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The Construction of Masculinity

In Post-9/11 Literary Narratives

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the construction of masculinity in four post-9/11 texts and examines how each of them does or does not fit into the category of a post-9/11 counternarrative, as defined by Don DeLillo and Thomas Bjerre. By analyzing Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón's *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and John Updikes' *Terrorist*, this thesis attempts to better understand and critique how constructions of masculinity have the ability to interact with other discourses in the dominant culture: primarily misogynist gendered rhetoric and representations of men and women; notions of xenophobia and Islamophobia; and American patriotism. After the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, a hegemonic narrative of the attacks was presented by the US government and the mainstream media that heavily censored the reality of the attacks. This narrative depended on a homogenized assumption of 'the other,' and fostered the emergence of a new hegemonic construction of mythic masculinity – the ordinary man. As the ordinary man rises to inhabit the hegemonic position post-9/11, the prior hegemonic construction of masculinity – business masculinity – falls from the hegemonic position with the destruction of the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in New York.

## Contents

Introduction: Constructions of Masculinity and Post-9/11 Literature .....	1
Chapter 1: <i>The 9/11 Report</i> .....	23
<i>The 9/11 Report</i> as a War Narrative .....	23
Shifts in the Construction of Masculinity .....	26
Interaction with Xenophobia .....	36
<i>The 9/11 Report</i> as a Counternarrative? .....	41
Conclusion .....	50
Chapter 2: <i>Falling Man</i> as a Literary Counternarrative .....	52
DeLillo's Counternarrative and "In the Ruins of the Future" .....	63
Conclusion .....	65
Chapter 3: Islamophobia in <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist &amp; Terrorist</i> .....	67
Mohsin Hamid's <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> .....	72
John Updike's <i>Terrorist</i> .....	80
Conclusion .....	85
Conclusion .....	86
Works Cited .....	90
Works Consulted .....	96

## Introduction: Constructions of Masculinity and Post-9/11 Literature

When two planes struck the World Trade Center towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, they unleashed a storm of media coverage that both tapped into existing tropes of masculinity and re-created others. The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> were arguably one of the most visible attacks on the United States in US history. As a national tragedy, the attacks immediately attracted a lot of media attention and were the subject of a constant stream of stories and media coverage for the following decade. The destruction of the World Trade Center and other nearby buildings and infrastructure caused serious damage to the economy of Lower Manhattan and to global markets, closing Wall Street until September 17, 2001. Although New York City did not shut down in the wake of the attacks, multiple closings and evacuations followed because of fear of further attacks. Although media coverage is to be expected for an event of this magnitude, the *constant* coverage and the *type* of coverage that occurred heavily affected the perception of the event and inscribed a very specific narrative to them.

The media representation of the 9/11 attacks were severely edited and skewed in a way that garnered the heaviest response from audiences while providing a particular narrative about the situation: “The Bush administration’s War on Terror was a war on, of, and over images . . . instigated by an iconoclastic spectacle, the hypervisible destruction of the World Trade Center towers” (Gleich 161). The same few images were shown repeatedly in the days, weeks, and months following the 9/11 attacks, with “an endless loop of video and photo images, [through which] the media had ‘systematically leached’ the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> of their ‘history’ and ‘meaning’” (Gleich 161). One of these

famous images and videos was the image of the towers burning and a man ‘falling’ as he jumped from the burning North Tower. This image became known as ‘The Falling Man’ and was deemed ‘too controversial’ and graphic for most newspapers. Many of the photographs shown in the media representing 9/11 did not show corpses or any of the bloody carnage. Rather, the emphasis was placed outside of the bodies of the victims and focused on the carnage of the towers, which was then treated as a symbol for the attacks and for the loss of life that occurred.

Just as certain images became easily recognizable symbols for particular narratives of the 9/11 attacks, the literature of the period undertook a similar depersonalization. The 9/11 attacks set off a crisis of representation which was emphasized within media depictions and literary texts that emerged out of the post-9/11 and War on Terror period. Because literature has a complex relationship with mainstream discourses and ideologies, literary texts often become a space in which these ideas and theories can be tested, questioned, and explored. As a result, literary narratives often act as a location to reflect on discourses and ideologies that represent major societal shifts and feelings, and in which the author and the reader can reflect and become more thoughtful about what shapes their sense of the meaning of their world. Furthermore, the representation of men and the constructions of masculinity that texts exhibit expose much about mainstream conceptions and dominant discourses that pervade the media.

In this thesis, I investigate four post-9/11 texts in light of contemporary constructs of masculinity, Islamophobia, representation, and narrative itself. My argument will be informed by the work of contemporary theorists of masculinity including R.W Connell

and Michael Kimmel, as well as literary critics who have explored the construction and disintegration of narrative and representation after 9/11. Because ‘post-9/11 literary narratives’ could arguably apply to all narrative fiction written after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I will only be considering narratives that directly integrate the 9/11 attacks or its aftermath into the narrative. Within this category of post-9/11 literature, I will be focusing on Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón’s *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* in Chapter 1 in regard to the construction of 9/11 narratives and how they (mis)represent masculinity and femininity. I will explore the concept of post-9/11 counternarratives in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* in Chapter 2, and examine the intersection of masculinity, Islamophobia, and xenophobia in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and John Updike’s *Terrorist* in Chapter 3. Although these chapters will all have slightly different emphases, they all concern various representations and constructions of masculinities and the intersections of those constructions with other dominant discourses as seen in the media during the War on Terror period. Analyzing these texts will help explain and critique the reinforcing of a misogynist, xenophobic masculinity that underlies the literature and overall symbolic media landscape of the post-9/11 period through the two most dominant (albeit fluid) literary genres: the war narrative, and the counternarrative.

Growing up in a post-9/11 environment surrounded by the symbols created during the 9/11 attacks has rendered most of the millennial generation blind to the representation of problematic constructions of masculinity, conceptions of a US ‘nation,’ and their intersection with other discourses such as Islamophobia and American patriotism in the

media. The period in which The War on Terror occurred produced texts that are considered 'war narratives.' A defining feature of such literature is the inclusion of gendered literary tropes such as the 'captivity and rescue' trope in which the rescuer is engendered masculine, and the rescued party as feminine. In "Rescuing Masculinity: Captivity, Rescue and Gender in American War Narratives," Brenda Boyle argues that such tropes encourage the valorization of masculinity. Due to the specificity of this type of masculinity's parameters, the 'captivity and rescue trope' creates a high expectation that few men can ever meet. Despite the existence of the war narrative genre and rescue trope prior to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, 9/11 and War on Terror narratives are unique in reinforcing these narratives in the heavy media coverage of the attacks, the war, and the construction of an abstract 'other.' 9/11 in particular was an event that was presented by the media more often and with greater immediacy and more ideological spin than prior conflicts in US history.

Although the majority of post-9/11 War on Terror literature was written and discussed a decade ago, the constructions of masculinity and the problematic construction of a Muslim 'other' has not changed much in the subsequent years. Rather, mediated representations of masculine 'heroes' and feminized 'terrorists' have become the norm within mainstream American media and rhetoric. The concept of both the 'Muslim other' and the 'feminized terrorist' arise from the same source, as Dana Moss suggests: "the Western construction of Islam as [the] enemy of 'Christian values' and 'democratic freedoms' . . . in which negative associations are sustained and replicated by the very manipulation of symbols and the hyper-reproduction of stereotypes" (Moss 197-8).

Despite the ultimate feminization of terrorist figures when they fail in these narratives, such characters are often positioned in a complex liminal space between hyper-masculine aggressor and feminized loser.

This project draws on feminist theory concerning the construction, representation, and analysis of masculinity to illuminate the construction and representation of masculinity in post-9/11 literary narratives. I argue that a collection of such theory will allow a richer view of the various constructions of masculinity and how shifts in such constructions and representations affect the reading of literary narratives, and explore how masculinity affects narratives of 9/11 and the War on Terror in addition to how masculinity operates within them.

In order to explain the fixation with such symbols and constructions, I turn to feminist theory on masculinity. For this project, I will be adopting and in some cases adapting major theoretical definitions and theories from masculinity studies and feminist theory to look at the construction of masculinity through a feminist lens. To track the shifts in constructions of masculinity and acknowledge the mutability of these constructions, it is important to begin with the foundation of masculinity theory and analysis with theories and terms pioneered by Michael Kimmel and R.W. Connell. These two began the earliest academic discussions and analyses of masculinity within feminist theory and established many of the key terms used in masculinity scholarship.

In “The Social Organization of Masculinity,” R.W. Connell defines masculinity and concludes that “the concept is inherently relational. ‘Masculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’” (68). This definition allows multiple types of



masculinities to coexist and acknowledges the mutability of their constructions: “With the growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race and class it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities: black as well as white, working-class as well as middle-class” (76). Noting that various constructions of masculinity can coexist and the importance of considering race and class when investigating them is integral to this project. Throughout post-9/11 media, various constructions of masculinity are assigned to men due to their bodies and their positions or roles in society.

From this analysis, I get one of my key terms, ‘hegemonic masculinity.’ Connell defines hegemonic masculinity “not as a fixed character type . . . [but], the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender-relations, a position [that is] always contestable” (76). Having an understanding of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the hegemonic position is integral to understanding my interest in constructions of masculinity. By establishing a hegemonic construction of masculinity as the most dominant construction, a hierarchy of masculinity is created. Those who exhibit characteristics of this particular construction are arguably at ‘the top of the food chain’ in the sense that they cannot be subordinated or oppressed by any other construct of masculinity.

Intersectionality is clearly central to this hierarchy of masculinity: due to the fact that hegemonic constructions are positioned at the top of that hierarchy, women, men of color, or men suffering from poverty struggle to inhabit this hegemonic position. As a result, men who inhabit this hegemonic position tend to be white, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual males, which is most apparent in my discussion of post-9/11 representations

when thinking about the depictions of terrorists and men of color (primarily Muslim men). Due to the color of their skin and their religious affiliation, individuals *perceived* to be ‘Muslim others’ are pushed down the hierarchy and barred from ever reaching the hegemonic position in this particular context in the United States. Rather, such men exhibit what is known as a ‘marginalized masculinity,’ which is subject to discrimination and oppression from more hegemonic constructions. In “Making Masculinity,” C.J. Pascoe uses R.W. Connell’s theory of ‘multiple masculinities’ to argue that masculinity is a configuration of practices and discourses that individuals embody in different ways and to different degrees. With Connell’s description of a hegemonic position in mind, Pascoe creates other categories of masculinity, ranking them from most to least dominant:

*Hegemonic masculinity*, the type of gender practice that, in a given space and time, supports gender inequality, is at the top of this hierarchy.

*Complicity masculinity* describes men who benefit from hegemonic masculinity but do not enact it; *subordinated masculinity* describes men who are oppressed by definitions of hegemonic masculinity, primarily gay men; *marginalized masculinity* describes men who may be positioned powerfully in terms of gender but not in terms of class or race. (Pascoe 7)

Here, you can see how Pascoe uses Connell’s idea of the ‘hegemonic positioning’ and the theory of multiple masculinities, combining them all into a hierarchy that shows the structure of the system of domination and subordination that exists among men, and to explain where men who inhabit a marginalized position lie in that hierarchy.

Oftentimes, mainstream print media prioritizes hegemonic masculinity in regard to terrorism politics and representation, constructing an inferior, passive identity for women and marginalized men. In “Gendering Abbottabad: Agency and Hegemonic Masculinity in an Age of Global Terrorism,” Lori Poloni-Staudinger discusses how this prioritization applies to representations of the Bush Administration and media representations of terrorists, and how similar representations occur when general figures are being discussed (i.e. the ‘ordinary’ men and women of the US and the Middle East). In many of these representations, women are often portrayed as being passive agents in situations of terrorism. In the context of US representations of the Middle East, Middle Eastern women are shown as passive agents who are oppressed by the ‘terrorist’ men in their lives. This victimization of women establishes that Middle Eastern men are the sole actors of terrorism, but simultaneously emasculates and feminizes them when a more hegemonically masculine man ‘catches’ them in their ‘wrong-doing.’

Exploring the relationships that men develop with one another in this hierarchy is important considering that “masculinities are social constructs and are therefore not universal . . . [and] that a critical piece of masculinities is hierarchies among men” (Dowd 423). In “Asking the Man Question: Masculinities Analysis and Feminist Theory,” Nancy Dowd claims that exposing the complexities and multiplicity of masculinities will allow an intersectional understanding of discrimination that doesn’t currently exist. Like Connell, Dowd also acknowledges the importance of considering intersectionality when thinking about hierarchies of subordination, emphasizing the need to think about intersectionality among men. Keeping in mind that “intragroup differences” (Crenshaw

484) exist among men from different backgrounds, it should be acknowledged that “ignoring differences *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups” (Crenshaw 484) when considering how “subversive and subordinated masculinities” (Dowd 423) exist and value men differently (primarily Muslim and immigrant men versus white men post-9/11). Following up with Crenshaw’s argument that tension within a group (in this case, among men) can contribute to tension among groups (through men’s interaction with women), a better understanding of systemic oppression may unfold.

Misrepresentations in the media often engage with such tensions and in some cases, construct symbolic protests. In *Misframing Men*, Michael Kimmel argues that men’s struggles are often misrepresented in the media. This misrepresentation often leads to a range of negative feelings and reactions among men, due to an insecure sense of what it means to be masculine: “men seem uncomfortable in their new spotlight, . . . [experiencing a] range of emotions from anxiety to anger” (2). Such discomfort has a tendency to feed into previously held stereotypes, redirecting the anger and anxiety felt by these men into a ‘white male aggression’ that is then projected onto marginalized groups. As a result, certain groups of men may interpret such shifts and movements as a threat to their hegemonic position, leading to the formation of groups that use tactics of ‘protest masculinity.’ In “Globalization and its Mal(e)contents,” Michael Kimmel defines ‘protest masculinity’ through anecdotes of extremist groups and movements where men begin to view masculinity (both their own masculinity and the masculinity of other men) as a ‘symbolic capital’ and an ‘ideological resource as a tool to explain and support their ‘plight.’

Although Kimmel discusses protest masculinity in regards to the formation of extremist groups and their incorporation of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity as symbols to structure their cause, this concept can be, and more commonly is, applied to conservative (although not necessarily extremist) responses to equality movements in the mainstream media. In the War on Terror period, I saw hints of the symbolic capital of protest masculinity used in the rhetoric deployed by the Bush Administration, largely to create a sense of solidarity and unison among the American populous after the attacks. When comparing the type of language that Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush used in their speeches, they are eerily similar. Both men are calling the people of their nations to come together and create a protest masculinity that aims to restore traditional patriarchal norms and gendered divisions. Additionally, both groups and leaders view the other as a terrorist. While describing that there was no need to differentiate between military and civilian, bin Laden also ‘others’ Americans and labels *them* as terrorists, emphasizing the importance of considering what location any given narrative may be coming from: “We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans” (Jacobson 30).

In such descriptions, bin Laden is targeting one of the pre-9/11 constructions of masculinity: business masculinity. Working alongside Julian Wood in “Globalization and Business Masculinities,” Connell defines the idea of a ‘transnational business masculinity.’ I draw a lot of parallels between Connell’s construction of a ‘transnational business masculinity’ and the hegemonic ‘business masculinity’ of white collar workers that appear in 9/11 literature. Although these are two different constructions, the type of

masculinity that Connell and Wood introduce are affected by the same global forces that constructed the pre-9/11 US business masculinity I am most interested in. These parallels, seen through characters such as the protagonist Keith Neudecker in *Falling Man*, narrator Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the less specific depictions of office workers in *The 9/11 Report*, highlight the type of construction that falls from the hegemonic position during the War on Terror period and acts as a backdrop for these character's plots within the novels.

Even prior to 9/11, the idea of a powerful businessman who works in the towers of the World Trade Center were very present in media. Soaring high above the Manhattan skyline, the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center represented a symbol of American masculinity and prosperity. Past the obvious phallic symbol of soaring high about the rest of the skyline, the Towers also stood as a symbol of American business and capitalism. Even the name of the center, The World Trade Center, emphasized the global and financial importance of the structure for the institution of capitalism. Having such a strong foothold on global business and business practices, the Towers stood as a symbol of the American businessman and the hegemonic construction of masculinity in New York City: a ruthless financier who would do what was necessary to turn a profit and flaunt the spoils of capitalism and the success of American business ventures. Following the attacks and the fall of this symbol of American power, masculinity, and capitalism, however, the moment quickly became a crisis for masculinity and a catalyst for misogyny and xenophobia. With the symbol of American success, wealth, and masculinity in ruins,

New York City and the US was searching for a heroic figure to save them, when the construction of an ‘ordinary man’ figure emerges.

The idea of an ‘ordinary man’ figure originates with Laura Shepard’s idea of the ‘ordinary decent citizen.’ In her description of this ‘ordinary decent citizen,’ Shepard argues that the Bush administration creates this construction when President Bush says “[T]he strength of this nation is founded in the character and dedication and courage of *everyday citizens*.” (Shepard 21, my emphasis.) Shepard explains that the Bush Administration emphasizes the “overwhelming[ly] masculine” (21) characteristics of these citizens as Bush praised their “national character” and “ability to save themselves” (21). For this project, I’ve adapted this idea and this construction of masculine citizenship to the hero figures that were represented in the media post-9/11 and throughout the War on Terror. From the first responders on site at the World Trade Center after the attacks, to the volunteers at the clean-up efforts and the soldiers throughout the War on Terror, their being *ordinary citizens* was always emphasized. Through this emphasis, the ordinary citizens became the figures of the nation and of American strength and power, during a time when the past symbol (the World Trade Center) failed.

In “Veiled References,” Laura Shepard argues that post-9/11 mediated representations depict the success of the ‘ordinary man’ figure, illustrating the importance of gender and gendered language in the creation of a ‘narrative of war.’ The media represented this ‘ordinary man’ figure as the first responders who responded to the attacks: the firefighters, police officers, EMTs, and later the civilians who volunteered their time and energy to help the cleanup and rescue efforts after the 11th. In “Post-9/11

Literary Masculinities,” Thomas Bjerre refers to this phenomenon as the creation of a new variation of ‘mythic American manhood.’ The idea of an ordinary man acting as a hero buys into this construction of mythic manhood, and is continually referenced in post-9/11 literature. During the post-9/11 period, however, the idea of mythic manhood largely referred to “the *man’s man*- strong and silent” and of “iconic images of the Old West” (Parish 186).

This ‘ordinary man’ was largely created by the media’s representations in their narrative of the attacks. As the once hegemonic business men of the World Trade Center were being attacked, the media turned to the heroic actions of the first responders who rushed to the scene just minutes after the attack and later weeks and months into the clean-up. Although not to say that the first responders were not heroic and did not deserve praise, the media’s constant representation of them made them out to be that type of mythic masculinity Bjerre discusses. In the media’s representation of the first responders, they did not necessarily matter as heroic individuals. Rather, the first responders operated as a *symbol* for the rise of a new form of hegemonic masculinity, which was supposed to be seen as more accessible than the prior: that of the ordinary man. By definition, however, the nature of hegemonic masculinity makes it inaccessible to most. So despite the media representation and the idea of the ‘ordinary man’ being accessible to all is misleading. That is not to say that this construction of masculinity was all bad, however. It created the idea that anyone and everyone could help out and have a say in what happened and how things happened. It actually managed to bring people (primarily men) together in a way that was necessary after such a devastating event.



Shepard asserts that specific constructs of gender and the use of gendered language “perpetuate a particular understanding of the situation [The War on Terror] and . . . organize a response based on this understanding” (19-20). Emphasizing the relationship between the representation of a situation and the impact that a representation can have in real life is significant bearing Kimmel’s argument in mind – the misrepresentation of an event or construction can have dire consequences when interpreted by a group. Just as men became anxious and projected their anxiety and anger onto marginalized groups for their unease about their identities, individuals are likely to react in a similar manner when information and language used about war is ambiguous and unclear. It is then likely that the anxiety and anger experienced by these individuals will be redirected to the group being misrepresented as the homogenized ‘other’ in which “individual human beings . . . are abstracted out of existence” (Cohn 241).

In regard to the abstraction of the homogenized other, in “Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War,” Carol Cohn asserts that all human characteristics are gendered, valued, and dichotomized as male or female in cultural representations. According to Cohn, the representation of the military as purely masculine often abstracts, erases, or distorts the severity of actions within war. Rather than being a product of misrepresentation, Cohn sees masculinity as being a *component* of misrepresentation as it not only “limits what is *said*, but even limits what is *thought* . . . gender discourse acts as a preemptive deterrent to thought” (235).

Only two months after the attacks, novelist Don DeLillo had an essay published in *Harper’s*, which was one of the “earliest nonjournalistic responses to the events” of 9/11

(Abel 1236). In “In the Ruins of the Future,” DeLillo responds to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in a manner that counters the coverage that major broadcast and print media sources presented in the wake of the attacks. In this essay, DeLillo uses the term ‘counternarrative’ when he says “The Bush administration was feeling a nostalgia for the cold war. This is over now. Many things are over. The narrative ends in the rubble and [it] is left to us to create the counternarrative” (“Ruins” 2). DeLillo continues to describe what constitutes this counternarrative that has been left to us: it includes the “100,000 stories crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world,” the countless “people running for their lives,” and “in Union Square Park, ... the improvised memorials” (2-3). For DeLillo, the heart of a counternarrative is the experience of those involved. It’s their reactions, their thoughts, and their feelings:

For the next 50 years, people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it. Others will claim to have lost friends or relatives, although they did not. This is also the counternarrative, a shadow history of false memories and imagined loss.

The internet is a counternarrative, shaped in part by rumour, fantasy and mystical reverberation. (3)

In his description of counternarratives, DeLillo defers the emphasis placed on hasty answers and solutions that Big Media have been suggesting and reporting on (i.e. why the attacks occurred, how to move forward, what this means, etc.) and poses a different reaction to the attack: a reaction that calls for “deferring judgment” (Abel 1237) and

posing questions that cannot easily be answered, emphasizing the fact that there is no easy solutions or lasting answer to the dilemmas of 9/11. A large aspect of this “deferring judgment” require that the messy, fragmented stories of the attacks that don’t necessarily make sense or add up be represented alongside the neat narrative Big Media presents.

As Marco Abel says in his article “Don DeLillo’s “In the Ruins of the Future”:  
Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11,” “DeLillo’s essay demonstrates the impossibility of saying anything definitive about 9/11 – especially anything that capture’s the event’s meaning” (1237). DeLillo’s idea that nothing definitive can truly be said about 9/11 so soon after the attacks is reiterated in his novel, *Falling Man*, which was released 5 years later in 2006 (and I will be discussing in more depth in Chapter 2 of this project). In many ways, DeLillo uses “In the Ruins of the Future” as both a spring board for *Falling Man*, and as one of the first examples of a post-9/11 counternarrative in regard to media representation of visual representations of the event through both televised broadcasts and print media.

For this project, I put DeLillo’s definition of ‘counternarrative’ in dialogue with the slightly different definition offered by Bjerre. Although they do not always agree with one another, thinking about the concept of a counternarrative in multiple ways is necessary to understand it and acknowledge the emphasis it places on multiple perspectives and realities. In “Post-9/11 Literary Masculinities,” Thomas Bjerre asserts that many post-9/11 literary representations go against mainstream media misrepresentations when he describes a literary ‘counternarrative.’ According to Bjerre, these counternarratives oppose the near-unattainable heroic masculinity portrayed in war

narratives, and focus on ideas of satirical, neutered, and marginalized migrant masculinities:

[A]fter 9/11, the government and the media were only too keen to participate in a mythmaking process intended to heal the national psyche. Rather than pose difficult questions, America wrapped itself in a protective blanket of mythic – and thereby familiar – narrative of manly men and defenseless damsels in distress . . . The novels I discuss are . . . trauma-driven in various ways. This points to an approach to 9/11 at odds with the triumphant narrative described above. Having male protagonists who are emotionally paralyzed by trauma in itself suggests that the authors have a different conception of American manhood after 9/11 from the one found in the jingoistic patriarchic narrative expounded by the mainstream media and much of popular culture. (243-4)

Just as the war narratives that Boyle describe misrepresent particular constructions of masculinity, however, it appears that the counternarratives Bjerre discusses unintentionally do the same: they perpetuate the mainstream construction of masculinity that they claim to counter due to a perception that the failure lies with the individual male, rather than with the construction of masculinity itself.

In my readings of such novels, I too have found that the failures in counternarratives can be attributed to the trauma the character experiences from witnessing and being involved in the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. As Rosemary Garland Thomson argues in “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” disability is

often associated with femininity (518), and “sickness is gendered feminine” (519).

Although the trauma and PTSD these male characters face from the 9/11 attacks are not precisely what Garland-Thomson was discussing in her article, the same concepts apply, and the failing male protagonists are engendered as feminine on a personal, micro level.

As with other major disasters in US history, the government issued an official government report following the attacks entitled *The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, or *The 9/11 Commission Report*.

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (also known as the 9-11 Commission), an independent, bipartisan commission created by congressional legislation and the signature of President George W. Bush in late 2002, is chartered to prepare a full and complete account of the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, including preparedness for and the immediate response to the attacks. The Commission is also mandated to provide recommendations designed to guard against future attacks. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States)

As a government document, however, *The 9/11 Commission* is a long-winded and dense text. Covering thirteen sections and just under 600 pages, *The Commission* isn't the most accessible content for a mass audience in the United States. Even so, it's an important text, filled with information that the government feels the general population should have access to. Due to this lack of accessibility, multiple adaptations of the text were created with the goal of making the material more accessible to a wider audience. In the first

chapter of this project, I look at one of these adaptations, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, and how it modifies the information of *The Commission Report* into an abridged graphic novel.

After *The 9/11 Commission* was published, the National Security Preparedness Group joined forces with members of the 9/11 Commission to issue a tenth anniversary report card on August 31, 2011, which addressed the progress the government made with following the suggestions posed in *The 9/11 Commission Report*. It was found that after a decade since the attacks, that “nine of the 41 recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission in July 2004 remain unfinished” (National Security Preparedness Group). According to *The 9/11 Report* and these report cards, the government did not follow many of the suggestions made in *The Commission*, but created the illusion that they had when addressing the media to ensure that sensations of nationalism and patriotism did not fall in a time of war. Similarly, President George W. Bush’s media presence followed a parallel pattern. Bush was largely represented and received as being an ‘ordinary man’ figure, drawing on his Texas roots and calling forth images of a cowboy in the Wild West who would fight for justice. In this characterization, Bush became a figure who was, in a sense, being restrained by his position as president. *He* wasn’t shown as being the problem, but *his position* as president and position in the government was shown as hindering his effectiveness to respond and help.

In Chapter 1, I intend to explore the layers of discourse that exist and interact with one another in *The 9/11 Report*. I will argue that a misogynist gendered rhetoric underlies much of the literature of the War on Terror and Bush Administration period. Due to the

nature of war narratives and the rescue trope, which pervades the literature of this period, certain characters are valorized and shown as superior, receiving more attention and representation throughout the texts. This hierarchizing generally erases women from active positions, forcing them to rely on men and accept a position in the background, or makes them absent entirely. This erasure also intersects with notions of xenophobia, which in post-9/11 America is almost inseparable from notions of American patriotism and nationalism. Such constructions of gender force individuals into generalized categories that transform them into symbols and ‘ideological resources,’ especially in a time of crisis and war to create a sense of solidarity among a particular group of nation.

In Chapter 2, I investigate idea of a post-9/11 counternarrative by analyzing Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and the essay from which it grew, “In the Ruins of the Future.” In both texts, DeLillo argues that there is no easy solution or answer to the dilemmas of 9/11, and that there is no easy solution or single narrative to ‘counter’ terrorism. If anything, one of the most prominent features of both of these texts is the acknowledgement that constructs of masculinity cannot successfully act as a counter to terrorism, despite what the mainstream media represents. In doing this, DeLillo argues against the heroism and hegemonic positioning of the ‘ordinary man’ figure, identifying it as just another variation of the symbol of mythic masculinity, and critiquing the media’s totalizing representation of it and the symbols of the 9/11 attacks.

In Chapter 3, I look at the intersection of xenophobic and Islamophobic discourses with the construction of masculinity in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and John Updike’s *Terrorist*. Both authors present racist, stereotypical

and sexist ideas to critique the hegemonically masculine American response to 9/11 and the attitudes that it caused, specifically through War on Terror discourse. Through my analysis of these texts, I intend to show how the authors' critiques of Islamophobic tendencies can be seen in the narrative structures of the novels. Both novels use a narrative structure in which the reader is positioned to mistrust the narrator, a Muslim other, despite acting as both narrator and protagonist. This intentional positioning allows Hamid and Updike to subtly force their readers to acknowledge the Islamophobia that has been ingrained in them throughout and after the War on Terror period. By the end of these novels, the reader is left questioning what we *assumed* and thought we knew from the beginning of the novel. There is no clear-cut protagonist, nor is there a clear-cut antagonist. Rather, the ambiguity mirrors the paranoia and uncertainty of war during this period.

Considering the massive shifts in the construction of masculinity over time, it is hard to determine how thorough my representation of the construction of masculinity is. As a mutable category, masculinity has changed with the years, largely aided by mediated representation – both positively and negatively. There have been various misrepresentations of masculinity and masculine characteristics in the media, largely with negative drawbacks associated with them. Even in representations that attempt to counter the mainstream hegemonic representations through the introduction of a character that fails, due to the high volume of representations of the rigid boundaries of constructions of heroic masculinity in war narratives, more nuanced representations in which the protagonist fails are still viewed as perpetuating the rigid boundaries of the norm. Even



though this may not be the goal or intent of such narratives, they cannot avoid such misrepresentations and misinterpretations.

## Chapter 1: *The 9/11 Report*

Despite having occurred over a decade ago, certain problematic discourses concerning masculinity and xenophobia that dominated the media after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks remain. Simply turning on the news or watching the preliminary presidential nominee race is enough to show that representations of white male heroes and Muslim ‘others’ are figures that we have come to see regularly. The representation of men and the constructions of masculinity that texts exhibit expose a lot about mainstream conceptions and dominant discourses that pervade the media. For 9/11, this presence in the media is even more pronounced due to the prominence of the media coverage surrounding the event; video footage of the attacks and the burning towers were broadcast on live television almost immediately after the impact of the first plane.

### **The 9/11 Report as a War Narrative**

War narratives were a prominent feature of post-9/11 media. Because the War on Terror differed from previous wars in the sense that there was an abstract web of enemies and mass civilian casualties rather than a quantified enemy or battlefield however, 9/11 war narratives have a tendency to focus on the sense of paranoia that reflect the amorphous nature this unfamiliar type of warfare. The following excerpts, taken from an address made to a joint session of Congress by President Bush on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 express such anxieties. The rhetoric used by Bush is left ambiguous, describing the ‘enemy groups’ as mysterious and dangerous, coming for the *entirety* of ‘our nation,’ and attacking the core values that *every* citizen of the US is meant to hold dear:

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country . . . The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al-Qaeda . . . There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries . . . Our War on Terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. (Bush)

This type of rhetoric dominated the post-9/11 War on Terror period, with speakers emphasizing the complex nature of ‘the enemy.’ Emphasizing the fact that this enemy is not from one particular place, but from a multitude of places and backgrounds, initiates a justification that the 9/11 attacks warrant a war to be declared on *all* of ‘them,’ which is an extremely totalizing frame of thought that may have had a direct influence on the emergence of the extreme American patriotism and nationalism in the following years.

Published on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* is precisely what it sounds like: a graphic adaptation of *The 9/11 Commission Report*. The authors of the text, Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón, felt that the content of *The 9/11 Commission Report* was important information that the general US population should have access to. In its original form, however, Jacobson and Colón felt that too few Americans had read and absorbed the details of the Commission’s investigation and suggestions. As a result, they sought to produce what they thought was the most accessible version of *The 9/11 Commission Report*: “That summer, the 9/11 Commission Report had been published and become a best-seller. Colón bought a copy and, as he read

it, told himself that only a fraction of the book's buyers would do the same. Unless, that is, it could be rendered more user-friendly" and could ultimately be used to "help readers remember" (Singer). In Jacobson's and Colón's adaptation, the text frequently follows the original report word-for-word, and attempts to covers the report's entire scope, even including the Commission's final report card on the actions the government had taken after the publication of *The Commission Report*. Due to the similarity of their titles, however, from this point forward I will refer to the original *9/11 Commission Report* simply as *The Commission*, while Jacobson's and Colón's graphic adaptation will retain its full name, *The 9/11 Report*, to keep the two texts separate from one another in further discussion.

Presenting the findings of *The 9/11 Commission Report* in graphic novel form makes the information much more accessible and easily understood than the full official *Commission Report*. As Tim Gauthier suggests in his article, "9/11, Image Control, And The Graphic Narrative," graphic novels work well with representations of 9/11 because the media's initial narratives and representations were presented through images that 'translated' both the personal and emotional traumas felt by individuals. Although *The 9/11 Report* may attempt to re-personalize and re-appropriate the events of 9/11 as a graphic novel, (Gauthier) it does not escape the rhetoric and influence of images presented in the mainstream media. Rather, it is often unintentionally influenced by those discourses, and exhibit much of the gendered, xenophobic, and sexist representations that predominated media representations of the event and the subsequent War on Terror.

### Shifts in the Construction of Masculinity

Prior to 9/11, a construction of masculinity known as ‘business masculinity’ was most dominant within NYC society. In this construction, men were expected to work hard, long days, amass a large amount of wealth to luxuriously support a wife, family, and generally extravagant lifestyle. This construction of masculinity was unlike the middle-class ‘family businessman’ of the 1950s, however, in which men were expected to work during the day to provide a comfortable life for a wife and family at home. Rather, the pre-9/11 construction of business masculinity that dominated New York City and other global financial centers demanded that men work ridiculously long hours and adopt ruthless business and rhetorical practices to achieve success. The expectation for ruthless manipulation became more common throughout the 80s and 90s, and can be seen in an exaggerated sense in Mary Hannon’s film, *American Psycho* (2000).

In *American Psycho*, the protagonist, Patrick Bateman, is a wealthy investment banker living in Manhattan in the late 1980s. His character represents the epitome of the ruthless business masculinity that held a hegemonic status near the end of the millennium. Bateman’s life revolves around dining at trendy restaurants and keeping up appearances for his fiancée and his circle of similarly wealthy associates, whom he largely dislikes. In order to maintain such a lifestyle, Bateman is required to be extraordinarily aggressive in the workplace to produce as much capital as possible, as wealth is associated with success. This success then allows these men to afford the highest caliber luxury items, fulfilling a shallow materialistic goal by having the nicest business cards, clothing, and apartments.

Throughout the film, Bateman describes the material fashions of his lifestyle: his daily morning exercise and beautification routines, his taste for expensive designer clothes, and the lavish decor of his apartment. These aspects of Bateman's life are all used as symbols of wealth and success, which are often flaunted in front of others. This brash materialism is the second side of this construction of a pre-9/11 business masculinity, which focuses solely on personal gain fueled by corruption, vanity, and superficial appearances. This obsession with capital success and wealth may be connected to what is called a neoliberal ethic, in which more emphasis is placed on globalization. Psychologist Paul Verhaeghe argues that "thirty years of neoliberalism, free-market forces and privatisation have taken their toll, as relentless pressure to achieve has become normative," even going as far as claiming that our current economic system "rewards psychopathic personality traits [and] has changed our ethics and our personalities" (1). Verhaeghe's argument supports the rise of this particular construction of business masculinity (particularly the Patrick Bateman type character), thus creating an iconic construction of masculinity despite the limiting conditions that surround the construction.

After the attack on the World Trade Center (WTC), the men exhibiting this specific construction of business masculinity were ones most visibly harmed by the attacks, both physically and in the media. As the individuals working in the towers, and those who experienced the trauma and gore firsthand, they were presented as being left the most vulnerable. Furthermore, these men were rescued and helped by the replacement type of masculinity: the 'ordinary man' (Shepard 21-22). The media represented this

'ordinary man' figure as the first responders who responded to the attacks: the firefighters, police officers, EMTs, and later the civilians who volunteered their time and energy to help the cleanup and rescue efforts after the 11th. In a sense, the men and women who represented the old business masculinity were being trapped by the attacks and the actions of the terrorists, with the ordinary men rising to the hegemonic position as their rescuers. The trope of 'captivity and rescue' perpetuates the idea that masculinity is immutable, as individuals become feminized after being captured (Boyle 149). This feminization occurs solely due to their fall from the hegemonic position. While such characters are still more masculine than others (particularly women and marginalized men), the men who are captured or rescued are then deemed 'less masculine' or capable than others who were not captured or did not require rescuing (thereby associating success with masculinity and adding more layers to the already complex gender hierarchy). Although the captivity in this trope is less apparent when applied to 9/11 and the attacks on the WTC, the men and women within the Towers were still feminized and 'needed to be saved,' as they were shown being trapped, killed, falling and even jumping out of buildings.

In a panel on page 91, when the attacks on the WTC are described in more detail, men and women in suits are shown being knocked over and injured by flying shrapnel and debris. In a panel on the previous page, two disheveled looking men are shown supporting one another, limping out into the stairwell of the South Tower. Simultaneously, two firefighters are shown bursting through the doors, presumably to their rescue. Just underneath this image, there is a block of text that states "they knew at

once that this would be a rescue operation, not a firefighter one” (Jacobson 90), reinforcing the shift in the hegemonic masculinity from the capitalist businessman to the ordinary man. While the men and women within the WTC may not have been held captive, the firefighters are still characterized as rescuers, engendering them as masculine heroes through the ‘captivity and rescue’ trope.

The construction of the masculine ‘ordinary man’ also applies to the representation of ordinary passengers on two of the hijacked planes, American Flight 77

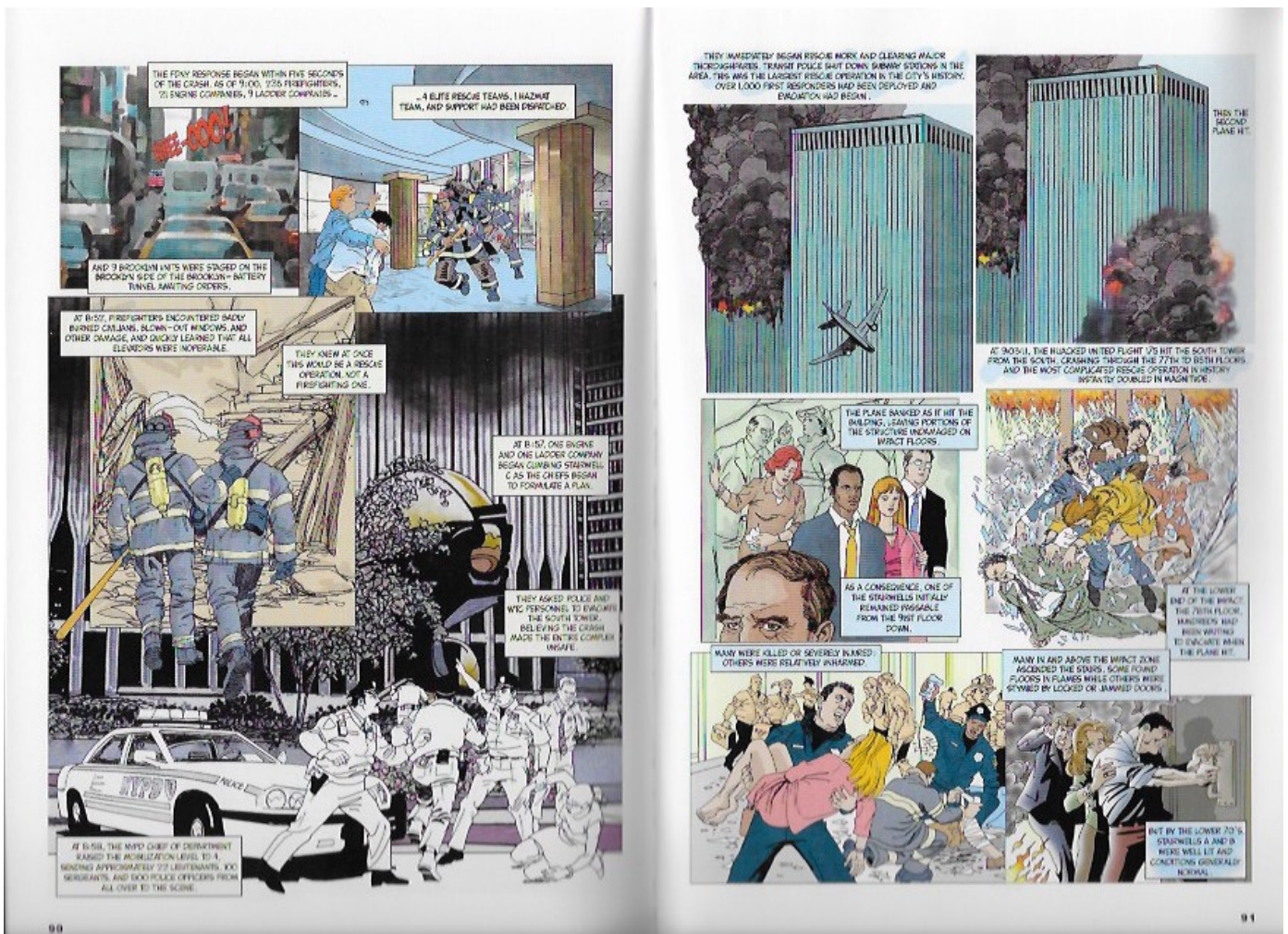
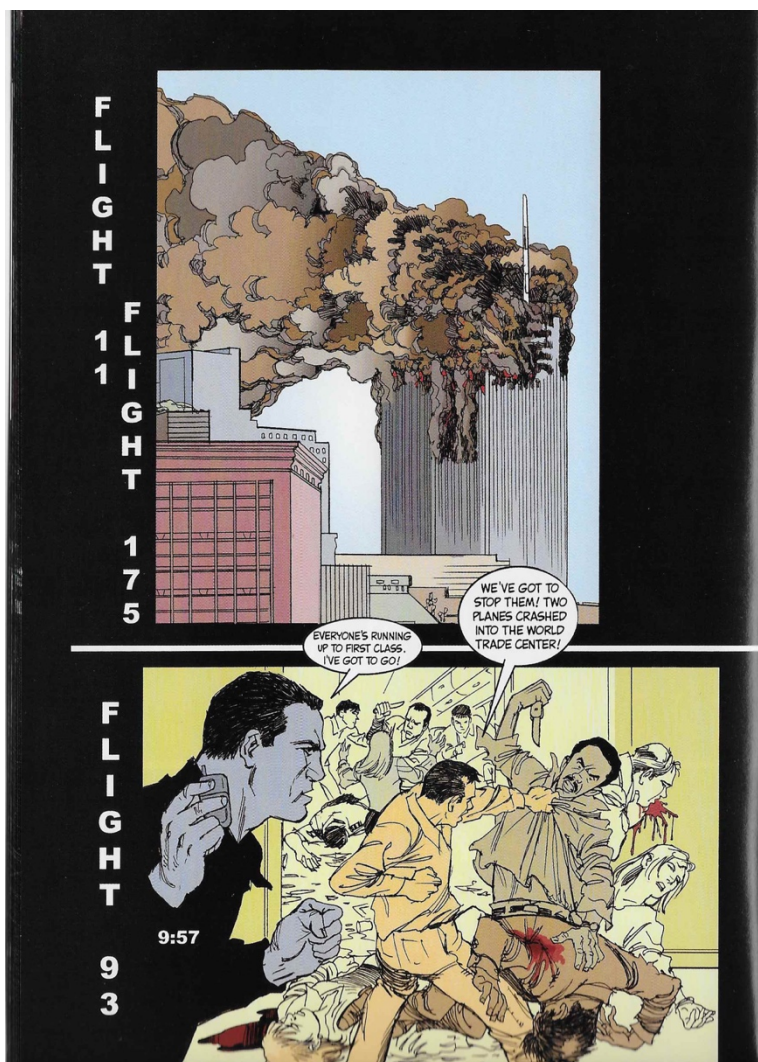


Figure 1. Jacobson & Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. 90-91. Print.



and United Flight 93 as a handful of passengers are shown trying to fight to regain control of the plane from the hijackers (Jacobson 12-14). One of the men in the panels states: “Everyone’s running up to first class, I’ve got to go!” This panel implies that the ‘ordinary’ people of the economy class are rushing up to save the executives and more hegemonically masculine businessmen of the business and first class ahead of them (as well as the *symbol* of American capitalism and prosperity, which such executives surely represent). It can be inferred that because the terrorists are up in first class with those exhibiting the characteristics of business masculinity, that the civilians in first class are



**Figure 2.** Jacobson & Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. 14. Print.

most targeted and blatantly attacked by the terrorists. Although this targeting may simply be due to the fact that first class is the closest to the cockpit where the pilots and controls are (meaning that the particular passengers within first class do not matter any more or less than other passengers on the plane), it is still an interesting parallel to consider, as many of al-Qaeda's attacks were described as targeting the West's materialism and consumerism which those sitting in first class would arguably be guiltiest of.

Interestingly, a similar shift occurs in the representation of terrorists, who occupy a marginalized position. While the terrorists who successfully hijacked the planes are shown as being very menacing, masculine and dominating, the hijackers of Flight 93 are feminized. Although this feminization initially only occurs with the hijackers of Flight 93, who were eventually taken down by the passengers of the flight, this feminization of terrorists is a repeated theme throughout much of post-9/11 and War on Terror representations (Shepard 28).

Such visual representations in *The 9/11 Report* show that the construction of masculinity occupying the hegemonic position is shifting, exposing the mutability of the construction of masculinity. The mutability of perceptions of masculinity is also reflected in the inability of government officials to act as quickly and effectively as the emergency personnel responding at the WTC had. These failures are most clearly expressed through multiple representations of high-ranking government officials hearing about the attacks from media and news sources.

Although men holding positions of power had once been viewed as more hegemonic and powerful than the ‘ordinary man,’ this shifts significantly post-9/11 as both President Bush and New York mayor, Rudy Giuliani, are shown as adopting characteristics of the ‘ordinary man.’ Certain men, like Bush and Giuliani, are positioned in a manner that allows them to change the way they present themselves, and therefore how they are perceived. In his campaign to get re-elected in 2004, for example, George Bush emphasized the idea that he was an ‘ordinary man’ with a platform that focused on cowboy imagery and Bush’s interaction with (and attempt to embody/become) the ordinary man: looking casual, wearing blue jeans, and a collared shirt with the top



**Figure 3.** *Getty Images.* Chumley, Cheryl K. "George Bush makes surprise visit to 9/11 Museum." *The Washington Times.* Dec. 15, 2014. Web

buttons undone. This presentation of being an ‘ordinary man’ also occurred in many of his speeches and in images after the 9/11 attacks. One image that circulated the media post-9/11 is particularly famous, in which Bush stands with his arm around a firefighter in plain-clothes at Ground Zero, three days after the attack. Bush is depicted with a retired firefighter Bob Beckwith (the ordinary man), and New York Governor George Pataki (the figure of authority). The masculinity of those involved in the government was arguably less destabilized and marginalized by the attacks than that of any other men. This lesser degree of destabilization is due to the fact that in the period of nationalism and patriotism which followed the attacks, the leaders of the government were able to reconstruct their presentations of themselves as masculine ‘figures of authority’ that represented the nation’s masculinity (Shepard 23) and stability not only within the US, but to the rest of the world.

The emphasis of the government’s failures reflects Carol Cohn’s claim that national security is engendered masculine in a way that often abstracts, erases, or distorts the severity of actions within war (Cohn 228). Although I wouldn’t say that the ‘figure of authority’ was necessarily absent or lacking in *The 9/11 Report*, they were always portrayed as trying to unable to find a solution; such an inability to decide leads to an inability to give orders and act.

On page 26, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is shown having a phone conversation with a secret service agent, discussing the lack of information the government has about the attacks: she’s shown saying “A twin-engine aircraft – No, wait – I mean a commercial aircraft” crashed into the Towers and “that’s all we know right

now, Mr. President” (Jacobson 26). Similarly, it’s noted that “most federal agencies learned about the crash from CNN” (Jacobson 26) and that “Vice President Cheney had just sat down at a White House meeting when his assistant told him ... ‘Turn on the television, Mr. Vice President, a plane has struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center” (Jacobson 27). In the next panel, Cheney is shown watching the attacks on a television screen saying “How the hell could a plan – Oh, no! A second one!” (Jacobson 27). Moving past the implications of these images, the bottom panel of page 27 notes that of all of the telecommunication meetings that occurred that morning, that “None of these teleconferences included the right officials from the FAA or Defense Department until 10 o’clock” (Jacobson 27). Conversely, President Bush, through his disassociation with the government and the ‘figures of authority,’ presented himself as an ‘ordinary man’ who was trying to act and save as the first responders and military personnel had. This representation emphasized that Bush’s ordinary man identity was being stifled or hindered by his ‘figure of authority’ position as president with all of its checks and balances. This characterization emphasizes the ineffectualness of the government when contrasted with the image of the aggressive ‘Bush cowboy.’

Such constructions of masculinity in the government emphasize Carol Cohn’s point about the danger of aggressive and hegemonic constructions to obfuscate many of the actual issues such as civilian and soldier casualties, the destruction of cultures, and the ramifications of bombing civilians and heavily populated residential and commercial areas for the sake of locating one individual target. Even the description of a person as a ‘target’ is dehumanizing and allows those actors in the military to overlook the humanity

of the people being affected by their attacks. When taking this into consideration while looking at the portrayal of the inability of the government to act, Cohn's claim that the construction of masculinity leaves a lot of gaps in our military and security can even be applied to planning due to the visualization of a heroic manly triumphant act, and the need to *appear* masculine, aggressive, and strong instead of focusing on the real logistics of making and sustaining a war.

This complex, often contradictory representation means we need to consider the images that *The 9/11 Report* presents of government officials and their actions in regards to dominant attitudes towards war and attacks. Although these attacks eventually fuel and evolve into the larger War on Terror, the immediate response of the government, and President Bush in particular, was to identify the attacks as a war, thereby inscribing a very specific narrative (the war narrative) to a global issue that has no easy narrative. This jump to classify particular attacks as acts of war is not specific to just the US, however, as seen in the recent terrorist bombings in Paris. Just as President Bush referred to the 9/11 attacks as an act of war in 2001, François Hollande, current president of France also referred to the November 2015 Paris attacks as a 'war' rather than simply a 'crime' or attack. Although this may have a lot to do with desires to bring the construction of 'the nation' together and promote nationalism and patriotism, it may also be affected by intersections of xenophobic discourses. Though the intersection of xenophobia and patriotism may be more specific to the US than it is to France, this relationship remains important to note because it shows how far reaching the effects of gendered discourse are on a global scale.

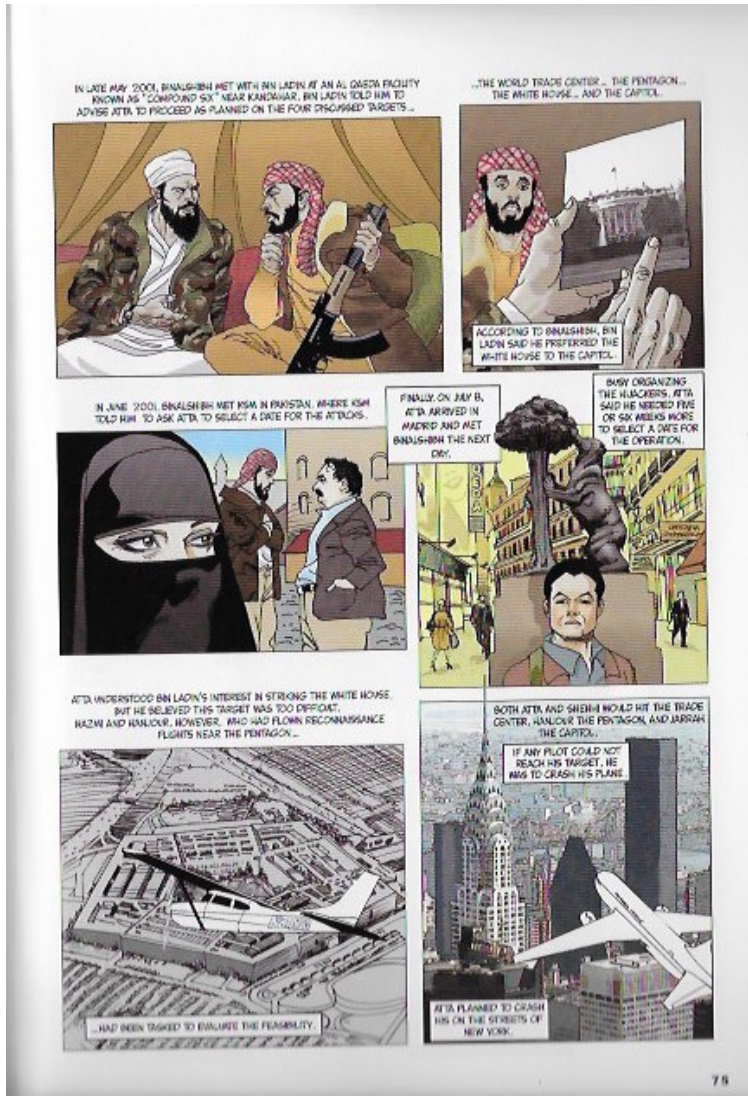
### **Interaction with Xenophobia**

In many media representations of Middle Eastern countries and people post-9/11, there was emphasis placed on the US's perception that countries in the Middle East were underdeveloped in comparison to the US. Furthermore, Afghanistan's and Pakistan's inclusion in the list of Middle Eastern countries ignores the country's location and historic association with Asia rather than the Middle East. Such depictions not only strip these countries of their own agency to identify and locate themselves, but confuses geographic fact and location through political rhetoric in an attempt to create the illusion of having a more concise enemy and reason for war. Even in *The 9/11 Report*, a text based on an official US document, Middle Eastern countries (and other Asian countries American media associate with the Middle East) are 'othered' and shown as less than: "In the past, to be dangerous an enemy had to muster large armies ... Now, an organization like al-Qaeda, headquartered in a country with little electricity or telephones ... can scheme to wield weapons of unprecedented destructive power" (Jacobson 114). By bringing attention to al-Qaeda's 'lack of resources,' they are constructed as marginal. As Martin Mills argues in "Cultural Reductionism and the Media," such interpretations are problematic in their homogenizing and denigration of minority cultures (Mills 428-429, 440). This problematic interpretation fosters the idea that the US is not only going to war to defend our nation, but to 'save' the struggling or oppressed individuals of these so-called 'Middle Eastern' countries; inviting a physical manifestation of the 'us v. them' mentality written into the text. Although *The 9/11 Report* presents this denigration through images of poverty and poor living conditions, most post-9/11 discourse achieves

this through the perpetuation of the idea that veiled women are oppressed. Post-9/11, the appropriation of ‘the veiled Afghan woman’ and the burqa became a symbol of female oppression and American heroism that plagued the media (Shepard 26-27). The idea that certain figures, in this case, primarily women, need to be saved stems from the idea that groups that have been ‘othered’ are inferior to ‘us’ and need to be saved. Furthermore, this can be connected back to the idea that only men can be classified as potential terrorists, with women only capable of being passive victims, making “the denial of female agency . . . central to this construction” (Shepard 26).

Although the image of the veiled woman is not explicitly evoked in *The 9/11 Report*, with a veiled woman only appearing once (Jacobson 75), the existence of this figure is heavily implied when discussing the (also problematic construction) of the poor and oppressive living conditions in the countries that the novel portrays as being the Middle East. This single representation, however, is significant and features the fragmented image of a woman’s eyes, peaking out of her burqa. In the background, there are two men discussing something, and a caption that reads “In June 2001, Binalshibh [Ramzi bin al-Shibh] met KSM [Khalid Sheikh Mohammed] in Pakistan, where KSM told him to ask Atta [Mohammed Atta] to select a date for the attacks” (Jacobson 75). In addition to showing these attacks as having been performed by a *network* of men, it also suggests that women are not involved in the plotting or in the attacks. Rather, Middle Eastern women are shown as innocent bystanders, lacking agency and unable to perform any acts of terror. The significance of this portrayal is two-fold, because it implies that veiled women are oppressed by both the terrorist men in their lives, and by their veils.





**Figure 4.** Jacobson & Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. 75. Print.

Although entirely unrelated in topic, this portrayal operates in a similar manner to the fact that women and feminized images and actions are excluded from US military proceedings (Poloni-Staudinger 35, Cohn 239). As an American representation, it makes sense that this portrayal would follow previous portrayals and absences of women. In addition to ‘othering’ the terrorists and individuals of Afghanistan (and much of the ‘Middle East’), the evocation of the ‘veiled woman’ established Afghanistan as less developed than the US. Globalization is also referenced when it is said: “To Americans,

Afghanistan seemed very far away. To al-Qaeda, America seemed very close ... In a sense, they were more globalized than we were” (Jacobson 108). In “Globalization and its Mal(e)contents,” Michael Kimmel emphasizes the effect that globalization has on reshaping masculinity. Globalization disrupts and reconfigures traditional cultural and economic arrangements in local and regional settings. Gender and gendered discourse are two of the main organizational values of local masculinities and resistance to the reconstructions following globalization. Kimmel observes that masculinities and globalization are central for the emergence of extremist groups; this argument focuses on comparisons between right-wing European movements, white supremacists in the US, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic world. In all three of these groups, masculinity is viewed as ‘symbolic capital’ and an ‘ideological resource’ to explain the groups’ plight, identify, and problematize the group they blame for their plight, and as a way to recruit other men to their cause.

Similarly, the Commission states “It [the 9/11 attacks] was carried out by a tiny group of people with trivial resources operating from one of the poorest, least industrial of all nations” (Jacobson 108). This description extends to other ‘Middle-Eastern’ (although actually South Asian) countries, such as Pakistan: “Pakistan’s endemic poverty, widespread corruption, and often ineffective government creates opportunities for Islamist recruitment . . . Millions of families, especially the poor, send their children to religious schools . . . Many of these schools have been used as incubators for violent extremism” (Jacobson 116). This comment targets not only the country of Pakistan, but also ‘others’ them as poor and as Muslims.

Despite this ‘othering’ of Muslims, the residents of Pakistan, and the American-made idea of ‘Middle Eastern’ countries are constructed as victims of poverty and oppression and are viewed as victims. This complex representation suggests two things. First, occurring during a period of war, I think such constructions operate as a wartime tactic to obfuscate actual conditions and individuals in the Middle East – providing a justification for the US to continue fighting and wage war. The discussion of the schools, although perhaps based in truth, can be seen reflected in US media about US schools, and the anxieties of exposing Muslim students to extremist ideas in an attempt to prevent any further acts of terrorism and to avoid the creation of ‘home-grown terrorists’ (Mills).

Second, as an orientalist construction (referring to the “intellectual fossilization of the ‘Orient’ . . . [which] was the driving force of the Western colonialism and Imperial expansion . . . in its very conscious and deliberate persistence on creating a dichotomy” (Kassim Al-Mahfedi 1) between constructions such as ‘East’ and ‘West’ or ‘us’ and ‘them’), the practice of othering erases the historical and political context of a situation. As Mahmood Mamdani argues in “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism,” post-9/11 discussions of Islam lack both “historical and extraterritorial terms” (767). As a result, discussions of Islam and the rise of extremism fail to “broaden the focus beyond Islam to include larger historical encounters, of which bin Laden and [the CIA involvement with] al-Qaeda have been one outcome” (768). Although the language of describing these individuals as ‘others’ and describing them as poverty stricken are slightly different, they have a similar effect. While the description of their poverty helps in the process of ‘othering,’ it is not the primary focus. The main goal

in using this rhetoric is to establish the individuals of, in this case, the countries of the Middle East as different from ‘us’ (the United States) in as many ways as possible: through religion, socio-economic status, and the representation of a failed state and society in an attempt to erase the history of US intervention in creation of these forces to some extent.

### ***The 9/11 Report as a Counternarrative?***

Of the texts I’ve consulted, *The 9/11 Report* is one of the few that acknowledges (albeit briefly) the vulnerabilities and failures of ‘the ordinary’ man during the 9/11 attacks rather than focusing only on their success in the aftermath. Just as the complex nature of the successes and failures of the ‘figure of authority’ and the government are depicted, the *9/11 Report* appears to nuance the complexity of the ‘ordinary man’ figure and his rise to a hegemonic position. According to Thomas Bjerre in “Post-9/11 Literary Masculinities,” many literary representations of masculinity in 9/11 novels go against the triumphalist narrative of heroic masculinity the mainstream media presented, focusing on ideas of satirical, neutered, and marginalized migrant masculinities. These ‘counternarratives’ focus on the horror and tragedy of the event, while exploring the emasculating wounds felt by the entire nation. Through male protagonists’ failures to live up to the construction of masculinity that the media represents, Bjerre claims that these characters create a new variation of ‘mythic American manhood,’ and create a counternarrative that deconstructs and reimages notions of masculinity post-9/11.

As counternarratives, these novels destabilize the ideal of the ordinary male hero through a representation of male protagonists who continually fail in their lives post-9/11.

These male characters fail to live up to the idealized heroic construction of masculinity, fail to move past their trauma and emotional baggage from experiencing the event, and retreat into the impossible standards of a nostalgic past to escape their realities.

According to this definition, *The 9/11 Report* cannot properly be classified as a counternarrative – due in part to the valorization of the ‘ordinary male’ hero and the notions of American manhood that were present in the media, as well as the inclusion of gendered discourses and representations of other types of characters.

As previously mentioned, *The 9/11 Report* manages to depict a few of the failures and vulnerabilities of the ‘ordinary man.’ These representations, however, do not put the ‘ordinary figures’ at fault as much as they do the nature of the architecture of the WTC and the malfunctions of the equipment that the first responders use. According to *The 9/11 Report*, the architecture of the WTC itself and the impact of the planes are to blame for much of the damage. Although there are some facts that cannot be disputed, such as the fact that the beams within the Towers melted due to the heat from the flames and the burning jet fuel, the way in which such facts are depicted is important. While it may seem small or insignificant, this representation of the facts of the attack connect back to the integration of anti-terrorist and xenophobic discourses. Such a comment takes much of the power and agency of the attacks away from the terrorists themselves, emphasizing their marginalized masculinity and position within the hierarchy of men.

Because the masculinity of the terrorists is shown as being so mutable due to its marginalized position, the emphasis placed on the failure of the architecture of the building is an interesting move. With the marginalized masculinity of the attackers in

mind, relocating the blame of damage away from the terrorist derides their actions and attacks. Rather than giving the hijackers and al-Qaeda full blame for the devastation of the attacks, which would be expected in war narrative, their ability as militants is overlooked and minimized. This displacement of blame reflects Carol Cohn's argument about the dangers of the gendered discourse and tendency to obfuscate actions in war, and how these discourses are contradictory with one another while still influencing and intersecting with one another. Furthermore, such representations encourage the idea that individuals who so much as look like 'Muslim others' (and are therefore, assumed to be terrorists) are meant to be targeted and marginalized. These representations, again emphasize the mutability of constructions of masculinity in the sense that the terrorists are simultaneously being shown as hyper masculine 'others' who are meant to be feared and defeated, while also being shown as incompetent in comparison to the ordinary figures of the American populace.

Similar to the portrayal of Muslim women as passive victims unable to act, American women within the WTC are shown as equally helpless. In Chapter 9 of *The 9/11 Report*, "Heroism and Honor," women are a largely absent or depicted as being passive. The title alone suggests that this chapter details the most heroic and helpful actions that the report documents during the attacks. This particular chapter focuses on the actions within the WTC and emphasizes the swift movement and the success of the first responders. In addition to not featuring women, however, the representation of the government is extremely sparse in this chapter, perhaps placing government officials in a similar position to women: far under the hegemonic position of the 'ordinary man.'

Interestingly enough, even representations of the government appear to fall prey to the captivity and rescue trope discussed by Boyle. Near the beginning of the chapter, Mayor Giuliani is depicted with a few other men in suits, presumably politicians. Accompanying text explains Giuliani's creation of the Office of Emergency Management in 1996 and its role in improving "the city's response to major incidents, and . . . [its] crucial role in managing the city's overall response to an incident" (Jacobson 88). The location of this panel suggests that Mayor Giuliani is most often categorized as an 'ordinary man' figure, rather than a 'figure of authority,' as he is the only political figure depicted within this chapter. Mayor Giuliani's presence in this chapter is noteworthy, because like President Bush, after 9/11 Mayor Giuliani made an effort to represent himself as an ordinary man and an ordinary New Yorker. This may, however, simply be due to the fact that as mayor of New York, Giuliani was very visible in the media after the attacks – primarily organizing search and response teams. Due to this association made by the media, it would follow that as an organizer and leader of the 'ordinary man' figure, that Giuliani would be grouped into their archetype and engendered as a masculine hero.

The only other representation of the government in this chapter is near the end, when the emergency response at the Pentagon is depicted. This representation of government shows the other side of the emergency and rescue trope that I mentioned earlier. Whereas Mayor Giuliani is shown as a hero, the government officials shown fleeing the Pentagon after American Flight 77 strikes the building are shown as victims. Despite this depiction, however, these individuals are positioned differently than

government officials like President Bush and Mayor Giuliani. Rather than showing them in an active role as government workers. Rather, they are shown in a similar manner as those evacuating the WTC site. This comparable depiction suggests that the unnamed government officials are closely related to the business masculinity construction that was depicted at the WTC, making their ‘rescue’ from the Pentagon almost identical to the ‘rescue’ of the workers at the WTC. These examples provide a different representation of the ‘figure of authority’ and may represent the shift in their attitudes and efforts post-

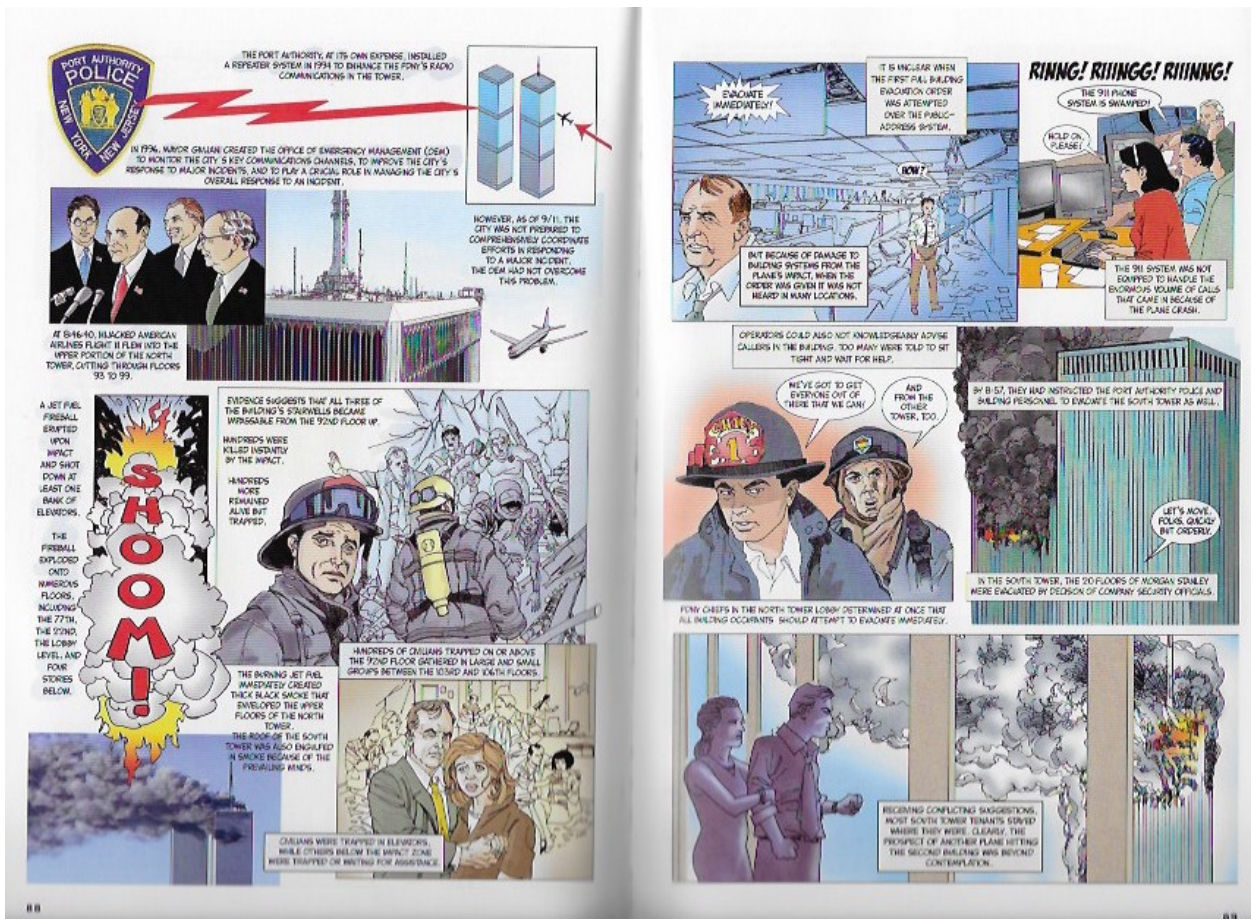


Figure 5. Jacobson & Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. 88-89. Print.



9/11, just as President Bush and Mayor Giuliani had in their efforts to embody and appeal to the 'ordinary man' figure.

Additionally, throughout Chapter 9, women are never shown as being actors in their own right, but are shown being supported, carried, and leaning on men. Even in an image portraying the impact of United Airlines Flight 175 into the South Tower, a group of men are shown shielding a woman from glass shattering around them from the impact. Although this shielding does not look intentional, it's still significant to note that the one woman depicted is surrounded by men and appears to be 'protected' by them. This depiction implies that the survival, or the attempts of surviving the attacks were all due to the actions of men. Furthermore, in all of these portrayals, the women and men appear to have very different reactions to the attacks, as seen through the expressions on their faces. While the women are shown as being distressed, worried and even sad, the men are shown to be angry or scowling at the attacks and the destruction. Other times, although less frequent, women are shown comforting distressed or injured men, through a hand placed on a shoulder or arm, and a concerned look on her face (Jacobson 93). Even this depiction shows women as less active than the men surrounding them, who in the same panel, are shown being more dynamic: one man holds the hand of an injured woman, as another helps her drink a glass of water.

Although the WTC is engendered as masculine even before the attacks, *The 9/11 Report's* depiction of the women working in the towers does nothing to challenge that idea. The women at the WTC are rendered inactive and unable to perform by a gendered discourse, which attributes a need to be saved or rescued by the men around them. These

depictions of women continually perpetuate the valorization of the 'ordinary man' hero. Additionally, at a time of war and action, masculinity is re-energized and equated with being heroic and honorable, something that is not afforded to women (as seen through their absence in Chapter 9). If the gendered depiction weren't enough to emphasize that the men were the heroic figures during the attacks, the women in this chapter are also denied one other aspect of agency and action: a voice. Although this chapter has fewer speech bubbles than previous chapters, it's interesting that all the dialogue is assigned to men. The only woman who speaks in the entirety of the chapter is a dispatcher receiving a 9-1-1 call on page 89. Her distance from the action of the event is also important, because I think it implies that women only have the *potential* for agency outside of catastrophic situations; although they can still help, women can never be afforded as active as a role as men do.

The inability of women to have as active a role as the men is also portrayed through the lack of diversity of the emergency personnel shown responding. Although most of the first responders rescuing those trapped in the tower are shown as being male, a few EMTs are depicted as female. Despite this, *The 9/11 Reports* lacks the depiction of any female firefighters or police officers. Additionally, all of the female first responders that are portrayed are shown in the background of the image, sometimes even lacking the detail and coloring of the male responders in the foreground (Jacobson 91). This lack of coloring and location in the background allows these characters to remain unnoticed unless actively looked for, while the male responders shown in the foreground are meant to be the primary focus. Furthermore, such a lack of coloring and descriptive features also

erases any chance of diversity in the ethnicity of the responders, leaving the reader with a homogenous set of first responders that will generally be assumed to be white.

Throughout the descriptions of the responses of the firefighters, police officers, and first responders, there were multiple remarks about the orderliness and calmness of those being evacuated. At no point in their descent are the men and women of the WTC shown panicking: “In their ascent, they [the first responders] passed a steady and heavy stream of descending civilians and were impressed by their lack of panic” (Jacobson 92). Rather, the only panic shown is in those who are most directly affected by the attacks, on and above the levels of impact. This lack of panic does not imply that the men who have evacuated the towers have remained their hegemonic position, however. Rather, it shows their fall from hegemony. Although these men are not being ‘saved’ as explicitly as others may be, they are still answering to the orders of the first responders. They report and listen to the firefighters, police officers, and EMTs on scene, signaling their fall from the hegemonic position and possession of dominance, to a position that is subject to domination and control by the ‘ordinary man.’

When thought about in conjunction with the high number of civilians responding to the attacks, the strength and unity of the ‘ordinary man’ figure was being used to bring the nation together. This emphasis shows the type of figure (and construction of power and masculinity) that rose to power post-9/11 and how it unified the nation to show that everyone was a part of this War on Terror. In representations of both US government officials and of al-Qaeda members, both parties state “we do not have to differentiate between military and civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets” (Jacobson

30). Although the prior statement was made by bin Laden, it is eerily similar to what Bush says after the attacks: “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them” (Jacobson 99).

The comparison of these two images and speeches show that although Bush and bin Laden are clearly on two opposing sides, that both are using similar rhetorical and political tactics. Both men are calling the people of their groups to come together and

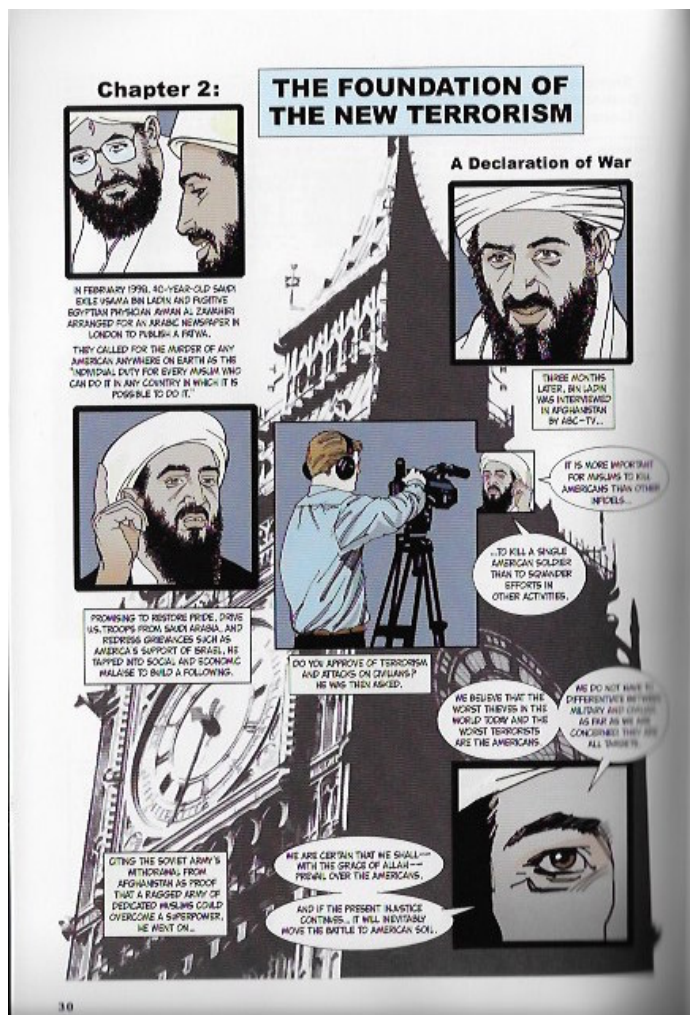


Figure 6. Jacobson & Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. 30. Print

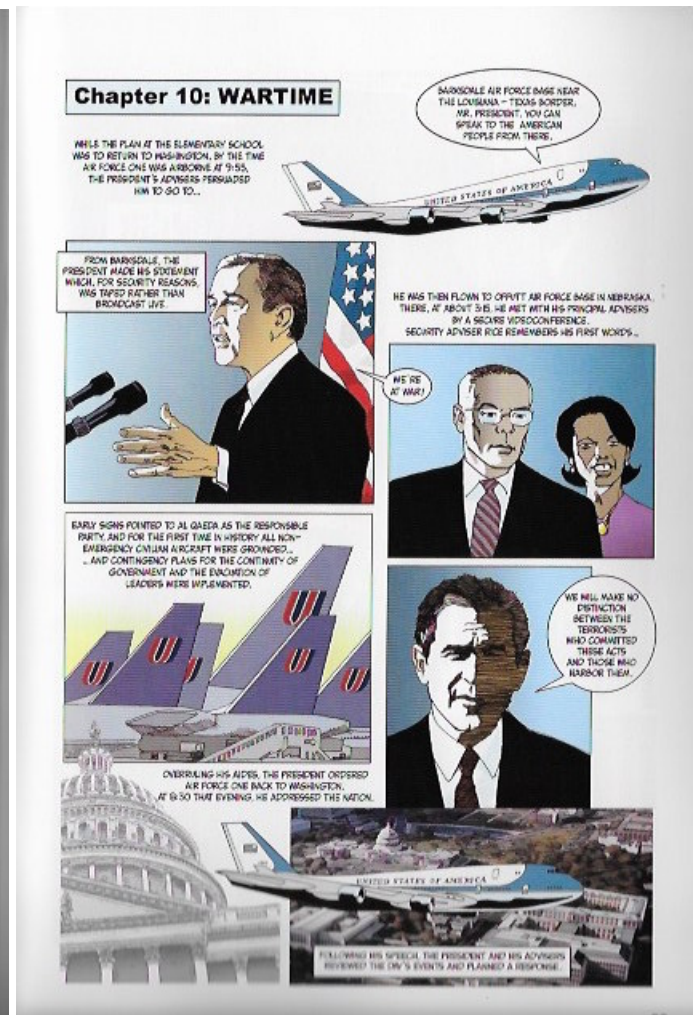


Figure 7. Jacobson & Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. 99. Print

create a “protest masculinity” that aims to restore traditional patriarchal norms and gendered divisions. Additionally, both groups and leaders view the other as a terrorist. While describing that there was no need to differentiate between military and civilian, bin Laden also ‘others’ Americans and labels them as terrorists: “We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans” (Jacobson 30). This similarity may suggest that these shifts in masculinity and the preoccupation with an ‘ordinary man’ figure as both a war tactic to target and to foster solidarity and patriotism within a nation or group.

### **Conclusion**

As seen in *The 9/11 Report*, a misogynist gendered rhetoric underlies much of the actions of the literature of this period. Due to the nature of war narratives and the rescue trope, which pervades the literature of this period, certain characters are valorized and shown as superior, receiving more attention and representation throughout the texts. This hierarchizing generally erases women from active positions, forcing them to rely on men and accept a position in the background, or makes them absent entirely. This erasure also intersects with notions of xenophobia, which in post-9/11 America is almost inseparable from notions of American patriotism and nationalism. Such constructions of American patriotism manifest as being extraordinarily white, masculine, heteronormative, and xenophobic. Furthermore, the representation of many of the first responders depicted lack a lot of color and detail marks them as race, religion, and gender neutral which contributes to the ‘us v. them’ mentality. This problematic construction simultaneously renders anyone who does not fit this description as an ‘other,’ and prohibits them from

occupying a hegemonic position, forcing them into a marginalized one, subject to the domination of the hegemonic male.

Such constructions of gender force individuals into generalized categories that transform them into symbols and 'ideological resources,' especially in a time a crisis and war to create a sense of solidarity among a particular group of nation. Although this can be seen among various groups, not just the US, it is a political tactic that must be noted to prevent the dehumanization of individuals and the abstraction or distortion of the severity of the actions within war and problematic discourses that predominate the media.

Chapter 2: *Falling Man* as a Literary Counternarrative

Counternarratives of the post-9/11 period emphasize the narrow scope of the representation of the 9/11 attacks in the mainstream media. While the media's narrative focuses on the attacks as an act of war that requires the emergence of a very traditional masculinity alongside hard numbers and statistics, the counternarratives of the period focus on a more varied representation and account of the attacks; counternarratives show and tell the stories that the hegemonic narratives refuse to, and convey them through disruptive and iconoclastic stories and personal accounts.

*Falling Man* begins and ends with the same character: Keith Neudecker. Keith is the 39-year-old protagonist who worked as a lawyer in the World Trade Center prior to 9/11. During the attacks, Keith managed to narrowly escape the Towers. Surrounded by panic and chaos, Keith leaves the World Trade Center in a daze and aimlessly walks to the apartment of his estranged wife, Lianne (despite having been separated and living separately for a number of months). After a short period in which Keith recuperates from his physical and mental trauma from the attacks, Keith resumes his life with Lianne 'as normal.' Despite not having lived together for months prior to 9/11, Keith and Lianne move back in together after the attacks. The novel follows the day-to-day life of Keith and Lianne, often blurring their own experiences with those of the individuals they encounter on a daily basis.

Throughout the novel, Lianne sees a performance artist dubbed the "Falling Man" as she goes about her day in New York City. Wearing business attire, he suspends himself upside-down with rope and a harness in the pose of the man in the famous

photograph of the same name by Richard Drew (see Figure 1) which presumably inspired the title of DeLillo's novel. Although this figure appears quite frequently throughout the novel, and for the most part, appears to do so at random without meaning, I argue that DeLillo uses this figure as the characterization of his idea of a post-9/11 counternarrative.



**Figure 1.** Drew, Richard. AP Photographer. 11 September, 2001. Taken from Stern, Marlow. "9/11's Iconic 'Falling Man.'" *The Daily Beast*. 8 September, 2011. Web.

Although Richard Drew's photograph is arguably one of the more famous images that was taken on 9/11, it was also one of the images that newspapers and broadcast media *did not* want to show, due to the graphic nature of the photograph. I argue that the acrobat's re-enactment of this photograph in particular characterizes the nature of



DeLillo's counternarrative because it forces Lianne in particular (and therefore, the reader) to continually think about the 9/11 attacks in relation to *individuals*, in addition to showing an image that the dominant narratives Big Media and the government wanted to leave unseen and undiscussed. The acrobat's presence acts as a metaphor for the censoring of alternative narratives of 9/11 due to the fact that he stages his performances in areas that cannot be filmed.

Despite the fact that the acrobatic Falling Man in *Falling Man* may represent the core of what DeLillo believes a counternarrative to be (and thus makes *Falling Man* a counternarrative), I don't think that *Falling Man* fits the definition of a counternarrative *for masculinity* that Thomas Bjerre claims it to in "Post-9/11 Literary Masculinities." Although there are certain aspects of *Falling Man* that follow Bjerre's argument, a focus solely on countering the mythic construction of masculinity greatly hinders potential analysis for the amount of content that DeLillo tries to counter in the novel. Furthermore, DeLillo's counter to the type of masculinity presented in the mainstream media post-9/11 is driven by a desire to bring the event back into the spectrum of human involvement and interaction and not focus on larger generalizations and comments about the attacks and 9/11 in general.

According to Don DeLillo, the counternarratives of the post-9/11 period consist of "the smaller objects and more marginal stories in the sifted ruins of the day. We need them, even the common tools of the terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practised response" ("Ruins"). The "massive spectacle" and the "practised response" DeLillo

speaks of is, without a doubt, the mainstream representation of the attacks in the media. Due to the idea of this practiced response and spectacle that mainstream representations tend to inspire in people, it becomes interesting to think about how DeLillo has his characters discuss the attacks in *Falling Man*. Rather than use the term “9/11,” which would be expected in a novel about the 9/11 attacks, DeLillo instead opts to have his characters talk about the event in a more oblique way.

Throughout the first chapter, as Lianne is going through her day, she continually thinks back to the events of 9/11. Rather than referring to them as such, however, she opts to refer to the event as “the planes.” As she picks up her mother from Grand Central station, Lianne runs into the Falling Man acrobat outside of the station. After finding her mother, Lianne purposely diverts their route so they can avoid this spectacle: “She led her mother across the concourse and along a passage that would bring them out three blocks north of the main entrance. There would be moving traffic there and cabs to hail and no sign of the man who was upside down, in a stationary fall, *ten days after the planes*” (*Falling Man* 34, *my emphasis*). In addition to referring to the attacks as “the planes” in this passage, it also becomes apparent how hard Lianne is trying to ease her mother back into a new version of New York City. Furthermore, DeLillo’s description of the scene appears to be typical New York, and a new version of the world that is now anything but normal: there are cabs, traffic, and a dizzying path through Grand Central. In such descriptions, it becomes clear that DeLillo is most interested in what many other authors would consider banal or unimportant, especially in a novel about 9/11. DeLillo’s writing

has the reader focus on Lianne's attempt to return to normalcy, emphasizing precisely what makes a normal day normal. In other words, what makes New York, New York.

For Lianne, her sense of normalcy largely refers to the writing group for Alzheimer's patients that she works with in East Harlem and to her relationship with her mother, Nina. While for Keith, normalcy refers largely to his memories of the past and his time spent with his lover, Florence, who also escaped the World Trade Center during the 9/11 attacks. In the second half of the novel, Keith disrupts his domestic life once more and begins to tour the country playing in poker tournaments in an attempt to recall his weekly poker nights with his co-workers, many of whom died or disappeared during the fall of the World Trade Center.

Despite the emphasis placed on the return to 'normal' in the hegemonic narrative within the media, DeLillo uses both Keith's and Lianne's characters to emphasize both the question of (and inability to define) what normal is. For Lianne, this manifests through volunteer work for Alzheimer's patients, although she very quickly comes to depend on these meetings and her patients for her own emotional support. Similarly, Lianne finds comfort in her thoughts; she thinks quite a bit about her father, who committed suicide when diagnosed with dementia just as Keith finds comfort in his thoughts about his weekly poker nights with his friends.

When Keith recounts the nights he would play card games with friends (many of whom were also co-workers in the WTC), the atmosphere was stereotypically masculine: the men drank "darkish liquors, scotch, bourbon, brandy, the manlier tones and deeper and more intense distillations." (*Falling Man* 98). In addition to drinking only the darkest

and manliest of liquors, Keith's descriptions of his friends' weekly poker games were so masculine, they often felt over-the-top and caricatured. Just as President George W. Bush capitalized on cowboy imagery and the masculine narrative of the Old Wild West in his 2004 re-election campaign, DeLillo's description of Keith's poker nights drew on similar imagery. The guys' games were filled with "elaborate curses and baleful stares, the dusky liquor in squat glasses, the cigar smoke collecting in stratiform patterns, the massive silent self-reproaches" (*Falling Man* 98). Such descriptions call to mind a mythic construction of masculinity 'from the good-old-days: the "silent man's man of the Old West"' (Parish 187). Furthermore, the "silent self-reproaches" that DeLillo describes calls to mind the men's hyperawareness of their own performances of masculinity. This awareness and sense of reproach, however, is never voiced; men are not encouraged to speak out about their experiences, regardless of where they are positioned within the hierarchy.

Despite exhibiting a construction of masculinity that sounds like it's straight out of an old American Western film, Keith and his friends were very much still in New York City. Amid descriptions of the "silent man's man" activities the men engaged in, DeLillo also provides reminders that this was a constructed reality for the men; although the guys could act and feel like they were cowboys in the Old West, they were still a group of middle-aged men playing poker on a folding table in a small apartment in downtown Manhattan. This paradox is reminiscent of Judith Butler's concept of the performativity of gender and gendered constructs. In "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," Judith Butler argues that gender is a repeated and performative

construction that conceals its own origin. Butler claims that the body is a passive medium, or boundary, to which cultural values are assigned and gender is performed through words, acts, gestures, and desires on the surface of the body. Taking Butler's argument into account, the poker games are actually a lot more oppressive and stifling than one would expect them to be. Although fulfilling every stereotype of the "silent man's man" cowboy construction of masculinity, the poker games were fraught with severe rules and regulations that oftentimes felt unnecessary and haphazard: "Somebody wanted to ban sports talk. They banned sports talk, television talk, movie titles. Keith thought this was getting stupid. Rules are good, they replied, and the stupider the better" (*Falling Man* 99). Bearing Butler's argument in mind, the creation of such rules emphasizes just how constructed the "silent man's man" construction (as well as every other construction of gender) truly is.

Although Keith first describes their rules and games as "a joke in the name of tradition and self-discipline," (*Falling Man* 96) the rules quickly become more of "a proud ritual, formal and indispensable" (99). While the rules were at first, implemented for fun, they were very quickly adopted as law and adhered to. Furthermore, the men began to police one another on their actions, drawing attention to anyone who transgressed their masculine rules.

Although there were no 'real consequences' to transgressing the masculine boundaries set for these poker games, Keith and his friends were still hyperaware of their actions and how they might be perceived with a level of self-policing through emasculating insults and jabs: "Cigarettes were not prohibited. There was one cigarette

smoker only and he was allowed to smoke all of the cigarettes he wanted if he didn't mind appearing helpless and defective . . . [while] most of the others smoked cigars and felt expansive, grand in scale, sipping scotch or bourbon" (*Falling Man* 99). This form of self-policing mirrors the manner in which men often create and adhere to the constructions of masculinity in the outside world of New York. Although DeLillo's example of Keith and his poker friends may be an exaggerated version, it's the same manner in which other constructs of masculinity are created and abided by in every-day life.

Keith's memories of his weekly poker nights act as a metaphor in which gender is constructed as a micro-practice. In addition to emphasizing the performative nature of gender and masculinity, it also emphasizes Keith's desire for what he saw as normalcy; the poker metaphor represents Keith's longing to return to a masculinity that he saw as comforting and safe, despite the fact that it could no longer afford him the same comfort that it once had.

As a corporate man working in the World Trade Center prior to 9/11, Keith fits the previous construction of hegemonic masculinity: the corporate business masculinity. Like the greedy and materialistic aggressive breadwinners, Keith was described as wanting to seize control, as he "used to want more of the world than there was time and means to acquire" (*Falling Man* 128). As previously discussed in Chapter 1 with *The 9/11 Report*, this construction was integral to constructions of American and global manhood as discussed by both Michael Kimmel and R.W. Connell. While Keith's character marks and represents the fall (and destabilization) of the business masculinity

from the hegemonic position post-9/11 (and the jarring marginalizing effects it had for the men who once held that position), his character does little to challenge that construction or the construction of the ‘ordinary man’ that rises to the hegemonic position in the wake of the attacks.

As I mentioned with the visual depiction of office workers in *The 9/11 Report* in the previous chapter, the recognition of multiple forms of masculinity is most closely associated with the change in the hegemonic masculinity: the once hegemonic business masculinity that Keith and his co-workers embodied fell from hegemony with the Towers and left them in a more marginalized and arguably, more feminine position, as explained by Keith himself at the beginning of the novel: “That was him coming down, the north tower” (*Falling Man* 5).

As DeLillo continues his description of the poker games, the experience begins to suffer as the guys’ construction of masculinity begins to deteriorate:

Then one night it all fell apart. Somebody got hungry and demanded food. Somebody else pounded the table and said, Food *food*. This became a chant that filled the room. They rescinded the ban on food and demanded Polish vodka, some of them. They wanted pale spirits chilled in the freezer and served near in short frosted tumblers. Other prohibitions fell, banned words reinstated.” (*Falling Man* 100)

Due to transgressions performed by the men, the neat construct of masculinity and of their ideal poker game could not survive. Just as hegemonic constructions of masculinity are bound to shift as individuals transgress boundaries and attitudes change, the rules of

the game collapsed once enough of the men spoke up. I think DeLillo also uses this event to foreshadow the eventual disintegration of the construction of a business masculinity post-9/11.

Due to the nature of these poker games and the rules they imposed on Keith and the other men, I find it interesting that it is the one place that Keith feels at home and continues to pursue near the end of the novel. While it's understandable that Keith is trying to re-stabilize his own life and masculinity by returning to the constructs he once knew and had benefitted from to find a sense of normalcy, he is unable to. Too much of the world and constructions of masculinity and gender had changed for the old construct to work in the same way it once had. This desire for normalcy and nostalgia for what he had prior to 9/11 may have been one of the factors that drove Keith to move back in with his estranged wife Lianne immediately after the attacks. Just as the old construction of masculinity Keith was once familiar with no longer worked as it once had, Keith's family didn't quite work the same way either, as he begins dating another woman who escaped the WTC on 9/11 named Florence.

Looking for an old sense of normalcy to ground him and his life, Keith simply returns to something that worked for him in the past. Travelling from casino to casino for months on end, Keith wanders the country "mastering the game" (*Falling Man* 197) of poker. Like Keith's experience with the rest of the world post-9/11, Keith's approach to poker has also vastly changed. As Keith wandered and played poker, it "never occurred to him to light up a cigar, as in the old days, the old game (*Falling Man* 198). Continuing with the idea that DeLillo's description of Keith and his memories about poker games



follow the pattern of Keith's real life, Keith can also be seen struggling with his relationship with his own aggression and sexuality after 9/11. While a large portion of his career as an attorney required him to be pretty cut-throat and aggressive when dealing with others (according to the construction of a business masculinity), Keith's aggression after the attacks is kind of uncontrolled. While mattress shopping with Florence in Chapter 7, Keith sees two men that he thinks are making a joke about her – despite his being too far away to actually hear their conversation. Keith's first reaction is to yell “Hey fuckhead” before he “walked over there and punched the man . . . hit[ting him] . . . up near the cheekbone” (*Falling Man* 133). As Keith continues confronting the man, DeLillo describes him as getting increasingly angrier as “the contact set him off and he wanted to keep going . . . Because if anyone said a harsh word to Florence, or raised a hand to Florence, or insulted her in anyway, Keith was ready to kill him” (*Falling Man* 133).

Keith's aggressiveness and possessiveness over Florence in this scene demonstrates his attempts at being more aggressively masculine, perhaps because it is all he has really known and been comfortable with. As a man who “want[s] more of the world than there was time and means to require,” (*Falling Man* 128) it makes sense that Keith would turn to Florence for an extramarital affair, rather than focus on his relationship with his (once estranged) wife, Lianne. Additionally, this situation implies that Keith views women as objects or property that can be owned, controlled, and protected in the sense that one would protect his assets or property; thereby confirming his own sense of masculinity.

Keith's extramarital relationship with Florence can also be used to represent the expectation that men are not very involved in family life under the construction of business masculinity. In the text, Lianne notes that Keith was never really around for her or their son. Her mother Nina continuously warns Lianne about getting back together after 9/11, especially considering that Lianne had always seemed uncomfortable in their relationship: "She'd never felt easy with that term. My husband. He wasn't a husband. The word spouse has seemed comical, applied to him, and husband simply didn't fit. He was something else somewhere else" (*Falling Man* 70).

### **DeLillo's Counternarrative and "In the Ruins of the Future"**

Just as it appears that Keith cannot properly fit into the narrative of a healthy marriage, Don DeLillo's discussion of counternarratives emphasize a similar idea. His essay, "In the Ruins," which I briefly discussed in the Introduction to this project, embodies DeLillo's response to the 9/11 attacks and misguided and totalizing narratives that immediately follow in the media. Rather than accepting a single, dominant narrative (such as the empty symbolic narrative offered by Big Media), DeLillo offers a different perspective and the idea that there is no single account or narrative for the attacks. Referred to as counternarratives, these narratives are complex, varied, and express images and details that the mainstream narrative pushed by the media and the government did not want to see perpetuated.

There are 100,000 stories crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world. Where we were, who we know, what we've seen or heard. There are the doctors' appointments that saved lives, the cellphones that were

used to report the hijackings. Stories generating others and people running north out of the rumbling smoke and ash. Men running in suits and ties, women who'd lost their shoes, cops running from the skydive of all that towering steel.

People running for their lives are part of the story that is left to us.

There are stories of heroism and encounters with dread. There are stories that carry around their edges the luminous ring of coincidence, fate, or premonition. They take us beyond the hard numbers of dead and missing and give us a glimpse of elevated being.” (“Ruins”)

Although this passage addresses the “100,00 stories . . . crisscrossing the world” in the wake of the attacks, DeLillo also emphasizes personal stories’ ability to go “beyond the hard numbers of dead and missing,” which is largely what the media focused on.

Furthermore, the “100,00 stories” expresses the idea that there isn’t *a single* counternarrative. Rather, there are multiple and contradictory stories that work together and separately from one another. Such narratives represent the multiplicity of stories that ultimately calls the dominant narrative into question. Recognizing these stories and these actions on a wider scale rather than the depersonalized view of the media is necessary in order to heal and move forward.

Because counternarratives rely on multiple narratives and perspectives, DeLillo structures *Falling Man* in a manner that often feels disorienting and complicated: jumping from one moment to the next, then an account of the attacks, and back to the present again. This narrative style, although hard at times to follow, arguably mirrors the

process and idea of the genre of the counternarrative. As a postmodern concept, counternarratives are suspicious of totalizing frames and narratives. Furthermore, as a genre that rejects the idea of a single perspective narrative, it would be impossible to tell the various stories and narratives that counternarratives emphasize in a single, clear narrative. With that in mind, DeLillo's fascination with the construction of gender and masculinity in *Keith and his friends* makes a lot of sense, as it emphasizes Connell's multiplicity of masculinity argument.

### **Conclusion**

Counternarratives of the 9/11 period focus on bringing attention to the misrepresentation of the attacks in the mainstream media, countering the traditionally masculine (and mythic) 'cowboy-type' of masculinity that is promoted through the representation of the 'ordinary man' in the media after the terrorist attacks. As a counternarrative, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* does so by emphasizing the personal in a period when sweeping generalizations and statistics dominate the media. DeLillo tells these stories, or counternarratives, through memories of characters who experienced the trauma of the attacks and living in a post-9/11 New York – stories that would not be seen in the mainstream media. Such stories include a man struggling to deal with emotional trauma in the wake of the attacks, the story of a failing marriage, and the stories of unreliable spectators who lie or blur the facts of where they were and what they saw.

Continuing the theme of sights that require to be seen to be experienced, the acrobatic "Falling Man" who appears throughout the novel and reenactments of Richard Drew's famous photograph characterizes the nature of DeLillo's counternarrative

because it forces both Lianne and the reader to continually think about the 9/11 attacks in relation to individuals and how it affected them. In allowing only a small, intimate audience for these performances, that acrobat is showing a highly contested image that truly represents the nature of the 9/11 attacks and the loss of life and trauma that occurred. Such actions represent images and ideas that many people do not generally see (or perhaps don't want to see) to counter the myth that other images that are circulating in Big Media representations of the attacks. Furthermore, it helps to counter the idea of a mythic cowboy image that the media pushes in post-9/11 media. By staging a moment that recreates the literal fall and demise of the symbol of the prior hegemonic construction of masculinity, the acrobat is drawing attention to the mutability of the construction of masculinity, and its inability to always be as strong and persistent as the media wants to present the new mythic-cowboy construction of the ordinary man masculinity to be.

### Chapter 3: Islamophobia in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist & Terrorist*

Notions and constructions of masculinity fluctuate according to world events. According to Anne McClintock, trouble and boundary confusion is “warded off and contained by fetishes, absolution rituals and liminal scenes” (McClintock 33) in times of crisis. McClintock’s argument introduces connections between colonial discourse and post-9/11 War on Terror Discourse, which both operate similarly and use comparable gendered language.

While both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and *Terrorist* by John Updike make use of such gendered language and rhetoric, they are also novels with unique narrative structures. Unlike *Falling Man*, however, these novels use their form to draw attention to the xenophobic and Islamophobic discourses and ideologies that have been ingrained into the American populous post-9/11; meaning that they still adhere to DeLillo’s definition of a counternarrative with a suspicion of totalizing narratives and symbolic constructs. The ambiguity throughout the novel positions the protagonists of both novels as ‘Muslim threats’ in the sense that the reader is meant to distrust them solely due to their characterization as a ‘Muslim other.’

Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* uses the technique of a frame story, which focuses on the life and experiences of the narrator, a bearded Pakistani man, Changez. The entire narrative arc occurs during the course of a single evening in an outdoor café in Lahore, Pakistan. At this café, Changez meets an unnamed American stranger who is nervous and exhibits signs of physical discomfort and distress (presumably due to his surroundings). As a former student at Princeton University,

Changez recognizes the man to be American and invites him to sit down, telling the man of his experience with America in great detail. Changez centers his story about his experiences in America around his love affair with a wealthy American woman, Erica, his prestigious employment at Underwood Sampson, and his eventual abandonment of America. Through this largely one-sided 'exchange' (if you can call it that) the reader finds out an immense amount about Changez, with minor interjections and questions from the unnamed American man throughout (often when Changez makes a critique about the US that the man would want to defend). As a result of this narrative frame, the reader has a tendency to favor the unnamed narrator throughout the text for no reason other than the fact that he is an American man who appears to embody all that is considered favorable and masculine in a post-9/11 society.

Throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid presents many racist, stereotypical and sexist ideas to critique the hegemonic masculine American response to 9/11 and the attitudes that it caused, specifically through War on Terror discourse. Both War on Terror discourse and post-colonial discourse intersect with the performance of gender and notions of masculinity. I intend to show how these connections are explicit and manifest most obviously in times of crisis, as seen in Moshin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. A critique of Islamophobic tendencies can be seen in the narrative structure of the novel: the reader is put in a position where we mistrust the narrator, a Muslim other, despite his role as narrator and protagonist. Rather, we side with the unnamed military operative that sits before Changez. The reader feels the same unease that this operative feels with Changez, and we relate to his suspicion of Changez.

This intentional positioning allows Hamid to subtly force his readers to acknowledge the Islamophobia that has been ingrained in them throughout and after the War on Terror Period. By the end of the novel, we are left questioning what we had *assumed* and thought we had known from the beginning of the novel. In doing so, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* acts as a counternarrative due to its unique narrative perspective, in the manner that it destabilizes assumptions about nation, identity, and location, and in its recognition that multiple narratives of Changez's situation can coexist.

Although there is at first no mention of Changez's religion, the reader is meant to mistrust him from the start due to his characterization as an 'other.' While this mistrust does not comment on the nature of Islamophobia within the text, it does further the argument that certain bodies are always assigned a particular narrative within the media, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Just as Pakistan and Afghanistan were essentially 'relocated' to the Middle East (rather than their actual geographic location in South Asia) in American portrayals of the country due to particular representations of the countries and their assumed affiliations, Changez is immediately assumed to be a Muslim as a brown-skinned Pakistani man in a post-9/11 novel. As this suspicion is confirmed as the novel unfolds, it gives the reader reason to believe that other implications about Changez may be true: the major implication being that Changez is a religious fundamentalist and terrorist, which the reader is meant to question and think about throughout the entirety of the novel. Similarly, there is no clear-cut protagonist, nor is there a clear-cut antagonist. Rather, the ambiguity of the novel mirrors the paranoia and uncertainty of war during this period. As a result, it embodies many of Boyle's war narrative characteristics, reflecting



the ambiguous and complex web of enemy relations. The reader does not know who is who, nor is it a black and white situation as prior war narratives have suggested.

John Updike takes a similar approach to Hamid in his novel, *Terrorist*. *Terrorist's* plot focuses on an American-born Muslim teenager, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy. Lacking a solid father figure, Ahmad turns to Islam and his Imam as a mentor and replacement father figure throughout the text. Despite this, Ahmad's high school life guidance counselor, Jack Levy, also plays a central role, adopting the function of acting as somewhat of a father figure once Ahmad's Imam disappears. Throughout the novel, Ahmad encounters other Muslim characters, gravitating towards them as he grows wearier and more distrustful of everyone else in his life. Through this progression, the novel seeks to explore the worldview and motivations of religious fundamentalists within Islam, while exploring the idea of a "corrupted Western society" through what is often portrayed as the skewed morals and lives of residents of the New Jersey suburb of New Prospect. Although Ahmad is an excellent student and his guidance counselor advises him to pursue a higher degree, Ahmad becomes a truck driver on the advice of his Imam. This decision ultimately sets-up the biggest component of the Ahmad's life in the second half of the novel: a terrorist plot to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River.

With the guidance of his boss, Charlie Chebab, and his Imam, Ahmad agrees to drive the truck into the tunnel and detonate the bomb. On the day of the planned attack, however, his accomplices do not show, insinuating that they had been caught and arrested by federal agents. Just as the assumptions based on the narrative of a Muslim terrorist and

other are meant to guide the reader's engagement with the novel in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the reader is meant to apply the same narrative to Ahmad. Just before Ahmad enters the Lincoln Tunnel and considers fulfilling the terrorist plot, Jack Levy intercepts him and enters the cab of the truck. At the last second, Jack reveals that the terrorist plot was a government sting and that his friend and co-conspirator Charlie Chehab was actually a CIA undercover agent whose cover had been blown. Charlie Chehab's purpose in this novel is thus twofold. On one hand, he disrupts both the 'Muslim other' and 'Muslim terrorist' archetypes and narratives, but his involvement with the CIA also places the incident back into a broader historical and political context, which is often erased in post-9/11 narratives and discussions (i.e. the covert CIA involvement in the creation of al-Qaeda and armed jihad to fight communism during the Reagan Administration (Mamdani 770-1)).

*Terrorist* begins with a negative representation of Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, an 18-year old New Jersey resident and high school student. Even turning to the summary of the novel, Ahmad is made out to be the terrorist: "The terrorist of John Updike's title is eighteen-year-old Ahmad . . . Devoted to Allah and to the Qur'an as expounded by the imam of his neighborhood mosque, Ahmad feels his faith threatened by the materialistic, hedonistic society he sees around him." This summary, located on the back cover of the novel, explicitly targets Ahmad as a terrorist. Furthermore, it assigns him a recognizable narrative that follows him throughout the remainder of the novel: that of the Muslim terrorist.

Hamid and Updike both critique popular American notions of masculinity, which

have failed many people and was unsuccessfully ‘destroyed’ after 9/11. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid uses War on Terror discourse and the juxtaposition of market and Islamic fundamentalisms to comment on the hyper-masculine constructions of hegemonic masculinity and extremist attitudes adopted by America post-9/11. This form of masculinity requires men to be white, American, dominant and successful to be considered ‘hegemonically masculine’ and fit the norm. This manifestation and focus on masculinity also concentrates so much on men that it disregards women and any agentic role they may play in such a novel and in moments of crisis; a possible justification for why Hamid only includes one female character in the entire novel.

### **Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a post-9/11 novel that accentuates one of the social constructions that the country was most concerned with after the attacks: masculinity. After the attacks, the media portrayed a large number of ordinary men saving the day and being masculine, while women were rarely shown or shown as being passive. As Anne McClintock argues in “The Lay of the Land, Genealogies of Imperialism: Porno Tropics,” oftentimes a lack of female characters can be interpreted in the same manner that colonial discourse views women, as “invisible as historical agents” (39). Despite this invisibility, Erica’s character acts as a symbol for America in a number of ways, largely American nostalgia through her longing for her deceased-fiancé, Chris.

Similarly, Changez is described as ‘conquering’ Erica due to his ‘otherness’ which gives him the value of the exotic other (Bjerre 259). Just after Changez’s sexual encounter with Erica, her health deteriorates, and her mother states that “her condition

has come back” (Hamid 110). After Changez sits and talks with Erica, he asks himself “what triggered her decline – was it the trauma of the attack on her city? . . . the echoes raised in her by our lovemaking? all of these things? none of them? – but I think I knew even then that she was disappearing into a powerful *nostalgia*, one from which only she could choose whether or not to return” (Hamid 113). In this passage, Changez equates his making love to Erica with “the trauma on the attack of her city,” meaning the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

According to Bjerre, Erica’s relationship with Changez “is marked by Changez’s inability to fill out the role as the ideal man in Erica’s life” (Bjerre 260). This inability arises from the fact that Chris, Erica’s childhood sweetheart whom she still loves, is a white American man who belonged to the privileged, upper class that she also belongs to. Despite being dead, Chris still proves to be more masculine than Changez due his lack of citizenship, his ethnicity, and his lesser socio-economic status. The fact that a deceased white male is considered more masculine and powerful than a living foreign man or woman exposes the gendering of War on Terror discourse, particularly in regards to the hierarchy of marginalized masculinities.

After having intercourse with Erica and ‘pretending’ to fit in as a hegemonic, white, American man, Changez feels that he has “diminished [himself] in [his] own eyes,” especially by “the continuing dominance, in the strange romantic triangle of which [he] found [himself] a part, of [his] dead rival” (Hamid 106). As a result, Changez’s sexual encounter with Erica marginalizes him, but also transforms him into an object of desire for both Erica and the reader; marginalization can work alongside exoticization, as

the two are not mutually exclusive or contradictory. Furthermore, Changez's representation as an object of desire is solidified once more when he becomes the focal point of her art exhibit: as the eroticized, exotic 'other' who could be viewed as 'edgy' or 'unique' due to his liminal position. In addition, this representation of Changez as an exotic object of desire shows that individuals who inhabit a marginalized position with their masculinity are treated and viewed in a feminine manner, and with the same heteronormative white male gaze.

Just as Changez is objectified as an exotic other, Erica is objectified as a symbol for America as a "wounded nation." Erica "is made symbolically to embody the whole fate of her home nation after September 11" (Morey 140). Erica's status as a symbol for America positions Changez as an "invading Muslim nation" when he discusses their intercourse and states that her vagina "reminded [him] – unwittingly – of a wound, giving [their] sex a violent undertone" (Hamid 106). This violent undertone, in addition to evoking thoughts of 9/11 and attack, also invites the reader to think of the notion of the 'otherness' of Changez and his conquering of Erica sexually, comparing it to the terrorist 'others' who attacked the World Trade Center conquered and destroyed the Twin Towers during 9/11. The "violence" of this sexual act also connects this reading of War on Terror Discourse in this novel to the older tradition of colonial discourse, as Anne McClintock says that "the expansion of male knowledge amount[s] to a violent property arrangement" (McClintock 23). Although I previously stated that Changez's marginalized masculinity positions him in a feminized position, almost equal with women, this interaction between the symbols that Changez and Erica represent reveals the complex nature of marginalized

masculinities in a hierarchical sense, and the tendency of its representation being so flexible between dominating (women) and being dominated (by more hegemonic masculinities).

While further describing the sexual encounter between Erica and Changez, Hamid writes that “she shuddered towards the end – grievously, almost mortally” (Hamid 106). The use of words like “grievously” and “mortally” evokes a feeling of dread and death, which reflects the emotion surrounding the 9/11 attacks. While “grievously” conjures the thoughts of mourning after the event occurred, the use of “mortally” creates a connection between the lives lost during 9/11, which their intercourse acts as a symbol for, and as a symbol for the deceased Chris, whom Changez is masquerading as during this scene.

As Changez continues to discuss his and Erica’s sexual encounter, he says that he “felt both *satiated* and *ashamed*” (Hamid 106), which also evokes thoughts of terrorism and regret in the sense that his desire for violence was gratified through his ‘violent attack’ of a sexual encounter with Erica. The shame associated with his ‘violence against America’ through Erica can also be seen through the American character’s response to this story at the end of the chapter. Changez describes his reaction as one of “a degree of revulsion” (Hamid 107), which would also mirror the reaction of an American upon hearing a description of the 9/11 attacks from the perspective of the attacker, which again, positions Changez as a symbol for terrorism and the terrorist as he ‘attacks’ Erica through intercourse.

Despite the fact that Changez’s status as an ‘other’ positions him as Erica’s attacker, his otherness also fetishizes him, and adds to the idea that Erica’s interest in him

and their relationship was largely caused by a “post-9/11 cultural curiosity” (Morey 142). This curiosity depicts Changez as a figure where all of Erica’s (and America’s) “forbidden sexual desires and fears” (McClintock 22) are projected. Interestingly enough, Changez’s position as an ‘other,’ also fetishizes Changez and the idea of “them” as “dangerously ambiguous and contaminating” (McClintock 48), an attitude much of America took after 9/11. I noticed this fetishization occurring when Changez received some backlash from his colleagues at Underwood Samson for growing a beard, just after the attacks on the World Trade Center.

If Changez were white and made the decision to grow a beard, he would not have received the same level of criticism for doing so, as a beard can be seen as a symbol of manhood and masculinity for white men. Because Changez is neither white, nor an American citizen, however, his behavior was deemed transgressive and threatening. The fact that this behavior was interpreted in such a manner shows that the basis of hate crimes and discrimination is largely due to the fact that men who *appear* to fit the conception of a ‘Muslim other’ are treated as a symbol due to their appearance. In a way, *being* Muslim does not matter as much as *appearing* to be Muslim. Therefore, the simple action of Changez growing a beard shows that Changez ultimately acts as an object of desire in calmer times, but becomes a threat in times of crisis. Furthermore, always thinking of Muslims as outsiders within America erases the history of Islam being in America prior to the 9/11 attacks.

Additionally, even early on in the novel, Changez’s ‘otherness’ is clearly defined and sets him apart from his colleagues when he states that “two of my five colleagues

were women; Wainwright and I were non-white. We were marvelously diverse” (Hamid 38). Changez’s comment on diversity establishes that men of color and women are on the same level, below white men. As an immigrant man of color and non-citizen, Changez is thus positioned with the same, lower status that women inhabit. With this label, Changez is a prime target for a hegemonic masculine male to attack and prove his masculinity on. Although he comments that he works with many other ‘diverse’ individuals, Changez is the sole employee who is targeted post-9/11, as a Muslim non-native – thus showing the Islamophobia that becomes inseparable from the notion of marginalized masculinity post-9/11. Changez’s comment both reinforces and critiques the fact that it is normal to be white and male in business. It is the fact of being an “other,” in this case, a non-white male, or a female, that attracts attention.

Changez, as a non-white foreigner, is arguably disadvantaged the most, suggesting that there is a hierarchy of masculinity or “American-ness” in America. Such a hierarchy clearly favors all America citizens over foreign individuals, despite how non-normative the American citizens may be. Such a hierarchy is troubling because it suggests that regardless of how much one attempts to assimilate into a single notion of ‘American-ness,’ that they will never be on the same level as even the most transgressive of American citizens. Furthermore, concerning threats, in “Guantanamo Conventions,” Neil Smith asks questions regarding “who gets to call who a terrorist” (Smith 157) which is especially important in post-9/11 American culture. Smith’s comment highlights the idea that Hamid’s title, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests a very specific idea in post-9/11 America. The mention of fundamentalism automatically brings to mind images



of Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, and in some cases, the terrorism associated with such extremism. The title does not bring to mind, however, the kind of fundamentalism the title actually refers to and is most common and invasive in the world system: market fundamentalism.

The connections between market fundamentalism and the financial Imperialism it causes in America (and the greater global economy) are actually much more closely connected than many people would think; “an intricate weave of political Islam and the political economy of oil [has been,] for decades mutually beneficial to the Saudi ruling elite, oil companies, and various strands of the rising Islamist movement” (Smith 187). Smith’s claim connects capitalism, Imperial finance, market fundamentalism, and terrorism, further linking market fundamentalism and the religious fundamentalism that the title suggests. While further analyzing some of the language Hamid uses when talking about Underwood Samson and their “focus on the fundamentals” (Hamid 98), there are a number of words that are commonly associated with religion and religious fundamentalism used to describe the world of business and finance. For example, the “creed” (Hamid 116) of the company that “valued over all else maximum productivity” and was “reassuring” and “knowable” (Hamid 116) – much like religious teachings are for many people.

The emphasis that Hamid places on aggressive business practices and American financial Imperialism draws on the hegemonic construction of business masculinity I discuss in prior chapters. In applying the business masculinity construct to Changez, however, Hamid challenges the construction by pushing and blurring its boundaries. As I

described in Chapter 1, pre-9/11 business masculinity was depicted as requiring a man to be both white and American. As a brown-skinned, Muslim, and non-citizen, however, Changez breaks every single rule and expectation that this construction demands. This positioning thus forces the reader into a structured assumption that Changez will succeed (as he possesses all of the non-physical attributes of this construction of masculinity and the reader begins to see past his skin color), only to pull it away and leave you questioning the very bounds and limits of the construction once Changez is stripped of his success, power, and wealth after 9/11. In a way, Changez's story also acts as another counternarrative to the hegemonic narrative presented after 9/11. Rather than depicting a white business man's fall from the hegemonic position as the construction of the ordinary man rises to hegemony, Hamid's narrative depicts a Muslim's man fall from hegemony as those around him begin to participate in the assumed narratives and constructions that emerge in the immediate days after the 9/11 attacks.

Hamid's positioning as a reluctant fundamentalist also acts as "a sort of deterritorialization of literature which forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, "Them and Us" (Morey 138). Throughout the novel, Hamid refers to Changez and his work with Underwood Samson in terms associated with the military and war. The training program was described to the training of soldiers (Hamid 38), Jim compared their work with finance and business to war when he says "soldiers don't fight for their flags . . . [but] for their friends, their buddies. Their team" (Hamid 153), and Changez explicitly states that "finance was a primary means by which the American Empire exercised its power" (Hamid 156). These comments

compare the work done in business to the imperial work fought in wars, like the War on Terror, post-9/11. Such claims can be connected to Immanuel Wallerstein's argument in *World Systems Analysis* that "a world economy and a capitalist system go together" (Wallerstein 24) and the focus on Underwood Samson. With the use of such militaristic language concerning Underwood Samson, Hamid positions America as a capitalist power/Imperialist financial power that "use[s] their muscle to prevent weaker states from creating counter-protectionist measures" (Wallerstein 26) from peripheral nations. Corporations and this type of fundamentalism and "focus on the fundamentals" (Hamid 98) is dangerous and exploitative. As a result, such cases of economic fundamentalism within capitalism is described as the reason for terroristic attitudes (and religious fundamentalism within religions like Islam), which again, positions Changez as the terrorist in this given situation and accentuates his unreliability throughout the novel; the reader is not meant to trust him completely.

### **John Updike's *Terrorist***

Just as I argued that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was one of the most accurate manifestations of a post-9/11 counternarrative in terms of Islamophobia, Updike's *Terrorist* falls into the same category due to the similar role of his main character, Ahmad. Even so, this narrative does not escape all of the negative discourses that pervade the period. Although Ahmad's character may not ultimately fit the homegrown terrorist archetype that the reader assumes him to, he isn't necessarily allowed the agency to decide his own fate. Rather, the actions of his guidance counselor, Jack Levy, intervene. As Alaa Alghamdi argues, "the stage is thus set to cast Jack Levy as an improbable hero,"

(5) that is highly reminiscent of the heroic “ordinary man” figure discussed in Chapter 1. Portraying Jack as the hero figure who persuades Ahmad out of Imam Shaikh Rashid’s terrorist plot, ultimately strips Ahmad of any agency in the situation and reflects his marginalized position in society. This marginalized position, however, is a complex liminal space for Ahmad because, although it emasculates him by stripping him of any agency, it also displaces the blame from him – similar to how mainstream representations often portrayed Muslim women.

In “Terrorism as a Gendered Familial Psychodrama in John Updike’s *Terrorist*,” Alaa Alghamdi argues that Updike’s representation of Ahmad as a radicalized Muslim has been called “essentialist, clichéd, and a caricature . . . in the simplistic and unconvincing” portrayal of Ahmad’s character and his religious views. Furthermore, Alghamdi emphasizes that the post-9/11 audience reading this novel (*Terrorist* was published in 2006) would have little to no sympathy for Ahmad and may even have aggravated reactions to both his attitude and religious position. Despite this caricatured representation, however, Updike manages to humanize Ahmad after “othering” him and placing his character in a moral Catch-22. Like Changez in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the character established as a terrorist or “other” from the beginning of the novel is humanized and redeemed by the end.

Much like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*’s monologue narrative style, *Terrorist* begins with a monologue from Ahmad:

*These devils seek to take away my God. All day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair.*

Their bare bellies, adorned with shining navel studs and low-down purple tattoos, ask, *What else is there to see?* . . . The teachers, weak Christians and nonobservant Jews, make a show of teaching virtue and righteous self-restraint, but their shifty eyes and hollow voices betray their lack of belief. They are paid to say these things . . . They lack true faith; they are not on the Straight Path; they are unclean. (3)

This short monologue puts the reader in the head of our suspected terroristic “other,” and begins building the reader’s distrust of, and even derision for the narrator. Looking at the language Ahmad uses, we start to believe that Ahmad’s actions within the novel will purely be driven by his assumed radical *religious* beliefs and contempt for the “West” and those who buy into its hedonism, performing a function similar to that of the title of Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Without necessarily describing Ahmad, this monologue provides the reader with a very strong initial representation of his character and future actions.

Positioning the reader in such a manner draws attention to what Katherina Dodou describes as “the attempts to reinvigorate myths of America . . . [and] visions of American exceptionalism” (178). Similar to Bjerre’s definition of what post-9/11 counternarratives accomplish, Dodou quotes Donald E. Pease in saying that such a conception of American exceptionalism and nationhood “relies on a conviction that tolerance of diversity and liberal individualism are cornerstones of American society” (178). Like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Updike’s novel focuses on revealing the “exclusionary and racist principles governing Post-9/11 society . . . which were

obfuscated in patriotic visions of national unity and sacrifice” (Dodou 179). Interestingly enough, I have not found any material that describes *Terrorist* as an example of a counternarrative; perhaps because it does not focus on deconstructing the myth of American manhood, but rather its connection of Islamophobic and xenophobic discourses.

Unlike *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, however, Updike addresses another aspect of post-9/11 anxiety and xenophobia that Hamid does not: the idea of homegrown terrorism. While Hamid focuses on the anxieties surrounding immigrants and non-citizens, Updike focuses on the anxiety surrounding homegrown terrorism, an anxiety that Martin Mills discusses in “Cultural Reductionism and the Media.” Mills’ claims that the shift in representations of school violence post-9/11 and ‘othered’ non-white students as dangerous, homogenous groups fits very nicely with Ahmad’s story as “the product of a red-haired mother, Irish by ancestry, and an Egyptian exchange student whose ancestors had been baked since the time of the Pharaohs in the muddy rice and flax fields overgrowing the Nile” (Updike 13). As an interracial student who identifies more with his absent father’s views, and who is largely guided by the teachings of the man he describes as his “surrogate father, [Imam] Shaikh Rashid,” (Updike 13) Ahmad is singled out in his New Jersey community.

Unlike Mills’ analysis, however, this reductionism and homogenization has less to do with Ahmad’s skin color, as New Prospect, the town in which Ahmad lives is populated with numerous African American characters of various backgrounds. Instead, Ahmad is ‘othered’ and homogenized due to his religious practices. Interestingly enough,

Ahmad also plays into this, as he acknowledges and reminds the other characters in the text of his ‘difference.’ When Joryleen, a friend of Ahmad’s from school, invites him to hear her sing in her church choir, Ahmad reminds her that he is not Christian: “He is shocked, repelled. ‘I am not of your faith,’ he reminds her solemnly” (Updike 10). Even near the end of the novel, characters in the government are shown to hold similar values: “What do these people have to offer instead? More Taliban – more oppression of women, more blowing up statues of Buddha. The mullahs in northern Nigeria are telling people not to let their children be given polio vaccine, and then the kids are brought in paralyzed to the health clinic!” (Updike 258). This passage exemplifies the “Us v. Them” mentality, even using the language “these people” when referring to Muslims and referring to them as if they are and have only ever been outsiders with the history of the United States.

Although post-9/11 counternarratives may not exist to the capacity that Thomas Bjerre suggested in “Post-9/11 Literary Masculinities,” his concept of creating a narrative that goes against the mainstream narrative does seem to exist in some capacity in both Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and John Updike’s *Terrorist*. Despite the texts engagement with constructions of masculinities, the characteristics of a counternarrative manifest largely through a critique of the association of Islamophobic and xenophobic discourses that were often tied to constructions of masculinity and the sense of an American nation immediately following the 9/11 attacks, and throughout the War on Terror period.

## Conclusion

Both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Terrorist* use stereotypical archetypes and narratives (such as the ‘Muslim other’ and the ‘Muslim terrorist’) to emphasize the xenophobic and Islamophobic discourses and ideologies that have been ingrained into the American populous post-9/11. Furthermore, although there is at first no mention of Changez’s religion, we are immediately meant to mistrust him due to his characterization as an other due to the color of his skin and status as a non-citizen. While this does not comment on the nature of Islamophobia within the text, it does further the argument that certain bodies are immediately characterized and assigned a narrative within media representations, as I discussed in regard to depictions of the (American idea of the) Middle East in *The 9/11 Report* in Chapter 1.

Similarly, John Updike’s *Terrorist* draws on Ahmad’s status as an ‘other’ to emphasize the idea of home-grown terrorism due to religious fundamentalism in religious communities within the United States. Ahmad, as an ‘othered’ non-white student, is seen as dangerous. Furthermore, when associating with other Muslim men like his imam and Charlie, the reader assumes them to be a homogenous terrorist group, guided by religious fundamentalism. Such an association would not be made with any other type of religion, which Updike recognizes and strategically used to acknowledge the Islamophobic and xenophobic discourses ingrained readers in a post-9/11 United States.



## Conclusion

Throughout this project, I have looked at a collection of novels that all focus on the misrepresentation of the construction of masculinity in the post-9/11 United States. As an event with a huge media presence, the narrative structures of these novels, as well as much of the rhetoric used within them, is eerily comparable to the reaction of many politicians and the mainstream American media after 9/11 – reflecting a desperate retreat into nostalgia for “the good old days” and a “mythic construction” of masculinity. While the hegemonic construction of the business masculinity that once dominated the New York City Metropolitan area fell with the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, Big Media capitalized on the emergence of a new construction of masculinity: the ordinary man. Although the ordinary man construction of masculinity may have been unique to the post-9/11 period in New York, it adopts several characteristics from a mythic construction of masculinity. This mythic masculinity largely refers to constructions of masculinity and imagery associated with cowboys and the old west: men who are silent, strong, aggressive, and most importantly, not ‘outsiders’ or Muslims.

Counternarratives of the post-9/11 period focus on the misrepresentation of the attacks in the mainstream media and countering the mythic ‘cowboy-type’ masculinity that is promoted through the representation of the ‘ordinary man.’ Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* is one of the best examples of a counternarrative that I have discussed in this sense, due to the emphasis that DeLillo places on the personal in a period when sweeping generalizations and statistics dominate the media. Within his counternarrative, DeLillo explores themes that do not fit the ordinary man construction of masculinity, instead

focusing on multiple stories and narratives that are absent from the hegemonic narrative presented by Big Media. The acrobatic “Falling Man” who reappears throughout the novel helps to counter the idea of a mythic cowboy image that the media pushes in post-9/11 media. By staging a moment that recreates the literal fall and demise of the symbol of the prior hegemonic construction of masculinity, the acrobat is drawing attention to the mutability of the construction of masculinity. His presence highlights the failure of this media trope and its inability to always be as strong and persistent as the media wants to present the new construction of the ordinary man’s masculinity to be.

Likewise, as seen in *The 9/11 Report*, a misogynist gendered rhetoric underlies the literature of the period. Due to the nature of war narratives and the rescue trope, certain characters are valorized and shown as superior, receiving more attention and representation throughout the texts. This hierarchizing erases women from active positions, forcing them to rely on men and accept a position in the background. This erasure also intersects with notions of xenophobia, as seen in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Terrorist*. Depictions of Muslim women are largely absent, and Muslim men are often viewed as a threat, even outside of the United States.

Post-9/11 portrayals of Muslim men and America’s perception of the Middle East homogenizes ‘them’ as one unified ‘other’ that can be more easily targeted and marginalized within the US – both physically and in media and literary depictions. This homogenization erases their identities, histories, and agency, which is most apparent when thinking about the American perception of the ‘Middle East.’ By incorrectly including countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan in this category, both the physical

geographic location and the historical associations the countries have are ignored in favor of the idea of a homogenized grouping based on religion, political affiliation, skin tone, and socio-economic status.

As a result of the creation of this homogenized other, depictions of various constructions of American patriotism manifest as being extraordinarily white, masculine, heteronormative, and xenophobic. Such constructions of gender force individuals into generalized categories that transform them into symbols and ‘ideological resources,’ especially in a time of crisis and war to create a sense of solidarity among a particular group or nation. Although such generalizations can be seen among various groups, not just the US, it is a political tactic that must be noted to prevent the further dehumanization of individuals and the abstraction or distortion of the severity of the actions within war and problematic discourses.

Although literature interacts with and has the ability to reimagine culture, literature also has the ability to perpetuate problematic discourses and ideologies that dominate the media and the culture. The representation of constructions of masculinity and notions of Islamophobia are especially important to recent discussions of terrorism and governmental decisions that have dominated the media in recent months. The rhetoric used in current political debates reflect this current cultural fascination – especially in regard to 9/11. In such settings, the phrase “9/11” is often used as a symbolic term to evoke a sense of national solidarity and patriotic emotion, although the manner in which it is used lacks any substance or specificity. Political candidates from both parties are guilty of the use of such empty, nationalistic language.

Despite this non-partisan deployment of such language, current GOP candidate Donald Trump exemplifies another aspect of the importance of being aware of shifts in masculinity and its intersection with other discourses. As a wealthy businessman, it's interesting to think about the fact that a large portion of Trump's following are blue-collar workers who previously might not have been as interested or involved in politics. This situation thus calls to mind the potential (and Trump's ability) to create a hybrid business/ordinary man construction of masculinity that draws on both mythic ideologies and Trump's own wealth and power as a businessman. Furthermore, this particular moment in Trump's campaign is eerily reminiscent of the attitude and narrative that dominated the media post-9/11. Trump, as the ordinary man/businessman hybrid, can be seen challenging the figures of authority within both the Republican and Democratic parties and within Big Media. Although it's too early in his campaign to tell how this situation and the creation of this new construction of masculinity will evolve, it acts as a powerful reminder that masculinity is not only mutable, but also extraordinarily influential in creating a sense of solidarity in one group and unrest in another.

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