the Conspiracy Label*

*Popular Mechanics* (2006, 2011) and its contributors (Dunbar & Reagan 2006, 2011; Meigs 2006, 2011) can be said to have intentionally set out to malign the collective character of the 911TM (or "9/11 conspiracy theorists"). Both editions, including the Forwords (McCain 2006; Meigs 2011), Introductions (Dunbar & Reagan 2006, 2011), bodies (*Popular Mechanics* 2006, 2011), and Afterwords (Meigs 2006, 2011) are replete with the conspiracy label. It is used to characterize individuals in terms of a collectivist identification of a social imaginary that is unworthy of serious attention. *Debunking 9/11 Myths* is presented as a "serious investigation" of the claims "9/11 conspiracy theorists," but it does not employ scientific standards used by sociologists and other social scientists when divulging the quotes they represent as "claims" and "facts." Griffin's (2007a) criticisms of the first edition are not squarely rebutted in the second edition, and Griffin's (2010a) deconstruction of NIST's (2008) is left unattended and, therefore, simultaneously silenced yet unrefuted. *Popular Mechanics* (2006, 2011) is hailed by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists as an authoritative account of how and why "9/11 conspiracy theorists" are wrong, yet this text itself is an example of how anti-

conspiracy discourse utilizes rhetorical strategies to discredit the 911TM while not engaging in sound, rigorous, or ethical practices.

As a final example of a direct interaction between the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists, we can turn to a debate hosted by Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* (2006). On September 11, 2006, the filmmakers of *Loose Change*, Dylan Avery and Jason Bermas, sat down with David Dunbar and James Meigs, editors of *Popular Mechanics* (2011) book, *Debunking 9/11 Myths*, with Goodman taking up moderator duties[23]. The term, "conspiracy," is employed several times throughout the debate, and it exclusively originates from the *Popular Mechanics* editors (one exception is Goodman's utterance of the subtitle, *Why Conspiracy Theories Can't Stand Up to the Facts*). As a clear indication of the 911TM's recognition of how the conspiracy label functions, we can look to one section of the debate that is about the film's questions of "what could blow a 16-foot hole on the outer ring of the Pentagon, smash through three rings, nine feet of steel-reinforced concrete and leave another 16-foot hole? A 757? Or a cruise missile?" Reproduced here, verbatim and in full, is the relevant excerpt from *Democracy Now!'s* (2006) transcript:

> **AMY GOODMAN:** An excerpt of *Loose Change*. David Dunbar, executive editor of *Popular Mechanics*, your response?
>
> **DAVID DUNBAR:** We just looked at the physical evidence, and when the filmmakers can present some evidence of a cruise missile striking the Pentagon, we'll be happy to look at it and evaluate it and talk to our experts. Just rolling the tape back a bit, the angle that the film shows of the facade of the Pentagon before it collapsed is a misleading picture. That gash in the E-ring was about 90 feet across.
>
> **DYLAN AVERY:** No, no it was not.
>
> **DAVID DUNBAR:** The wingspan of the plane was about 124 and change—not loose change, but that punched the hole into the building. And then the landing gear was more dense and heavier and continued on through a forest of columns to smash that exit ring. So when you see that nice round hole, that's the exit ring

in — that's the exit hole in the C-ring punched by the landing gear. And Purdue University did a massive computer reenactment of the crash and the aftermath, and they worked with the American Society of Civil Engineers to preparation of their report, and it's conclusive that the plane did strike the Pentagon.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Dylan Avery.

**DYLAN AVERY:** The initial impact on the Pentagon was no more than 20 feet wide, and if you are telling me that initial round impact hole in the facade of the Pentagon is 90 feet, then you're telling me that the two windows above it are 30 feet across.

**DAVID DUNBAR:** And incidentally, about the windows, I'm glad you mentioned that. Those were recently replaced in the Pentagon as part of a whole renovation program designed specifically to be blast resistant after the explosions at the American embassies in East Africa.

**DYLAN AVERY:** I find it very convenient that Hani Hanjour decided to choose that one particular section of the Pentagon to hit, when he could have just dove straight, right into the front door.

**DAVID DUNBAR:** In the world of paranoid conspiracy theories —

**DYLAN AVERY:** You're not addressing the evidence.

**DAVID DUNBAR:** —there are no coincidences.

**DYLAN AVERY:** You're not addressing the evidence.

**JASON BERMAS:** I would just like to say this.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Jason Bermas.

**JASON BERMAS:** The first official version was this thing bounced off the lawn and hit it, and it would appear that it would have to, because it's such a low-level hit. Okay, it didn't bounce off the lawn, because there's no scratches on the lawn. On top of that, we actually interviewed the first person on the scene before the collapse, and he was on the lawn taking video of it for twelve minutes. His name is Bob Pugh, and it is no more than a 16- to 20-foot hole. And we actually have one of the survivors who crawled out of that hole and said she saw no plane debris. Her name is April Gallup. Explain to me how a woman can come through a hole where a 757 has just impacted the building.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Ten seconds, Jim Meigs.

**JAMES MEIGS:** Yes. We didn't fact check every detail of *Loose Change*, but what we did do was look at the broad cross-section of conspiracy theories. There are photographs of the plane in the building of wreckage wrapped around reinforced concrete columns, and there is a map of the path of destruction that plane tore through that area.

The claims and counterclaims take the form of an assertion that a statement is factual with a rebuttal that, "no, no it [is] not." The conspiracy label is used in place of an argument against proffered assertions, and Meigs states that a "broad cross-section of conspiracy theories" were looked at instead of evaluating the truth-value of details in the arguments from the 911TM. The debate continues in this fashion.

The final section of the debate reveals an important pattern in the interactions between members of the 911TM and their countermovement antagonists. Goodman uses the final minutes of the show to focus attention on the question of the collapse of WTC 7, and that section of the transcript is reproduced here, verbatim and in full:

> **AMY GOODMAN:** Now, we only have a few minutes, and I want to get to Building Seven. Dylan Avery what is your thesis of what happened to Building Seven?
>
> **DYLAN AVERY:** Sure. Well, basically, which is — this is one thing that a lot of people don't know about September 11th, myself included, until I started doing the research. At 5:20 p.m. on September 11th, World Trade Center Building Seven — it was a 47-story steel-frame skyscraper 300 feet to the north of the North Tower — at 5:20 p.m. this building collapses in under seven seconds completely into its own footprint into a debris pile about six or seven stories high. Now, it wasn't hit by a plane. It was hit by debris from the North Tower when it fell. But, if you look at all the buildings surrounding the World Trade Center, and if you actually look at Building Five, which is right underneath both the Twin Towers, that building is engulfed in flames for hours after Building Seven even collapses.
>
> So, we have all the buildings surrounding the Twin Towers heavily engulfed with debris, some engulfed in flames. We have World Trade Center Building Seven, which has isolated fires on floor seven and twelve. It has smoke coming from its south face, and these guys claim that 25% of the building was scooped out. Even if 25% of the bottom of the building was scooped out, that still does not account for the building falling in perfect freefall into —
>
> **AMY GOODMAN:** And your thesis about what happened? What do you believe?
>
> **DYLAN AVERY:** It would have had to have been a controlled demolition. That's the only way to prove — that's the only way to explain what we saw with our own eyes, and any attempts to discredit that are just not scientifically sound.
>
> **JAMES MEIGS:** You know, this is a wonderful example of how conspiracy theories work. Any time there's a little bit of doubt, a little bit of area where we

don't know everything, then the answer immediately is, well, someone must have blown it up. It's a form of argumentation that's also used by Creationists. If they can find one little gap in the evolutionary record, they say evolution's a hoax. Or Holocaust deniers —

**DYLAN AVERY:** Mr. Meigs, with all due respect, these are two completely different things.

**JAMES MEIGS:** Holocaust denial works with very similar logic —

**DYLAN AVERY:** Oh, my God!

**JASON BERMAS:** Oh, man!

**JAMES MEIGS:** And, but what we see here is — one of our sources was Vincent Dunn, the retired deputy fire chief for the New York City Fire Department, who wrote the textbook, *The Collapse of Burning Buildings*. And what he explained is that the building was extremely unconventional. It had this giant Con Ed substation with enormous trusses carrying extraordinarily high loads, very vulnerable to fire and other kinds of damage. It was not a conventional skyscraper by a long shot. Those fires burned unfought for seven hours, fed by diesel tanks that were in the building to fuel backup generators. And when those trusses ultimately failed, the building did collapse in its own footprint. That's what happens when a building's internal supports fail.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We only have about one minute and we have to divide it. Can you respond to that point and make your larger point?

**JASON BERMAS:** Please let me respond to that.

**DYLAN AVERY:** Go ahead, Bermas.

**JASON BERMAS:** On top of everything he said, that's where everybody rushed to for the local government, okay? We have somebody who was on the 23rd floor, okay, working with the local government, being escorted by fire fighters. He gets down to the eighth floor, "huge explosion in Building Seven." "Bomb goes off." Okay, this is his words, not mine: "Why are there explosives in Building Seven." On top of that, there have been five different reasons why it fell. They're trying to say generators, there was a big fuel tank, there's a 20-story thing scooped out of the building, all of which is false, because they don't know.

**DYLAN AVERY:** They keep changing their explanations for why the building fell.

**JASON BERMAS:** And I would say this, the 9/11 Commission Report actually has the nerve in a footnote to say that it collapsed in 18 seconds. Look for yourself and time it. It's no more than 7 seconds.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And who do you believe blew up Building Seven?

**DYLAN AVERY:** We don't want to try to implicate anybody. We're just trying to tell people to go out and research for themselves. But, I mean, you have to ask

yourself, who could have possibly placed explosives inside Word Trade Center Building Seven, secretly without anyone noticing, and especially the Twin Towers?

**JASON BERMAS:** Especially because the CIA, the DOD, the Secret Service are all located there.

**DYLAN AVERY:** Yeah, I mean, that building was a government hotspot.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Ten seconds, Jim Meigs.

**JAMES MEIGS:** You know, conspiracies have a way of constantly expanding. You just listed a whole range of government agencies. Apparently the fire fighters we talked to, we at *Popular Mechanics*, other journalists, our friend David Corn at *The Nation* is accused of being part of this massive cover-up. The fact is, there are always little details that don't always add up until you finish your research.

**DYLAN AVERY:** Mr. Meigs, you're still not addressing the evidence.

**JAMES MEIGS:** But when you really dig down, every single one of these has a clear explanation. And if there's areas that don't, let's continue to dig. We should be skeptical. We should ask questions. By all means, we fully support the effort to get to the bottom of any remaining questions.

**AMY GOODMAN:** We're going to have to leave it there. David Dunbar and Jim Meigs of *Popular Mechanics*, and Jason Bermas and Dylan Avery of *Loose Change*, I want to thank you all for being with us.

Instead of focusing his response on Avery's and Bermas's empirical claims, Meigs instead dons the hat of an expert in the social psychology of conspiracy theories, supplanting attention to the empirical claims with the argument that Creationists and Holocaust deniers use similar tactics in their argumentation styles as Avery and Bermas were using. This was flatly denied by Avery and Bermas, and this is where Meigs makes an appeal to the authority of "the retired deputy fire chief for the New York City Fire Department" before moving to an argument now discredited by NIST (2011) and abandoned by *Popular Mechanics* (2011), that office fires fed by diesel fuel tanks led the building to fall into its own footprint. In his final issuance of the conspiracy label, this time using the term "conspiracies" to mean "conspiracy theories," Meigs constructs a straw person argument by promoting the idea that Avery and Bermas believe he,

*Popular Mechanics,* firefighters they interviewed, and others are "part of this massive cover-up." As Avery stated, Meigs was "still not addressing the evidence."

**Conclusion: Reflecting on 9/11 Truth**

I opened this chapter with a statement by a frequently active member of the 911TM Facebook group, Arlyntha J. Love (a.k.a. Lyrantha Jen L), and this comment latter turned into a question for the entire group: "What happens next?" This question, considered by Ken Doc to be among the hardest to answer, is premised on the assumption that "9/11 was an inside job," which movement members arrive at through such revelations as the collapse of WTC 7. Replying to this question, Sooty Mangabey promoted the ReThink911 campaign, just as he had promoted it several times in posts and other comments to the group: "ReThink911 - if they get the proper funding it'll be a HUGE step forward for the truth movment- the biggest to date. So if you haven't donated, please do NOW! And share on your FB wall as well. Thanks!" [sic] After spreading awareness about such issues as the collapse of WTC 7, or even after achieving widespread knowledge of it through the ReThink911 campaign, Ms. Love and others in the movement wonder what will become of society once people realize that elites and central institutions are sometimes at the center of heinous crimes. In the presentation of discourse among the Truthers and Deniers of 9/11 in this chapter, I have at several instances allowed the 911TM's many voices to be heard in relation to what their opposition say about the movement. Several times during my interviews and participant observations, I was asked about my own beliefs about "9/11," and these can be most succinctly shown in my responses to when Ms. Love and Mr. Mangabey both queried back to me with regard to my intentions for my studies with the 911TM.

What follows are key responses to my July 18th, 2013, post to the 911TM

Facebook group where I requested statements about what woke them up to 9/11 Truth

and what its members would like to be made known to the public through my work:

> Ryan Rabalais: It was obvious when the towers collapsed. The problem was that the media was telling us that we weren't seeing what we were seeing.
>
> July 19, 2013 at 12:54am · Unlike · 2
>
> Sooty Mangabey: Alright then Richard- I'll take the bait buuuut-!I searched your posts, I saw the Scholars for 9/11 truth banner on your homepage [see Figure 13]- but that doesn't really assuage my assumptions (wow alliteration anyone?) ? PHD and thesis aside- These are 3,000 people that were murdered by our own government on 9/11. After that over 1,000,000 people (at least) have died in the name of it. Do YOU think we've been lied to? Or are we some side-show that you choose to write about because it's amusing or a 'phenomenon' that needs recording. Get on the record here and tell us what you think happened- thanks!
>
> July 19, 2013 at 1:34am · Edited · Like · 1
>
> Lyrantha Jen L: What is the topic of this dissertation you're writing and how exactly do you plan to represent us and our views in this supposed paper? I notice all the social scientists who come here soliciting perspectives never actually tell us anything about who they are, what they believe, and what the topic and main thesis of their work is. And then we don't even get a follow-up.
>
> July 19, 2013 at 1:44am · Edited · Like
>
> Lyrantha Jen L: I don't care about people learning what we're about, it's just poor character to mislead in order to get that information when we're so willing to discuss it with just about anyone anyway.

*Figure 13.* *Facebook Banner Used for Participant Observation with the 9/11 Truth Movement.*

Richard G Ellefritz:  Thanks, all.

In response to Sooty Mangabey:

I personally believe that 9/11 was a false flag, domestic terror operation carried out by professionals and experts with the capability to rig three buildings with explosives, fly two airplanes into the twin towers, give stand down and shoot down orders for flights 77 and 93, respectively (I am open to the possibility of a missile or other, non-plane object hitting the Pentagon). This network of people had the power and influence to use mass media to influence most people to believe that Osama bin Laden planned and coordinated the attacks from caves in Afghanistan (and erase WTC 7 from public memory); the 9/11 Commission Report was fraudulent, as were the FEMA and NIST reports; and let us not forget the U.S. military grade anthrax mailed out in letters to U.S. officials shortly after Sept. 11. The loss of American lives that day calls for investigations and trials for the high crimes of mass murder and treason. The lies to the American people and subsequent wars of aggression, and the 1 million plus lives lost and decimated civilizations (and ongoing acts of aggression) in the Middle East, are among the most egregious offenses I am aware of in the history of the world (save, possibly, for the atomic bombs dropped in Japan, the Holocaust, the Cultural Revolution in China and other mass murders associated with communism, etc.). However, as 9/11 was the pretext for wars of aggression abroad and reductions of U.S. civil liberties, and because the official, predominantly known story is a lie, knowing and spreading the truth about 9/11 is not only just and righteous in and of itself, it is a way to begin to mend and heal from the long train of abuses and usurpations to liberty and justice we have witnessed from this SCAD and others like it.

With that said, no, the 9/11 Truth Movement is not a hobby, novelty, or just some random phenomenon I happened to be studying. Professionally, it is an investment for and risk to my career as a sociologist, but the movement is also deserving of having its own story told in a non-slanderous, non-partisan way that shows its depth, complexity, and potential to identify and solve public problems (e.g., corruption, conspiracy, and other state-corporate crimes).

You can check out some of the videos I've posted on my page to see a presentation I've done on the movement, as well as my introduction for Richard Gage's film when he came through OKC on his tour for Explosive Evidence. I went to NYC, "ground zero" on Sept. 11, 2011 to interview members of the movement, and my participation on this group page is an extension of that project. I might go back this year, but as I have to pay for this out of my own pocket, because there is no funding for this type of research if I am unwilling to portray the movement as ineffectual and its members as mentally unstable, I will likely use the data I have already gathered.

July 19, 2013 at 11:41am · Edited · Like

Richard G Ellefritz:  In response to Lyrantha Jen L, whom I thank for your lengthy response that I will likely use in whole:

The topic of my dissertation is the 9/11 Truth Movement. I had planned on writing about the sociology of conspiracy, but that topic is too broad for a

249

dissertation, and Lance deHaven-Smith's new book, *Conspiracy Theory in America*, pretty much addresses most of the issues with which I was concerned.

I plan to represent the movement and its members as they are, in their own words, by their own actions, and in the context that SCADS and other state-corporate crimes are regular occurrences throughout history. One way to do this is through participatory research: http://what-when-how.com/sociology/participatory-research/ So, involve yourself to the extent you wish, and please follow up with me.

I cannot yet say for certain what my final explanation is for the 9/11 Truth Movement, for one thing because of the ongoing participatory nature, but also because I am using the grounded approach http://www.groundedtheoryonline.com/what-is-grounded-theory I will say that people like Michael Shermer, Jonathan Kay, and others who misrepresent the movement and its members are in need of a substantiated rebuttal.

July 19, 2013 at 11:34am · Like · 1

Lyrantha Jen L: Thanks for the explanation. I studied sociology as a minor in college so I can relate. I consider myself as an advocate for finding out what really happened that day since 2003. And right now it seems the movement reached a peak of awareness and being covered in media up until about 2009-10, and following the defeat of the Gallop suit in court, it seems that we lack direction in how exactly to get accountability. We really need to address this.

July 19, 2013 at 12:05pm · Like · 1

Sooty Mangabey: ReThink911 is a fantastic place to drop a few hard-earned coins- that will be the most exposure 9/11 truth has received to date. Thousands of people will be donating their time to make sure the message is well-received. I encourage you and everyone here to donate!

July 19, 2013 at 12:09pm · Like

This series of exchanges indicates that members of the 911TM are sensitive to how the collective character of the movement is represented to the public, and it highlights my reflexivity *vis-à-vis* 9/11 Truth and sociology.

ReThink911 eventually did 'get the proper funding,' and posters and billboards were placed in 12 cities worldwide asking the public, "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11?" Dutifully promoting ReThink911's campaign on several posts, Sooty suggested to Ms. Love that spreading awareness through the campaign should be the definitive goal of the 911TM at that time. Ms. Love, though, replied as follows:

Sooty the question is what happens next. We have to address the future how it's going to be and what we can do to prepare for it since we have been unable to defeat it. People become aware, and then what? What comes after awareness? For now the goal is continuing to do that - raise awareness - but we have to convert the awareness that the system is not in our favor, into action. Are we showing it in how we treat ourselves and others? What we choose to eat? What we choose to consume from businesses? The curricula we teach our children? Are we going to choose to continue a life within a corrupt system whose failure is certain, or are we going to begin taking steps to gradually prepare to abandon it and pursue a different type of lifestyle elsewhere, be it the countryside or a different nation?

July 19, 2013 at 12:37pm · Like · 3

As pointed out by their countermovement antagonists, certainly the 911TM has questions, both for the public and for themselves, and while their countermovement antagonists view their investigation as a symptom of errant thinking and a pathological social psychology, movement members continue to attempt to raise awareness through provocative public inquiries in order to achieve social change.

CHAPTER V


DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Fifty-one years ago, Peter Berger (1963) published *Invitation to Sociology*, which is

a book that introduces readers to many of the fundamental assumptions and practices

sociologists use in the endeavor to understand society, social behavior, and ways of

knowing the social world. Although not without due criticisms, Berger offers many

insights that have inspired generations of sociologists (Christiano 1990; Persell 1990),

among them being his constant refrain that there is an inherent debunking quality in

sociological studies. Of the book's many insightful adages, one particularly relevant

statement is that it is the sociologist who "rejects the pretense that thought occurs in

isolation from the social context within which particular men [and women] think about

particular things" (1963:111). When thinking about "9/11," the events of September 11,

and the people who and ideas and facts that challenge the official story of how and why

the attacks occurred, several social forces are in operation when people either adhere to

a belief that everything is as it has been made to seem or come to know that so-called

"9/11 conspiracy theorists" have been socially constructed as a "conspiracist

phenomenon" (Kay 2011:183). Anti-conspiracy discourse, produced by a plethora of

social actors representing myriad institutional orders, encourages and facilitates

skepticism of claims that "9/11 was an inside job," and it is this social force that limits

the capacity for rational and empirically based discourse about the 911TM and its

claims.

As demonstrated in this dissertation and other analyses of anti-conspiracy

discourse (Aistrope 2013; Asadi 2010; deHaven-Smith 2013; Goshorn 2000; Husting &

Orr 2007; Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011), many of the 911TM's members

and countermovement antagonists recognize and openly discuss and debate the

function of the conspiracy label. That the conspiracy label is used to discredit and

defame the collective character of the 911TM and others who question the official story

of "9/11," might seem obvious at first thought. However, it is this obviousness that

sociologists *must* look through in order to uncover undergirding social forces that might

influence how we think about such things as radical social movements and catastrophic

events in history. Once again, Berger's (1963) wisdom is instructive:

> The sociologist moves in the common world of men [and women], close to what
> most of them would call real. The categories [the sociologist] employs in his [or
> her] analyses are only refinements of the categories by which other men [and
> women] live—power, class, status, race, ethnicity. As a result, there is a
> deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations.
> One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this
> before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on
> truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically
> questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This
> is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (1963:23).

As a socially constructed category that constitutes subjects as "conspiracy theorists" and

their beliefs and claims as "conspiracy theories," the conspiracy label has become

common parlance to ridicule, stigmatize, and silence interlocutors for crossing symbolic

boundaries of permissible discourse. In sociological studies, "the excitement of finding

the familiar becoming transformed in its meaning" leads to a fresh perspectives that

make "us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives" (Berger

1963:21).  The conspiracy label is one such familiar category in need of critical

sociological attention and rethinking in the way it is typically used.

For many members of the 911TM, the recognition of the problematic nature of

the collapse of Building 7 led them to radically question their given reality.  Like many

others in the movement, I believe this fact *should* radically challenge the beliefs of those

who unquestioningly or determinedly subscribe to the official story of "9/11."

However, at base, this dissertation has supported bodies of literature that show that

countermovements employ counterrhetorical strategies and discursive obstructions in

order to undermine their opponents' interests (Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008; Ibarra &

Kitsuse 2003; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Shriver et al. 2013), and it has also been

demonstrated in this document that for the 911TM the conspiracy label performs the

discursive function of maligning its collective character while averting serious or

rigorous treatment of its empirical claims (deHaven-Smith 2013; Husting & Orr 2007;

Pelkmans & Machold 2011; Truscello 2011).  What this dissertation adds to our

sociological knowledge is that discursive fields are an important social force to consider

as always-already contextual factors in movement-countermovement dynamics, and

that movements and their countermovements have unequal access to the symbolic

resources within those fields, with the latter group benefiting more than the former.

The discourse between the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists differs

from the discourse within each claimant group.  The 911TM already "knows" that "9/11

was an inside job," and their countermovement antagonists already "know" that the

movement is a "conspiracist phenomenon."  Among countless other issues, what the

911TM's members discusses among themselves is how and why Building 7 serves as a

"smoking gun" for 9/11 Truth, and why the conspiracy label should not legitimately

function to obfuscate their empirical claims. These discourses take place while the conspiracy label continues to be discussed among the 911TM's countermovement antagonists as a legitimate analytic category in further need of rhetorical employment and scientific investigation. The micropolitics of the conspiracy label, i.e. the label's employment in text and talk with the intent to malign the individual and collective character of its targets, helps produce and operates within a discursive field that shades and masks the empirical claims of the 911TM by painting the movement and its members as incredible and unworthy of serious or rigorous attention. Where serious or rigorous attention is claimed to be given (e.g., *Popular Mechanics* 2011), the analysis is sourced to the very contested texts the 911TM holds in contention (e.g., Griffin 2007a; 2010a, 2013), and it is bookended with the assumption that the conspiracy label provides the explanatory power behind the 911TM's attention to what is portrayed as a non-problem, i.e. the collapse of WTC 7.

Movement-countermovement dynamics produce a unit of analysis for which it is not easy to produce data. In this dissertation, discourse among the Truthers and Deniers of 9/11 serves as a demonstration of how one or more discursive fields surrounds and penetrates the communicative interactions between a social movement and its countermovement antagonists. Much like the 911TM members are brought together in their claimsmaking and framing activities, its countermovement antagonists, representing a variety of institutional orders (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008,) are loosely coupled via their counterframing efforts (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). Whereas journalists, psychologists, philosophers, and professionals in other areas rely upon the institutional logics of their areas of expertise to analyze the 911TM (Thornton et al. 2012), all of them put into use the conspiracy label to stigmatize and discredit the 911TM.

Consequently, the conspiracy label helps produce and operates within anti-conspiracy discourse (Goshorn 2000) at the detriment of the 911TM regardless of what claims are put forward and from whom claims originate. Paralleling another study on a similar topic, "[w]hat we see here is a discursive field in which different actors attempt to position themselves and their adversaries — to mobilize the trappings of legitimacy and authority, and to deny standing to others" (Aistrope 2013:117). In terms of the discursive field of the 911TM, and within the dramas of social movements (Benford & Hunt 1992) and conspiracy (Wexler & Havers 2002), audiences in public domains are presented with the question of who are the true protagonists and antagonists in the narrative of "9/11."

**The Discursive Field of the 9/11 Truth Movement**

Movement-countermovement interactions do not take place in a social vacuum, and audiences are not passive receptors who change their interpretations based on direct effects of the most active party. To be effective, social movements must employ frames, or interpretive schema, that resonate with or approximate existing interpretive schema in audiences (Benford & Snow 2000; Snow & Benford 1988). Audience perceptions of a social movement's legitimacy involve its empirical claims as much as the audience's culturally inherited background assumptions. In the U.S., a tipping point exists for the interpretation of how and why the events of September 11 happened, beyond which empirical claims perceived as too far outside normative explanations are unacceptable or unthinkable, or doxic (Entman 2004). The conspiracy label is one discursive mechanism employed that ensures if and when empirical claims are issued about a historical event such as the attacks on September 11 those claims will likely be treated as arising from an incredible and untrustworthy source (Husting & Orr 2007). Social

movements attempt to reach their goals of persuading audiences to readjust their interpretations of reality out in the open where audiences are located, and in doing so they invite oppositional forces to counteract, in real time or asynchronously, their claimsmaking and framing activities.

Resistance to the narrative of "9/11" and attempting to engage the public in discourse about the events of September 11 are powerful acts (Foucault 1980), but in the context of the dominant narrative of "9/11" and interpretation of the events of September 11, straying too far from the dominant narrative leads to being labeled as a "conspiracy theorist" (Pelkmans & Machold 2011). Only by shedding the conspiracy label can the 911TM attempt to project their truth-claims as such, but because they oppose a dominant narrative generated and circulated by powerful actors who occupy legitimate institutional orders (i.e. government, mainstream news media, and academia), they will likely not succeed in reframing their discourse as factual, valid, or trustworthy (Pelkmans & Machold 2011). To do so, the 911TM would have to garner enough public support and allies in mainstream media organizations to fight upstream in the downward thrust of the cascading network activation of frames put forward since September 11, 2001 (Benford & Hunt 2003; Best 2008; Entman 2004). Alongside efforts to gain support from the public and media who likely buy into the official story of "9/11," the 911TM have oppositional forces in core institutional arenas who play a part in affecting which narrative, the 911TM's or the official one, will be considered legitimate.

Staying within the framework that *The 9/11 Commission Report* was an accurate account of the events of September 11, or that it was flawed but for the most part factually correct, affords one an insider status because they have aligned themselves with the narrative of "9/11" generated and circulated by powerful actors legitimized by

core social institutions. In doing so, one will likely find their beliefs and behaviors largely uncontested, and when they *are* contested they can rely upon the conspiracy label to quickly and effortlessly rebut the contenders. Among the discourse that takes place within the 911TM, such as that information produced by SMO's like AE911Truth are used to inform street activism and public campaigns, like that of the ReThink911 campaign, its members also spend significant amounts of energy discussing how and why the conspiracy label should not function as a legitimate threat to their collective character. The conspiracy label is legitimized by the interactions between academics who construct and reify it, journalists who employ it as the bases of their analyses, and for trade journalists who similarly use it as the ultimate explanation for why divergent beliefs from the official story of "9/11" exist and propagate. Thus is constructed the discursive field of the 911TM, as is depicted in Figure 14.

Certain claims made about the 911TM by its countermovement antagonists are clearly based upon facts. "The rhetoric of just asking questions" (Byford 2011:90), as an analytic category imposed by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, is present throughout the claimsmaking and framing activities of the 911TM and their countermovement antagonists. However, how the rhetorical aspects of the questions asked are interpreted depends upon one's standpoint in relation to the orthodoxy to heterodoxy of the official story of "9/11." For the 911TM, raising the question of WTC 7 is a way to raise awareness in the public about the fact that the official narrative of "9/11" (Zelikow 2004) is missing a key component that calls into question other events of September 11. For the 911TM's countermovement antagonists, questions raised about WTC 7, or about any other aspect of the official story, signals that "9/11 conspiracy theories" are being proffered or endorsed.

*Figure 14.* The Discursive Field of the 9/11 Truth Movement
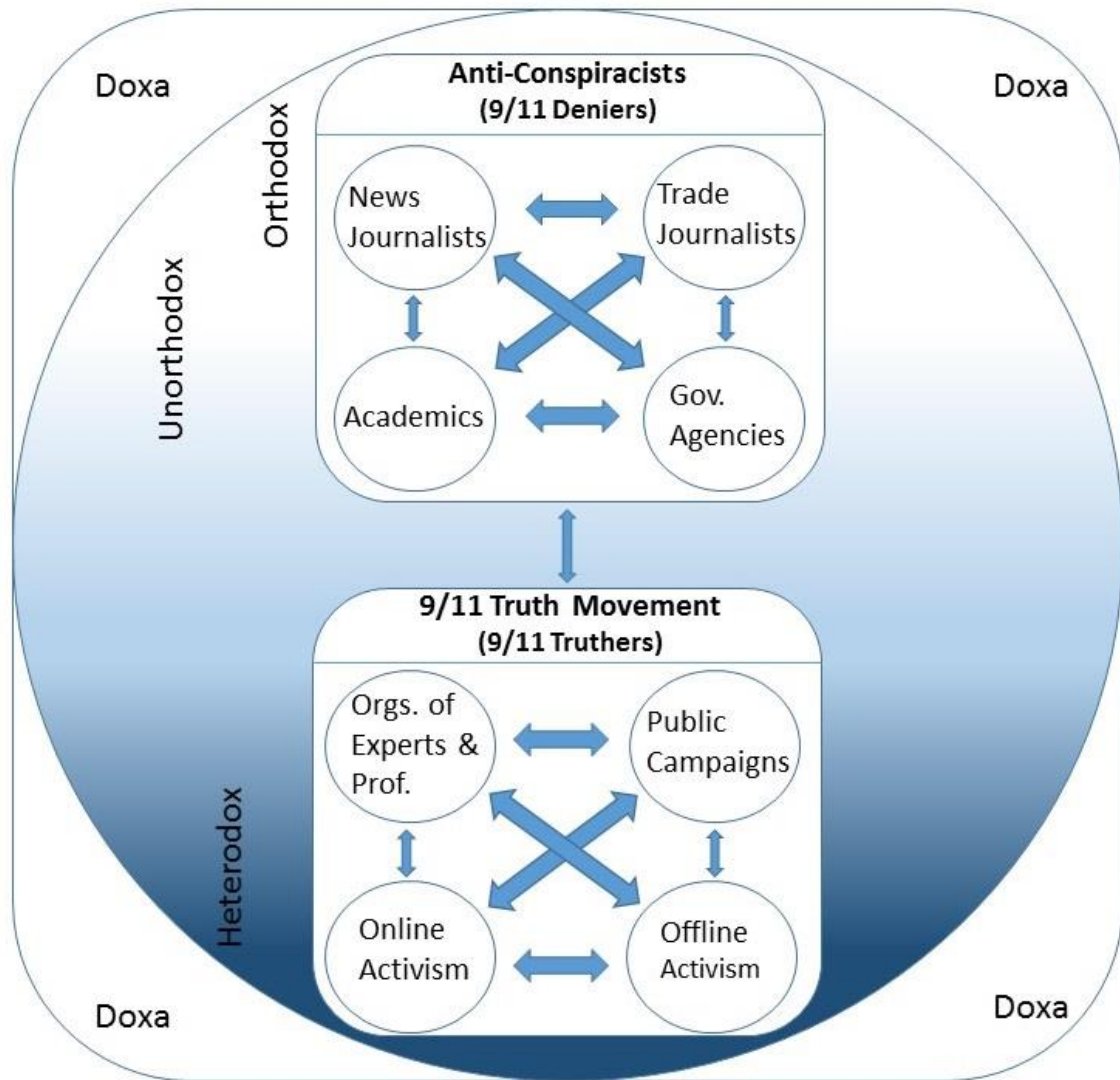


Since they deny the existence of any major problem relating to the narrative of "9/11," the 911TM's countermovement antagonists can justifiably (within the logic of their discourse) issue the conspiracy label. Some anti-conspiracists recognize that there are always going to be flaws in official stories due to the complexities of physical and social realities, but taking unorthodox positions such as these allows one to ultimately recede to the orthodox positon that "9/11 was an *outside* job." By denying that there are any facts that cannot be legitimately explained by authorities aligned with and

defending the official narrative of "9/11," the 911TM's countermovement antagonists must resolve to an explanation of why certain facts are interpreted as signs of conspiracy. Problem denial is the most efficient of counterframing strategies (Benford & Hunt 2003), and it is demonstrated repeatedly when the 911TM's countermovement antagonists frame the question of Building 7's collapse as one best left to the experts and professionals, such as those at the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST 2008). This same strategy is used in direct exchanges between members of the 911TM and their countermovement antagonists when either a claim is replaced with a straw person argument or when a claim is ignored altogether. The next part of the strategy is an attack on the collective character of the 911TM, which is to merely substitute the conspiracy label for the substance of a logically coherent and factually substantiated rebuttal.

So well established within the 911TM is the narrative that "WTC 7 is a smoking of 9/11" that members use it as a way to establish or repair their credibility in the eyes of the public, because if it is an uncontestable, empirical fact that Building 7 did not collapse from jet fuel fires as is alleged of the Twin Towers, then claiming that WTC 7 is a signifier of a conspiracy makes one not a conspiracy theorist. The 911TM's countermovement antagonists key into the 911TM's claims about the collapse of WTC 7, explaining to their audience that it is a non-problem because its mystery has already been solved by the very social agents the 911TM believe to be complicit in the cover up of what actually occurred on September 11. Countermovement antagonists use such logic as further evidence of the conspiratorial nature of the 911TM, which provides further justification for their logic that the 911TM is, at base, a "conspiracist

phenomenon." As deHaven-Smith's (2010, 2013) and Husting and Orr's (2007) works make clear, though, this is the exact function of the conspiracy label.

Interactions between the 911TM and their countermovement antagonists take place discursively (i.e. not through physical altercations) in public arenas, which allows for rhetorical assaults that need not follow strict rules of debate, science, or logic. In the sciences, the peer review process accounts for unstated assumptions, inherent biases, logical leaps, lack of empirical evidence, and over-extension of claims. In journalism, the pursuit of profits and pandering to the partisanship of audiences leads at best to a thin illusion of objectivity (Parenti 2007). For instance, *Popular Mechanics* (2006) and the official FEMA and NIST reports they rely on are rebutted by 911TM members (Griffin 2007a, [2009] 2013, 2010a), and *Popular Mechanics* (2011) ignores key rebuttals (Griffin 2010a) while counterframing others (Griffin 2007a, [2009] 2013) with tactics such as keying, ignoring, and problem denial (Benford & Hunt 2003). *Popular Mechanics'* (2006, 2011) book is presented by several of the 911TM's countermovement antagonists as a definitive account of how and why detractors from the official narrative of "9/11" are merely "conspiracy theorists," and therefore wrong in their assertions. Ignoring key statements and texts by Griffin is one of *Popular Mechanics'* tactics in opposing efforts to challenge the official story of "9/11." Reviewers and editors of scientific articles are often familiar enough with a body of research to know when key texts and facts are not accounted for, but the publishing business of the popular press does not hold to these same standards.

The imputations and refutations of the existence or non-existence of the problematic nature of the collapse of WTC 7 has taken place between the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists in a *public* arena. As Ken Doc, Mike Figa, David Ray

Griffin, and other intellectual organizers within the 911TM have stated, bringing their message to the public is an important component in the process of attaining justice for the crimes of September 11. The public nature of their claims helped organize their countermovement when the 911TM's antagonists began publishing works that cite each other as sources as to why the 911TM is organized around a non-problem and, therefore, why the 911TM is merely "conspiracist phenomenon." Debates and arguments that the 911TM and its countermovement antagonists have made show various characteristics of the interactional dynamics of framing and claimsmaking tactics, with each party "attempt[ing] to prevail in *public* definitions of imputed problem conditions" [italicized in original] (Benford & Hunt 2003:155). Interactants in the public problems marketplace do not have equal footing, as we can see with the endorsement of *Popular Mechanics'* (2006) from media, academic, and public policy sources. Moreover, the employment of the conspiracy label by *each* countermovement antagonist harnesses its known discursive power to further delegitimize and marginalize the 911TM and its members, and this 'transpersonal strategy of exclusion' (Husting & Orr 2007) is known to them to work in this way, as can be readily seen in Michael Shermer's (2011) admission about the "derisive" nature of the conspiracy label.

ReThink911's entire campaign is based upon whether or not the public knows about WTC 7's collapse. It was inspired by those who would continue to spread Islamaphobic and militaristic propaganda, which is in effect a discursive barrier to the 911TM. If Entman's (2004) cascading frame activation model is correct (see Figure 7), then even public campaigns to spread awareness about the 911TM's "strongest card" is likely an uphill battle in a downpour of anti-conspiracist propaganda. During direct interactions, countermovement antagonists counterframe the 911TM's claims with

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rhetorical fallacies (i.e. the straw person argument), and in more abstract interactions, such as ReThink911's response to public campaigns that assume the veracity of the official story of "9/11" as a self-evident truth, the official narrative of "9/11" already exists as a main component in the anti-conspiracy discourse. The 911TM already had an uphill battle in combatting the weight behind the official story of "9/11," but its countermovement's employment of the conspiracy label in the context of anti-conspiracy discourse detracts the 911TM's energies and distracts public attention away from investigating its empirical claims.

**Limitations & Future Research**

Probably the biggest drawback of this particular study is my own dual status as a sociologist *and* member of the 911TM. This study is largely sympathetic to the 911TM, and therefore any claim to objectivity would be moot. If my thesis is correct, that because the conspiracy label will override rational and rigorous analysis of the 911TM's claims, then it would be difficult in the first place to produce any study sympathetic to its claims that could be read as objective. The analysis in this dissertation is intended to demonstrate that the conspiracy label is used to discredit the 911TM without first giving due diligence to their empirical claims, and this is a strategy that is recognizable as a component of the movement-countermovement dynamics of the 911TM and its countermovement opposition. As a sociologist, my interests are in how groups operate and interact within society, and so my status as a sociologist does not necessarily move the 911TM forward in its efforts to make publicly known the flaws in the official story and to bring the true perpetrators of the events of September 11 to justice.

Sociologically, this critical ethnography is limited to only that portion of the 911TM with whom I personally interacted with and observed. Therefore, my claims

about the 911TM as a whole can be held suspect.  As one example, there are people I interviewed and observed who reported that they believe mini nuclear weapons, directed energy weapons, and remote pilot technologies were used in the events of September 11.  I have not given these claims attention, nor were other claims, such as that Israeli agents were involved in the planning, carrying out, and/or cover up of the events of September 11.  I have avoided all of these issues because in my opinion they are not central to the 911TM.  WTC 7 is mentioned in nearly every account by 911TM members and SMO's, and therefore I focused on that aspect.  However, I also avoided these other issues for several reasons, including the fact that I have not personally studied them in much detail, that some of the claims seem fairly outlandish, and because I do not want to be issued the label of "anti-Semitic" by countermovement antagonists.  As discussed in Chapter 3, these are methodological issues with studying "9/11," the events of September 11, and the 911TM.  The taboo associated with questioning the official story of "9/11" limits what researchers are willing to ask and report, and this is in tandem with how the taboo influences how the reports will be interpreted by various audiences.  Therefore, an inherent limitation in this study is my own unwillingness to entertain certain claims by the 911TM due to my fear of stigmatization.

Many of the 911TM antagonists' analyses are rooted in two pieces of popular press, Richard Hofstadter's (1964) oft cited[24] (e.g., see Dimitriadis 2011; Howell 2012; Moynihan 1985; Parsons 1970; Smith 1977) news magazine article, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," and a somewhat obscure newspaper editorial by Tom Bethell (1975), titled "The Quote Circuit," which spawned a series of studies testing its "large explanations" hypothesis (Ebel-Lam et al. 2010; Leman & Cinnirella 2007; McCauley & Jacques 1979).  Future research should trace the origins and development of the

conspiracy label, and efforts should be made to note any patterns used before and after the 911TM developed. If similar tactics were used before the 911TM existed, this would further strengthen the argument that anti-conspiracy discourse is the product of social actors who intend to use those methods to discredit people who question official narratives of historically important events (for recent work on this, see deHaven-Smith 2013). Tracing the historical trajectory of anti-conspiracy discourse can further help sociologists understand how countermovements produce subjects through discourse (Foucault 1980; van Dijk 2009), and continuing a line of research on the conspiracy label can uncover the various ways that it threatens open, democratic discourse (Husting & Orr 2007).

As stated previously, it is as infeasible to study the entire 911TM and all of its countermovement antagonists as it would be to provide an exhaustive analysis of all their claims and frames. The focus in this study has been on the movement-countermovement dynamics of the 911TM and its countermovement, particularly with an emphasis on how anti-conspiracy discourse functions. Therefore, reviewing how a particular claim or frame is articulated by either party is less fruitful than demonstrating the discursive field of the 911TM. This was accomplished by focusing on one claim, i.e. the WTC 7 problematic collapse, and one framing strategy, i.e. the various ways the conspiracy label is employed and rebuked. Future research with the 911TM might focus on one or more claims that the movement debates, such as whether or not a missile instead of Flight 77 hit the Pentagon, and future research might divulge framing strategies related to how the movement portrays itself, its opponents, and its audiences. Moreover, a systematic content analysis of methodically collected texts by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists will more rigorously show what strategies and tactics are

used to undermine the 911TM, and this will benefit social scientists and social movements interested in how to achieve social change.

By applying social constructionist analyses of how and why the 911TM has been constructed as a social problem, we might be able to avoid threats to communicative action and the free exchange of ideas that are necessary for democracies to prevail. The use of labels to categorize individuals and groups as inferior to others has had terrible and horrific consequences throughout the history of human civilizations. The construction, reification, and continued use of the conspiracy label as an analytic category for human subjects is an irony the IRB should consider remedying in future studies. Without giving rigorous attention to the grounds, warrants, and conclusions of claims about such things as why and how the events of actually September 11 transpired, social analysts risk playing a part in the continuing cover up of what is known by many to have been a historically tragic event with disastrous consequences for the future of human civilizations. New social movements of the 20th century have led to improving the human condition by bringing attention to the fact that all people should have equal access to civil liberties and protections under the rule of law, that governments sometimes engage in fraudulent activities that lead to war and genocide, and that the continued exploitation of human beings and the natural environment has potentially catastrophic consequences for human civilization, such as global climate change and the continuing threat to human rights by authoritarian political regimes. Without systematic reflection upon the hegemonies, ideologies, and discourses that influence how we think about such socially constructed categories as "conspiracy theorists" and "9/11 Truthers," the existing ruling systems of authorities and their truth regimes will likely continue to practice false flag, domestic terror operations.

# ENDNOTES

[1] A nationally representative Scripps Howard telephone survey that was conducted July 6-24, 2006, found similar results as the 2006 Zogby poll (911Truth.org 2006), which was conducted in May of that year. Thomas Hargrove and Guido Stempel (2006) report that "[m]ore than a third of the American public suspects that federal officials assisted in the 9/11 terrorist attacks or took no action to stop them so the United States could go to war in the Middle East," and that "[s]ixteen percent said it's 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' that 'the collapse of the twin towers in New York was aided by explosives secretly planted in the two buildings'."

[2] The co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission, Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton (2007), indicate in several instances of their insider narrative of the structure and operation of the 9/11 Commission, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission*, that Phillip Zelikow played a central role in organizing both the 9/11 Commission and *The 9/11 Commission Report*: *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. Kean and Hamilton state that "Zelikow drove and organized the staff's work" (2007:38), and that, "[o]f course, before the report could be published, it had to be written" (2007:271). Continuing, Kean and Hamilton state that the "question was how the fact-finding being done by our staff teams could feed into the chronological format envisioned for the report. Originally, there was a suspicion among staff that Zelikow and May would attempt to draft the entire report, which was a point of some tension, particularly because the prospective outline was not circulated to the staff teams" (2007:271). At several points, Kean and Hamilton note that Zelikow was one among several people to provide the initial outline and drafts of the report, and that, among other material for the report, "Philip Zelikow drafted chapters on the response in the days after 9/11, and the recommendations —what became the last four chapters of the report" (2007:273). In *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation*, by Philip Shenon (2008), we further learn about Zelikow's role as the executive director of the 9/11 Commission. As Kean and Hamilton (2007) point out, Zelikow was intimately involved in the hiring and placement of the staff members of the 9/11 Commission, and these staffers were largely responsible for gather and organizing data that would eventually find its way into a the final report, which was fully outlined, mostly organized, and partially written by Zelikow (Shenon 2008). Even though other people were involved in authoring the final version of *The 9/11 Commission Report,* Zelikow's role as executive director substantiates my use of his name as its central author.

[3] Les Visible's (2008) blog, "9/11 is the Litmus Test," includes an embedded YouTube video, titled "Nine Eleven IS the LitmusTest" [sic] (Snordster 2013). This version currently (March 24, 2014) has 48,494 views, but two mirrors of the video on YouTube each have thousands of views. "9-11 Is the Litmus Test" (Ahijab 2011) has 6,156 views, and "9/11 Is the Litmus Test" (911TimeForTruth 2012) has 2,001 views. The fact that the embedded video in the blog is the newest of the three, and that it has the most views, indicates that there might have been a previous version with potentially many more thousands of views. "The 9/11 Truth Movement" Facebook page includes many links to these videos and references to the phrase, and a Google search currently returns more than 28,000 results for the phrase.

[4] "Deniers," "Debunkers," "Truth Deniers," and variations of these terms are commonly used by members of the 9/11 Truth Movement to identify their adversaries. The 9/11 Truth Movement Facebook group has a search function that returns several hundred results for these terms. What follows is the most recent (as of June 10, 2014) example of a post that uses a variation of the "Denier" label:

> [Name Omitted]→9/11 Truth Movement
> May 31, 2014 at 9:29am ·
> It's crazy that all these "Truth Deniers" are so easy to discredit everything you say. But cannot explain how or why WTC7 comes crashing down at freefall. All I'm asking is to hear me out and not be so closed minded. Spreading the truth.
> Like · 10 Comment 8 · Share ·

[5] By "narrative of 9/11," I refer to how the term, "9/11," has been employed discursively in reference to the actual events of September 11, 2001, as well as to other events, such as the anthrax letters mailed in the following weeks to media and political elites and the responses to the events of September 11, 2001. The narrative of "9/11" generally represents the official narrative put forward by political and media elites that is robustly described in Robert Entman's (2003, 2004) "cascading activation model." This model depicts how elites' initial frames were adopted and promoted in mass media outlets, and how lower-level political officials became more and more reluctant over time to challenge it for fear of reprisal and sanction. David Altheide (2006) has robustly described the politics and discourse of fear that were generated by political elites and major news media in the hours and years after the attacks occurred, and these discussions of terrorism, victimization, and fear in relation to al Qaeda, Afghanistan, and Iraq are part of the narrative of "9/11." Public challenges have a difficult time altering the dominant narrative of "9/11" because they have to gain access to and then legitimacy within mass media outlets. The 911TM put forward a counter-narrative (Levis 2002; Schechter 2011) that challenges the official, dominant narrative, and that is part of the subject of this dissertation.

[6] I distinguish between what I refer to as the narrative of "9/11" and the events of September 11, 2001. The former is the official story or the commonly known and discursively transmitted conceptual schema of what happened on September 11, 2001, and why, including the ensuing Global War on Terror, and the latter refers to the specific occurrences or events that happened on that date alone involving the four airliners, Flight's 11 (North Tower, Building 1), 77 (Pentagon), 93 (Shanksville, PA), and 175 (South Tower, Building 2). As shown by 911Truth.org's (2006, 2007) Zogby polls, a large part of the U.S. public is ignorant of the collapse of WTC 7, or they are unconvinced that it should be included as part of the narrative of "9/11," as indicated by their responses that it should not have been included in *The 9/11 Commission Report*. As an occurrence on September 11, 2001, that is geographically (i.e. it happened in Manhattan) and conceptually (i.e. it was another building to experience a total structural failure leading to collapse) related to other events, I include the collapse of WTC 7 as part of the events of September 11, 2001, or just September 11 as I use in this dissertation.

[7] The image used in Figure 1 is taken from the Facebook page, "Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth," which can be found at the following URL: http://tinyurl.com/oey523y. The same image minus the purple frame, logo, and text can be found in an article on AE911Truth's website by Chris Rocco (2012), and this is where the caption to Figure 1 originates, which is the caption used for the same image in that article.

[8] While succinct biographical statements could be found through Internet searches for Richard Gage and Barrie Zwicker, Paul Zarembka's information was drawn from his biography in the list of contributors to the second edition of his edited volume, *The Hidden History of 9/11*:

> Paul Zarembka is professor of economics at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Editor since 1977 of *Research in Political Economy*, this series of twenty-four annual volumes addresses economic and political issues from the perspective of the social classes involved. He is the author of *Toward a Theory of Economic Development* and editor of *Frontiers in Econometrics*. … Zarembka is also coeditor of *Essays in Modern Capital Theory*. He has been a senior researcher at the International Labor Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, and a Fulbright-Hayes lecturer in Poznan, Poland. Currently working within the Marxist tradition on a book on the accumulation of capital, he has been a union president on his campus and is currently its grievance officer for academics. (Zarembka 2008:ix)

Reproduced here is a short biographical description of Richard Gage:

> Richard Gage, AIA, is a San Francisco Bay Area architect of 25 years, a member of the American Institute of Architects, and the founder and CEO of Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth (AE911Truth.org), a 501(c)3 educational charity representing more than 2,000 degreed/licensed architects and engineers who have signed a petition calling for a new, independent investigation, with full subpoena power, into the destruction of the Twin Towers and the 47-story World Trade Center Building 7 on 9/11. The more than 17,000 non-A/E signatories include many scientists, attorneys, and other responsible, educated citizens in the US and abroad. They cite overwhelming evidence for explosive controlled demolition. (AE911Truth 2013a)

And, lastly, here is a short biographical description of Barrie Zwicker:

> Barrie Zwicker is an independent documentary producer, author and social and political activist. His latest production is the 75-minute THE GREAT CONSPIRACY: The 9/11 News Special You Never Saw, on DVD and VHS (order by phoning 1-416.651-5588). Its world premiere was Sept. 9th 2004 in New York City. Reviews have been highly positive.
>
> Zwicker instigated and was Director of the International Citizens' Inquiry Into 9/11, held at The University of Toronto 25-30 May 2004. It featured 40 presenters from three continents. Video from the Inquiry is being incorporated into numerous documentaries including The Great Conspiracy. The inquiry organization, Skeptics' Inquiry For Truth (SIFT) is incorporated and continues as an educational and activist group.
>
> Zwicker has worked in journalism and communications since he was 16, when he joined the Russell (Man.) Banner as a Printer's Devil. He worked on major newspapers including The Vancouver Province, The Detroit News, the Flint Journal and the Lansing State Journal, for a year at Canada's largest-circulation newspaper, The Toronto Star and for eight years at "Canada's National Newspaper," The Globe and Mail. While the Globe's education writer, he won all three top awards of the Education Writers' Association of North America.
>
> Zwicker taught journalism part time for seven years at Ryerson Polytechnic University. His courses were "Media and Society" and then "Media, Ethics and the Law." (GreatConspiracy.ca 2005)

[9] According to Dictionary.Reference.com, "contentious" has the following definitions:
1.  tending to argument or strife; quarrelsome: a contentious crew.
2.  causing, involving, or characterized by argument or controversy: contentious issues.

[10] The following is taken from ReThink911's (2013a) website:

> ReThink911 is a global public awareness campaign launched on September 1, 2013 to educate the public and galvanize support for a new investigation into the events of September 11, 2001. Led by the group Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth and supported by a coalition of organizations, ReThink911 raises public awareness by introducing viewers to the destruction of World Trade Center Building 7 and informing the public that over 2,000 architects and engineers have signed a petition calling for a new investigation into the destruction of Building 7 and the Twin Towers.
>
> In September 2013, the ReThink911 campaign ran ads in 12 cities ads posing the simple question, "Did you know a 3rd tower fell on 9/11?" in reference to World Trade Center Building 7. ReThink911's September 2013 ads included:
>
> - A 54-foot-tall billboard at 47th Street and 7th Avenue in New York's Times Square,
> - 45 taxi top ads in Washington D.C.
> - 60 taxi top ads in Boston,
> - 30 taxi top ads in Chicago,
> - A billboard on Dallas' Stemmons Freeway near the Feizy Center,
> - 100 poster on San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit
> - A mobile billboard in San Diego and Los Angeles from Sept. 5 to Sept. 11
> - A 60-foot-tall billboard in Toronto's Dundas Square,
> - 300 posters on Ottawa buses,
> - 8 transit shelter posters in downtown Vancouver,
> - A billboard and four street boards in downtown London, and,
> - 150 street posters in downtown Sydney.
>
> At the tail end of the successful September 2013 campaign, ReThink911 raised $25,000 in three days to keep the ReThink911 billboard in Times Square through the month of October. ReThink911 then raised $24,000 in three days in late October to sponsor a billboard across the street from the New York Times Building and Port Authority during the month of November, and since extended the billboard through December. The billboard asks the New York Times about its lack of coverage of questions concerning the destruction of World Trade Center Building 7. In November, ReThink911 successfully raised $75,000 for a major winter campaign in Ottawa and Toronto. In Ottawa, ReThink911 ads will be seen on the backsides of 40 buses from December 12

to January 9. In Toronto, the ads will run throughout the month of January on 800 bus and subway cars.

ReThink911 will continue to launch new ad campaigns every one to two months until awareness of Building 7's destruction becomes widespread.

[11] "Remember Building 7 is a non-partisan campaign led by 9/11 family members to raise awareness of the destruction of World Trade Center Building 7 through television and other forms of advertising, and to shift public opinion such that the New York City Council and Manhattan District Attorney will be compelled to open an investigation into Building 7's destruction" (RememberBuilding7 2011).

[12] The following passages are from NYC CAN's website for the High-Rise Safety Initiative, which

is a ballot measure that will appear on the November 4, 2014 ballot in New York City. If approved by voters, it will require the NYC Department of Buildings to investigate high-rise building collapses in NYC that occurred on, or any time after, September 11, 2001. Its provisions exclude the collapse of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, but apply to the collapse of World Trade Center 7 and any high-rise collapse that may occur in the future.

…[some text omitted]

Before 9/11, no high-rise building had ever collapsed as a result of fire. High-rises are built to withstand all types of office fires, including that which occurred in World Trade Center 7, which is why its collapse has great significance for architectural and engineering professionals in New York City and across the globe. There are valuable lessons to learn from its collapse, lessons that can and will save lives.

Although the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) issued a report on World Trade Center 7 in 2008, it was imperfect first and foremost because the destruction of the steel in the building's cleanup necessitated over-reliance on a computer model for its investigation. Experts dispute NIST's conclusions, citing the omission of critical structural features from the model and the model's failure to reproduce the observed free-fall motion. Curiously, NIST refused to release modeling data on the grounds that its release "might jeopardize public safety," thus preventing engineers from being able to independently verify its model and findings. A new investigation by the City of New York will allow for these shortcomings to be addressed, thus furthering our understanding of how World Trade Center 7 collapsed and leading to safer building design in the future.

[13] The picture and comments for Figure 4 can be found at the following URL: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4799952433099&set=gm.10151319476241782&type=1&theater. For further examples of this type of claimsmaking by the 911TM (i.e., through Internet memes) see the first page of the Appendices.

[14] The terms "dialogic" and "dialogism" do not appear in the index, and an electronic search returns no results for these terms. The term "discourse" appears half a dozen times, and in one instance they use it interchangeably with language (Thornton et al. 2012:149). Thus, dialogism and discourse are under theorized in their work.

[15] In the video description to "9/11 Conspiracy Solved," AlienScientist (2012) states the following: "Special thanks to Michael C. Ruppert, Mark H. Gaffney, and Kevin Ryan for solving the crimes of 9/11 with their amazing research. This video is a compilation of evidence they have uncovered." Therefore, it is logical that people who find the video (in)credible will also find these works, for the most part, (in)credible as well.

[16] It is unclear from where Meigs (2006, 2011) retrieved this quote as he cites no source nor does he discuss data gathering techniques or interviews that indicate this is, in fact, a quote often used "in conspiracy circles."

[17] A LexisNexis search for "9/11 Truth Movement" was further refined with the phrase, "just asking questions," of which Morello's (2004) news article was the earliest to employ it.

[18] Another intellectual organizer, Jeremy Baker, who is quoted by *Popular Mechanics* (2006) in reference to the 911TM's claims of how and why WTC 7 collapsed, has written a blog titled, "How Many 'Secret

Agents' Did it Take to Screw Up 9/11?" In it, Baker (2010) concludes the following:

> We may never be able to prove how many people took part in the planning and execution of the attacks of September 11[th], but the assumption that a small army of conspirators was required to 'do' 9/11 is unprovable at best and, for many good reasons, highly unlikely. At a time when erroneous conjecture and uneducated opinionating have lost all meaning in a criminal investigation of literally stunning magnitude, the quality of the answers—but also the quality of the *questions*—must be responsibly evaluated. (n.a.)

[19] Paikin's (2011) episode is broken into two parts, an interview with Jonathan Kay and then a debate between him and members of the 9TM. What follows is how the webpage describes the episode, apparently titled "Friday May 13 2011":

> The Interview: Jonathan Kay: It's All a Conspiracy Is bin Laden really dead? Did we really land on the moon? Author Jonathan Kay spent time researching conspiracy theories for his new book "Among the Truthers". Kay sits down with Steve Paikin to tell us what he believes is behind the rise in conspiracy theories. Producer: Wodek Szemberg The Debate: The Truth is Out There Birthers, truthers and conspiracy theorists. People who don't believe that US President Obama is American-born. People who don't believe that Osama bin Laden was killed. Why don't people "believe"? Is it cynicism run amok? Or are there legitimate reasons for questioning what we're told? Guests: Jonathan Kay Barrie Zwicker Richard Gage Paul Zarembka Producer: Wodek Szemberg.

The episode can also be viewed at the following webpage
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHbZi80IBNU).

[20] As of May 24[th], 2014, a LexisNexis search for "9/11 Truth Movement," controlling for moderately similar articles, returns 242 news articles. When refined with the phrase, "Loose Change," 24 articles are retained, and a majority of these criticize the 911TM. Moreover, *Loose Change* is mentioned in peer reviewed articles (Banas & Miller 2013; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009) and books (Byford 2011; Kay 2011; Shermer 2011) that criticize the 911TM. This is a point that needs further empirical attention in future research.

[21] *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Zelikow 2004) is sometimes cited by the 911TM's countermovement antagonists as why the movement's "conspiracy theories" are false (e.g., see Bale 2007; Sternheimer 2007, 2010), but because it was not written explicitly to counteract "9/11 conspiracy theories," I will not go into detail with it in this dissertation.

[22] A point of interest might be that Richard Gage is not cited nor are any of his projects with AE911Truth, such as his 2008 documentary, *Blueprint for Truth*—*Popular Mechanics'* 2011 book moves from "Fruehan, Richard" to "Garcia, Andrew" on page 212 in their Index. Gage's work with AE911Truth is almost exclusively focused on analyzing the collapse of the WTC buildings, and so if *Popular Mechanics* wanted to address the most serious claims about WTC 7, they might have included in their analysis his work on the subject.

[23] The following description has been excerpted from the introduction to the transcript of the September 11, 2006, debate between the *Loose Change* filmmakers and editors of *Debunking 9/11 Myths*:

> Today, a debate about 9/11. Ever since the attacks took place, many people across the country have raised a number of questions about what actually happened on that day in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. Websites, articles, books and documentaries have put forward a variety of alternate theories to the government's account of what happened.
>
> The most popular of these is a documentary called * "Loose Change."* The 80-minute film first appeared on the web in April 2005. Since then, it has had at least 10 million viewings and is described by Vanity Fair as "the first Internet blockbuster." As the popularity of "Loose Change" has soared, a book dealing with the questions it and others have raised about 9/11 has been published. It's called * "Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories Can't Stand Up to the Facts"* put together by the editors of the magazine, Popular Mechanics. (*Democracy Now!* 2006)

In the section pertaining to this debate, I quote from *Democracy Now!*'s (2006) transcript, which, as stated on the webpage, might deviate slightly from the participants' statements. Efforts were made to

correct for these errors by watching the debate on the webpage and simultaneously reading the transcript for errors or discrepancies.

[24] Richard Hofstadter's ([1964] 2008), "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," is cited 1,230 times, as indicated on Google Scholar.

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APPENDICES

*Sample of WTC 7 claimsmaking through Internet memes by the 9/11 Truth Movement.*

## THE PENTAGON

FBI agents immediately confiscated all video evidence from the surrounding buildings of the Pentagon within moments after the attack and with eighty video cameras around the Pentagon, why have we only been shown five grainy frames from a security camera as evidence?

Hani Hanjour was evaluated by his instructor as incompetent at flying a single engine prop-plane. How are we to believe he maneuvered a commercial airliner in an extreme turn, at a high speed, all while dropping 7,000 feet in two minutes to hit the Pentagon inches above the lawn? Many experienced pilots feel this to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Pilots have found many inconsistencies from the Flight Data Recorder of Flight 77 to the actual events.

The 9/11 Commission Report states that the flight path taken by Flight 77 was on the south side of the Citgo station. This directly contradicts the flight path from the Flight Data Recorder that was released by the NTSB. The data shows clearly that the path of the plane was not only on the north side of the Citgo station, but was not near the light poles that were allegedly hit and knocked down by Flight 77.

## 76 PAGE MOTIVE

The Project for The New American Century, a neo-conservative think tank, wrote a paper in September 2000 titled 'Rebuilding America's Defenses', where they stated that their goals of total US Military superiority would take a long time to achieve, "absent some catastrophic and cataclysmic event - like a new Pearl Harbor." One year later they got their event.

REBUILDING
AMERICA's
DEFENSES

Strategy, Forces and Resources
For a New Century

*A Report of
The Project for the New American Century
September 2000*

## HOW COME?

In the event of a hijacking, all airline pilots are trained to key an emergency four-digit code into their plane's transponder, surreptitiously alerting air traffic controllers. How is it that not one of the pilots, in any of the hijacked planes entered the code?

With a simple shove of the yoke down, anyone not buckled in would be slammed to the roof of the plane and a simple pull back on the yoke would slam them to the floor disabling any hijacker. How are we to believe that none of the pilots thought to do this, and instead just handed over their plane?

Construction Steel has an extreme high melting point of 2800°F and NIST reported that the fires only got to a maximum of 1800°F for just 15 minutes. Why did firefighters describe a "foundry" of molten steel at Ground Zero, and why did it fume for months after the event?

## COINCIDENCES, CONTRADICTIONS, AND LIES

On September 10th, 2001 Donald Rumsfeld announced that the Pentagon had 2.3 trillion dollars of undocumented adjusts, meaning the money is missing.

The accountants responsible for tracking down the missing money happened to be in the section of the Pentagon that was destroyed; they were killed that day, along with their investigation.

The White House claimed that the idea that planes would be used as weapons was never considered. However, in 1994 Frank Corder crashed a single-engine Cessna onto the lawn of the White House, two stories below the presidential bedroom. In 1995 a plan named Operation Bojinka was discovered where terrorists planned to hijack planes and detonate bombs over US cities. During the G8 Summit in 2001, attended by President Bush, the airport in Genoa was closed and surface-to-air missiles were engaged to protect against similar plane attacks.

Thousands of American and British troops along with carrier task forces were massed on the borders of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan as well as other countries, all while President Bush had the launch order to attack Afghanistan on his desk the day before 9/11.

Six weeks before 9/11 Larry Silverstein purchased the entire WTC complex adding an insurance policy that specifies coverage against a terrorist attack.

The company in charge of security at the WTC, Stratesec, involved Marvin Bush (the former president's brother) as a principal owner. It was also engaged in providing security for United Airlines and Dulles Airport, where Flight 77 took off.

For many years, the military commanders in charge of interceptors had the authority to order a shoot-down on their own. Just months before 9/11, the Bush Administration changed these rules so that any such order would have to be approved by the Secretary of Defense directly.

Yes, of course, it's all just bureaucratic incompetence. Billions upon billions of dollars in defense and yet the systems to defend against such an attack were not in place. We are told there was nothing that could have been done to prevent the attacks. So with more money to defense, incompetence seems to get rewarded with no accountability.

### PLEASE DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH BY STARTING WITH THE SITES BELOW

ae911truth.org
wtc7.net
911research.com

infowars.com
pilotsfor911truth.org
truthaction.org

prisonplanet.tv
globalresearch.ca
911blogger.com

patriotsquestion911.com
historycommons.org
trueworldhistory.info

## YOUTUBE VIDEO

Truth Rising
Endgame
Loose Change: Final Cut
Truth and Lies of 9-11

America: Freedom to Fascism
In Their Own Words
Invisible Empire
Fool Me Twice

Terrorstorm
9/11 Ripple Effect

Press for Truth
9-11 False Flag
9/11 Mysteries

### Support the 9/11 First Responders

# www.WeAreChangeNYC.org

Get Involved!

We Are Change are at Ground Zero (Path Station) every Saturday 2-5pm
New to join us, come after 3pm

meetup.com/we-are-change-nyc

twitter.com/nycwearechange          youtube.com/nycwearechange

# TEN REASONS
## WHY YOU SHOULD
### QUESTION 9/11

**1** After waiting 442 days to get an investigation started, why did the 9/11 Commission fail to answer 70% of the questions from the victim's families?

**2** Why have the co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission, Lee Hamilton and Thomas Keane, written in their book *Without Precedent* that the 9/11 Commission was "set up to fail?"

**3** Why was there no mention in the 9/11 Commission Report of WTC Building 7, a 47-story tall skyscraper which was the third building to totally collapse that day?

**4** Why are so many Senior Military, Intelligence Service, Law Enforcement, Government Officials, Engineers, Architects, Pilots, Aviation Professionals and Professors questioning the official story of 9/11?

**5** With more than 80 video cameras surrounding the outside of the Pentagon, why have we only been shown a few frames of the impact?

**6** Why is there absolutely no indication of Osama Bin Laden's connection to 9/11 on the FBI Most Wanted List?

**7** What force pulverized most of the concrete and office material of the Twin Towers into dust, and was able to eject steel beams into buildings over 400 feet away? Gravity could not have done this alone.

**8** Why wasn't the chief of the Pakistani Intelligence Agency investigated for the transfer of $100,000 to Mohammed Atta, the leader of the 19 hijackers?

**9** In August 2003, it was revealed that the government ordered the EPA to lie about the air quality at Ground Zero, resulting in 50,000 sick and dying first responders. Why has no one been held accountable?

**10** Just one of these statements is reason enough to question what you were told about 9/11. There are more than ten reasons, so why not read on.

# WTC BUILDING SEVEN

At 5:20 PM, the 47-story steel framed building collapsed vertically, falling in 6.5 seconds into a pile only seven stories tall, much like a controlled demolition.

If the structural damage on the south side had been the only cause of collapse, the building would have toppled over. Photos from the other three sides of the building show little fire or damage.

The symmetrical collapse would require all 58 perimeter columns and 25 core columns to be cut at precisely the same time. Professionals require computer-controlled detonators to achieve this precision.

Days after 9/11, the rubble showed temperatures of 1200°F (as measured by NASA aircraft). How can office furniture and carpet burn so hot inside an oxygen starved rubble pile? Why was it still turning months after the event?

BBC and CNN reported that WTC 7 had collapsed twenty minutes and one hour, respectively, before it actually collapsed. How would they know this when no high rise steel framed building has ever collapsed due to fire in history prior to 9/11? What officials told them and why is this not in the report?

Fire and Police personnel were warned to get people back because the building was about to collapse or "blow up," as one police officer can be heard saying to a CNN reporter. What officials made this determination, and how?

Building 7, also known as the Solomon Brothers Building, contained numerous government offices, including the CIA, FBI, FEMA, and some offices of the Securities and Exchange Commissions (SEC). Many files on the Enron and MCI WorldCom investigations were destroyed in the collapse.

Due to the structural integrity of the building, Mayor Giuliani's emergency command bunker was installed on the 23rd floor. It was a heavily reinforced and self-contained section of the building that would have made a total collapse even more unlikely.

"We built in enough redundancy to allow entire portions of floors to be removed without affecting the building's structural integrity, on the assumption that someone might need double-height floors," said Larry Silverstein, president of the company that owned WTC 7.

After seven years and five different explanations for the collapse, NIST produced their final report and came up with a new, unprecedented theory of "Thermal Expansion" as the only explanation of how the building could have collapsed. Again, many Architects and Engineers recorded a multitude of inaccuracies in this report.

Look at the image on the right of a chunk sliced from WTC 3 yet this building did not collapse.

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# SHOW ME THE MONEY

On September 10th, Pakistani Intelligence Agent Saeed Sheik wired $100,000 to Mohammed Atta, on an order from Mahmoud Ahmad, chief of Pakistani Intelligence. Why did our supposed ally in the war on terror send $100,000 to a known terrorist?

Interestingly enough, Mahmoud Ahmad was also in Washington on the morning of 9/11, meeting with future CIA chief George Tenet. This was not investigated by the 9/11 Commission.

The week leading up to 9/11, an extremely high number of PUT options were placed on American Airlines and United Airlines stock indicating someone knew those stocks would decrease in value. American Airlines experienced four times and United Airlines twenty-five times above normal option trading on September 6th, 2001. The firm used to place some of the PUT options was chaired by an Executive Director of the CIA, A.B. "Buzzy" Krongard.

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# THE COLLAPSE OF THE TWIN TOWERS

The NIST Report admits that all the jet fuel burned off within 15 minutes. The remaining fires were fueled by office furniture and wallboards. It also admits that only the "worst case estimate" in their simulation resulted in any collapse.

Why does the NIST Report not explain what caused the rest of the towers to peel apart after the top started to collapse? They just refer to it as "global collapse" with no explanation of how that occurred in the undamaged sections.

Why wasn't a desk, computer, phone, chair, stapler, or anything from the inside of an office found in the debris of the towers? A gravitational collapse may crush this material, but it would still be there. This is not the case with the collapse of the Twin Towers.

During the collapse, steel beams were hurled over 400 feet away from the buildings. Where did the energy come from to achieve this? Some were embedded into the sides of nearby buildings, like spears.

What caused most of the 400,000 cubic yards of concrete to be pulverized into dust? Gravity alone cannot explain the degree to which the towers were pulverized.

What could explain the bending of these giant steel columns? Where did the heat source come from to bend them without fracturing or cracking? It takes thousands of degrees to bend steel like this without any buckling or tearing on the tension side.

If the heat caused the trusses to sag and pull the perimeter columns in, thus initiating a pancake collapse, why were the 47 core columns not left standing as the floors pancaked around them like a spindle on a record player? The NIST computer simulation even shows these columns remaining, with no explanation of how they collapsed.
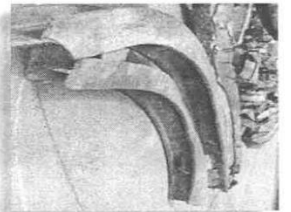
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# MILITARY DRILLS AND AIR DEFENSE FAILURES

Over 12 different military exercises were happening on that fateful day, some involving simulations of airliners crashing into the WTC and other targets. Operation Tripod III was simulating a bio-attack on NYC and had FEMA pre-positioned in the city on September 10th.

Air traffic controllers and NORAD were confused which of the many false radar blips were real, and which were part of the exercise. They can be heard asking, "Is this real world or exercise?" How could Al Qaeda know drills would be run that day to add to the confusion?

Why was standard operating procedure not followed that when a plane goes off course, or radio contact is lost, jet fighters are immediately scrambled to visually check on the plane and its pilots?

Why were the tapes of the communication between air traffic controllers and the pilots/hijackers destroyed by the FAA?

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# BUT SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TALKED?

Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta testified before the 9/11 Commission that he was in the Presidential Emergency Operating Center with former Vice President Cheney as American Airlines Flight 77 approached the Pentagon when:

> There was a young man who had come in and said to the Vice President; "The plane is 50 miles out. The plane is 30 miles out." And when it got down to, "The plane is 10 miles out," the young man also said to the Vice President, "Do the orders still stand?" And the Vice President turned and whipped his neck around and said, "Of course the orders still stand. Have you heard anything to the contrary?" Well, at the time I didn't know what all that meant.
> – Norman Mineta

### What order was Cheney giving, and was this a direct stand down order?

FBI counsel Colleen Rowley detailed how bureau higher-ups thwarted attempts to investigate accused 20th hijacker Zacarias Moussaoui prior to 9/11. Zacarias Moussaoui laptop contain evidence linked to 9/11.

FBI agent Robert Wright wrote a 500 page manuscript, "Fatal Betrayals of the Intelligence Mission," in which he details how FBI bureaucrats "intentionally and repeatedly thwarted his attempts to launch a more comprehensive investigation to identify and neutralize terrorists." His book has been illegally blocked by the FBI from being released.

Sibel Edmonds, a former translator for the FBI with top-secret security clearance, spent several hours in a closed session with the commission's investigators providing information that was circulating within the FBI in the spring and summer of 2001, suggesting that an attack using aircraft was just months away and the terrorists were in place. The Bush administration went to great pains to silence her, even obtaining a gag order from a court by citing the rarely-used "state secrets privilege."

## PENTAGON

- Why were FBI agents immediately confiscating all video evidence of the impact around the Pentagon within moments of the attack and why have we not seen any of these videos except for 5 grainy frames from a security camera?

- Why does an analysis of Flight 77's Flight Data Recorder show the plane at 480 feet adjusted altitude a second before impact when it supposedly hit and knocked down five light poles?

- If Hani Hanjour was incompetent at flying a single engine prop-plane, then how are we to believe he maneuvered a commercial airliner - making a 270° turn at 400 mph all while dropping 7,000 feet in two minutes - and hitting the Pentagon inches above the lawn? Many experienced pilots say with luck it would take several tries to accomplish such a feat.



The 9/11 Commission Report states that the flight path taken by Flight 77 was on the South side of the Citgo station. This directly con-tradicts the flight path from the Flight Data Recorder that was released by the NTSB. This data clearly shows that the path of the plane was not only on the North side of the Citgo station, but was no where near the light poles that were allegedly hit and knocked down by Flight 77.

## THE 76-PAGE MOTIVE

The Project For A New American Century, a neo-con think tank, wrote a paper in September 2000, titled Rebuilding America's Defenses where they stated that their goals of total US Military dominance would take a long time to achieve, "absent some catastrophic and cataclysmic event - like a new 'Pearl Harbor.'" One year later they got their event.

## HOW COME?

- In the event of a hijacking, all airline pilots are trained to key an emergency four-digit code into their plane's transponder. This would surreptitiously alert air traffic controllers, causing the letters "HJCK" to appear on their screens. How is it not one of the four pilots entered this code?

- Construction Steel has an extremely high melting point of 2800°F and NIST reported that the fires only got to a max temp of 1800°F for 15 minutes. Why did firefighters describe a "foundry" of molten steel at Ground Zero?

- With a simple shove of the yoke down, anyone not buckled in would be slammed to the roof of the plane and a simple pull back on the yoke would slam them to the floor disabling any hijacker. How are we to believe no pilot thought to do this, and instead turned over their plane?

## COINCIDENCES, CONTRADICTIONS & LIES

- On September 10th, 2001 Donald Rumsfeld announced that the Pentagon had 2.3 trillion dollars of undocumented adjusts, meaning the money is missing.

- The accountants responsible for tracking down the missing money happened to be in the section of the Pentagon that was destroyed, thus killing them along with their investigation.

- The White House claims that the idea that planes would be used as weapons was never considered, however. On September 11th, 1994 Frank Corder crashed a single-engine Cessna onto the lawn of the White House, two stories below the presidential bedroom; in 1995 a plan named Operation Bojinka was discovered where terrorists planned to hijack planes and detonate bombs over US cities; and during the G8 Summit in 2001, attended by President Bush, the airport in Genoa was closed and surface-to-air missiles were positioned.

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- 6 weeks before 9/11/01 Larry Silverstein purchased the WTC complex including an insurance policy that specifies coverage against a terrorist attack.

- The company in charge of security at the WTC was called Stratesec, which includes Marvin Bush, the president's brother, as a principal owner. It was also involved in providing security for United Airlines and Dulles Airport (where flight 77 took off from).

- For many years the military commanders in charge of interceptors had the authority to order a shoot-down on their own. Just months before 9/11, these orders were changed so that any such order must now be approved by the Secretary of Defense directly.

- And yes, of course, it's all just bureaucratic incompetence. Billions upon billions of dollars in defense and yet the systems to defend such an attack were not in place. We are told there was nothing that could have been done to prevent the attacks. The answer then must be: GIVE MORE MONEY TO DEFENSE. It's funny how incompetence seems to get rewarded with bigger budgets!

## SUPPORT 9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS - WWW.FEALGOODFOUNDATION.COM

## GET ACTIVE! GET INVOLVED! CHECK US OUT AT:
# WWW.WEARECHANGE.ORG

## PLEASE VISIT THE SITES BELOW AND DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH!
- www.911blogger.com
- www.911research.com
- www.prisonplanet.com

- www.wtc7.net
- www.ae911truth.org
- www.truthaction.org

- www.cooperativeresearch.org
- www.patriotsquestion911.com
- www.pilotsfor911truth.org

## GOOGLE VIDEO:
- Terrorstorm
- Endgame

- 9-11 Mysteries
- America : Freedom to Fascism

- Loose Change
- Press for Truth
- Clinton Chronicles

# WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT A NEW 911 INVESTIGATION!

- Why after waiting 442 days just to get an investigation did the 9/11 Commission fail to answer 70% of the questions the victims families had?

- In August '03 it was revealed the Gov't ordered the EPA to lie about the air quality resulting in 50,000 sick and dying 1st responders, why has no one been held accountable?

- Why do 120+ Senior Military, Intelligence Service, Law Enforcement and Gov't Officials, 310+ Engineers & Architects, 70+ Pilots & Aviation Professionals and 200+ Professors all question the official story of 9/11?

- Why have co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission Lee Hamilton & Thomas Keane, in their book Without Precedent, say that the 9/11 Commission "were set up to fail"?

- The head of Pakistani Intelligence transferred $100K to Mohammed Atta but was not investigated - why?

- Why have the 80 + videos outside the Pentagon never been released?

- WTC Building 7, a 47 story skyscraper was not hit by a plane but collapsed later that day. Why was this not investigated by the 9/11 Commission?

- What force pulverized most of the concrete and office material of the Towers into dust, then ejected steel beams into the air?

- Why is Osama Bin Laden not wanted for 9/11 on the FBI's Most Wanted List?

# WTC BUILDING 7

- At 5:20PM the 47 story steel framed building collapsed vertically, falling in 6.5 seconds into a pile only 7 stories tall, much like a controlled demolition.

- Structural damage on the south side facing the towers, if the only cause of collapse, would have toppled the building over. Photos of the other 3 sides of the building show little fire or damage.

- Symmetrical collapse would require all 58 perimeter columns and 25 core columns to be cut at precisely the same time. Professionals require computer-controlled detonators to achieve this precision.

- 1200°F temperatures were measured by NASA aircraft in the rubble days after 9/11. How can office furniture and carpet burn so hot inside an oxygen starved rubble pile?

- BBC and CNN reported that WTC 7 had collapsed 20 minutes and 1 hour (respectively) before it actually had collapsed, how would they know this when no steel framed building has ever collapsed due to fire in history prior to 9/11? What officials told them and why is this not in the report?

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- Mayor Giuliani's emergency command bunker was installed on the 20th floor of this building due to its structural integrity. It was a heavily reinforced and self contained section of the building that would make a total collapse even more unlikely.

- "We built in enough redundancy to allow entire portions of floors to be removed without affecting the building's structural integrity, on the assumption that someone might need double-height floors.", said Larry Silverstein, president of the company that owned WTC7 in 1989.

- Look at the chunk sliced from WTC 3 (image right), yet this building did not collapse.

- There is still no official report explaining the collapse of WTC 7. It is however pending.

# SHOW ME THE MONEY

- Pakistani ISI Agent, Saeed Sheik, wired $100,000 on September 10th to Mohammed Atta at the instruction of Mahmoud Ahmad, the head of the ISI. Why is the head of Pakistani intelligence, our supposed ally in the war on terror, sending $100,000 to a known terrorist?

- Interestingly enough Mahmoud Ahmad was also in Washington meeting with the future head of the CIA, George Tenet on the morning of 9/10. This was not investigated by the 9/11 Commission.

- The week leading up to 9/11 an extremely high number of PUT options were placed specifically on American Airlines and United Airlines indicating someone knew those stocks would decrease in value. American Airlines experienced 4 times and United Airlines 25 times above normal option trading on September 6th, 2001. The firm used to place some of the PUT options was chaired by the number three Executive Director of the CIA, A.B. "Buzzy" Krongard.

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- Why is not a desk, computer, phone, chair, stapler, or anything from the inside of an office, found in the debris of the towers? A gravitational collapse may crush this material but it would still be there. This is not the case with the collapse of the twin towers.

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- What caused most of the 425,000 cubic yards of concrete to get pulverized into dust? Gravity alone cannot explain the degree to which it was pulverized.

- If the heat caused the trusses to sag and pull the perimeter columns in, thus initiating a pancake collapse, why were the 47 core columns not left standing as the floors pancaked around them like a spindle on a record player? The NIST computer simulation even shows these beams remaining in a video, with no explanation as to how they collapsed.

- What could explain the bending of this giant steel column? Where did the heat-source come from to bend this without fracturing or cracking it? It takes 1000's of degrees to bend steel like this without any buckling or cracking or tearing on the tension side.

# MILITARY DRILLS AND AIR DEFENSE FAILURES

- Over 12 different military exercises were happening on that fateful day. Some involved simulations of airliners crashing into WTC and other targets.

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- Why were the tapes of the communication between ATC and the pilots/hijackers destroyed by the FAA?

- Why was standard operating procedure not followed that when a plane goes off course, or radio contact is lost, jet fighters are immediately scrambled to visually check on the plane and its pilots?

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> "...a young man who had come in and said to the vice president, 'The plane is 50 miles out. The plane is 30 miles out.' And when it got down to, 'The plane is 10 miles out,' the young man also said to the vice president, 'Do the orders still stand?' And the vice president turned and whipped his neck around and said, 'Of course the orders still stand. Have you heard anything to the contrary?'

**What order was Cheney giving, and was this a direct stand down order?**

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**If a documentary or film woke you up to 9/11 truth, which one was most responsible?**

☒

| | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Loose Change: A 9/11 Truth Film | +32 |
| ☐ Zeitgeist | +18 |
| ☐ 911: In Plane Site | +9 |
| ☐ War By Deception | +3 |
| ☐ 911 Mysteries Part 1: Demolitions | +2 |
| ☐ The Great Conspiracy by Barrie Zwicker | +2 |
| ☐ Local 9/11Truth group | +2 |
| ☐ Pentagon Strike (6 minute Flash Media Presentation) | +1 |
| ☐ September 11 Revisited | +1 |
| ☐ Sep 11 - "Why the Towers Fell" - Nova PBS | +1 |
| ☐ Hunt the Boeing: test your perception | +1 |
| ☐ September Clues | +1 |
| ☐ Terrorstorm a History of Government Sponsored Terrorism | +1 |
| ☐ Endgame: Blueprint for Global Enslavement | +1 |
| ☐ Zero: An Investigation Into 9/11 | +1 |
| ☐ 9/11 Explosive Evidence - Experts Speak Out | |
| ☐ Fabled Enemies: A Film By Loose Change Filmmaker Jason Bermas | |
| + Add an option... | |

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VITA

Richard G. Ellefritz

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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