New Directions in Networked Activism and Online Social Movement Mobilization: The Case of Anonymous and Project Chanology

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ABSTRACT

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The present study explores the structural aspects of online communities and the potential of online communications technologies for social movement mobilization. This is accomplished through an examination of the online collective known as Anonymous and this group’s social movement activism targeted against the Church of Scientology. The research is primarily concerned with answering questions of how the social structural contexts of Anonymous as an online community influenced the growth and development of Project Chanology, how Anonymous is able to establish insider status and group boundaries without access to traditional markers of identity, and what, if any, form of leadership developed within Chanology. To answer these questions, a hybrid methodology consisting of a qualitative case study and network analysis is developed. Results indicate that Project Chanology was a highly fluid movement possessing an informal, cell based leadership structure and that Anonymous was able to achieve stable boundaries by leveraging mastery over the group’s esoteric culture as a marker of insider status.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Howard T. Welser

Assistant Professor of Sociology
To my mother and father.

I owe everything to you.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For scientologists in London, February 10, 2008 started out as an ordinary Sunday. They awoke and went about their business as they would on any day. Some would travel to the Scientology Org\(^1\) on Queen Victoria Street in downtown London. On the way into the Org they may have noticed police officers preparing for a demonstration outside the building. This would not be an entirely unusual sight, as Scientology has contended with a small but vocal group of critics over the past two decades (Goodman, 1996), and there had been rumors of a picket in front of the Org that day. However, the placement of barricades along the sidewalk and the arrival of constables on horseback already implied that demonstration might be something more than the handful of picketers that the Org had seen in the past. It was quite cold and it is unlikely that many of the Scientologists dwelt long on the sight before hurrying inside to the warmth of the Org.

By 11:00 AM that day, any semblance of normality for those within the Queen Victoria Street Org had been shattered. Were anyone within to peer outside, they would be greeted by the sight of more than 500 individuals, engaged in loud and boisterous public protest against the Church of Scientology. They danced, passed out anti-Scientology fliers, sang obscure 1980s pop songs, and offered cake to any Scientologists coming in and out of the Org. From time to time one of the protesters would take a megaphone and lead the gathering in chants accusing the Church of Scientology, or

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\(^1\) In Scientology, the “Org,” short for Organization, serves as the location where Scientologists come to participate in the courses that constitute the bulk of Scientologist religious practice. The Org serves a similar function to other religious gathering places, such as Churches, Temples, or Mosques.
“CoS,” of a variety of unethical and criminal acts, ranging from fraud to human rights abuses. Many of these charges were printed on large placards carried by the demonstrators. Some of the signs, however, carried seemingly nonsensical messages such as “Longcat is Looooooong” or “Brb, cult.”

Those outside did not come from the groups that had been fighting Scientology for years. Most seemed young, high school and college age. Almost all of them covered their faces with scarves, gas masks, or Guy Fawkes masks.\(^2\) The carnivalesque demonstration continued for hours. And then, just as mysteriously as they had appeared, the demonstrators dispersed. There was no orderly march away from the Org. They simply went their separate ways, many walking to nearby subway stations. As the police outside packed up the barricades, those inside the Org were left to turn to one another and ask what, exactly, had just happened.

Over the course of the day, this scene was repeated in front of Church of Scientology Orgs in cities across the globe, with each demonstration starting at 11:00 AM and ending several hours later. This was the first in a series of global public demonstrations against the Church of Scientology orchestrated by a group known as Anonymous. This group has no official leadership or membership and, prior to these protests, consisted solely of individuals who posted messages on a handful of connected websites. Who are these people? How was such a nebulous and decentralized group able

\(^2\) The design for this mask is taken from the popular graphic novel, “V for Vendetta.” The novel focuses on a revolutionary anarchist, named V, who wears a caricatured mask of Guy Fawkes, a 16\(^{th}\) century Catholic revolutionary, and encourages members of a future London to revolt against their fascist government.
to mobilize thousands of individuals to participate in coordinated, global public demonstrations? Why did a group with no real connection to the Church of Scientology decide to protest the Church and how were they able to reach a consensus regarding how such protest was to be orchestrated?

Dubbed “Project Chanology,” by members of Anonymous, these protests (which are still ongoing as of April, 2009), were staged in response to the efforts of the Church of Scientology to have leaked footage of a video, in which Tom Cruise extols the virtues of the Church, removed from the popular video hosting website Youtube.com. Members of Anonymous saw this as an effort at censorship undertaken by an overly litigious organization. Anonymous initially responded to these actions by launching attacks on websites owned by the Church of Scientology. However, Anonymous quickly realized that if they were to cause any significant damage to the CoS, they would have to engage the Church offline. From this realization, Project Chanology was born. What started as an effort to have fun at the expense of the Church of Scientology has developed into a small but dedicated group driven by their outrage at what they allege are “hundreds of illegal actions, fraudulent activities, and human rights violations perpetrated by the Church of Scientology” (Anonymous, 2008). Anonymous and Project Chanology represent a unique and fascinating new development in online social action. As such, they provide valuable objects of research for those seeking to develop broader understandings of human social interaction in online settings and how collective action emerges from such settings.
The complex web of globally connected computers known as the Internet or World Wide Web, has been identified by scholars as one of the most significant technological developments in the entirety of human history (Antaki, Ardèvol, Núñez, & Vayreda, 2006; Bostdorf, 2004; Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Kleinberg, 1999; Lampel & Bhalla, 2007; Nip, 2004; Pfeil, Zaphiris, & Siang Ang, 2006; Rolfe, 2005; Rybas & Gajjala, 2007; Schiano, 1999; Shade, 1996), with some arguing that the widespread use of the internet has transformed many cultures from post-industrial societies into a globally interconnected information society (Jones, 1999). The Pew Internet and American Life Project estimates that 126 million adult Americans, or sixty-three percent of the adult population used the internet as of August, 2003 (Cornetto & Nowak, 2006). The growth and proliferation of online communication technologies, or “OCT,” have had a profound impact upon human society and social life (Bagozzi, Dholakia, & Pearo, 2007). Technological developments as significant as the development of the internet transform human life, creating new patterns of behavior which calcify and generate new social structures (McLuhan, 2006). As OCTs become increasingly embedded within our lives, new ways of interacting with one another continually expand the frontiers of our social worlds. Some of these changes simply graft existing modes of interaction onto the mediated online realm (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006), while others present radical evolutionary forms of existing modes of interaction.

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3 From here on, these two terms shall be used interchangeably, unless noted otherwise.
4 It must be noted that this obviously only holds true for societies in which internet access is widely available. While it is beyond the scope of this particular research program, differential access to computers and the internet, commonly known as the “digital divide,” presents a pressing concern of great interest to researchers across multiple disciplines.
As the use of these technologies develops, it becomes increasingly vital that we examine their use and impact upon our world. While it is certain that the World Wide Web will bring dramatic change to society, we cannot understand these changes via a reductionist or deterministic framework. As with all technological development, the societal impact of the internet is mediated by and contingent upon its use by members within society (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). In considering the recursive relationship between technology and society, the words of Dutton (1996) are illustrative: “technologies can open, close, and otherwise shape social choices, although not always in the ways expected on the basis of rationally extrapolating from the perceived properties of technology” (pg. 9). The decisions we make today regarding the use of these technologies will have profound impacts upon their future growth and implementation.

Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs), also commonly known as Online Communication Technologies (OCTs), provide a uniquely advantageous setting for the observation and study of social action. Online communication often takes the form of textual exchanges between individuals, which are stored on a web site’s servers, allowing for subsequent retrieval and display (Browne, 2003). Most online discussions are also formatted in a manner such that each statement is visually linked to the identity of the author of the statement. In this way, much online communication is self-documenting, leaving behind a verbatim record of what was said and by whom. Welser, Smith, Fisher, and Gleave (2008) note that these “digital traces” provide the researcher with a large

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5 In its most general form, a server is a computer that stores, or “hosts” the digital information that comprises a web site. When viewing these pages, the user’s computer connects to the server and retrieves the requested information.
quantity of rich interactional data that is amenable to analysis via powerful quantitative methodological techniques. Thus the Internet provides a uniquely valuable research site for social scientists.

Anonymous and Project Chanology provide a compelling instances of online community and social interaction, and serve as valuable objects of research for inquiry into questions of the impact of online settings for human behavior. Specifically, the study of Anonymous and Project Chanology has the potential to develop our understandings of how individuals in online settings are able to create and maintain collective identities and what new challenges and opportunities ICTs present for social movement mobilization. What makes Anonymous itself a particularly interesting object of study is the group’s lack of formal membership or any type of formal internal hierarchy, as well as a lack of durable identity markers. Despite the absence of these features, Anonymous was able to not only maintain a stable identity, but also rapidly plan and mobilize global, coordinated, street protests. By understanding how Anonymous was able to accomplish this, we can learn a great deal about online identity, and the future potential provided by online social movement organization.

The present research is driven by several broad goals. The first of these goals is to further sociological understanding of the discursive and interactional processes through which group identities are constructed and maintained in online settings. Despite lacking traditional markers of group membership and identity, Anonymous has been able to maintain stable communal boundaries which separate insiders from outsiders. This success challenges, but does not invalidate, current assumptions about what is necessary
for the successful performance of group identity in online settings. Through my research, I show how members of Anonymous use knowledge of the group’s esoteric culture as a form of cultural capital, the appropriation of which serves as a means for members to signal their insider status.

The second of these goals is to further investigate the influence of online interaction upon the emergence and mobilization of social movements, and to explore the potential that online mobilization provides for future social movement activity. This investigation will be carried out through an examination of the emergence, development, and execution of Project Chanology. I will first demonstrate that Project Chanology does fit within existing conceptions of what constitutes a social movement. Following this, I explore how the online interactional context and unique cultural ethos of Anonymous contributed to the emergence of Project Chanology. I pay particular attention to the influence of the formally leaderless and decentralized structure of Anonymous upon their mobilization efforts. I will show how these unique structural aspects allowed Anonymous to rapidly mobilize global protest activity in response to a perceived threat in the form of internet censorship on the part of the Church of Scientology.

The third broad goal driving the present research is to examine whether or not Anonymous is truly a leaderless collective, and, if such leadership roles are uncovered, the investigation of what form and structure those leadership positions take. In pursuit of this goal, I examine the community of encyclopediadramatica.com or “ED,” which is a
satirical version of Wikipedia\textsuperscript{6} that focuses upon online culture (Encyclopedia Dramatica, 2009). ED also serves as a gathering place for members of Anonymous and contains a large number of articles that document Project Chanology. I leverage the format of communications among members at Encyclopedia Dramatica to construct a social network representing the structure of interaction within the community.

Through an examination of network attributes and operationalization of community involvement, I investigate whether or not leadership roles are visible within the community and, if so, what form this leadership takes. This combined with qualitative investigation of the growth and development of Project Chanology forms a useful hybrid methodological framework for the examination of online communities. Through this research program I demonstrate the efficacy of this hybrid methodological approach. I turn now to a brief outline of the questions that guide and inform the present research, as well as the strategies that were adopted to gather information necessary to provide answers to those questions.

\textsuperscript{6} Wikipedia is a collaborative online encyclopedia whose articles can be freely edited by any individual with access to an internet connection.
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present research program is guided by three research questions that investigate the group structure of Anonymous and how that structure, situated within the broader social context of online community interaction, shaped the growth and development of Project Chanology. By answering these questions I further sociological understanding of online group life and the potential for social movement mobilization provided by internet communication technologies. In addition, I develop a methodological framework of use for researchers seeking to examine leadership structures within online communities.

First Research Question

1.1 How has the social context in which Anonymous exists influenced the emergence and continued development of Project Chanology?

One of the cornerstones of sociological inquiry is the assumption that human action is conditioned by surrounding social structures (Marx, 1978; Durkheim, 1984; Weber, 1946). While all humans possess free will, the range of choices available to us at each action we take are circumscribed by broader social structures and the context in which we act. At a more fundamental level the social context in which we operate conditions what actions we come to understand as desirable and appropriate and, conversely, which actions are inappropriate and to be avoided. Likewise, the actions of social groups, which exist as structured patterns of interaction among members of those groups (Simmel, 1971), are both enabled and constrained by the social context in which they exist. As a result of this, clear patterns of behavior begin to emerge when we
investigate social life. Thus, if we are to understand the actions of individuals and groups of individuals, we must gain knowledge and understanding of the broader social context in which the ongoing interactions that define social life take place (Marx, 1978). And so, in order to understand Anonymous and Project Chanology, we must also understand the online context in which both emerged.

In asking this question, I seek to develop broader understandings of how the culture of Anonymous, along with its decentralized, ephemeral nature, and lack of individual member identity has shaped the growth and development of Project Chanology. Anonymous exists as a loose confederation of individuals bound by a shared culture and communication on a small constellation of nominally independent web sites. There is no official leadership hierarchy within Anonymous, nor is there any sort of official membership. The group is also highly decentralized, with members calling multiple websites home. These different websites foster a weak sense of tribalism among members of Anonymous, with members of different websites sporadically attacking one another, despite their shared identity as Anonymous. All of this contributes to a group structure very different than that seen in traditional Social Movement Organizations (SMOs)⁷ or even that seen in newer social movements, such as the anti-globalization movements.⁸ Despite these differences, Anonymous experienced success in staging protest against a group with vastly superior financial and public relations resources: The Church of Scientology. Through examining how the context of Anonymous shaped the

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⁷ For examples, see Tilly (2004).
⁸ For examples, see Best (2005).
growth and development of Chanology, I seek to develop a deeper understanding of how Anonymous achieved this initial success against the Church of Scientology.

To generate knowledge to be used to answer this question, I conduct qualitative research at several websites that serve as gathering places for members of Anonymous as part of constructing a qualitative case study of Chanology. The application of traditional ethnographic techniques to communities in online settings, also known as “cyberethnography” (Fay, 2007), is a rapidly emerging qualitative research technique used by those studying online social interaction, and is the technique used for gathering data to construct the case study. These websites were selected because they served as active hubs of activity relating to Project Chanology and because their format was amenable to ethnographic observation. Through ethnographic observation focused upon discourse and narrative exploration, I explore how the contextual setting of Anonymous influenced the growth and development of Chanology—paying particular attention to the ways in which members of Anonymous made use of their online settings and unique culture to overcome challenges and obstacles to the successful implementation of Project Chanology. By examining my observations and the findings related to those observations, I tell “the story” of Anonymous and how this group was able to successfully implement and execute global, coordinated protest, how understandings of Chanology among members of Anonymous changed over time, and why the original groups behind Chanology ultimately abandoned it.

9 See Chapter 4: Methodology.
Second Research Question

2.1 How is Anonymous able to establish shared membership criteria or maintain durable group boundaries in the absence of stable identity markers?

In order to remain a cohesive unit, a social group must possess some means of separating and identifying those within the group and those outside of the group. This separation refers to the actual identity of the group, as well as the identity of individual group members. From dyads on up to entire civilizations, social groups continually struggle to maintain a cohesive identity and shared sense of self among members (Simmel, 1971). Indeed, one of the most ubiquitous forms of group activity is the definition of “us” and “them” (Mead, 1934). The establishment of insider and outsider status plays a vital role in the successful establishment and maintenance of group boundaries. Much like a biological cell and its membrane, this separation of insiders and outsiders maintains group stability and, if ruptured, can have dire consequences for the group (Erikson, 2005).

Anonymous lacks several aspects of group structure which often serve as essential resources for the establishment of insider and outsider status. There are no membership dues, no group charter, no pledge to be taken, and no official group agenda or code of conduct. Furthermore, members of Anonymous often express antipathy towards efforts aimed at describing Anonymous as a traditional social group. Yet, Anonymous does exhibit characteristics typical of social groups, such as a shared culture, group norms, and efforts by members to establish insider status. While members of Anonymous may not see themselves as an official group, they still display strong efforts to separate insiders, or
those who understand Anonymous, from outsiders. In asking question 2.1 I am interested in the role that culture plays in the ability of Anonymous to construct and maintain such boundaries.

As with the first research question, I turn once again to my qualitative observations of Anonymous in order to gather data to be used to answer my second research question. The data used for this question are drawn from the same set of observations from which data for the first question were extracted. Through telling the story of the growth and development of Project Chanology I explore how members of Anonymous continually drew upon and displayed mastery over the shared cultural code of Anonymous in an effort to both display insider status and as a way of discursively constructing a shared image of what Anonymous is. Alongside this I am also interested in exploring the rhetorical strategies employed by members of Anonymous to frame their ideas and proposals in ways such that other group members would see them as valid and fitting within accepted definitions of what types of actions Anonymous should undertake and what types of motives for such action are appropriate.

Through my research I show that, from a theoretical standpoint, it is most useful to examine Anonymous through the framework of cultural capital and social fields, as most thoroughly formulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). I argue that Anonymous can be understood in terms of social fields, with the group boundaries of Anonymous existing as a social field that intersects with the broader social field of Internet culture. Within this

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10 Bourdieu’s conception of social field and cultural capital is explored in greater depth within the literature review.
social field, members of Anonymous discursively define, construct, and preformitively deploy cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) in order to signal insider status. It is through the accumulation and use of cultural capital that members of Anonymous are able to establish insider status and frame proposals in a manner such that other members are more likely to accept those ideas as legitimate.

In this I am heavily influenced by the work of Perrotta (2006), who demonstrates how members of an online forum for psychologists actively make use of cultural capital in an effort to bound the field of psychology as a professional discipline and to protect their status as credentialed experts within that field. Applied to the case of Anonymous, I demonstrate that mastery of the esoteric cultural code of Anonymous serves as the primary source for the construction of cultural capital within Anonymous. Thus, I show that differential acquisition of cultural capital, in the form of differential levels of mastery of this cultural code, leads to a defacto hierarchy within Anonymous in which individuals with a greater understanding of the culture of Anonymous are more likely to have their ideas followed than are members with less cultural capital. While this defacto hierarchy is of little consequence in the typical interactions among members of Anonymous, it became important in Chanology where members of Anonymous had to find ways of reaching agreement upon strategies and tactics.

Third Research Question

3.1 Is Anonymous truly a leaderless collective?

One of the most interesting aspects of Anonymous is the group’s internal structure and social hierarchy; or to be more specific, the apparent lack of such internal structures.
Members of Anonymous participating in Project Chanology are often adamant that they have no leaders and that Anonymous is a truly egalitarian collective with no internal power differentials or heirarchial structures. While it is true that Anonymous posesses no formal leadership structure, the well coordinated protests of Chanology and the noticable degree of similiarity among the behaviors of individuals at each protest and the broader similiarity among each protest suggests that some form of unofficial leadership developed and acted to coordinate the actions of members of Anonymous.

In addition to its relevance to examination of the internal structure of Anonymous, the question of whether or not a leadership structure exists within Anonymous is of great importance for our understanding of social movement mobilization. Project Chanology bears similarity to other “new social movements” such as the anti globalization movements (Best, 2005). Through examining the presence or absence of leadership within Anonymous, we can further our understandings of the changing role of group leadership in social movement mobilization. As I will show, my observations of Anonymous indicates that a form of unofficial leadership did develop within anonymous.

This observation leads to another important question:

3.2 What form does leadership within Anonymous take and how do members within Anonymous come to take on such positions?

Having observed that a leadership structure did develop within Anonymous, it is natural to then ask what this leadership looks like and how individual members come to take on these leadership roles. This question, as an extension of question 3.1, further explores the
internal structure and provides more refined information relevant to issues of leadership and dynamic action in social movement mobilization.

To answer these questions I once again draw upon data gathered from my observations of websites where members of Anonymous congregate and interact with one another. This data is used to explore the ways in which members of Anonymous talked about leadership and internal hierarchies and how they actively negotiated their ideals of true egalitarian collective action with the need for coordination of individual action typically provided by group leaders. My data show that members of Anonymous successfully negotiated these conflicting needs by accepting that some individuals would take on specific responsibilities, with some of these individuals serving as unofficial leaders. To preserve their egalitarian image of themselves, group members defined a leadership position as just being one more responsibility, no more or less important than any other responsibility within the group. As I show, over time, members of Anonymous participating in Chanology developed a cell like structure, with each cell having an unofficial individual or individuals who served as de facto leaders by coordinating action within that cell.

In addition to qualitatively exploring Project Chanology as a case study, I examine the activity of users at encyclopediadramatica.com, which is a satirical version of Wikipedia that focuses upon documenting internet culture (Dramatica, 2009). As previously stated, the format of Encyclopedia Dramatica facilitates the collection of

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11 Reasons for the selection of Encyclopedia Dramatica are explored in greater depth in the “Methodology” section.
data regarding the posting activity and communication patterns of users of the website. Through the use of a webscraper, an automated program that gathers targeted information from a given set of websites, I collected information on the activity of 392 members of the Encyclopedia Dramatica community. This data was used to measure the level of content generated by each user, the level of commitment of the user to constructing a visible identity within the community, and the level of involvement with Chanology at Encyclopedia Dramatica exhibited by each user. In addition, the user talk pages\textsuperscript{12} of these users were examined.

From this list of messages, a network representing the communications among sampled members of the Encyclopedia Dramatica community was constructed. To examine the overall structure of the community at Encyclopedia Dramatica and to explore the different structural roles of individuals within this community, the network of communications was explored via network analysis. Network analysis is both a way of conceptualizing social structure (Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006) and a set of powerful methodological tools for characterizing and examining that structure (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). One of the most important aspects of network analysis is that it does not characterize individuals in terms of intrinsic qualities (such as class or race), but rather in terms of their position within broader webs of communication and social structure (Hogan, 2008). This method of characterization is particularly useful for exploration of

\textsuperscript{12} At encyclopediadramatica.com, each user has his or her own user page which they are free to customize. In addition, each user has a user talk page on which other users may leave comments. These user talk pages serve as a sort of interconnected electronic bulletin board which is used for communication among members.
communities such as Anonymous, in which there is a severe paucity of personal
information which can be used to characterize group members.

Via network analysis and examination of the data on the activity of members, I
explore the community at Encyclopedia Dramatica. Through analysis of this data I am
able to search for and draw out individuals who exhibit high levels of involvement within
the community as well as individuals who occupy structurally important positions within
the community at Encyclopedia Dramatica. By doing this I am able to provide
information to answer the key questions of whether or not Anonymous possesses any
type of leadership structure and if such structure exists, what form it takes. As my
research will show, there exist differentials in the level of involvement of users within the
Encyclopedia Dramatica community which also correspond to differentials in the level of
activity related to Chanology at Encyclopedia Dramatica. What is most notable however,
is the relative autonomy among highly active Chanology contributors at Encyclopedia
Dramatica.
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic inquiry exists not in isolation, but rather in dialog with exiting research and theoretical understandings (Cohen, 1988). Thus I now provide a brief exposition of the key works that have informed the present research. This existing body of literature provides a foundation upon which my work builds. I situate my own work within existing research into online social interaction. Finally, I demonstrate how my work furthers existing understandings of online social interaction and points towards no directions for analytic investigation into these issues.

Human behavior is both conditioned and constrained by the broader social context in which this behavior takes place, making exploration of this context vital to our continued pursuit of ever greater understanding of human social life. The creation and proliferation of online communications technologies, combined with increasing access to these technologies, have vastly expanded the space available for social life, creating fascinating new frontiers within our social worlds (Kahn and Kellner, 2005). Another development of great importance in recent years has been the spread of globalization and the concurrent evolution of the targets and tactics of social movements (Best, 2005). Throughout this period of large scale structural change, social movements have remained as a vital expression of popular activism and participatory democracy.

Recently, online life has seen increased interest from scholars across a wide range of disciplines; yet there is still much that remains unknown and research on online life remains under theorized and under developed when compared to research in other realms of social life. The case of Anonymous and Project Chanology presents a compelling
instance of internet mediated social activity and social movement mobilization. The study of these phenomena presents the opportunity for increased understanding of the nature of social interaction in online settings. Through the course of investigating Project Chanology and exploring existing literature on online life and social movement activism, several important questions emerged. The first of these questions is what Anonymous and Project Chanology can tell us about the role that the context of online settings plays in the development of group structure of online communities. Another emergent question is what role culture plays in the ability of Anonymous to construct and maintain stable group boundaries in the online setting. Such questions of identity remain an area of important focus in the literature regarding online life. A third question that emerged is how Project Chanology fits within our existing understanding of social movements and how it forces us to revisit or refine these understandings. Given the new challenges that globalization poses to participatory democracy, it is vital that we continue to examine the emergent modes of social movement mobilization. The final question that emerged was how social network analysis can be used as a tool to draw out and examine social structure within online communities.

Online Communities Defined

While Anonymous is a rather unique social group, it did not develop in a vacuum. Certainly the group presents highly interesting and novel modes of social interaction. However Anonymous does not represent a radical break with existing communal forms or modes of interaction. Rather, Anonymous must be understood as a product of accelerating changes in human behavior brought about and made possible by rapid
technological advances. Viewed this way, Anonymous can be understood as one of the most recent developments in what Anthony Giddens (1991), calls “the Consequences of Modernity.”

In his examination of claims regarding so called “postmodern” societies, Giddens notes that these societies do not represent a radical departure from modernity. Rather contemporary Western life should be understood in terms of a rapid acceleration of changes brought about by modernity and the logic of global consumer capitalism. Giddens identifies the “emptying of time and space” as one of the most important and long running of these accelerating changes. The emptying of time and space refers to processes by which time and space are decoupled from the patterns of daily social life. As will be seen, the spread of online telecommunications technologies and the modes of interaction enabled by those technologies represent a continuation of the emptying of time and space.

In understanding the emptying of time and space, one must begin with time, as it necessarily precedes and prefigures the emptying of space. Giddens notes that throughout most of human history, time has been a loosely defined construct that was intimately bound up with the daily patterns of social life. Time was experienced not as rigidly defined intervals based upon the rotation of the Earth, but rather as general periods corresponding to repeated activities. For example, the idea of morning would be experienced as the daily period when most people in a given community would awake and eat their first meal of the day while after noon would be experienced as the time
when most people in the community would trade with one another and go about their daily occupational tasks (Giddens, 1991).

This experience of time was radically altered by the creation and widespread adoption of the mechanical clock. The abstract concept of time was now rigidly defined as a continuous progression of unchanging intervals. Time could now be measured and understood in the absence of any social referent. Returning to the previous example, morning is now defined in terms of this abstract partitioning of time, from 6:00 AM, to 12:00 PM. As a consequence of this, time was no longer bound up with social activity. It is this decoupling of time from lived social experience that is referred to as the “emptying” of time (Giddens, 1991). Essentially, time became an empty construct upon which the experience of day to day life was grafted. Another importance of the emptying of time is that humans were able to standardize their activities across individuals and eventually across different nations and cultures (Giddens, 1991). Time was standardized and placed above or transcendent in reference to the social sphere, allowing for its disconnection with space, thus paving the way for the emptying of space.

As with time, understandings of space were once bound up with social activity. Locations were defined by the social functions they served, and different types of social interaction required individuals be present in those spaces. The rise of mass media technologies such as newspapers and later electronic media such as radio and television allowed for rapid communication and interaction among geographically disparate groups of people (Giddens, 1991). The development of modern telecommunications technologies accelerated this trend, allowing for instant communication across vast geographical
distances. As interaction increasingly became mediated, the vital role once played by geographical proximity diminished, leading to the emptying of space (Giddens, 1991). The widespread adoption of Internet Communication Technologies can be understood as a continuation of this process, allowing for large scale communication across great distances.

We can view Anonymous as an instance of a group that exists almost entirely in a space that has been emptied of geographical boundedness. For most of the group’s life, members almost never interacted physically with one another as members of Anonymous. The space in which Anonymous existed was defined solely in terms of a complex and tangled web of computer terminals, servers, and fiber optic cables. Anonymous is certainly not the first online community to exist without a physical space to call home (Jones, 1999), and this lack of a spatial anchor is hardly unique to Anonymous. What is important is that this lack of a geographical anchor influences the manner in which Anonymous constructs an image of itself. Furthermore, this lack of boundedness has supported Anonymous’ image of itself as a group that is not constrained or divided by territorial group markers such as nationality. Thus, Anonymous can be understood, in part as a consequence and continuation of the long developing process of the emptying of time and space. For this reason, the work of Giddens serves as a useful theoretical guide for the examination of the influence of the online setting upon the growth and development of Project Chanology.

As with place, identity is often times more fluid and ephemeral online than offline (Antaki, Ardèvol, Núñez, & Vayreda, 2006; Cornetto & Nowak, 2006). Early
investigations of online identity were often framed within postmodern conceptions of the self as a fractured entity, no longer strongly bounded and often times difficult for both the individual and others to discern. As a result of this approach, much of this early investigation focused upon the construction of identity online and celebrated the online realm as a place where individuals had limitless freedom to construct any identity desired and as a space in which individuals could play with and subvert dominant definitions of gender, race, and sexuality (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007).

However, as research continued, this initial optimism faded as scholars began to realize that the contours of the online realm, like it’s offline counterpart, were defined and shaped by the interactions of individuals within this online realm. While online actors do possess tremendous freedom in constructing an identity, this freedom was counteracted by the desire of many people to construct an idealized version of their offline identity in online settings (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Furthermore, researchers realized that people often brought existing, dominant definitions of acceptable and desired identities with them from offline settings applying them to the online world and using them to shape their online selves (Schiano, 1999). As a result, despite the revolutionary potential of online settings, actual interaction online often reproduces offline power structures and dominant norms (Crowe & Bradford, 2006). With this realization, scholars began to shift focus away from the potential of online interaction and toward empirical observation and study of actual interaction in online settings.

One of the earliest explorations of the function of online identity and community was carried out by journalist Julian Dibbell (1998). Dibbell recounts his time spent at
LambdaMOO, an early form of an online community known as a Multi User Domain, or MUD.¹³ Of these observations Dibbell is most well known for his account of a “rape” that took place within the virtual space of the MUD. Based upon Dibbell’s account of events, this virtual rape took place in one of the busier rooms of the MUD, which served as a general social space for users. A character named Mr. Bungle, who described himself as a ghoulish and vulgarly dressed harlequin clown entered the room. Using malicious code¹⁴ Mr. Bungle was able to “control” other users by making it appear as though they were preforming various actions (Dibbell, 1998).

Mr. Bungle used this ability to make it appear as though two characters were engaging in extremely violent and degrading sexual acts (Dibbell, 1998). After a few minutes of this, one of the moderators in the room “kicked”¹⁵ Mr. Bungle from the room. However the code he inserted still allowed him to manipulate other users in the room and the vulgar text continued to show up in the room. After several minutes, Mr. Bungle was finally silenced and the virtual “rape” had ended. Afterwords, the community would

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¹³ A MUD is essentially one or more connected online chat rooms in which multiple users are able to interact with one another (Schiano, 1999). MUDs are entirely textual, with interaction among individuals existing in the form of typed messages that appear to all other users in the MUD or, only specific users, depending upon the instructions provided by the sender of the message and different types of communication allowed by the server on which the MUD is hosted. Users on MUDs commonly adopt an online persona known as an avatar and provide a textual description of this avatar to be viewed by others. The “physical” characteristics of the MUD are provided to all present users in the form of a textual description. Thus MUDs constitute a highly preformative space. LambdaMOO was one of the largest early MUDs and was hosted by the Xerox PARC labs.

¹⁴ This particular MUD allowed users to construct simple programming objects (Dibbell, 1998). Those with knowledge of the inner workings of the software could use this ability to find ways of manipulating the normal functioning of the software environment that governed the functioning of the MUD.

¹⁵ Kicking is a common term in online communities which refers to someone being disconnected from the community. Repeat offenders are often blocked from being able to reconnect to the community, known as “banning.”
come together and debate what was to be done with Mr. Bungle. After several hours of
discussion, the community came to the decision to “toad” Mr. Bungle, which would
render him unable to do anything other than observe conversation within the community
(Dibbell, 1998).

Dibbell’s account of cyber rape has spurred academics to investigate the legal,
psychological, and philosophical questions surrounding whether or not virtual rape
should actually be considered rape and what the consequences of these behaviors are. For
the present research, the most important conclusion to draw from Dibbell is to note that,
regardless of how we understand Mr. Bungle’s actions on LamdaMOO, the people of the
community were truly angered by his actions and took steps to protect their community
from him and others like him. Furthermore, as Dibbell notes, many of those community
members felt conflicted regarding how to act and experienced great difficulty reconciling
their desires to punish Mr. Bungle with their optimistic hopes for a truly open communal
setting free of regressive punishment. These very real, very tangible emotional responses,
and the strong sense that their online space needed to be protected, demonstrate that
while places and actions online may not exist in the physical realm, the consequences of
the existence of these communities and the action that takes place within these
communities are very real in their consequences. This recognition has served as the
cornerstone of subsequent investigation of online social action.

In examining online communities, it is important to start by establishing workable
definitions of what constitutes an online community and what traits are commonly
observed in online communities. Doing so also provides a useful generalized conception
of an online community against which Anonymous may be compared. Bellini and Vargas (2003) explore existing literature on online communities and provide useful characterizations of these communities. These definitions provide a useful framework for understanding the broader social contexts within which Anonymous exists.

Irriberry and Leroy (2007) provide another useful investigation of online communities. They investigate existing examinations of the structure of online communities and, based upon a synthesis of this body of work, propose a five stage lifecycle through which online communities develop. In their investigation, Irriberry and Leroy start with the definition of online communities provided by Lee, Vogel, and Limayem (2003) as

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\text{cyberspace[s] supported by computer-based information technology, centered upon communication and interaction of participants to generate member driven content, resulting in a relationship being built (pg. 51).}
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Drawing upon this definition, Irriberry and Leroy drew a sample of 27 articles reporting on factors leading to successful formation of online communities, from an initial selection of 1167 peer reviewed journal articles. Based upon this review, they formulate a five stage lifecycle through which online communities progress and set forth the factors that contribute to success at each stage.

The first phase of the lifecycle is inception. During this phase the idea for the formation of an online community arises in order to support various needs of a set of people, such as information, entertainment, or assistance (Irriberri & Leroy, 2009). What is necessary for success at this stage is a relatively well defined definition of the general
purpose of the community, an understanding of the types of individuals likely to become members of the community and consensus regarding appropriate conduct among members of the community.

Following successful negotiation of the inception phase, an online community moves next into the creation phase, during which the technology that supports the community is designed and implemented. During this phase of development, it is essential that the creators and moderators of the community strive to constantly observe, evaluate, and meet the needs of community members through effective implementation of new technologies and refinement of existing technologies. Irriberri and Leroy encapsulate the necessary conditions for success during the creation phase:

> In creating the community, creators must focus relentlessly on the needs of the users and must ensure that the tools are useable, that the supporting platform is reliable, that the personal member information is secure, and that all technology components have an adequate level of performance (2003; pg. 23)

Following creation, the next phase is growth. As the name implies, during this phase the size of the community expands as knowledge of the community spreads and new members join (Irriberri & Leroy, 2009). For success during the growth phase, the authors found that it was important that new and existing members alike have the ability to construct and share unique identities with one another, often times in the form of visible member profiles. As the community grows and the number and frequency of interactions among members increases, the community begins to develop a unique culture and group identity begins to solidify.
After growing to a sustainable size and achieving a shared culture, the community enters into the fourth stage, maturity. During this phase of the lifecycle, the culture of the group, the boundaries of the group, and the different roles within the group harden and the community becomes resistant to disruption. Irriberry and Leroy note that during this phase those who were instrumental in the conception and creation of the community can delegate the day to day functions of maintaining the community to others and begin to take a more hands off approach. One of the most important factors contributing to success at this phase is the ability for community members to have their contributions to the community recognized.

The fifth, and final stage of the lifecycle is death. When a community enters this phase membership declines, disrupting patterns of communication among remaining members and often depriving the community of individuals who played key roles in normal functioning (Irriberrri & Leroy, 2009). As this process continues, remaining members often loose interest due to decreased community activity, accelerating the process of atrophy and eventual abandonment of the community. There are multiple factors that can cause an online community to experience death, but Irriberry and Leroy found that poor or infrequent participation from members and a lack of original and high quality content to maintain interest are particularly harmful to online communities.

In their work Irriberrri and Leroy establish a life cycle model of online community growth and development. They note that, in general, active user participation, recognition for participation, and easy to use technology are vital for successful online community formation. This model provides a useful framework for examining Anonymous. I use this
model to explore the emergence of Project Chanology as an online community and to formulate predictions of future directions that Chanology might take. As will be seen, Chanology has progressed through the phases identified by Irriberri and Leroy and currently exists in the Maturity phase. The success of Anonymous also challenges some of the core assumptions in Irriberri and Leroy’s model regarding the importance of recognition of user contributions and the importance of visible member identities. The present research points to useful additions to the model that take the success of Chanology into account.

One of the most important developments that has taken place as the internet continues to grow and develop has been the emergence of a fundamental shift in the ways individuals produce and consume information online, commonly described as “Web 2.0.” Grasping the nature of this transformation is of the highest importance for scholars investigating the ever evolving world of online interaction. However, as a phenomenon, Web 2.0 is rather difficult to define. Tim O’Reilly, one of the individuals instrumental in theorizing and explaining the nature of Web 2.0 defines it as “a set of principles and practices that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core” (O'Reilly, 2007; pg. 19).

O’Reilly approaches the task of defining Web 2.0 by means of comparison to the characteristics of the internet prior to the emergence of Web 2.0. While a complete analysis of Web 2.0 is beyond the scope of the present research program, I review the core features of Web 2.0 which are relevant to Anonymous: namely the shift of web structure from a top down structure to a decentralized, networked structure, and the
shifting locus of online cultural production to user generated content. These features of Web 2.0 are instrumental in making the formation of Anonymous possible and have had a large impact upon the development of Anonymous.

The structure of Web 1.0 was defined by a top down system of highly popular web sites providing a particular type of information to a large volume of users (O’Reilly, 2007). While there was a much wider array of information available than that provided by other forms of mass media, such as television or newspapers, the most popular websites still tended to be owned by existing media conglomerates and powerful business interests. Furthermore, these websites were still organized on the principle of capturing a sizable market of internet users to sell to advertisers (O'Reilly, 2007). Finally, there was little in the way of strong links between these major providers of online content. Thus the structure of Web 1.0 was highly centralized, with a clear division between large content providers and smaller, personal web pages.

With the emergence of Web 2.0 this dominant structure shifted towards a more decentralized and networked arrangement of smaller websites (O’Reilly, 2007). Instead of relying upon these centralized websites, users now turned a vast array of smaller websites, following links between them, sharing information and links with other users along the way. In this way connections among these smaller websites increased in number and intensity as they linked to one another and as users traveled among these connections (O’Reilly, 2007).

The primary catalyst for this shift was the rise of personal web publishing or “Blogging” (O’Reilly, 2007). While internet users had always been able to construct
personal pages upon which they could post their thoughts, the chronological formatting of blogs and the availability of software that could automatically inform readers of new updates to blogs helped to transform blogs into a popular source of information for internet users. As blogs proliferated and spread they developed connections to other blogs by linking to posts or responding to what other bloggers had written. Readers of blogs also contributed to these connections by commenting on blog entries and referencing other blogs in the process. Through this activity, blogs became embedded within complex, networked webs of connection to other sites. This form of interlocking connections to other sites quickly began to spread to other constellations of user created websites (O’Reilly, 2007).

Along with the growth of this networked structure, Web 2.0 has brought user generated content to prominence (O'Reilly, 2007). Blogs themselves consist entirely of user generated content. In addition to blogs, technological improvements such as improved video compression and streaming protocols, enabled internet users to create and easily distribute high quality multimedia products to users. This content spread along networked websites, cutting out traditional producers of media. Entire communities, such as YouTube, developed around user made videos. The combination of a networked constellation of websites and the popularity of user generated content has given rise to a form of cultural production in which existing cultural products are taken apart and recombined with other cultural products in new and innovative ways (O’Reilly, 2007).

As will be seen, Anonymous embodies the decentralized structure and user driven cultural production that are hallmarks of Web 2.0. Examining Project Chanology
provides an important opportunity to explore how groups can make use of the unique features of Web 2.0 for rapidly disseminating information and how these aspects of Web 2.0 translate into offline social interaction and behavior. In this way I build upon the description of Web 2.0 provided by O’Reilly and apply his descriptive framework to the analysis of a specific online community.

Bellini and Vargas (2003) further refine definitions of online communities. The authors also synthesize a large body of research on online communities and develop twelve factors important to these communities that emerge from the literature. The authors define online communities as “social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact within a specified boundary or place… symbolically delineated by topic of interest” (Bellini & Vargas, 2003; pg 4). While online communities are nebulous and difficult to define, Bellini and Vargas note that this is true of all communities and that physical location alone is not enough to establish a community, nor is it necessary.

The twelve key features of online communities drawn from the body of research on online communities are: focus, membership, technology, trust, moderation, tutorial, communication, status, participation, real life, electronic commerce, and broadcasting (Bellini & Vargas, 2003). The first feature, focus, refers simply to the need for online communities to have a common purpose or set of goals to which members are oriented. Bellini and Vargas (2003) found that it is important for the focus of an online community to match up well with the interests and concerns of the community’s constituent members. Anonymous had a very loosely defined focus that necessitated the creation of multiple different imageboards at the *chan sites. Within Chanology however, there was
a highly defined focus. Yet, this united focus eventually gave way to schism, creating two conflicting factions with differing understandings of the motives underlying Chanology.

The second key feature is membership and refers to a set of group behavior that creates definitions of insiders and outsiders. Bellini and Vargas (2003) note that this shared understanding is vital for establishing group boundaries as well as establishing trust among members. As such, they conclude that formal membership rules, including costs of entry and a “hierarchy of leaders” (Bellini & Vargas, 2003; pg. 7) to enforce the normative standards of the group and to potentially exile members. These findings echo the importance of visible user identities noted by Irriberri and Leroy (2009). What makes Anonymous interesting as an object of study is the stability of the group despite a lack of formal membership, identity markers, or formal leadership heirarchy to enforce group norms.

The next feature identified as important is technology, which refers to the communications systems used to enable interaction among community members. The ability for members to easily communicate with other members is important but having cutting edge technology is not (Bellini & Vargas, 2003). This is true for Anonymous as well. The fourth feature is trust and refers to the need for members to have faith in other members and the accuracy of information exchanged within the community. The authors note that the importance of trust means that members of online communities need to be able to gather information about others within the community so that they can make informed decisions as to whether to trust these other members. The issue of trust was problematic throughout Chanology. The norms of anonymity within Chanology meant
that the identities of individuals could not be discerned, greatly limiting the development of trust within Chanology. As a result, members of Anonymous within Chanology were highly sensitive to the perceived threat of infiltrators from the Church of Scientology sent to disrupt Chanology.

The next feature, moderation, refers to the presence of individuals given the authority and power to regulate activity and ensure that the code of conduct is followed by members. Bellini and Vargas found that, in general, members of online communities desired moderation. Anonymous has always been ambivalent towards moderators and generally bristles at perceived efforts to regulate behavior within the group. Chanologists accepted moderators as a necessary evil at Enturbulation.org, as the website initially was to serve as the public face of Chanology; but moderators at other Chanology sites generally had little influence, only enforcing rules designed to protect the websites’ owners against legal action.

Tutorial, the sixth feature, refers to efforts to teach new users how to use the technology of the online community. Bellini and Vargas found that users desired this but Anonymous mostly lacked tutorials, with learning the technology on one’s own considered a cost of entry. As Chanology evolved and became increasingly dominated by new members, forum threads at Enturbulation.org teaching new users how to use the site became increasingly common.

The seventh key feature identified by Bellini and Vargas was communication and refers specifically to those technologies that enable exchange of information between members. The authors noted that online community members prefer to be able to
customize these technologies. Status, the eighth feature refers to relative differences in importance and power among members of an online community. Bellini and Vargas note that anonymity online tends to break down status barriers and fosters more democratic participation. This was very true of Anonymous, and led to participation in Chanology being of a markedly democratic nature. As the authors note, in communities with high levels of Anonymity “relationships are more democratic and status differences are attenuated” (Bellini & Vargas, 2003; pg. 9).

The ninth feature is the importance of participation within online communities. The authors state that “online discourse is highly participative, and, to be successful, all people must contribute” (Bellini & Vargas, 2003; pg. 10), findings later confirmed by Irriberri and Leroy (2009). This was generally true within Chanology as well, but normative standards demanded that members spend time learning the culture of Anonymous before participating in discussions. As will be seen, this was a direct result of the importance of mastery over this culture for display of insider status. The tenth feature, real life, is the finding that online communities are strengthened when members are able to interact with one another in offline settings, although this type of interaction was not at all necessary for success in an online community (Bellini & Vargas, 2003). The events of Project Chanology largely confirm these findings. Offline interaction was not necessary for group cohesion, but solidarity among members in geographically based Chanology cells did increase following the rise of offline protests.

The eleventh feature of online communities is that members generally do not want their communities to be commodified (Bellini & Vargas, 2003). This was true of
Anonymous, but rarely was addressed as commerce did not play any noticeable role at Chanology websites. The final important feature of successful online communities is broadcasting and refers to the degree to which knowledge of an online community’s existence is spread. Bellini and Vargas (2003) noted that, in general, members of online communities prefer broadcasting in order to increase the size of the community.

Anonymous stands in marked contrast to this as the group generally prefers its existence to not obtain mainstream recognition, primarily because they fear the influx of new users which would need to be successfully socialized. Even in Chanology, in which recognition for the efforts of the group was desired, new users were directed away from the chans and the Party Van wiki, and towards Enturbulation.org in order to try and keep sites like the chans hidden from new Chanologists.

Study of Anonymous provides a useful means by which the findings of Bellini and Vargas can be measured via empirical observation. As will be seen, the nature of Anonymous largely confirms their findings. However there are some features of Anonymous that notably challenge the findings of Bellini and Vargas. Specifically, Anonymous has been able to maintain group cohesion and to thrive as an online community despite lacking important group features identified by Bellini and Vargas, such as stable and visible user identities, a leadership structure, active moderation, or the development of significant levels of trust.
Online Identity

The Online Self

As the literature reviewed thus far demonstrates, identity is a crucial aspect of online communities. Sand (2007) conceptualizes of online identity in terms of the “interactive self,” approaching the subject from a postmodern perspective. For Sand, the interactive self is the constellation of identities that an individual constructs in online spaces. This process of identity construction is not done solely as a performance for others. Through such construction the individual also comes to explore and learn more about his or her offline self (Sand, 2007). As the author states: “the interactive self reflects the relationship of the individual to cyberspace, how one uses e-mail, the Internet, and multi-user domains (MUDS)” (Sand, 2007; pg. 85).

Being conceived through a postmodern lens, Sand’s interactive self is highly fragmentary. The interactive self is also highly performative in nature (Sand, 2007). While she does not draw the connection herself, Sand’s interactive self can be seen as a natural analog or extention of Goffman’s (1999) conception of the self. Goffman conceptualized the self as an ongoing performative effort that could not be entirely divorced from social context. Likewise, Sand (2007), identifies the interactive self arising from performative activity in the online realm. A key difference between Sand’s interactive self and the Goffmonian conception of the self is that the interactive self is highly experimental and often divorced from an individual’s offline identity.

This idea of the online self being radically separate from the offline self is common in postmodern examinations of online identity. However, as others have noted,
online identity does not commonly represent a total break with an individual’s offline identity, but rather serves as an extension or idealized version of a person’s offline self (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Furthermore, as online communities have continued to develop, honesty in one’s presentation of self in the online setting has become increasingly valued (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Sand’s conception of the interactive self is most useful when understood as an extension of Goffman’s conception of the performative aspects of self to the online realm. Performance becomes paramount in online settings in which physical markers of identity are absent. This is particularly true of Anonymous, in which members must rely entirely upon performative cultural displays to ascertain insider group status.

*The Production of Group Identity*

Individual online identity provides a starting point for the construction of online group identity. Once members possess means of displaying insider status, group members can begin to build a shared sense of self. David Giles examines the reciprocal relationship between individual and group identity at several pro-anna websites. At these sites, primarily young women interactively constructed shared meanings of what it is to be pro-anna, in the process discursively constructing a shared group identity and shaping their individual identities as they located themselves within this community (Giles, 2006). Giles goes on to note that maintaining this group identity and guarding against interlopers

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16 Pro-anna refers to individuals that frame eating disorders as positive, or at least non-harmful, lifestyle choices, rather than the widely accepted definition of eating disorders as psychological disorders with potentially severe health risks (Giles, 2006).
was of great importance for these young women and the process of defining insiders and outsiders played a key role in the maintenance of group boundaries.

At the pro-anna sites examined by Giles (2006), identity, both individual and group, was achieved discursively. Key to these discursive practices was the ability for the women to create agreed upon definitions of what it was to be pro-anna and what separated legitimate pro-annas from “wannabes” (Giles, 2006). With this definition established, individual group members then sought to establish themselves as legitimate participants within the community, based upon this definition. Valorizing those who epitomized the accepted definition of pro-anna and villifying wannabes that sought entry into the community served to reinforce communal boundaries. As the author notes “in many respects, the community is defined in adversity” (Giles, 2006; pg. 464). This finding parallels the importance of the enforcement of a normative order for the maintenance of offline communities (Erikson, 2005).

Other researchers (O’Connor & Mackeogh, 2007; Zhang, 2008) examining online group identity have reported findings supporting those of Giles (2006). O’Connor and Mackeogh examined an online women’s forum that served as a general discussion forum for a wide variety of issues from a woman’s perspective. They found that the forum served primarily as a space used by the women for the performance of identity. And as with Giles’ work, they noted that a stable definition of group identity was an important project on which the women worked. A key aspect of this creation of group identity and solidarity was the construction of a gendered in group at the site, which was set against putative out groups (O’Connor & Mackeogh, 2007).
The performance of identity at these message boards was accomplished primarily through discursive practices, particularly those revolving around the performance of gender (O’Connor & Mackeogh, 2007). In keeping with the findings of others (Giles, 2006), a shared identity served as the primary resource for individual identity performances, with the women positioning themselves as legitimate members of the group. O’Connor and Mackeogh also noted the importance of visible member identities for establishing a social hierarchy based upon how long a given member had been a part of the community. In addition to this, the regulating of behavior on the part of moderators and senior members played a vital role in supporting the normal functioning of the community (O’Connor & Mackeogh, 2007). Finally, active participation and production of content was highly valued within the community, once again confirming the findings of Irriberri and Leroy (2009) and Bellini and Vargas (2003).

In contrast to the types of online communities referenced thusfar, Zhang (2008) examined an online community which served primarily to maintain existing offline relationships. The members of this community were Chinese alumni from a university that used online message boards to stay in touch with one another and to discuss a broad range of topics. Even with a specific offline shared identity, group members still actively performed identity maintenance within the online setting in order to maintain the unity of the group (Zhang, 2008). What is most relevant about Zhang’s work regarding the present study is that it demonstrates the importance of ongoing identity work within

\[\text{ibid.}\]
online spaces even in situations in which group members already possess a stable offline collective identity.

Production of Group Boundaries

As the literature regarding online communities shows, the establishment of a shared group identity and the production of means of separating insiders from outsiders are paramount for ensuring the survival of an online community. Typically, these needs are fulfilled through a process in which a group identity is formed and agreed upon. Subsequently, this identity, and the cultural signifiers of this identity, become important resources upon which group members draw to build and display stable identities to one another. Over time, members become increasingly well established and increasingly well known to one another, allowing trust to develop. Combined with moderators to enforce the group’s code of conduct, the community becomes increasingly cohesive and bounded. However, this still leaves the question of how Anonymous is able to maintain cohesion without stable individual identity and how the group is effectively able to separate insiders from outsiders without a formal membership roster or internal social hierarchy.

In his examination of an online forum for psychologists, Perrotta (2006) provides an application of Bourdieu’s (1990) conception of social fields and cultural capital that can be used to explain the construction of insider and outsider status within Anonymous. In his study, Perrotta employs discourse analysis to examine the processes by which the users of this forum established psychology as a professional field, identified themselves as professional psychologists, and defended this putative professional turf against encroachment from others. Ultimately, the forum users discursively positioned
psychology within the social field of professional medical practice (Perrotta, 2006). From here, users drew upon cultural capital afforded by the discipline of psychology and the professional medical field to establish both psychology’s position as a professional practice and their own identity as professional psychologists.\textsuperscript{18}

A social field consists of the objectified systems of meanings (Perrotta, 2006) that comprise a given institution or area of coordinated action within a society, such as education or medical practice (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). An individual’s ability to successfully navigate these fields is constitutive of his or her position within these fields; and it is these differential positions that create differential structures of power and opportunity within a society.\textsuperscript{19} Bourdieu states that individuals navigate these fields through the accumulation and use of cultural capital. This cultural capital consists of the objectified signs and meanings which are themselves constitutive of a given social field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Perrotta, 2006). Differential access to cultural capital then creates differential opportunities for social actors to navigate social fields, leading to differential hierarchies and class structures within society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

In this formulation, Bourdieu explains the objectification and commodification of knowledge in the educational field and anticipates the subsequent objectification and commodification of information itself, as exemplified by the current financial value of the database (O'Reilly, 2007).

\textsuperscript{18} ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} ibid.
Perrotta (2006) applies Bourdieu’s conception of social fields and cultural capital to the online setting. The accumulation and deployment of social capital was the primary means by which members of these forums were able to signal insider status to one another (Perrotta, 2006). This same mechanism, according to Perrotta, was used to create out groups (those without sufficient access to salient cultural capital) and to deny entry to members of those outgroups. Thus even though the forums were public, the community members effectively created a means of identifying insiders and established a barrier for entry to the community.

In the present study I extend Perrotta’s work by using it to examine the creation and signaling of insider status within Anonymous. By conceiving of Anonymous itself as a social field intersecting with the broader social field of internet culture I show how members of Anonymous constructed resources to be used in the signaling of insider status. This same process created a barrier for entry into Anonymous, even without any kind of membership roster or official requirements for becoming a part of the group. The esoteric culture of Anonymous, particularly the internet memes originating from the group, can be understood as the stable systems of meaning which are constituative of Anonymous as a social field.

Thus, knowledge of and sucessful mastery of this culture is the cultural capital which members of Anonymous participating in Chanology used to signal insider status to one another. The necessity of learning this culture to be able to sucessfully communicate with other members of Anonymous formed a barrier to entry as it required new members to invest time and effort into learning the group’s culture. As will be seen the boundaries
between “us” and “them” within Anonymous are continuously constructed and enforced discursively at the point of contact in which one user convinces others that he or she is an insider. The esoteric culture of the group, as the key source of cultural capital, becomes an important resource, which is why Anonymous is hostile towards attempts to give the group mainstream knowledge. By making knowledge of the group’s culture widely available, the value of the cultural capital within the group used for identity construction and maintenance of group boundaries becomes devalued, rendering it no longer able to preform its vital functions.

Online Social Movement Activism

*Historical Definition of Social Movements*

The next body of literature important to the present research is that related to social movements. The current study intends to examine Chanology in order to further understandings of social movements as well as to examine the potential Chanology itself represents for future social movement mobilization. While unique in many ways, Chanology does not represent a radical break with the past development of social movements, but rather an evolution predicated upon the logic of online communication. Thus it is necessary to begin with an existing definition of the social movement.

Charles Tilly (2004) provides one of the most fully developed and widely cited examination of social movements currently available to scholars. Here, I simplify Tilly’s in depth exploration of the historical development of social movements and touch upon the key aspects of his description of the modern social movement. The social movement is a relatively recent creation emerging in the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of a
constellation of social, political, and economic factors (Tilly, 2004). Of these factors, the most important were the profound social and economic changes brought on by the industrial revolution and the political changes brought by the expression of Enlightenment ideals through the American and French Revolutions. The industrial revolution brought large numbers of individuals together and formed a visible class system. At the same time, ideals of self governance, liberty, and popular democracy took hold in populations within the newly formed United States and France as Enlightenment ideals spread.

As democratization spread throughout Europe and North America during the 19th and 20th centuries, the social movement grew as a form of collective behavior to its current position as a prevalent form of popular political action (Tilly, 2004). Tilly goes on to note several key characteristics of social movements that form the core of his arguments regarding social movements. The first characteristic Tilly notes is that social movements are collaborative and participatory efforts. This key feature of social movements is bound up in their origin and refinement in political environments that venerate self government and popular democracy. And it is this feature that has made social movements an important source of participatory democracy in contemporary society.

A second key aspect of social movements is their use of program, identity and standing claims (Tilly, 2004). Program claims establish the group’s agenda, including what other groups or institutions they are targeting, what changes they would like to see, and what policies or programs they propose or endorse to effect these changes. Identity
claims seek to establish the legitimacy and desirability of the group and its goals in the eyes of the public. Identity claims most commonly take the form of displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. Worthiness displays seek to legitimize the group and their demands and commonly involve efforts to elevate the movement itself while demonizing the targets of the movement and in this way are a key component of efforts to garner public support.

Unity displays seek to portray the movement as a cohesive front, bound by the group’s professed beliefs (Tilly, 2004). Numbers displays emphasize the size of the social movement in an effort to portray it as a widespread popular uprising whose demands deserve to be considered as the movement represents a noticeable number of people. Commitment displays emphasize the dedication of the social movement participants and insist that the movement will not dissipate until its demands have been met. Finally, standing claims seek to establish the legitimacy of the group and its position as an advocate for change. Tilly notes that these different claims will have varying degrees of saliency for different members within a given social movement.

Tilly goes on to state that democratization nourishes the emergence of new social movements. By democratization, Tilly means social and political processes that increase the ability of individuals to actively participate in governance and to influence governmental procedures through popular action. The next feature of social movements is that they assert popular sovereignty (Tilly, 2004). Social movements hinge upon the logic of popular governance, and so the presence of a social movement asserts the collective will of a community of individuals, be it real or symbolic.
Tilly goes on to note that unlike other forms of popular politics, social movements depend upon political entrepenuers, which are individuals or organizations that are specifically devoted towards sucessful navigation of and influence upon the arena of political power. Often times social movements are formed without such individuals but do not achieve true success until entrepenuers take on their cause and exercise their connections to put pressure upon social elites. Another defining aspect of social movements is that, after achieving success in one setting, they tend to proliferate and spread to other connected settings (Tilly, 2004). As an example, the success of Civil Rights movements in the deep south region of the United States allowed these movements to spread out into new arenas, connecting with similar movements in the process and eventually consolidating into a large, powerful social movement.

Yet another key aspect of Tilly’s definition of social movements is that the forms and structures of social movements evolve over time in response to internal and external pressures. The social movement is a fluid form and one of it’s greatest strenghts has been its ability to adapt to new situations and challenges (Tilly, 2004). Tilly notes that we should expect social movements to continue to evolve but that we cannot take for granted that social movements will not die out in the furture. Tilly examines current and historical trends and predicts four potential future scenarios for social movements: internationalization, decline of democracy, professionalization, and triumph.

Internationalization is a trend in which social movements increasingly transcend national or other territorial boundaries and come to target transnational groups and sources of power (Tilly, 2004). Professionalization is a situation in which social
movement leadership transfers from local power centers into the hands of dedicated social movement organizational structures, often transnational in scope. Decline of democracy is a situation in which democratization is reversed, stifling the formation and expression of social movements under repressive government action. Finally, triumph is a situation in which social movements flourish at every level of human society, driving true popular change and creating more egalitarian social structures.

Based upon current trends, Tilly predicts that a combination of internationalization and professionalization is the most likely future direction of social movements. As the logic of globalization increasingly concentrates power in the hands of transnational groups like the WTO or multinational corporations, social movements will need to respond by embracing a transnational scope themselves and construct new multinational communities of people to claim to represent (Tilly, 2004). Such a change will necessitate increasingly complex organizational structures, leading to professionalization as the centers of power within social movements are shifted towards large professional social movement organizations. Tilly sees these developments as a threat to the popular, locally situated political action social movements have traditionally provided, and fears that social movements will become increasingly detached from the people they claim to represent.

As will be seen, the structure and nature of Project Chanology fits well within Tilly’s definition of social movements. At the same time, Chanology possesses many unique qualities that lead us to reconsider some of the conventional wisdom regarding social movements. Also of importance, Chanology challenges Tilly’s predictions for the
future and holds out hope for future developments in social movement structures that keep power local. Chanology fits well with the trend of internationalization predicted by Tilly. Yet, as will be seen Project Chanology was able to organize individuals internationally while still operating primarily upon direct democratic participation.

*The Use of Online Communications Technologies by Social Movements*

Anonymous is not the first group to make use of online communications technologies for the construction and execution of a social movement. Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner (2006) examine the growth and proliferation of the internet and theorize its potential for social activism. They draw connections between today’s internet based activism and the so called people’s media movement of the 1960’s. They also note that since its extension to civilian use, the internet has existed as a contested space. From the beginning, notions of democratic use and popular political support of keeping the internet a free space, fostered communities of politically minded individuals in online communities (Kahn & Kellner, 2006).

As access and ease of use attracted a wider variety of individuals to the internet, political communities concerned with a broad array of issues, including those not related to the internet, formed (Kahn & Kellner, 2006). The open, but contested, nature of the internet nourished the formation of such groups and provided an environment in which norms of direct democratic participation encouraged popular political participation in

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20 What we know today as the internet began as a joint project between American universities and the Advanced Research Projects Agency, designed to implement a communications system that could persist in the event of a full scale nuclear war (Jones, 1999). Access to this technology did not extend beyond academic and military circles for several decades.
social movement activities. The authors point out the successful implementation of online technologies by groups such as MoveOn, ANSWER, and United for Peace & Justice for organization and dissemination of information among group members. They also note the success of anti-globalization movements for leveraging online communications technologies for organization and point out the success these groups have had in constructing an international “virtual bloc” (Kahn & Kellner, 2006; pg. 706) and targeting international interests in their demands for change.

What is particularly interesting about the emergence of online activism and offline activism coordinated by online communications technologies is that, against the theorized homogenizing and flattening influence of globalization (Appadurai, 2006), these forms of activism have managed to effectively synthesize the local and the global—maintaining local centers of power and action while acting on a global level (Kahn & Kellner, 2006). This confirms the predictions of Tilly (2004) regarding internationalization, while still holding hope that the popular political participation so long intrinsic to social movement action will not be lost. The authors state that this hybridization of local and global politics provides an important check upon the spreading power of transnational elites, leveraging intertwining of global and local processes to bring local concerns to bear on global interests. This also serves as an important opportunity for researchers to reexamine the relationships between the local and global by observing how global forces influence and even structure an increasing number of local situations. This in turn requires analysis of how local forces mediate the global,
inflect global forces to diverse ends and conditions, and produce unique configurations of the local and the global as the matrix for thought and action in everyday life (Kahn and Kellner, 2006; pg. 710).

The greatest potential of online activism, according to Kahn and Kellner, lies in its ability to successfully merge local and global concerns, which is of the utmost importance as local and global interests become increasingly intertwined. As online communications technologies grow, flourish, and become increasingly easy to use, the democratic and revolutionary potential of social movement activism is magnified. At the same time, the authors remind us that we cannot simply assume that these technologies will be used to further democratic ideals. As with all technology, the internet is not inherently good or bad—it is no more and no less than what we make of it. Already, groups such as the Ku Klux Klan have embraced online communications technologies to further their reactionary, anti-democratic agendas (Bostdorf, 2004; Kahn & Kellner, 2006). It is for these reasons that the authors urge scholars to continue to examine the potential of these technologies and to recognize their potential, noting that as today’s internet citizen-activists organize politically around issues of access to information, capitalist globalization, imperialist war, ecological devastation, and other forms of oppression, they represent important oppositional forms of agency in the ongoing struggle for social justice and a more participatory democracy (Kahn & Kellner, 2006; pg. 704).

Brett Rolfe further bridges the connections between online and offline activism, noting that as activists have moved online, they have adapted traditional offline social movement techniques into similar forms suitable for virtual space. Specifically, Rolfe
examines the processes by which innovation in social movement forms diffuses in online communities and refers to the constellation of these forms utilized by online social movements as electronic repertoires of contention. These electronic repertoires of contention are explicitly connected to the array of social movement displays which Tilly (2004) notes are an intrinsic aspect of social movement action. Thus Rolfe (2005) explicitly connects online social movements to their offline antecedents.

Rolfe proposes a three part process by which an online repertoire of contention develops. In the first part of this process, existing social movement groups enter the online arena, bringing offline activism techniques with them and modifying them to be suitable in an online space (Rolfe, 2005). In the second part of this process, highly creative online groups with technical expertise take these existing techniques and modify and combine them in unique ways to create radical new forms of online based activism. In the final phase of this process, these new forms of activism diffuse among online social movement groups coalescing into electronic repertoires of contention that can be shared and drawn upon by online social movement organizations. It is through this process that offline social movement action has entered into and diffused through online spaces and communities.

Project Chanology fits well into the second part of Rolfe’s (2005), explanation of the development of an electronic repertoire of contention. He notes that the characteristics of groups that act as radical innovators in the creation of electronic repertoires of contention are
a high level of critical awareness, technical expertise in various fields, small organizational structures, an innovative and cooperative mindset and a flexible rolling agenda, rather than allignment to a specific ideological cause (Rolfe, 2005; pg. 70).

The group formed by members of Anonymous participating in Chanology fits these criteria particularly well. While Chanologists did not initially display a high degree of critical awareness, this changed as Chanology became more oriented towards moralistic justifications for action. As will be seen, one of the greatest strengths of Chanology was the ability for members to innovate and adapt to changing situations. As predicted by Rolfe’s model, Anonymous took existing online forms of activism and modified them to suit their own needs, creating new, innovative forms of activism in the process. What is particularly interesting however is that Anonymous innovated in the opposite direction as well, taking electronic forms of activism and adapting them into conventional forms of offline activism, bringing innovation full circle.

Pickerill (2004) provides further analysis of the adaption to online settings by offline activists and how those activists leveraged online communications technologies to augment their offline actions. Through 80 in depth interviews Pickerill examines the use of the internet by environmental activists in Great Britain. She found that these environmental activists did not abandon or radically alter their existing repertoires of action in adopting internet communications technologies. Rather, they used the internet to augment their activities and existing repertoire of action (Pickerill, 2001). As the author states: “environmentalist use of the Internet as a tactic provides an additional appendage rather than a fundamental shift in their repertoire of actions” (Pickerill, 2001; pg. 368).
In general the environmentalist groups she studied grafted online communications technologies onto their existing organizational structures (Pickerill, 2001). In particular, Pickerill notes that her subjects effectively leveraged online communications technologies to rapidly increase the speed with which they were able to interact with one another and the speed with which they were able to desiminate information. Another key aspect of the use of internet communications technologies by the environmentalist groups was that it allowed them, according to Pickerill, to remain decentralized and to “organize using non-hierarchial structures, reducing the pressure towards professionalization that many groups have faced” (Pickerill, 2001; pg. 369). My own findings show that Project Chanology leveraged online communications technologies in a similar fashion and to similar effect. Also, note once again, that Pickerill’s findings address internationalization, while showing simultaneous resistance to professionalization (Tilly, 2004).

Overall Pickerill found that environmentalist groups adopted online communications technologies and implemented them in a way such that their existing strategies and repertoires of action were augmented, rather than radically altering these aspects of their groups. These groups did not abandon their offline activities, instead using the internet to better coordinate these activities (Pickerill, 2001). This fits well with the findings of other researchers (Kahn & Kellner, 2006; Rolfe, 2005) and my own findings, as will be seen, largely confirm those of Pickerill. One aspect of Anonymous that is interesting however is that they displayed the same hybridization of on and offline repitories of action as in Pickerill’s findings, but innovated in the opposite direction.
Chanology began in an online space and adapted by moving offline and adding offline actions to its repertoire of action. In the end, the result is the same, Anonymous leveraged both on and offline actions to form a highly mobile and highly flexible protest movement resistant to efforts at disruption, similar to the structures observed by Pickerill who states that

by maintaining their non-hierarchial forms of organizing, environmental groups could sustain a nomadic form of power and a center-less organization that centralized state authorities and heirarchial multinational organizations have a hard time targeting (Pickerill, 2001; pg. 369).

Historical Conflicts with Scientology

As has been seen, Project Chanology is not a radically new form of social movement, but is rather the latest evolution of hybridized on and offline social movement activism. Furthermore, Chanology is not the first instance of an online conflict between the Church of Scientology and it’s critics. Michael Peckham (1998) explores the conflict between the Church and critics who sought to dessiminate documents detailing the most secret doctrines of Scientology and which the Church claimed were copyrighted documents. This conflict set a precedent for Chanology and provided Chanologists ready made discursive frames for attacking Scientology. The author describes the contours of this conflict as follows:

Scientology claims that Internet users are illegally disseminating secret, copyrighted materials, while Internet users say that Scientology has trampled on their rights in an attempt to silence critics (Peckham, 1998; ps. 323)
The Chanologists drew upon the understandings of this historical conflict in shaping their own framing efforts.

Peckham’s work also notes that as conflicts between social movements and the targets of those movements move online, traditional understandings of these conflicts must be reexamined. Specifically he notes that the concept of resource mobilization takes on new meaning in the online realm. In the conflict between Scientology and its critics, traditional resources such as access to state power became less important, and new resources such as access to internet bandwidth and the ability to recruit new members rose to prominence in the struggle (Peckham, 1998). This is also true of Chanology. As will be seen, public perception and support became a key resource in the conflict between the Chanologists and Scientology.

My work in general confirms many of the key findings in the literature regarding online social movements, specifically concerning the ways in which social movement groups make use of online communications technologies and the impact these technologies have upon social movement structure. Like other social movements making use of the internet, Chanology is highly fluid and adaptable, and possesses a decentralized structure lacking a well formed leadership hierarchy. At the same time, my observations of Chanology pose new questions for this body of work. Specifically, the ability of Chanology to operate effectively without any type of formal leadership structure, and without any traditional identity markers shows that these technologies have powerful potential to enable new social movement forms.
Social Network Analysis in Online Settings

The recent resurgence of social network analysis has been identified as one of the most important and significant quantitative methodological developments in sociology and several other social scientific disciplines (Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1998). The logic underlying social network analysis conceptualizes social groups and systems as a graph, with nodes on the graph representing individual units (usually individual people) within the subject of analysis, and edges between these nodes signifying a given form of connection between two nodes (Scott, 2007). In addition to providing a visual representation of social structure, the network can be analyzed and quantified through the mathematical framework of graph theory (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Knox, Savage, and Harvey (2006) examine the development of social network analysis and provide a critique of its contemporary use. The use of network analysis in the social sciences, particularly sociology, has always been driven by a desire to examine individuals within the context of their connectedness to others and to provide a means of handling such empirically complex structures (Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006). Indeed, one of the most unique aspects of network analysis, is that it allows social actors to be characterized not solely in terms of individualistic traits such as race, class or gender, but rather in terms of structural traits derived from their positional ties to others (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Scott, 2007). What is significant about this is that it allows for analysis of individuals at a structural level and provides a new method of comparing individuals by
examining the contours of their connections within a given social unit (Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006).

While network analysis provides a powerful means of producing empirical measures of social structure and the role of individuals within that structure, one must be cautious to not reify the network and confuse it for the actual object of study (Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006). In their critique, Knox, Savage, and Harvey note that the social network serves both as a mathematical characterization of a given social object and as a heuristic representation of that object, but it is not the object itself. In selecting a given set of individuals for analysis and deciding what criteria to use to establish connections the researcher inevitably creates an imperfect representation of his or her object of study. Furthermore, as with all quantitative research, one must be cautious not to lose sight of the empirical reality of social life within mathematical abstraction. While these critiques are valid, they apply to a wide variety of research methodologies beyond network analysis. And as with these other methodologies, the researcher can avoid these potential pitfalls by always remaining aware that characterization of social life can never be perfect and is always subject to distortion via the acts of observation and characterization themselves.

Social network analysis is particularly well suited to investigations of online community structure (Hogan, 2008; Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1998). One of the most difficult aspects of network analysis is the collection of data of a significant quantity and quality to accurately represent relations among a given set of units of analysis. In online communities, interaction among individuals often leaves durable
traces (Welser, Smith, Fisher, & Gleave, 2008), which can easily be examined by researchers. Network analysis is also particularly well suited to investigations of online communities because much of the social actions on these communities takes on a networked structure (Hogan, 2008).

Bernie Hogan (2008) provides an overview of the application of network analysis to online settings. A useful starting point for such analyses, according to Hogan, is to produce a graph of the network under study. An examination of this graph can give a sense of the overall structure of the network and the flow of information throughout the network. In addition, examination of such graphs can allow the researcher to visually locate specific nodes that appear to possess important or unique structural attributes. Finally, observation of the graph can reveal potentially interesting structural features of the network as a whole.

Hogan (2008) goes on to note the most useful graph and nodal metrics for investigation of online communities. Here I provide an overview of these attributes, detailed descriptions of the attributes used in the present analysis is provided in the methodology section. Density provides a basic overall measure of the completeness and connectedness of the network while the clustering coefficients of individuals within the graph and the average clustering coefficient of the network as a whole provides a means of characterizing the relative cliquishness of the community (Hogan, 2008). For examining the importance of individuals within the network, Hogan recommends several centralization measures. Degree centrality can be used to examine the extent to which a given individual is seen as a reliable source of information within a community.
Closeness centrality serves as a measure of how much access a given individual has to information passing throughout the network. Finally, betweenness centrality provides a measure of how important a given individual is for the flow of information throughout a community (Hogan, 2008).

With the application of network analysis to an examination of Project Chanology, I demonstrate the efficacy of network analysis for characterizing online groups with highly undifferentiated internal structures. This network data is not examined in isolation but is rather used to augment other data collected regarding Anonymous and Project Chanology. The data gathered from network analysis provides valuable additional information about social structure within Anonymous and allows me to triangulate with the qualitative case study of Chanology to provide a rigorous analysis that is able to capture overall structure while still maintaining valuable social context. Having explored the body of literature that informs my work, I turn now to an explanation of the methodological techniques to be used to produce data to answer the research questions that guide the present study.
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Selection of Methodological Techniques

Methodological considerations were taken into account following the formulation of research questions. The selection of methodological tools was driven by the belief that research methods should provide a maximum level of information relevant to the research questions while minimizing error due to chance or the influence of the researcher. Given the research questions, the methodological tools would need to be able to collect and analyze information on two primary levels. The first of these levels concerns the attitudes, norms, and ongoing interaction of members of Anonymous— in short, the culture of the group. The second level concerns the overarching pattern of relations among members of Anonymous— the structure of the group.

An initial review of the relevant literature was conducted in order to examine the methodologies used by researchers conducting similar investigations. This analysis revealed that interest in internet communities has been relatively low but has seen a marked increase in recent years. As this interest has increased, so too has the range of methodologies employed in the analysis of online communities. The methodological techniques used in such analyses have included electronic surveying (Schiano, 1999), rhetorical criticism (Bostdorf, 2004; and Jordan, 2005), content analysis (Pfeil, Zaphiris, & Siang Ang, 2006), online focus groups (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007), integration of online and offline inquiry (Millen & Patterson, 2003), functional linguistics (Steinkuehler, 2006), conversation analysis (Antaki, Ardèvol, Núñez, & Vayreda, 2006), network...
analysis (Burris, Smith, & Strahm, 2000), and ethnographic methods adopted for online communities (Burri, Baujard, & Etter, 2006).

Proper understanding of observational data is contingent upon being able to place observed behavior and interaction within social-structural contexts. For this reason it was essential to collect data on the culture of Anonymous - the norms, practices, and shared understandings of the group. This importance is heightened due to the esoteric nature of the culture of Anonymous. As previously noted, the group uses knowledge of this culture as a means to establish and distinguish insiders from outsiders. Without a firm grasp of this cultural knowledge, the probability of misinterpretation of gathered observational data remains problematically high.

Qualitative Case Study

The best means of collecting data to answer the research questions is to perform a qualitative case study of Project Chanology. By exploring Chanology as an instance of online interaction and social movement mobilization, useful information regarding these processes can be uncovered. It was determined that ethnographic data gathering techniques were best suited for the collection of information regarding the culture of Anonymous, the interactions among group members, and the development of Project Chanology. Ethnographic methods were used for data collection; however the focus of data gathering was not exploring the subjective experience of Chanology that members had. Instead the focus was upon constructing a narrative account of Chanology to be used for the construction of a qualitative case study. Here I explore the ethnographic data collection procedures.
The complexity of human life is such that the best method of recording and interpreting it is through direct observation and analysis of one’s own experience with the subject of research (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). While quantitative data analysis techniques have made great gains in power and complexity, to date there is still no quantitative substitute for the richness and complexity of data available to the researcher through ethnographic observation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

The online setting provides the researcher with unique opportunities and challenges (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). The biggest advantage of conducting ethnographic research in an online setting is that as online communication often consists of written messages, the researcher has access to a verbatim transcript of each instance of communication among group members (Fay, 2007). In many cases, such as online forums or wiki sites, this record of communication is stored indefinitely on the host’s server. Even in instances in which textual communication is more ephemeral and not stored on a server it can still be easily stored and archived in the form of electronic text files for subsequent retrieval and analysis.

One of the largest challenges for the researcher in traditional ethnographic settings is the accurate recording of field notes necessary to document the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The rapid pace at which social life takes place can make it difficult for the researcher to adequately devote time and attention to both observation and the recording of those observations.
The text based, often durable\textsuperscript{21} nature of much online communication allows the researcher to focus on recording his or her thoughts and emotional experiences, not having to be as concerned with creating a record of ongoing interaction. And with records of conversation stored in textual format, the researcher can “slow down” the pace of interaction, reading through records of communication at a more methodical pace while searching for themes and patterns.

Another advantage of ethnographic work in online settings is that, under specific circumstances, the researcher has the ability to virtually eliminate the influence of the observer on the object of study. Minimizing the impact of one’s own presence on a research setting has long been an important goal of ethnographic researchers (Lofland et al, 2006). It is well established that human subjects may behave differently when they are aware that they are being observed. This effect is magnified when human subjects are aware of the true purpose of the observation (Lofland et al, 2006). When observing communication on public website,\textsuperscript{22} the presence of the researcher is virtually invisible.\textsuperscript{23} Despite this invisibility, the researcher still has access to the communications of the users

\textsuperscript{21} “Durable” refers to inscribed nature of text based online communication as well as the ease with which such communication is stored for subsequent review. For further information regarding the durable nature of online communication, see Welser, Smith, Fisher and Gleave (2008).
\textsuperscript{22} Public websites refer to those sites which can be viewed over a standard internet connection, with no requirement that the viewer register an identity with the website in order to view content.
\textsuperscript{23} All websites keep a log of the IP addresses of computers accessing the site. However this information is almost never made visible to the users of websites and even if such information made visible, one would have to look up the IP address to find the identity of the computer registered to that address. Some other public sites, particularly forums, may display an unregistered user as a “guest” on a list of users currently viewing a page. While this information is visible to all users of the site, there is no way for those users to know if the “guest” viewing the page is a researcher.
of the website in question. This allows the researcher to perform his or her observations without his or her presence impacting the behavior of the objects of observation.

While online settings offer advantages for ethnographic research, they also present unique challenges. One of the largest challenges for analysis of online identity is the issue of identity (Nip, 2004). When compared to offline settings, reliably ascertaining the identity of individuals can be problematic in online environments. Even in situations in which web site users have unique names or avatars, the potential for impersonation or theft of identity remains much higher than in a situation in which the researcher can link a given individual’s identity to an actual physical body or the sound of the individual’s voice. This issue becomes increasingly problematic with Anonymous, as the culture of the group tends to denigrate or sanction efforts on the part of individuals to establish unique, durable identities. On sites such as 4chan, users almost always post as “anonymous,” making it impossible to assign statements to unique individuals with any degree of certainty.

The inability to reliably ascertain the unique identity of members of Anonymous limits the ethnographic techniques available to study the settings in which members of

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24 It is important to note that IRB standards still apply to online research. Key for consideration of informed consent with online ethnographic research is the standard of expectation of privacy. In a publically accessible website, users are aware that what they say may be viewed by anybody, and is thus the online equivalent of having a conversation in a public space. As there is no expectation of privacy, it is not unethical for the researcher to observe and analyze the content of publically available websites without the informed consent of those posting on the website. This changes in the case where the website is not publically available. In such cases there is an expectation of privacy and informed consent is required.

25 In the context of online spaces, an individual’s avatar refers to the visual representation of the user’s online identity. This may be as simple as a small picture next to the user’s online name, or as complex as a customizable three dimensional model, representing the identity of the user.
Anonymous come together. Online surveys are of little use as it would be difficult to ensure that the survey would reach a representative sample of members of Anonymous, or that no one person completed the survey more than once. Members of Anonymous have, in the past, engaged in coordinated efforts to undermine online surveys and voting systems. These past efforts combined with the group’s antipathy towards outsiders introduces the unavoidable potential that group members would actively subvert efforts on the part of a researcher to gather data on them.

The same circumstances making survey research on members of Anonymous difficult make interviews entirely impractical. In addition to problems of discerning identity, there are strong norms amongst members of Anonymous which sanction any efforts by an individual to speak on behalf of Anonymous as a group. Even if members were willing to speak to a researcher, the fluid nature of the group and its lack of any formal rules or guidelines make it difficult to discern how representative of the group any one member’s experience is. While these limitations hinder efforts to draw out rich and complex data from the selected research sites, it was determined that remaining ethnographic observation techniques available were more than sufficient for gathering data necessary to answer the research questions relating to how the culture of Anonymous both constrained and enhanced their ability to drive effective social movement mobilization.

26 Recently, members of Anonymous have undertaken an effort to manipulate an online voting system to have 80s pop musician Rick Astley selected as MTV Europe’s “Best Act Ever.” Their efforts thus far appear to have been successful first by getting Astley on the ballot and at last measure, giving Astley 99.98% of the votes cast (Sarno, 2008)
After gathering this data, I went through all of my observations and began to construct a coherent narrative account of the growth and development of Chanology. It is through the construction of such an account that I am able to explore Chanology as a qualitative case study of online social interaction. In constructing this case study I was not primarily concerned with the subject experience of members of Chanology but rather upon the events of Chanology and how group members actively constructed understandings of these events through discursive interaction. In particular, I explore the ongoing and often contentious interactional process through which group members continually defined and framed shared understandings of Project Chanology.

**Selection of Research Sites**

I had followed the development of Project Chanology from its early beginnings in January of 2008. As I had identified the group Anonymous as a potential subject for research on internet culture, I kept copies of some of the conversations among members of Anonymous debating what they should do and how they should do it. After the real world protests of February 10th, I decided to focus on Project Chanology as a subject of research. Having identified the object of study, I next turned to identification of viable research sites.

Based upon initial observation of members of Anonymous, I identified two primary research sites based upon level of activity and popularity with members of Anonymous. The first of these sites is the website www.4chan.org. The name Anonymous and much of the culture which defines this group originates from 4chan. Of the sites where members of Anonymous congregate, 4chan is by far the most popular in
terms of page traffic, with an estimated 8.5 million page views per day (Grossman, 2008). Members of Anonymous often jokingly refer to 4chan as “the motherland.”

The second research site identified was www.encyclopediadramatica.com. Encyclopedia Dramatica is a satirical version of Wikipedia which focuses upon internet culture and several popular internet communities, such as Live Journal, MySpace, and 4chan. While Encyclopedia Dramatica is dwarfed in activity by the far more popular 4chan, it remains a highly active site and proved to be an important location for the planning of strategy early on in the development of Project Chanology, and also served as a clearinghouse for the archiving of information concerning ongoing activity related to Project Chanology.

As Project Chanology developed, I identified additional sites for research as the central locations of discussion shifted. The first additional site identified was the so called “insurgency wiki” at www.partyvan.info. As the name of the site implies, the insurgency wiki, is a site similar to Wikipedia which is dedicated to the planning and archiving of information related to raids\(^{27}\) carried out by members of Anonymous.\(^{28}\) The insurgency wiki quickly became an important site for the early planning of Project Chanology, particularly the first phase which focused on cyber attacks on the Church of Scientology.

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\(^{27}\) As noted earlier, members of Anonymous often use the term “raid” to refer to coordinated efforts to disrupt, harass, or destroy websites and other online communities.

\(^{28}\) The insurgency wiki also holds archived information on raids carried out by individuals from somethingawful.com (a group commonly referring to themselves as “Goons”- not to be mistaken for the hacker crew g00ns), and individuals from YTMND.com. The site primarily focuses on raids carried out by Anonymous, but these different groups often cooperate on raids. Individuals often consider themselves members of two or more of these groups and they share a common history.
Another important research site that developed alongside Project Chanology is the forums at www.enturbulation.org. After early problems with reliable hosting, enturbulation has become an active and important site for discussion of strategy related to the real world protests of Project Chanology. Enturbulation became the most active site of discussion of Project Chanology; however the community at enturbulation formally declared that they were no longer associated with Anonymous. As will be shown, enturbulation came to be the central hub for the newer members of Project Chanology who sought to transform Chanology from a real world version of a “raid” into a true activist social movement.

Finally, two other websites similar to 4chan were identified as research sites-315chan.org and 711chan.org. 711chan was created around the time that Project Chanology began and created an imageboard, “/xenu/,” specifically for discussion related to Project Chanology. In fact, the actual first calls for action against the Church of Scientology came from 711chan before being sent out to 4chan for recruitment of members. Thus 711chan was of great importance in the early planning of Chanology. 315chan.org was a website created specifically for discussion of Project Chanology and was similar in format to 4chan and 711chan, and was developed in response to Chanology related discussion and planning being banned from 711chan. As figure one shows, 4chan is by far the most popular of the sites where members of Anonymous congregate.

29 A complete list of all sites related to Project Chanology and a summary of each site can be found in Appendix B.
Figure 1: Activity of selected web sites.\textsuperscript{30}

Figure one displays the search volume of the four most popular sites used by members of Anonymous for Project Chanology in terms of site popularity. The values shown for each site are the search volumes calculated by Google Trends. Google Trends tracks the relative frequency of search terms related to the sites in question and displays the search volume as a proportion of the average search volume of a site chosen as a baseline value (Google, 2008).

\textsuperscript{30} Source: Google Trends. Values represent proportion of search volume relative to average search volume of “Encyclopedia Dramatica” over the past year.
In the case of Figure 1, the average search volume of Encyclopedia Dramatica was chosen as a baseline. Thus a value of 1.5 on a given day would indicate a search volume 1.5 times as large as the average search volume for Encyclopedia Dramatica; and a value of 0.5 on a given day would indicate a search volume 0.5 times as large as the average search volume for Encyclopedia Dramatica. Google Labs, the group that created Google Trends notes that the values do not meet scientific rigor at present (Google, 2008a). However, this data is being used to show only the relative popularity of sites used by members of Anonymous over the past year. Still, this data should be interpreted as indicating general levels of popularity and is not meant to be a specific measure of the popularity of the sites in question.

Figure one shows that the activity of the 4 most popular websites related to Project Chanology has remained fairly stable over the past year, with the exception of a noticeable spike and subsequent drop in activity at 4chan. This stability over time demonstrates that the chosen sites of research remained active throughout Project Chanology and did not experience any catastrophic down time or sudden fluctuations in activity. Having enumerated the sites selected for research, I turn now to an explication of the research methodology employed at each research site.

As stated previously, I first came to identify 4chan as a research site after selecting Anonymous as a subject of research concerning Internet communities. I took interest in observing Project Chanology initially as it was a large subject of discussion among members of Anonymous and thus was a natural target for the collection of rich observational data on the activities of Anonymous. After the successful global street
movements of February 10th, I decided to focus my research specifically on Project Chanology and its implications for broader understandings of social movements and online community.

Qualitative Data Collection

While at 4chan I engaged in participant observation in an effort to construct a narrative account of Project Chanology. The broader objective of this observation is to construct a qualitative case study of Chanology comprised of data from websites used in the planning and execution of Chanology. I spent time browsing the conversations at the “Random” imageboard, called “/b/”, or just simply “b.” B is by far the most popular and active imageboard at 4chan and the two are often referred to interchangeably. While 4chan contains many imageboards, all references to 4chan within this document should be understood to be references to b unless stated otherwise.

In addition to being the most popular image board on 4chan, b also serves as the place of origin for the group Anonymous and is the closest thing to the “home” of Anonymous. Conversations at b are grouped into “threads” which consist of an original post and a subsequent series of replies to that original post. The front page of b displays recent threads with the first post of each thread visible and the most recent replies to the threads underneath their respective original posts with a different color background to distinguish the replies from the original posts. If a thread contains more than three replies,

31 The website 4chan.org consists of multiple “imageboards.” Image boards are similar to message boards, however greater emphasis is placed on the posting of images instead of the posting of textual messages. Despite this emphasis, almost all posts have a textual component; and purely textual posts typically outnumber posts containing only images.
In making observations, I followed a general procedure. I navigated to the front page of 4chan and scrolled through the posts looking for threads concerning Project Chanology. Upon finding a thread relating to Project Chanology I would navigate to the reply page of the thread and read the contents of the thread in full. While reading the contents of the threads I would jot down notes in a text editor open on the same computer used to view the thread. This allowed me to read through the threads at a methodical pace, recording any thoughts and ideas I had while reading through the threads. I used a stream of consciousness approach (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to my notes, jotting things down as they occurred to me.

After reading through the thread, I refreshed the reply page in order to view replies that had been made in the time spent reading through the thread. 4chan is a highly active message board and it was typically necessary to refresh threads several times before the activity of the thread died down. The high rate of activity on 4chan also meant that threads would rapidly move from the front page, replaced by newer threads. Eventually, threads with no activity are deleted from the server to save space and are then lost. To avoid losing large, detailed threads, I saved the threads as html files on the same computer used to view the threads. Some of the largest threads related to Project Chanology were selected by the moderators of 4chan to be preserved in the 4chan
archive- which stores selected threads in their original form on a separate server indefinitely for subsequent viewing.

In examining threads at 4chan, special attention was paid to the rhetorical frameworks that members deployed in order to convince other members of Anonymous to support and take part in Project Chanology. There was a great deal of resistance to the initial proposals for Project Chanology and rhetorical framing played a key role in convincing detractors that Chanology would be entertaining, successful, and would fall within the nebulous normative order of Anonymous. Attention was also given to the strategic use of internet memes, particularly references to popular raids from Anonymous’ past. These aspects of communication were examined closely in order to compare the framing of Chanology to similar efforts in other social movements, and to develop an understanding of the framing of Project Chanology within a broader claimsmaking process. In doing so, comparisons may be drawn between genesis of Project Chanology and that of other social movements.

One of the most important aspects of the research at 4chan was gathering information on the norms, values, and overall culture of Anonymous. The group is known for its esoteric, meme driven culture and a somewhat dark sense of humor (Grossman, 2008). In order to accurately analyze data drawn from observations of Anonymous, it is essential to understand the often obscure internet memes used by the group. In addition, the group often uses intentionally offensive or shocking humor as a means of differentiating insiders- who “get” the joke, from outsiders who would take the humor at face value and find it highly offensive. As will be seen the use of such humor developed
into a key fault line separating individuals familiar with Anonymous before Project Chanology from those who were first introduced to Anonymous through media coverage of Project Chanology.

Identical methodological techniques were employed for the collection and analysis of observational data from the other “chan” sites- 711chan and 315chan. These websites use the same software as 4chan and so have a layout identical to that of 4chan. As with 4chan, 711chan and 315chan were searched for threads related to Project Chanology. These threads were read, and notes were taken for subsequent analysis. Notes and stored web pages were subsequently analyzed through the use of grounded theoretical techniques, as outlined above. In analyzing data from 315chan and 711chan, attention was again given to the processes of rhetorical framing and claimsmaking deployed by individuals seeking to guide the development of Chanology. Attention was also given to responses of Project Chanology to challenges from the Church of Scientology. Of these three sites, the majority of observed activity, and thus the majority of observations, came from 711chan.

Similar methodological techniques were used for the collection and analysis of data from Encyclopedia Dramatica. The process of gathering data was altered to fit the format of Encyclopedia Dramatica, which is laid out in a manner similar to that of Wikipedia. Pages or “articles” from Encyclopedia Dramatica were gathered via a type of snowballing procedure. The first page selected for analysis was the page dedicated to Project Chanology. At the bottom of the article, there are several links to related articles under a “see also” section. Each "see also" link relevant to Project Chanology was
followed and analyzed. The see also links of these pages were subsequently followed. In all, 116 articles and the associated talk pages of each article were selected for analysis.

While the articles at Encyclopedia Dramatica are nominally satirical encyclopedic articles, I did not treat the articles as purely textual accounts of knowledge related to Project Chanology. Far from static, the content of the articles observed were constantly and dynamically changing- reflecting the addition of new information as well as changing attitudes towards the subject of the respective articles. Articles were read and analyzed as ongoing dialogues rather than as static pieces.

This approach allowed for the gathering of data on the ever shifting attitudes of members of Anonymous towards Project Chanology. The wiki software used by Encyclopedia Dramatica archives a record of each revision to every article. This information was leveraged to allow for the observation of changes to articles over time- allowing the researcher to track changing attitudes. As the articles at Encyclopedia Dramatica can be edited by anyone who creates a free account at the site, the ongoing struggle over the creation of articles related to Chanology played out as individuals added new information and altered existing accounts to reflect what they saw to be the proper or “true” account of what was taking place. Analyzed this way, the content of articles at Encyclopedia Dramatica can be understood as markers of the general consensus attitudes regarding Project Chanology and related topics.

Each article at Encyclopedia Dramatica, as with other Wiki sites, has an associated “talk page,” on which users can discuss the article and come to decisions about matters such as what information the article should contain or in which style it should be
written. These talk pages were also selected for analysis and were treated in much the same manner as threads posted at the chan sites. The talk pages essentially represent ongoing dialog inscribed in a textual format. Analysis of talk pages focused upon the evolution and resolution of debates over the accepted meanings and understandings of Project Chanology, particularly the stated motives of those involved with Project Chanology.

The wiki at www.partyvan.info, known as the “insurgency wiki,” was analyzed in a manner similar to that used for Encyclopedia Dramatica. The wiki was searched for articles relating to Project Chanology. After identifying relevant articles they were analyzed in the same manner as those at Encyclopedia Dramatica. The insurgency wiki serves largely as a strategic resource used for the planning and coordination of raids and served this function during the first several months of Project Chanology. At the onset of Chanology, the insurgency wiki was not well known and thus also served as an important site for coordinating the quasi legal or illegal aspects of the first phases of Project Chanology. As Anonymous moved away from cyber attacks and the insurgency wiki became better known, even to those outside of Anonymous, the wiki focused less on the planning of cyber attacks and more on the coordination of real world protests and the archiving of information relating to Project Chanology. As with Encyclopedia Dramatica, the associated talk pages of relevant articles at the Partyvan Wiki were also selected for analysis.

The chan sites and the two wikis provided the majority of data collected through qualitative research, however there were two additional sites selected for research. The
first of these research sites are the forums at www.enturbulation.org. Like many websites related to Project Chanology, enturbulation.org (hereafter simply referred to as Enturbulation) began as a hub for the coordination and planning of cyber attacks on Church of Scientology internet assets. This quickly changed however and Enturbulation came to be intentionally constructed as the “public face” of Chanology. As such, the dark humor typical of Anonymous was largely self censored at Enturbulation. The site eventually evolved into the home of individuals taking a moralistic approach to Project Chanology and those who identified with the stated beneficent goals of Project Chanology, which had existed previously as merely a façade to maintain positive public image. Near the end of 2008, the server went offline. However, the database containing all of the usernames and forum posts were successfully moved and hosted at a new site called WhyWeProtest.net, which, as of April 2009 is still operational and largely serving the same role as Enturbulation.org.

Enturbulation.org consists of several message boards in which individuals can post topics to which other users respond. While there is a theoretical limit to how many active threads the message boards can hold based upon available bandwidth, in practice threads were only abandoned once the level of activity in the thread had naturally reached a minimum, usually due to interest in the topic of the thread fading. In this way, the conversations at enturbulation are far more stable than those at the chan sites.

The threads at enturbulation were treated as conversations and analyzed in a manner similar to that used to analyze threads at the chan sites. An important difference between enturbulation and these chan sites is that users at enturbulation register unique
user IDs, which are visible to all readers of the forums. This allows users to reliably communicate with one another and also allows users to establish stable identities. As noted by others (Bellini & Vargas, 2003; Irriberri & Leroy, 2009), these features helped to sustain and strengthen the community at Enturbulation. However these features also contributed towards gradually producing a culture different from that of Anonymous. While these developments are beyond the time frame selected for the present study, they pose interesting questions for further research.

The final site selected for observation was comprised of several IRC chat rooms used by members of Anonymous. IRC stands for “internet relay chat” and is a network of chat rooms that developed as one of the first large scale internet based social networks. A given IRC server can host tens or even thousands of chat rooms, which are called “channels.” For the present research I followed the conversations at the main channel used for planning and discussion during Project Chanology. For most of the duration of the research, this was the channel “#Xenu” on the “Partyvan” IRC server.

Communication in IRC channels takes place in real time. Each user registers a given user name linked to an email address and, if required by the server, creates a password. The standards for creating an ID at the Partyvan server were extremely lax and it was in fact expected that users would not use their real email addresses when registering with the server. The Partyvan server did require users to create a password, but there was no expectation that the rooms were private. Passwords were simply employed to prevent one person from usurping the user name of another individual.
To communicate in IRC, the user types in messages which show up on the screens of all other users along with the ID of the person sending the message as well as a time stamp. Communication moved extremely rapidly in the IRC channels, particularly during the first phases of Project Chanology. Despite the speed, the text based nature of the communication and the fact that the IRC client used by the researcher kept an ongoing log of communication enabled the researcher to review the conversations from a given observational period at a leisurely pace.

In analyzing the conversations at the IRC channels, I was focused not on specific statements but rather on the general flow of communication- observing how group members framed their activities and how the group came to agree on what kinds of collective action to take. Being real time, the communication at IRC was far more dynamic than the communication observed at the other research sites and provided important insight into the nature of ongoing communication of group members, the norms and values shared by these group members, as well as how members sought to distinguish outsiders or “spies” from insiders.

While observing interaction on the IRC channel I jotted down notes in a text editor. I saved text copies of particular interesting or insightful conversations for subsequent analysis. While analyzing the data I was interested in the processes by which members of Anonymous were able to coordinate their activities and reach consensus decisions on what actions should be taken and how those actions were to be presented to the public. Such information is of particular importance for answering questions regarding the way in which the culture of Anonymous shaped the growth and evolution
of Project Chanology. Having explicated the methodological structure of the qualitative
analysis I turn now to an explanation of the methodological techniques used for the social
network analysis of Anonymous.

Network Analysis

Encyclopedia dramatica was selected as the research site for the collection of
network data. The intent of this data collection was to provide information on the overall
structure of one of the communities in which members of Anonymous are active.
Encyclopedia dramatica provided such a community, and the wiki software upon which
the site is built greatly facilitated the data collection process. A single network was
constructed from communications among active users at Encyclopedia Dramatica.
Network data was drawn from the associated user talk32 pages of sampled members of
Encyclopedia Dramatica. The sample was selected by first constructing a list of articles
related to Project Chanology. This list was formed from all articles at Encyclopedia
Dramatica belonging to the “Chanology” category.33 Next the history34 page of each
article was examined and the user names associated with each edit were collected,
producing a list of all users who had made at least one edit to a Chanology related article

32 On wiki sites, such as Encyclopedia Dramatica, each user typically has a “User Page” and a “User Talk
Page.” The user page can be customized as the user sees fit and is often used to provide biographical
information on the User or his or her interests. The user talk page functions as a bulletin board in which
other users can post comments. The user pages of wiki users, taken together, serve as an inter-user
communication system for members of the given wiki.
33 Users creating new articles add category tags early on to attract editors with similar interests. Thus
almost all articles at Encyclopedia Dramatica have category tags. The “Chanology” tag contains 114
articles.
34 At sites using WikiMedia software, such as Encyclopedia Dramatica, each page on which edits are made
has an associated history page which provides a complete list of every edit made, the size of the page (in
bytes) after the edits were made, a time stamp of when the edits were made, the username of the person
making the edit, and any comments the editor may have chosen to leave.
at Encyclopedia Dramatica. Duplicates were removed from this list. After the removal of duplicates and users with various missing data, the sample contained 393 unique user IDs.

**Data Collection**

A list of the URL of the history page corresponding to the user talk page of each sampled user was compiled for data collection. The data collection process was facilitated by the use of a program known as a “web scraper.” A web scraper is a semi-autonomous program that runs on a host machine and, from that host, navigates to a given web site or multiple web sites and generates a record of content from those sites specified by the user. This data may include, but is not limited to, text, images, or HTML code. A web scraping program should not be confused with a web spider, which is a semi-autonomous program that scrapes websites, but follows hyperlinks within a site to find new pages to scrape according to a user defined algorithm.

For the present research, the product “Webscraper Plus” created by Velocityscape\(^{35}\) was used. The program provides a web scraper, SQL database management, exportation of data to several native formats (such as those used by Excel), and an integrated graphical front end interface for the operation of the program and management of data storage. The web scraper was given a list of the history page of the associated user talk page of each user in the sample. Upon navigating to the proper web page, the scraper gathered the user ID of each user leaving a comment on the page, the timestamp of each uploaded comment, the cumulative size (in bytes) of the user talk page

\(^{35}\) For more information, see http://www.velocityscape.com/Products/WebScraperPlus.aspx.
after each edit, and any comments left by the user making the comment. This produced a network with full data on the 393 sampled users and a graph representing a total of 1,259 users.

In addition to the generation of a sample for network analysis, the web scraper was used to gather data on the number of edits to Chanology related Encyclopedia Dramatica articles by sampled users. In addition, data was gathered regarding the number and size of each edit a user made to his or her own user talk page. This data was gathered to develop metrics to operationalize the relative activity level of each user regarding Chanology related edits, as well as to gauge the overall level of community involvement of each user. These metrics play a vital role in examining the relationship between the structure of the network graph and the empirical roles played by members of the community. By combining an analysis of network structure with a case by case analysis of individual nodes in the network, a much more detailed picture of the structure of the community at Encyclopedia Dramatica can be developed. When combined with a qualitative case study, this produces understanding of the relationship between action and community structure and how these factors interacted to produce Project Chanology.

The gathered data was exported to an excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet was then copied into a new excel spreadsheet created with an excel add-on called NodeXL. NodeXL is a freeware program that allows for the creation of network graphs and the calculation of basic descriptive statistics for those graphs, including graph density,

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36 The program provides an internal check of its accuracy with regards to correctly identifying and recording desired information, based upon comparing an actual count of items recorded, to an expected count of those items. Each run of the program yielded an accuracy level greater than 99%.
measures of betweenness and centrality, and degree counts. NodeXL was primarily used
for the management of the database of edge lists and the generation of network graphs.
The excel workbook based program allowed for quick and efficient management of data
and the rapid generation of a wide array of network graphs.

More complex and computation intensive analyses were carried out using the
freeware program “Pajek.”37 Pajek provides a wide variety of algorithms for analysis of
network data, ranging from basic descriptive network statistics (such as vertex counts,
degree distributions, and graph density) to advanced recursive routines for exploring
graph structure. Pajek also provides more robust, but far less efficient visualization of
network data when compared with NodeXL. Unless otherwise stated, all computer-aided
analysis of network data was done with Pajek and all network graphs were generated with
NodeXL. A graph of the posting activity on the “Project Chanology” article reveals
congruence between editing activity and the offline protests, with a lull in activity
immediately preceding each offline protest and a spike in activity following each protest.
This indicates that there is correspondence between levels of activity at Encyclopedia
Dramatica and the overall flow of activity within Chanology.

37 For more information, see http://pajek.imfm.si/doku.php.
Overall Network Measures

Initially, a graph of the entire network was constructed to provide an overall feel for the shape of the network, as well as to provide a starting point for locating potentially important users within the network structure. Subsequent to analysis of the network, other graphs were produced displaying subgraphs and ego graphs of empirically interesting individuals. The graphs were laid out using a common energy based algorithm (Scott,

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38 The graph displays the number of daily edits to the article on the y-axis with the date of edits arrayed along the x-axis. The labeled points correspond to the date and name of each protest event.
Directed force algorithms are ideal for networks of the size generated for the present research, and provide reasonably clear and aesthetically pleasing graphs conducive to analysis (Newman, 2003).

After creating the network graph, descriptive statistics were obtained for the graph. Of these descriptive statistics, the distribution of in degrees was obtained as a check on the validity of the sample used for the generation of the network. The in degree of each node in a network refers to the number of inward directed ties to other nodes in the network (Scott, 2007). The out degree of each node in a network refers to the number of outward directed ties to other nodes in the network. For the present analysis, in degree is operationalized as the number of users leaving messages on one’s user talk page. Out degree is operationalized as the number of user talk pages on which one leaves messages. The distribution of degrees for the network followed a power law distribution. As Newman (2003) notes, social networks typically display exponential distributions of vertex degree. Thus one should expect that a valid sample of users from Encyclopedia Dramatica should also follow a power law distribution.

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39 The Fruchterman-Reingold directed force algorithm was used for graph layouts. Similar to other directed force methods, the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm is a recursive process that simulates attractive and repulsive forces between graph nodes and attempts to minimize the potential energy of the system. In this case, nodes are modeled like charged particles according to Coulomb’s law and edges are modeled as ideal springs, according to Hooke’s law, connecting the nodes. Thus each node is repelled from other nodes and is drawn towards any other nodes to which it is attached. The nodes are initially laid out randomly and the algorithm moves the nodes according to the force constants acting on them. As the potential energy or “temperature” of the system lowers, the algorithm moves the nodes less and less with each loop. After motion falls below a given threshold, the algorithm decides that the energy of the graph has reached a minimum, and terminates. For more information, see (Newman, 2003).

40 For the check only the in degree of the sampled users was selected as data on the in degree of non sampled users was incomplete.
In addition to degree distribution, several descriptive graph metrics were calculated to provide characteristics of the overall structure of the network. The first calculated value was graph density which is characterized as follows. Let the number of nodes in a graph be represented as \( n \), and the total number of lines\(^{41} \) be represented as \( \ell \), then the density (\( \Delta \)) of the graph is the total number of actual lines present divided by the total number of possible lines (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

\[
\Delta = \frac{\ell}{n(n-1)/2}
\]

The density provides an overall measure of the overall completeness of the graph. A graph with a density of 1.0 would possess every possible direct connection among individual nodes while a graph with a density of 0.0 would have no connections among nodes.

The mean clustering coefficient of the network was collected as well and is calculated simply as the sum of the clustering coefficients within the network divided by the total number of nodes within the network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). This value serves as a measure of overall cliquishness within the network.\(^{42} \) In network analysis terms, a clique refers specifically to a set of three users which (in a directed network) all share bidirectional edges with one another (Scott, 2007). Networks with a high degree of cliquishness often have many nodes strongly connected to nearby nodes, but a lower overall level of connectedness and ease of information flow (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

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\(^{41}\) Since graph density is calculated based upon the number of connected nodes compared to the total possible number of connections among nodes, the calculation is always preformed as if the graph were to be considered undirected (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

\(^{42}\) *ibid.*
Also related to cliquishness, a complete triadic census of the network was preformed. In network analysis a triad is a set of three users with connections between at least two of the users. A triadic census is a count of the number of each type of triad within a given network graph. Pajek provides a recursive algorithm for the detection of triads within a network. This algorithm was used to provide a count of the number of complete cyclic triads within the network. A complete cyclic triad, as shown in Figure 4, is a set of three nodes all sharing bidirectional edges (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Thus a count of the number of cyclic triads in a network provides an absolute count of the number of cliques within the network, compared to the overall clustering coefficient, which provides an average measure of cliquishness within a network.

![Complete cyclic triad](image)

*Figure 3: Complete cyclic triad.*

**Nodal Attributes**

Having obtained visual representations and descriptive metrics of the graph, I moved on to the next phase of the network analysis. As previously stated, one of the
primary goals of this network analysis was to provide insight into the community
structure of Anonymous and to investigate what, if any, leadership positions existed
within the group, and, if they exist, what form they take.

Community Variables

Mathematical techniques within network analysis exist which draw out important
vertices within a graph (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). These techniques are useful and
provide valuable structural information about the position of person (represented as a
vertex) within a network. However this information is somewhat abstract and it is
important to combine this information with other measures of that person’s status within
the community in order to arrive at meaningful characterizations of social relations
among members of the community (Scott, 2007).

To provide this contextual information, two measures of an individual’s level of
involvement with the community were constructed. The first of these metrics is a
measure of the complexity of the user page of each member from the sample. This
measure was obtained by using the webscraper to gather each edit made to a given
person’s user page, the ID of the user making the edit, the timestamp of each edit, and the
size of the edit in bytes. This list was then imported into excel. All edits not made by
users to their own respective user pages were removed. Finally, each edit was weighted
according to the size, in bytes, of the edit. From this list of edits, a measure of the overall
size of edits to the user page was constructed as follows. Let $\psi_r$ represent the size (in
bytes) of the earliest sampled edit, then the total volume of user page activity ($\omega_{USER}$) is

$$\omega_{USER} = \sum_{i=r}^{\infty} \sqrt{(\psi_{r+1} - \psi_r)^2}.$$
The rationale for this metric is the assumption that individuals more involved in the Encyclopedia Dramatica community will put more time and effort into the construction of their user pages in order to more firmly establish an identity within the community. It was necessary to weight these edits because not all edits add or change the same amount of content. For instance, one user may have a highly complex user page created with five edits while another user may have a fairly Spartan user page created with five edits. A simple raw count of the number of edits to the user page would indicate the same level of involvement from each individual despite a significant difference in the amount of effort each user put into his or her respective user page. To resolve this, each edit was weighted according to its size, in bytes, such that larger edits contributed more to the measure of community involvement of each user. Specifically, the weight was calculated as the square root of the square of the difference between the size of the article after a given edit and the size of the article before the edit.

The second metric consists of a measure of the editing activity of each user in the sample. Each user at Encyclopedia Dramatica has a page that displays all of the article edits they have made. The webscraper was used to obtain a list of all of the article edits made by each user in the sample, the title of the article being edited, and the timestamp of each edit. This metric provides a simple measure of the level of editing activity of each user in the sample. Users with higher levels of editing activity are presumed to be more involved in the goal of ensuring Encyclopedia Dramatica has significant volumes of high quality content. Prior to analysis, the total number of article edits was separated into a
count of the number of edits to Chanology related articles. This allowed for the separate measurement of editing activity strictly related to Project Chanology.

Two other metrics of user involvement were constructed. The first was a subjective measure of the quality of Chanology related edits formed from a review of the edits of each user. This was operationalized as a trichotomous variable whose levels are low (0), medium (1), and high (2). Low was coded as users who made a handful of minor edits to Chanology related articles, such as grammar fixes or those who made a single substantive edit, such as adding a picture or significant body of text to an article. Medium refers to those users who made a number of substantive edits to an article or who made a very large volume of minor edits to a variety of articles. Finally high referred to users that made substantive edits to a large number of articles, or created new articles. The final metric was a measure of whether or not a user used a user name in more than one research site. This subjective measure was operationalized as a simple dichotomous variable whose levels were no (0), and yes (1).

It was important to construct multiple measures of user community involvement because there are different ways in which users may participate in the community and these different modes of activity do not necessarily go hand in hand with one another. Other analyses of online communities (Fisher, Smith, & Welser, 2006) have noted that, as with other communities, members may play different roles and participate in different ways. For instance one user may not put much effort into their user talk page but still put much work into editing articles. Another user may spend less time editing articles, but spend a good deal of time reading and leaving messages on talk pages. A single,
monolithic, measure of activity is likely to only accurately measure one type of participation. Thus, multiple measures of participation were taken for each user in order to better capture the actual level of participation of those users.

Network Variables

Having obtained measures of the level of participation of sampled users, I next produced a set of network variables to characterize the structural and relational positions of each user within the network. In selecting which network variables to gather I am searching for three key types of structural significance. The first of these is concerned with the importance of a given individual for the transmission of information throughout the graph. With a directed network graph, it is assumed that information may only flow among connected nodes, and may only flow in the direction of that node (Scott, 2007). A path from any one vertex on a graph to any other vertex along edges is called a walk. The shortest walk between two vertices is called a geodesic and represents the most efficient route for the flow of information between those two vertices. A vertex that lies on many geodesics is said to possess structural significance as many other vertices are dependent upon it for the successful transmission of information. Likewise, the individual represented by that vertex is likely to have an important position within his or her community as many members of the group rely on that person for communication with other group members (Scott, 2007).

The first, and most simple, measure of this form of structural significance was to calculate the *closeness centrality* of each node in the network. Broadly stated, closeness centrality is a measure of the relative distance of a given node from all other nodes in the
graph (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The algorithm used by Pajek for the calculation of
closeness centrality is adapted from Sabadussi’s (1966) work and is stated as follows: let
vertex $x_i$ be a member of a graph with $n$ number of vertices, and let the geodesic between
$x_i$ and $y_j$ be defined as $d(x_i, y_j)$. The closeness centrality ($C_c$) of vertex $x_i$ is then defined as

$$C_c(x_i) = \frac{n - 1}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} d(x_i, y_j)}$$

With a directed graph, each vertex has two measures of closeness centrality, one each for
the in and out degree of the vertex. Both were calculated. These measures indicate the
average distance a user is from all other users in the sample and indicates the degree to
which this user must rely upon intermediaries to reach all points within the graph.

The next measure of centrality calculated more closely examines the potential
importance of nodes for the transmission of information and is called betweenness
centrality. Betweenness centrality measures upon how many geodesics a given vertex lays
compared to the total number of geodesics in the graph. In the context of the analysis of
this online community, the betweenness centrality of a vertex provides a measure of the
importance of the represented individual for the successful transmission of information
throughout the graph. The higher the betweenness centrality of a vertex, the more others
rely on that individual for communication with other members of the community. Those
individuals with the highest betweenness centralities play vital roles in connecting
disparate groups within the community (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The algorithm used
by Pajek for the calculation of betweenness centrality is adapted from Freeman (1977) and
is defined as follows: let $g_{yz}$ represent the total number of geodesics between vertices $y$
and $z$. Let $g_{yz}(x_i)$ represent the total number of geodesics between vertices $y$ and $z$ that pass through vertex $x_i$. The betweeness centrality ($C_B$) of $x_i$ is then

$$C_B(x_i) = \sum_{y<z} \frac{g_{yz}(x_i)}{g_{yz}}$$

Adapted for directed networks, the algorithm is modified to use the following measure of betweenness centrality where $n$ represents the total number of vertices in the graph

$$C'_B(x_i) = \frac{C_B(x_i)}{(n-1)(n-2)}$$

The next form of structural significance investigated seeks to measure the importance of a group member in the eyes of other group members. Broadly stated, this is operationalized by measures of the level of communications directed at a given node on the graph, also known as measures of prestige (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Measures of prestige are calculated from the influence domain of an actor, which is defined as the set of all vertices that can reach the vertex representing the specified actor. A common, basic measure of prestige is obtained by dividing the influence domain of the vertex $d(x_i,j)$ by the total number of other vertices in the graph ($n-1$).

This basic measure of influence is problematic in strongly connected graphs since most vertices in the graph can be reached by all other vertices, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from this measure (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In strongly directed networks, the standardized in degree centrality of each vertex is used, and is defined as the in degree of the vertex $x_i$ ($C_D(x_i) = \sum_z x_{yz}$) divided by the number of

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*ibid.*
other vertices in the graph \((n - 1)\), giving us the standardized in degree centrality as:

\[
C_b(x_i) = \frac{d(x_i)}{n - 1}.
\]

In addition to in degree centrality, the *proximity prestige* of each vertex was calculated. Proximity prestige represents the ratio of a node’s proportional influence domain to the average distance of the actors in the node’s influence domain. Essentially the proximity prestige index weights prestige according to closeness (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The proximity prestige index used for the present analysis is adapted from Lin (1976) and is stated as the following: let \(I_i\) represent the number of vertices in the influence domain of \(x_i\) and let each geodesic between \(x_i\) and another vertex in its influence domain be represented, generally, as \(d(x_j, x_i)\). The proximity prestige index \((P_P)\) is then defined as

\[
P_P(x_i) = \frac{I_i/(n - 1)}{\sum d(x_j, x_i)/I_i}
\]

The final measure of prestige was obtained by calculating the *hub* and *authority weights* for each vertex. Vertices with large authority weights are considered good authorities and have strong levels of inward directed communications. Vertices with large hub weights are considered good hubs and point to many authorities. Vertices pointed to by many hubs are considered to be particularly good authorities. In the context of a social group, authorities are considered individuals to whom many turn for the transmission of information. Likewise, hubs are individuals whom have connections to several authorities. Both play key roles as brokers in the dissemination of communication across the network. The algorithm Pajek uses is adopted from Kleinberg (1999), and is similar in
function to the algorithms used by online search engines.\textsuperscript{44} Hub and authority weights were calculated for each vertex.

The final form of structural significance investigated seeks to measure the relative strength of each vertex’s ties to surrounding vertices. The first of these measures is called the \textit{clustering coefficient} and it is a measure of the relative “completeness” of the subnetwork of a given vertex and its immediate neighbors, which are all of those vertices with distance of 1 from the given vertex. This is called the \textit{1-neighborhood} of the vertex and its value is the same as the sum of the in and out degree of the vertex (Newman, 2003). An individual with a high clustering coefficient is more strongly integrated with those individuals closest to him or her in the network structure.\textsuperscript{45} These individuals should be expected to have solid relations with their closest neighbors and be well integrated, locally, within the community. Global integration of individuals with high clustering coefficients depends on having a strongly connected graph in which the individuals within a given person’s 1-neighborhood also have ties to members outside of the 1-neighborhood (Newman, 2003).

The clustering coefficient of a vertex and its 1-neighborhood is calculated by taking the number of triangles of a vertex and dividing that by the number of triples of a vertex (Newman, 2003). A triple of a vertex refers to two vertices within the 1-neighborhood of the vertex in question, which are connected to this vertex, but not to one another.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{44} The inner workings of Kleinberg’s algorithm are somewhat complex and beyond the scope of the present analysis. At a basic level each vertex \( v \) has two weights \( x_v, y_v \in [0,1] \). Using the adjacency matrix \( A \), the hub weight is calculated as the principle eigenvector solution of \( AA^T \) and the authority weight is calculated as the principle eigenvector solution of \( A^TA \) (Kleinberg, 1999).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}}
another. A triangle of a vertex is the same as a triple with the important difference that the two vertices in the 1-neighborhood are connected to each other as well.\textsuperscript{46} Thus the clustering coefficient is essentially the ratio of completed triangles to the total possible number of triangles in a neighborhood and is stated as follows\textsuperscript{47}: let $\lambda_G(x_i)$ denote the number of triangles on vertex $x_i$ and let $\tau_G(x_i)$ denote the number of triples on vertex $x_i$, then the clustering coefficient ($CC_i$) of vertex $x_i$ is

$$CC_i = \frac{\lambda_G(x_i)}{\tau_G(x_i)}$$

Upon collecting the full set of measures of each member in the sample, the final phase of the analysis of the network required the comparison of the gathered network data to the obtained measures of community involvement at Encyclopedia Dramatica. Such comparison allows for the identification of important or structurally interesting individuals within the community and also provides a means of characterizing the overall structure of the community as it relates to particularly active Chanology editors. In addition, it allows for subgraphs of the ego networks of structurally interesting individuals to be produced and analyzed in an effort to detect structural similarities among users with specific sets of network and community involvement measures. This allows for greater exploration and understanding of the nature of the community at Encyclopedia Dramatica as it relates to Project Chanology. Having reviewed the

\textsuperscript{46} ibid
\textsuperscript{47} Adapted from (Newman, 2003).
methodological techniques employed for the collection of data, I turn now to an overview of the results of this data collection.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

A Narrative Account of Chanology

In the following section I provide an analysis of the data gathered to be used in providing answers to the research questions that have guided the present research. I begin by reporting the qualitative data gathered on Project Chanology. This data is arranged chronologically and thematically in the form of a narrative of the events leading up to Project Chanology, as well as the development of Chanology from February of 2008 through the end of April of 2008. This period of time encompasses the genesis of Chanology, the shift to offline protests, and the eventual abandonment of Chanology by much of the group that created it. In the following section, observations are drawn from this data. In addition to qualitative data, information on the quantitative data gathered from Encyclopedia Dramatica is outlined. The meaning of this data is explored in depth in the subsequent section.

As with any collective social action, Project Chanology must be understood within proper social and historical contexts. To do so it is important to understand the broader history of the conflict between the Church of Scientology and internet based critics. It is in large part because of these historical conflicts that internet groups initially took note of and reacted with anger to the efforts of the Church of Scientology to remove a video from the internet. Thus in constructing a narrative account of Project Chanology, one must begin with the first major conflict between the Church and online critics.
Precedents

The Church of Scientology has, throughout its existence placed a high value on secrecy, and has been known to be highly protective of what it considers to be protected church materials (Bainbridge & Stark, 1980; Peckham, 1998; Atack, 1990). The Church also has a history of taking aggressive litigious action against its critics (Atack, 1990; Peckham, 1998). As with some religious sects, Scientology considers its doctrines and scriptures to be privileged information only meant to be revealed to individuals who have been properly prepared to receive such information (Hubbard, 1998). However, unlike most religious groups, the Church of Scientology has copyrighted all associated texts, which are held by a separate corporate entity, the Religious Technology Corporation (Lamont, 1986). Often times the church targets its critics by claiming copyright infringement (Atack, 1990; Lamont, 1986).

The first major conflict between the Church of Scientology and online based critics occurred in 1994 on the Usenet group alt.religion.scientology48. The group began as a place for general discussion of Scientology but quickly developed into gathering place for critics of the Church, including many former members (Peckham, 1998). Typical discussions on alt.religion.scientology (or “ARS”) involved reports on recent activities by the Church, testimonials from former members, discussion of Scientology doctrines, and discussion of alleged unethical or illegal actions committed by the Church.

48 Usenet is an early Internet BBS (Bulletin Board System). Usenet groups can be thought of as the forerunners of modern Internet forums. Usenet groups allowed users to post and read messages stored on a centralized server. At the height of its popularity thousands of highly active Usenet groups existed dedicated to a diverse array of interests. Usenet groups still exist (and some are still extremely active), however their popularity has decreased as more user friendly internet forum software has proliferated.
Upon learning of ARS, Church officials became concerned that the group’s activity could harm Scientology’s public image\(^{49}\) (Peckham, 1998), and thus attempted to silence the source of dissent.

The Church began by threatening legal action against individual members of ARS, claiming that those members had engaged in copyright infringement by describing and discussing private Church scriptures in a public forum (Peckham, 1998). Representatives of the Church demanded that group members no longer engage in open discussion of copyrighted church materials and that existing archives of such material be removed. Group members targeted by these demands responded defiantly, refusing to cease their discussions or to remove archived materials. These group members felt, quite strongly, that their discussions fell well within the protections of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, as well as similar protections existing under other nations’ legal systems as well as international standards of human rights (Peckham, 1998). As a result of these views, members of ARS saw the Church’s claims of copyright infringement to be an attempt to silence its critics and to censor the content on ARS. In their refusal to comply with the demands of the Church, members of ARS sought to reframe the conflict as one between freedom of speech on the Internet and the repressive actions of a financially powerful organization (Peckham, 1998).

\(^{49}\) According to Peckham (1998), it is interesting to note that prior to the Church’s involvement ARS was a relatively little known Usenet group. However following the actions of the Church of Scientology, interest in the group increased dramatically, and several groups devoted to defending free speech on the internet rushed to defend ARS.
The Church of Scientology found its claims of copyright infringement to be of little success in silencing its critics on ARS. Many internet communities, particularly those that developed earlier in the history of the Internet place an extremely high value on the free exchange of information, often holding a romantic view of the Internet as a place free from the constraint of powerful societal groups, such as governments or corporations (Shade, 1996). Thus in framing the actions of the Church of Scientology as an assault on free speech on the Internet, defenders of ARS effectively deployed a discourse which was highly salient to other Internet based communities. As a result, many other Internet communities, as well as groups who considered themselves to be defenders of free speech online (such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation), publically supported ARS and sought to publicize what they saw as unreasonable attempts at censorship by the Church of Scientology (Grossman, 1995).

Due to a combination of sustained resistance from ARS and the group’s new supporters, and lack of legal support for their claims, the Church of Scientology was forced to abandon their efforts to have what they felt to be objectionable material removed from ARS due to copyright infringement. The Church shifted tactics and attempted to generate public sympathy for their cause by portraying themselves as victims of religious bigotry and hate speech (Peckham, 1998; Grossman, 1995). As one representative of the Church stated

[Alt.religion.scientology] is really a forum for a handful of individuals to engage in bigoted attacks upon the Church of Scientology and its parishioners. . . Ninety-nine point nine percent of [the comments] are no more criticism than it is
criticism to abuse a black by calling him 'nigger' or a Jew by labeling him a 'kike.' (Goodman, 1996: p 18)

By framing ARS as a group of religious bigots, the Church of Scientology sought to invert the discourse deployed by members of ARS and portray the Church as victims, not perpetrators, of abuse (Peckham, 1998). As scholars of social movements have noted, portraying oneself as a victim of unjust abuse is a powerful rhetoric often deployed by groups seeking to gain legitimacy and sympathy in the eyes of the public (Best, 2007; Tilly 2004). Despite their efforts, representatives of the Church were unable to convince others that ARS was facilitating hate speech and intolerance and therefore needed to be shut down (Peckham, 1998).

Concurrent to their efforts to have ARS shut down, Scientology officials allegedly engaged in an active campaign to destroy alt.religion.scientology from within (Peckham, 1998; Grossman, 1995; Post, 1996). These efforts were all designed to disrupt the normal functioning of the community. The Church employed three tactical approaches aimed at disrupting ARS. The first of these tactics was to flood\textsuperscript{50} alt.religion.scientology with nonsense posts or posts that were supportive of scientology (Grossman, 1995). Doing so...

\textsuperscript{50} The term “flood” is commonly used to describe the act of bombarding a message board with off topic or otherwise useless posts in order to make it difficult for users to find useful posts. Flooding is still a common tactic used by individuals or groups who seek to disrupt internet forums and message boards. Many software programs used to build and maintain message boards now have automated defense mechanisms designed to detect and block attempts at flooding. However a large group of individuals simultaneously flooding a message board can often overwhelm these automated defense mechanisms, forcing site administrators to temporarily block access to the message boards until the flooding posts can be removed. Large enough floods can overwhelm the servers on which targeted IRC channels are hosted, causing the server to disconnect all users as a defense mechanism.
disrupted the normal flow of communication among community members and made it
difficult for members of the group to find useful or relevant posts.

The second tactic employed by the Church was to make posts which appeared to
be critical of the Church, but in reality contained praise of the Church and its various
activities\(^{51}\) (Peckham, 1998). Doing so had a similar effect to the first tactic employed by
the Church in that it made it difficult for users to find reliable posts and information on
the message boards. Once again, the intent of these actions is to disrupt the normal flow
of communications on the message board in order to make it difficult for group members
to exchange information. A secondary goal is to frustrate group members, and thus
pushing them to abandon the group\(^{52}\).

The third tactic employed by the church was to impersonate the identity of
members of ARS. By successfully taking on these identities, Church members were able
to delete messages posted by group members whom they were impersonating (Peckham,
1998; Post, 1996). Church representatives actively targeted users known to post the most
scathing critiques of the Church and systematically deleted their posts (Grossman, 1995).
The obvious outcome of these actions was to silence the strongest opposition to the
Church in the group. It is interesting to note that the lack of identity markers within
Anonymous essentially denied the Church this tactical approach as Chanology
developed.

\(^{51}\) Usenet boards are typically arranged by listing the subject line of each post. Readers then click the
subject of the post they wish to view and then the entire message is presented on screen.
\(^{52}\) Recall that lack of quality content and difficulty in locating quality content can contribute to the death
of an online community (Irribarri & Leroy, 2009)
Members of *alt.religion.scientology* were aware of the actions of the Church and actively resisted the efforts to disrupt the community (Peckham, 1998; Post, 1996; Grossman, 1995). Members effectively communicated with one another to spread information concerning the attacks and, more importantly, to differentiate legitimate members of the group from Scientology members seeking to disrupt the group. The Church of Scientology ultimately failed in its efforts to have ARS shut down completely. However, they did succeed in severely disrupting the community. These disruptions created friction within the community causing many active members to leave in frustration. The community is still active today, however less so than at its peak in 1996.

The most important consequence of the conflict between *alt.religion.scientology* and the Church of Scientology was that it established a precedent of the Church actively attempting to stifle and suppress criticism originating from online sources. In addition, this brought the Church of Scientology to the attention of online groups such as Cult of the Dead Cow, who brought the actions of the Church to the attention of the broader constellation of online groups advocating free and open exchange of information online. The actions of the Church and the response by critics established a historical precedent and readymade framework upon which future online critics of Scientology could draw.

Following the events at ARS, the conflict between Scientology and its critics cooled somewhat, but did not disappear. ARS continued to function, albeit in a diminished capacity, and critics continued to disseminate copyrighted Church documents, and the CoS continued to seek legal injunctions against those responsible (Goodman, 1996). Despite the efforts of both parties to gain public sympathy, there was little interest
extending beyond those who were themselves involved with the conflict. In 2005, a series of events brought the Church of Scientology back into public view. Odd public behavior by well known Scientologist and actor Tom Cruise led to Scientology and its beliefs being discussed in media outlets. In November of that year, the popular comedy program *South Park* released an episode in which highly confidential Scientology doctrines were described and mocked. This once again brought attention to the beliefs of Scientology.

*Chanology Conceived*

In January of 2008, an unauthorized biography of Tom Cruise was set to be released. Early information indicated that there were sections of the book that portrayed Scientology and Tom Cruise’s relationship with the religion in a negative light. The Church of Scientology and those representing Tom Cruise engaged in an effort to have sale of the book in the United Kingdom halted based upon the accusation that the claims in the book constituted slander and defamation, convincing the book’s publisher to halt production in some markets (Quarles, 2008). Once again public interest in Scientology developed and the efforts on behalf of the Church to prevent the book from being published were seen as unreasonable and as attempts at censorship by many.

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, with media outlets still reporting on the controversy surrounding the unauthorized biography of Tom Cruise, a video of the star extolling the virtues of Scientology was leaked and posted on several public websites, notably YouTube.com and Gawker.com. The video was part of a ceremony in 2004 in which the Church of Scientology held a large award ceremony honoring Cruise for all his work on behalf of Scientology. In the video, Cruise made many odd remarks that presented a somewhat
fanatical image of the star and the Church itself. Among the statements made by Cruise were claims that the Church of Scientology is the only true expert on mental health, drug addiction, and reducing criminality; and claimed that Scientologists can create new and better realities.\textsuperscript{53}

As popularity of the video increased, the Church responded by claiming that hosting the video without their permission constituted a violation of their copyright to the video.\textsuperscript{54} The Church of Scientology International, the formal business entity representing Scientology, filed complaints with YouTube and Gawker, demanding that the sites remove the copyrighted material. In both instances, the Church claimed violations of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 512(c)\textsuperscript{55}, which regulates what action may be taken against the owners of websites that host copyrighted materials.

YouTube has a well known policy regarding DMCA claims and will remove copyrighted materials immediately if a DMCA complaint is filed by a copyright holder (YouTube, LLC, 2009). As a result, the video was quickly removed from YouTube’s website. Gawker, a news blog that focuses on pop culture and celebrities hosted the video and, as with YouTube, received DMCA claims from lawyers representing the Church of Scientology. Gawker however refused to remove the video, which they claimed was newsworthy. Furthermore, they claimed that their use of the video fell under the fair use

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 53 The video can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ_uAbxS0.
\item 54 The Church of Scientology has developed a reputation for vigorously enforcing its copyrights (Atack, 1990). Critics claim that the Church of Scientology abuse copyright law in order to silence any dissent aimed at the Church.
\item 55 The text of this law can be found at http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap5.html#512.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
clause within US copyright law, 17 U.S.C. § 107, rendering them exempt from copyright claims on behalf of the Church of Scientology. As of April 2009, no legal action against Gawker regarding the Tom Cruise video has been initiated.

As an exemplar Web 2.0 community, the users of YouTube are embedded within a complex network of websites connecting multiple online communities. Such a configuration allowed word of the video and the actions of the Church of Scientology regarding that video to spread rapidly among various online communities (O'Reilly, 2007), including Anonymous, despite a relative paucity of news media coverage. Anonymous, as a community, was predisposed to pay attention to the efforts of the Church of Scientology. One of the most common themes in my observations was the strident belief, expressed by many members of Anonymous, that the internet should remain a space in which information is exchanged freely and openly. My observations also indicate that members of Anonymous see the internet as “their turf,” and react with at least rhetorical hostility towards what they perceive to be efforts to introduce mechanisms of control upon this space by external entities. As a result of these views, many members of Anonymous reacted negatively to news that the Church of Scientology had attempted to use its legal clout to force YouTube and Gawker to remove the Tom Cruise video.

As news of the video and its removal spread, members of Anonymous that had collaborated in previous online attacks began to discuss the idea of attacks against the

56 For more information on fair use see http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#107.
57 Indeed I noticed this particular phrase used often in discussions among members of Anonymous regarding the internet as a figurative space. This is explored in greater depth in the following section.
Church of Scientology. On January 15th, 2008 the first call for action against Scientology was posted on the “random” imageboard, also known as “/b/,” on 4chan.org:

I think it’s time for /b/ to do something big. People need to understand not to fuck with /b/, and talk about nothing for ten minutes, and expect people to give their money to an organization that makes absolutely no fucking sense. I’m talking about ‘hacking’ or ‘taking down’ the official Scientology website. It’s time to use our resources to do something we believe is right. It’s time to do something big again, /b/. Talk amongst one another, find a better place to plan it, and then carry out what can and must be done. It’s time, /b/.

The first response to this post was a link to the Tom Cruise video on Gawker.com with the added comment “inspiration to feed the fire /b/.”

Initial responses varied, with some giving highly enthusiastic responses and others derriding the idea to attack the Church of Scientology as futile and potentially dangerous from a legal standpoint. However most responses ranged from apathy to extreme derision. The following post is representative of many early statements questioning the wisdom of attacking Scientology:

[M]ission impossible[.] [A] random image board cannot take down a pseudo-religion with the backing of wealthy people and an army of lawyers. [E]ven if every person who has ever browser /b/ ONCE joined in on a mass invasion it would still amount to nothing. [P]lus if anyone got found out they would have 500 lawyers up their ass before they could ssay (sic) ‘litigation’. [S]cientologists are famous for hounding critics.

Another common theme that emerged early among those critical of attacking Scientology was the claim that all targeted attacks undertaken by Anonymous were purile and resulted in causing more harm to Anonymous itself than the target, primarily due to retaliation on
the part of the target and outsiders being drawn to 4chan by news of the attacks. A final theme among early detractors was the belief that Anonymous simply was not capable of inflicting damage upon the Church of Scientology and that efforts to do so would result in embarrassing failure. As one poster stated, “/b/ is a sack of shit, we havnt (sic) done anything of win caliber since brb church dude and that was over 100 year (sic) ago.” These three themes would dominate the discourse employed by those initially opposed to Project Chanology.

Not all initial posts were hostile. As this initial thread continued to expand, the frequency of supportive posts began to increase somewhat. As with detractors, the posts of those supportive of Chanology tended to coalesce around two specific themes. The first of these was simply a statement of support, often accompanied by a request for information on how to aid in the effort. The following post typifies these responses: “I am a /b/tard, reporting for duty. I have 3 computers. How can I help?” The second theme observed involved statements that Anonymous had great success with attacks in the past and should not back down from a challenge. As one poster said in response to another encouraging post: “this man speaks the fucking truth. [L]et’s do it, /b/. [N]othing has stopped us before.”

58 The poster is referring to Chris Forcand, a Canadian church retreat leader. Members of Anonymous posed as an under aged boy and lured Forcand into sending sexually explicit messages and nude photos. Some of these individuals forwarded records of the online conversation to Canadian law enforcement officials, who arrested Forcand.
59 /b/tard is a term that members of Anonymous who post messages on the random image board at 4chan.org commonly use to identify themselves.
60 The phrase “reporting for duty” is often used as a pledge of support for a proposed action. My observations revealed that members of Anonymous commonly couch descriptions of their online attacks in militaristic language, usually in a joking lighthearted fashion.
Over the course of the day, this debate continued on several other threads appearing on 4chan’s /b/. The conversation in these threads unfolded much the same as in the initial thread, with posters debating the merits of an attack. As debate continued, reading through posts indicated that those opposed to taking action against the Church outnumbered those who were in favor of taking action. Another problem for those advocating the attack was that one of the few rules established at 4chan forbid the use of the website for the planning of attacks on other websites.\textsuperscript{61} Within hours of the initial post calling for an attack, the moderators of 4chan began leveling IP bans\textsuperscript{62} upon users making posts calling for attacks on Scientology websites. Other users were made aware of these bans by the telltale phrase “USER HAS BEEN BANNED FOR THIS POST,” printed in bold letters directly below the offending post.

Most of those advocating attacks were aware that 4chan would not be an ideal place for the planning and coordination of such attacks. Thus many of the initial posts regarding Chanology consisted of links to the /i/ board\textsuperscript{63} at www.711chan.org. 711chan is a smaller chan whose moderators were early supporters of Chanology, even creating a board, /xenu/, specifically dedicated to Chanology. 711chan was founded in November of

\textsuperscript{61} Originally there was no such rule. However, as complaints from targeted entities began to increase, the administrators decided to crack down on attack planning to avoid possible legal action taken against them. While US law (the servers hosting 4chan are located within the United States and are thus subject to US law) regarding punitive action against sites on which illegal activities are planned is unclear, many website owners forbid the planning of illegal activities to avoid any potential illegal action.

\textsuperscript{62} While the identity of users posting on /b/ is invisible to all other users, moderators can still access the IP address of each user. 4chan institutes bans by blocking access to a specified IP address. Users of 4chan, particularly those who post regularly at /b/, commonly evade IP bans.

\textsuperscript{63} “/i/” is traditionally the name used to refer to image boards used for the planning and coordination of attacks on other websites, typically referred to as “raids.” The name comes from the word “invasion,” but is often attributed to coming from the word “insurgency.” As a result, those posting on an /i/ often refer to themselves as “/i/nsurgents, similar to the use of the term /b/tards, by those posting on a /b/.
2007, and steadily grew. The idea of attacks on Scientology had actually been proposed several times on 711chan prior to January, 2008; however the idea never gained traction. My observations indicate that the userbase of 711chan initiated Project Chanology and used the Tom Cruise video to successfully recruit significant numbers of posters from 4chan’s /b/.

By the 16\textsuperscript{th} of January, the number of posts on 4chan calling for attacks on Scientology had decreased, with the remainder mainly serving to direct those interested to 711chan, where the bulk of the discussion had moved. As the /i/ and /b/ boards of 711chan quickly became overwhelmed by Chanology related posts, the moderators created a board named /xenu\textsuperscript{64} dedicated solely to Chanology in order to prevent Chanology posts from drowning out other topics of discussion in other boards. Since most people posting on /xenu/ where there specifically because of their interest in Chanology, there were very few posts deriding Chanology as a whole. Debate continued, but was focused upon choice of tactics and logistics, rather than on the decision of whether or not to attack.

While 711chan provided Chanologists\textsuperscript{65} a space in which they could plan and organize without fear of bans or being drowned out by a chorus of detractors, the imageboard format was still problematic. The largest difficulty was the lack of organization inherent in the imageboard software used by almost all chan sites. The

\textsuperscript{64}This board was named for Xenu, an alien ruler that plays a key role in Scientology doctrine regarding the emergence of intelligent life on Earth. These doctrines are some of the most tightly kept secrets of the Church, and Xenu has come to embody much of the criticism of the Church’s secrecy and fringe beliefs. The choice of this name for the Chanology board at 711chan can best be understood as an act of mockery.

\textsuperscript{65}From this point forward, Chanologists will refer to those actively taking part in Project Chanology.
structure of posts on these image boards makes it challenging to organize discussion of specific subjects by topic. In addition, there was no way to organize and gather together topics of a similar subject matter. Finally, the lack of durability of threads on chan sites meant that entirely new threads would have to be periodically re-created with all the information contained within the original thread needing to be reentered.

While 711chan provided an excellent space for general discussion of Chanology and for bringing new people into Chanology, it was far from an ideal location for the organization and archiving of information related to Chanology. Fortunately for the Chanologists, one of the primary administrators of 711chan was also an administrator of the Partyvan Wiki site. This site, run on wiki software, served as a centralized location for the organization and archiving of information and software to be used in online attacks. The owners of the partyvan wiki also decided to allow Chanologists to use their IRC network, irc.partyvan.org, for planning and discussion of attacks against Chanology.

The connections between 711chan and the partyvan network illustrate the interlocking network of several smaller loosely defined groups that fit under the umbrella of Anonymous. The lines between these smaller groups are fluid, with the specific allegiance of an individual often a function of the situational context in which he or she acts. These factions possess a somewhat tribal nature, with members of Anonymous often

66 “Partyvan is a term used by Anonymous that refers to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but is commonly used to refer to law enforcement in general. The word partyvan is a reference to the common portrayal of FBI agents in movies conducting wiretapping operations from non-descript panel vans. Based upon the ways in which I observed members of Anonymous speak about law enforcement and this site in particular, it seems most likely that this name was selected as a tongue in cheek acknowledgement of the illegal and quasi-illegal activities often planned at the wiki. The name also serves a practical purpose by not arousing suspicion as outsiders are unlikely to understand the connotation of the term.”
feeling allegiance to a specific chan. However, as the response to the actions of the Church of Scientology demonstrate, members of Anonymous are able to readily submerge these tribal identifications, in favor of a common identification as members of Anonymous when the need arises. The partyvan network itself was comprised of several smaller groups that cooperated often in conducting online attacks. Yet, whatever group they believed themselves to be a part of, they all shared a common identity as members of Anonymous. Since none of these groups have any kind of official membership, self-identification served as the primary marker of belonging and individuals often saw themselves as being part of multiple groups.

By January 17th, 2008 the various threads on 711chan and a nascent Chanology section on the Partyvan Wiki had begun to coalesce around a general plan of action. The primary goal of the attacks was to cost the Church of Scientology money, anger Church workers, and to disrupt their ability to effectively advertise by making Church websites inaccessible, bombarding Church email accounts with bogus messages, sending large quantities of empty shipping boxes, pizzas, and limousine services to Scientology orgs and clogging phone and fax lines used by the Church. Many from the 711chan community were already familiar with these tactics as they had been used previously in attacks against other targets. However, based upon observations of communication on the 711chan boards and on the IRC channels used for Chanology, there appeared to be some sentiment that the large number of individuals recruited from 4chan were, as a whole, less
educated on the tactics of online warfare and were to be used primarily for strength in
numbers rather than for their expertise.67

Of these multiple avenues of attack, the assault on Scientology websites was
undoubtedly the centerpiece of the overall strategy. Observations indicate three primary
reasons for this. First, making websites unreachable has traditionally been the primary
method of attack utilized by Anonymous. Thus many members were already familiar
with these techniques and how to properly utilize these techniques. Second, as it was the
Church’s efforts to remove information from the internet that played a large role in
provoking the attacks, many members of Anonymous saw the act of essentially removing
Church websites from the internet (by means of making them unreachable) as a fitting
form of retaliation. The third and final reason for the emphasis on attacks on websites
was that, of the options available to the attackers, these actions possessed the greatest
potential for causing financial damage to the Church.

The developed plan was to take down Church websites using an attack known as a
Distributed Denial of Service attack, or “DDoS.” DDoS was selected because members
of Anonymous involved with the attack were familiar with the technique and tools
developed for executing such attacks in previous raids68 could be easily adapted for use in
attacks against the Church of Scientology. Another reason for the selection of DDoS was
that the techniques used to carry out such an attack are relatively simple and easy to
learn, relying on brute force rather than precision (Molsa, 2005). The availability of

67 There were, in fact, multiple joking comparisons of the 4chan members to the large, relatively
untrained Russian army during World War II, as well as the Mongol hordes of Genghis Kahn.
68 Recall that the term “raid” is used by Anonymous to refer to coordinated attacks against online targets.
existing tools and simplicity of DDoS techniques meant that that the majority of attackers did not need to possess advanced knowledge of computing or network protocol to carry out the attack. This was important as many of the Chanologists, particularly those recruited from outside of 711chan, did not possess such advanced knowledge.

A detailed examination of the nature of DDoS attacks is well outside of the scope of the current research, however a basic understanding of such an attack is necessary in order to understand the growth of the cyber warfare phase of Chanology and the subsequent transition to offline protest. At a basic level, a denial of service (DoS) attack is a means of taking down a website or other online content by making the server on which this content is hosted unreachable by other computers. There are multiple methods of accomplishing this, but they all consist of the attacker’s computer bombarding the target server with bogus requests for information, or exploiting network protocol in such a way as to cause the targeted server to utilize all of it’s available resources trying to connect to another machine (Molsa, 2005). In doing this, the targeted server is unable to process legitimate requests for information, effectively rendering the server unreachable by other computers, which will then be unable to retrieve the requested content.

A Distributed Denial of Service attack consists of multiple computers simultaneously executing an attack on a single target (Molsa, 2005). In most cases this is accomplished by a botnet, which is a networked connection of computers that have been infected by malicious code allowing the attacker to utilize the machines to attack a given

69 For a more detailed description of the technical aspects of DDoS attacks, see Molsa, 2005; Peng, Leckie, and Ramamohanarao, 2007; and Tian, Hu, Li, Liu, and Zhang, 2006.
target.\textsuperscript{70} In the case of Chanology however, a botnet was not used for the execution of the DDoS. Instead members of Chanology coordinated their actions such that individual members would attack a target in unison at a selected time. Once targets and times of attack were selected, they were posted in the IRC channels used for discussion of Chanology, in Chanology related articles on the partyvan wiki, and on pastebin.\textsuperscript{71} Instructions on where to obtain the necessary tools to carry out the attacks were posted in these locations as well. Users interested in joining the attack were instructed to obtain the necessary tools, learn their use, and then gather in a specific IRC channel at a given time to launch the attack and communicate with others, in real time, during the attacks.

As this process of target selection demonstrates, Project Chanology did not develop entirely organically among its constituent members. Early on there was a smaller subset of individuals within Chanology, primarily composed of administrators and moderators from 711chan and the partyvan network, who were familiar with online attacks and who were primarily responsible for the formulation of a plan of attacks. These individuals did not possess any sort of formal leadership authority. Rather, their knowledge of online warfare and their previous interaction with one another on other attacks meant that they were able to quickly formulate attack plans. In the absence of other individuals capable of producing such plans, this group of moderators and

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{71} Pastebin is a website designed to facilitate collaborative debugging of computer code (Dixon, 2008). Use of the site is free and anyone can upload text to the site and then obtain a unique URL linking to the upload which can then be used to direct others to the text. The site served as a popular method for members of Anonymous to upload and share instructions relating to the execution of attacks on Scientology.
administrators became the defacto source of drawing up attack plans. Their position as leaders was a result not of deference and authority, but rather necessity. They did not speak of themselves as leaders and my investigation did not uncover evidence that they were viewed as leaders by other participants within Chanology. However as a result of their pivotal role early on in selecting targets and times of attack, this group of moderators from 711chan and the partyvan network organized and directed the beginning phases of Chanology and it is questionable whether or not Chanology would have grown beyond this initial phase without their guidance.

*Online Attacks*

The first attacks were set to begin on January 18th, at 6:00 PM EST. The primary target to be attacked was the main Scientology website at www.scientology.org. If the attackers were successful in bringing down this website they would move on to the primark website of the Religious Technology Corporation, the corporate entity holding the copyrights on all Scientology scriptures, at www rtc.org. If this website was also brought down the Chanologists were encouraged to select smaller Scientology websites to start attacking. Most of this list of tertiary targets were websites for individual Scientology Orgs.

On the 18th, members of Anonymous began gathering in the #xenu channel on the partyvan IRC server. In the time leading up to the attack, the number of people in the channel grew to just over 200. The actual number of individuals participating in the attack was most likely significantly higher than this as many individuals would begin the attack at the agreed upon time, but would not remain in the IRC channel. There was also
a steady stream of individuals entering the channel and leaving a few minutes later. These individuals were joining the channel to check for any changes to the plan of attack, but were not remaining in the channel to communicate with others.

As the scheduled attack time drew near, the conversation on the IRC channel increased in intensity, with many members jumping the gun and launching their attacks early. Those stating that they had already launched their attacks were admonished to immediately cease their attack. The success of a DDoS attack is largely contingent upon a target being hit with a large barrage of data in a short time. Individuals starting the attack early risked alerting the administrators of the Scientology websites that an attack was imminent, allowing them to prepare a defense of the sites. Since there was no official or legitimate form of leadership in the IRC channel, those demanding a halt to the early attacks drew upon a discourse of labeling the early attackers as neophytes whose incompetence would jeopardize the success of the attack.

At 6:00 PM, the attack began in earnest. The IRC channel filled with individuals shouting “FIRE!” and quotes from popular war movies. Conversation then dropped noticeably as the attackers attended to their efforts against www.scientology.org. After thirty minutes of the barrage, individuals on IRC began reporting that the targeted website was loading very slowly and urged everyone to not let up. Several hours later the primary target, scientology.org, had been successfully taken offline, with the server being shut down as a self defense mechanism. The attackers turned their attention to the secondary target, www.rtc.org, and took it offline as well. Following this, the attackers
turned their attention to the tertiary, smaller targets, and claimed to have taken 22 websites offline.

Figure 5 shows traffic data for www.scientology.org. Specifically the graph shows an estimate of the percentage of internet users that visited scientology.org over time and serves as a reliable measure of general traffic patterns over time (Alexa, 2008a). As figure 5 shows, there is a sudden and dramatic spike in traffic at scientology.org corresponding to the DDoS attack launched by Anonymous.

![Daily Reach (percent) graph](image)

*Figure 4: Site traffic at www.scientology.org.*\(^{72}\)

After the first attack ended, the Chanologists declared victory and took screenshots of the error screens displayed when trying to reach the targeted sites. These

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\(^{72}\) This graph is generated from free traffic data provided by Alexa. For more information, see Alexa, 2008.
screenshots were posted on 4chan and several other chan sites to serve as proof of their accomplishments and as trophies. News of the successful attacks against Scientology websites was met with a degree of bemused surprise by those who professed to believe that the attacks would be unsuccessful. Images of the disabled websites were accompanied with links to information on Chanology and the posters exhorted others to join in the attacks. Based upon statements made by those in the IRC channel #xenu following the success of the initial attacks, it appears that some members of Anonymous were motivated to join in the efforts of Chanology due to news of the initial success of Chanology.

Figure 5: A screenshot used to spread word of Chanology's success.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{73} This image was taken from http://images.encycopediadramatica.com/images/d/df/Scientology.orgdown.png.
By this point the discourse employed by supporters of Chanology had shifted somewhat, away from an emphasis on retaliating against an organization attempting to restrict the free flow of information on the internet and towards an emphasis on attacks on Scientology being a significant source of entertainment. The motives for attacking Scientology were framed within the idea of “doing it for the lulz.” Doing it for the lulz is an explanatory device deployed by members of Anonymous in many different situations. However it is primarily understood to refer to taking actions in order to disrupt, anger, or provoke hostile responses from other individuals or groups online, providing entertainment in the process. Closely related to the notion of doing it for the lulz is the more general online phenomenon of “trolling.” To troll someone or a group is to attempt to upset and anger the group or individual or to disrupt an online community.

Members of Anonymous often frame Anonymous as being a group of skilled trolls, adept at angering others without revealing their intentions as trolls. Often singled out as targets are individuals and groups who members of Anonymous believe to be highly emotionally invested in online interactions. Many members of Anonymous see the internet as a playful realm in which interactions are of less consequence than are their offline counterparts. A common, mocking critique, of those who become easily upset by arguments or heated online discussions is the phrase “Lol,74 internets is serious business.” As will be seen, a growing tension developed between the dedication of Anonymous to not taking internet interaction too seriously, and the desire of many members of

74 The acronym “LOL” is one of the most widely used and commonly understood neologisms originating in online communication and means “laughing out loud.” The term “lulz” in fact is derived from lol.
Anonymous to lash out at Scientology for perceived efforts at censorship. This tension would eventually result in a significant schism, profoundly impacting the development of Chanology.

Within this framework of “lulz,” Scientology was identified as a valuable and deserving target due to their manifest displeasure of having one of their videos displayed online and their well documented history of responding aggressively and vigorously to perceived threats. Scientology, Chanologists argued, would likely provide a highly entertaining target for attack. In drawing upon this discourse, Chanologists attempted to reframe Chanology in a manner that would make it more appealing to a larger audience within Anonymous, who may have been initially skeptical of Chanology, seeing it as a violation of normative sanctions against treating the internet as “serious business.”

For the Chanologists, particularly those dedicated to viewing Chanology as trolling, the desired response from Scientology was anger and public statements vowing to destroy the attackers. Attackers scanning news stories for evidence of a response from scientology were disappointed. The attacks had not generated any kind of public response from Scientology. In addition, the targeted websites had been brought back online by the evening of January 19th. By this time, the number of those joining Chanology had increased due to the initial success of the attacks and a second round of attacks was planned to begin on January 21st.

Some within Chanology began making posts on 711chan and adding edits to the Partyvan wiki article on Chanology stating that Anonymous should attempt to get news media outlets to report on the attacks. One person, posting on the talk page for the article
related to the attacks at Encyclopedia Dramatica, stated “This is the second most important part of the second wave. We need media coverage, so place calls to foxnews (sic), MSNBC, ABC, and CBS telling them about what's going on” (Quoted from Anonymous, 2008b). The rationale for this was that public attention to the attacks would put greater pressure on Scientology to respond and would, in and of itself, be an accomplishment for the attackers. Recognition is often a goal sought by hackers and hacker groups (Woo, Kim, & Dominick, 2004), and while Anonymous itself is not a hacker group and the DDoS attacks of Chanology were not hacking, there is still significant overlap with hacker culture, including desire of recognition for one’s work.

A large thread grew on 711chan in which Chanologists debated how to best get media attention. None of the members had access to media contacts, forcing Anonymous to find other ways of releasing public statements. Eventually it was decided that the best way to make a statement would be to post a video on YouTube, in which Anonymous would state its reasons for attacking the Church and would officially announce its intentions to destroy the Church. The Chanologists were aware that the Church could easily spin their actions as religious persecution and suppression of free speech, tactics which the Church had used in the past in responding to critics (Lamont, 1986; and Goodman, 1996).

It was agreed that the best approach would be to draw upon the discourse of existing Scientology critics and frame the actions of Chanology as a response to efforts at censorship and suppression on the part of a cult like religious sect that bullied critics and defrauded and violated the human rights of its own parishioners on a daily basis. Those
present at 711chan also debated how Anonymous itself should be portrayed in the video. This provided a unique challenge in that Anonymous had no formally defined spokesperson or charter- no official mission statement of any kind. In the end, the image of Anonymous was carefully and purposefully constructed as well. Members decided to portray Anonymous as a faceless and ephemeral entity that represented a certain philosophical approach to life and a group whose actions were governed by a hive mind like intelligence. In addition members wanted to create an image of Anonymous as a group composed of individuals from all walks of life, transcending traditional social barriers and acting in unison for a specific idea or cause.

Those in the thread decided to make a video similar to one that had been reproduced by members of Anonymous as a response to an alarmist FOX News report on the group several years earlier. The video would consist of a spoken message against a simple visual backdrop. A post was made on 711chan containing a draft of the message for the video. Other present members of Anonymous took this draft and made modifications to it, posting their modified version online to be further edited by others. In this way, the process of the creation of the text of the video functioned as a collaborative effort undertaken by networked individuals, very similar to the process whereby wikipedia articles are constructed. By leveraging the brainpower provided by having multiple individuals simultaneously revising the draft, Anonymous was able to rapidly produce a well written message that could successfully convey their desired image of Anonymous and Chanology. This networked mode of production, characteristic of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2007), would become a key strength of Chanology.
The finished video was uploaded on YouTube on January 21st, to coincide with the next wave of attacks against Scientology.\(^75\) The video itself, titled “A Message to Scientology” consisted of a droning, synthetic computer voice narrating the message set against time lapse video footage and subdued dischordant ambient music. The intended effect was to make the video appear ominous and to subtly reinforce the image of Anonymous as a shapeless entity gathering to exert its will. Members of Anonymous found joy in crafting this particular image of Anonymous, set in contrast to their view of themselves as trolls looking to have fun and defend their turf.

In Anonymous’ efforts to actively shape it’s public image we see the efforts to produce WUNC displays whichTilly (2004) notes are key components of social movement activity. Anonymous made claims of the worthiness of their cause by casting the Church of Scientology as a dangerous and abusive organization, while constructing Anonymous as an entity that had decided to destroy Scientology in order to protect Scientologists and others from abuses by the Church. In the Message to Scientology video, the Church is targeted because of it’s “campaigns of misinformation; suppression of dissent; [and] litigious nature” (Anonymous, Message to Scientology, 2008a). The video then goes on to declare the intentions of Anonymous:

\[\text{Anonymous has therefore decided that [the Church of Scientology] should be destroyed. For the good of your followers, for the good of mankind--for the laughs--we shall expel you from the Internet and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form.}\] \(^76\)

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\(^75\) The video, along with a transcript, can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ.

\(^76\) ibid.
Thus the video frames Anonymous as acting on behalf of the greater good, a common rhetorical device utilized in worthiness displays (Tilly, 2004).

It is interesting to note the usage of the phrase “for the laughs,” which would be instantly recognizable to other members of Anonymous. This phrase was included as a signal to other members of Anonymous that Chanology had not lost sight of attacking targets for fun and that, while they were framing their actions in idealistic terms, their motives still fit within the dominant normative framework of Anonymous. That Chanologists would risk undoing their carefully crafted public image to include this signal demonstrates the importance of properly framing Chanology to both the larger public and to other members of Anonymous.

Unity displays were less prevalent in the early phases of Chanology. However, Anonymous’ efforts to portray itself as a hive mind like entity bonded together by a common cause fits within the definition of a unity display (Tilly, 2004). The attempt by Anonymous to frame the group as being comprised of individuals from all walks of life implicitly suggests a large size and scope for Anonymous, serving as a numbers display.77 In the Message to Scientology video there are explicit numbers displays, such as

You cannot hide; we are everywhere… We’re getting bigger every day- and solely by the force of our ideas… if you want another name for your opponent, then call us Legion78, for we are many (Anonymous, Message to Scientology, 2008a).

77 ibid.
78 The capitalization of Legion is interesting as it references a story in the Christian Bible in which a demon possessing a man calls itself Legion, noting “we are many.” Based upon my observations, it is unclear whether or not most members of Anonymous were aware of the biblical origins of the name Legion. It
Displays of unity and number would come to play a much larger role in the social movement repertoire (Tilly, 2004) of Chanology once offline protests began. Finally, the video contained clear displays of commitment, as the following quote illustrates:

We acknowledge you as a serious opponent, and we are prepared for a long, long campaign. You will not prevail forever against the angry masses of the body politic (Anonymous, Message to Scientology, 2008a).

On January 21st, the second wave of the attack was launched alongside the release of the Message to Scientology video. Bolstered by new recruits, the second attack wave was more powerful than the first79 and quickly brought the targeted websites offline again. By now news of the attacks had begun to spread. The Encyclopedia Dramatica article on the attacks continued to grow and the name “Chanology” began to be used as an unofficial name for the campaign against Scientology. The Message to Scientology video spread quickly along the networked ties of online bloggers and members of online communities, it’s spread a classic instance of a viral video (O'Reilly, 2007). Significantly, Anonymous was able to spread it’s message without access to traditional media gatekeepers, such as newspapers and television news shows. As of April 2008, the Message to Scientology video has been viewed in excess of 3.5 million times and is ranked as the thirteenth most viewed video of all time amongst videos within the “Science and Technology” category on YouTube.

appears as though the phrase “we are Legion” was primarily understood by members of Anonymous to be a statement of solidarity and strength.  

79 The highest point in the January traffic spike in Figure 5 corresponds to this second attack wave.
News media outlets did start to take note of Chanology, thanks in large measure to the release of the Message to Scientology video. Coverage began on blogs and started to spread to the online components of local affiliates of news outlets such as NBC and ABC, eventually reaching the online components of these outlets at the national level. Early on there were several stories in print media regarding the efforts of the Church of Scientology to suppress the Tom Cruise video (Dodd, 2008; Bowser, 2008; Olszewski, 2008). However, with the second round of attacks, larger and more highly regarded media outlets began to take notice, and began reporting on the online attacks (Clarkson, 2008; Barkham, 2008). In addition, television and radio news affiliates began to run pieces on the actions of Anonymous. Once again, the networked structure of Anonymous allowed them to quickly gather and archive links to online versions of these news stories, as individual members of Anonymous searched for stories in their respective news markets, uploading anything they found. In general, these early news stories treated the conflict between Anonymous and Scientology as a quirky and entertaining online event, newsworthy primarily for its novelty.

After having its websites taken down for a second time, the Church of Scientology took active steps to guard against future attacks by purchasing protection against DDoS attacks from Prolexic, a company specializing in network security. With the targeted websites restored, a third wave of attacks was planned for the 24th of January. By now, the Chanology article at the Partyvan wiki was highly active and some

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80 For more information on methods by which Prolexic defends against DDoS attacks, see Prolexic Technologies (2006).
individuals had begun to propose new strategies noting that, given the considerable monetary resources of the Church of Scientology, they would likely be able to successfully defend against future DDoS attacks by purchasing protective services or by simply purchasing more bandwidth.\textsuperscript{81} According to these individuals, the methods available to Anonymous for attacking Scientology web resources were not sufficient for causing true damage to the Church. Some of these individuals suggested that Anonymous should begin to investigate methods of having Scientology’s tax exempt status in the United States removed, inflicting a heavy financial burden upon the Church in the process.

News coverage of the online attacks also drew the attention of longtime critics of the Church, most of whom said they were happy to see others acting out against the Church, but decried the online attacks as counter productive and as suppression of the Church’s right to free speech. In a newspaper article, longtime Scientology critic Andreas Heldal – Lund was quoted as saying “People should be able to have easy access to both sides and make up their own opinions. Freedom of speech means we need to allow all to speak – including those we strongly disagree with” (George-Cosh, 2008; pg. A8). Some members of Anonymous voiced support for abandoning DDoS attacks, citing the likely inability of Anonymous to cause significant damage to Scientology via DDoS attacks. A small minority of these individuals also expressed concern over the ethical

\textsuperscript{81} Bandwidth is a measure of how much electronic information can pass through a computer network in a given amount of time, and is typically expressed as Megabytes per second (Mb/s). A the highest speed at which information can pass in and out of a computer network is limited by the smallest point of bandwidth within that network. As a DDoS attack works by using up all available bandwidth on a network, the effects of the attack can be mitigated by expanding the available bandwidth on the network.
inconsistencies of claiming to be fighting against censorship while essentially censoring the church’s own websites. Most of these individuals were harshly rebuked and reminded that the true purpose of Chanology was having fun, with claims of fighting censorship intended to create a positive public image.

*Addition of Offline Tactics*

A third wave of attacks was launched on the 24th of January. The attacks were initially successful, however the defenses purchased by the Church of Scientology eventually responded to the attack and effectively mitigated the effects of the attack. Conversation on the #xenu channel shifted to proposing potential means of subverting or circumventing the defenses, however none of these met with success. The attacks were still having an effect, but the targeted sites remained online and usable. With the effectiveness of the DDoS attacks dwindling, Anonymous began exploring alternate methods of attacking the Church.

On January 27th, longtime Scientology critic and documentary film maker Mark Bunker posted a video on YouTube praising Anonymous for their activism against Scientology, but criticizing them for their tactical reliance on dismantling church websites. Like other critics, Bunker condemned the attacks as suppression of free speech and noted that they were counterproductive, as it allowed Scientologists to paint themselves as victims of religious persecution and censorship. Bunker’s video circulated widely among members of Anonymous and many members took his advice to heart, affectionately calling him “Wise Beard Man.”
One effect of longtime critics attempting to open a dialog with Anonymous was exposing members of Anonymous participating in Chanology to a large volume of information documenting abusive and anti-democratic activities perpetrated by the core Scientology leadership structure, including physical and human rights abuses of members, harassment of critics, tax fraud, and attempts to subvert and defraud governments. As members of Anonymous began sharing what they had found, the idea of damaging Scientology by generating negative attention for the Church became increasingly popular. Calls for public action that had been previously rejected out of hand began to be debated in earnest.

In the week following the last attack on the 24th, Anonymous debated the merits of taking offline action against the Church of Scientology. As Anonymous does not have an official leadership core to decide upon what actions to be taken by the group, achieving consensus was vital for determining the direction that Chanology would take. In addition, the lack of hierarchy and visible markers of identity, meant that individuals making proposals would have to ensure that those proposals would be perceived as desirable and would not be able to rely upon building consensus based upon status within the group. As a result, framing played an important role in building consensus around specific proposals and ultimately shaping the development of Project Chanology.

The largest difficulty facing those advocating offline action was that there was no established precedent for Anonymous executing coordinated action in an offline setting. Prior to Chanology some members of Anonymous had attended comic and anime conventions as members of Anonymous. However this generally consisted of small
groups of people who already knew one another offline and enjoyed attending such conventions. A previous series of attacks against white supremacist radio host Hal Turner included an offline component, but this component was considered by most members of Anonymous to be an abject failure in an otherwise highly successful raid. Put simply, for Anonymous, the offline world represented alien territory.

In order to overcome this difficulty, members of Anonymous advocating offline action framed such action as a natural extension of Anonymous’ online activities, presenting the concept of the offline actions as “IRL\textsuperscript{82} raids.” Thus tactics such as flyering communities with anti-Scientology propaganda, putting up stickers and signs critical of Scientology, and writing letters to local newspapers condemning the alleged abuses of Scientology were framed as analogs of the disruptive online attacks employed by Anonymous. The intended effect of the offline actions was presented as being the same as the effect of the online actions- namely disrupting the Church of Scientology and causing financial damage to Scientology. In this way, the supporters of offline action sought to have such actions understood not as a departure from methods familiar to Anonymous, but rather as an adaptation of those methods to offline settings.

Those opposed to taking offline action generally expressed doubt that Anonymous would be able to effectively mobilize significant numbers of people for offline actions and feared that meager support would lead to embarassment for Anonymous. These individuals also pointed to growing media coverage and stressed that the best course of

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\textsuperscript{82} “IRL” is a commonly used acronym in online communication that stands for “In Real Life.” IRL is typically used to differentiate actions and events occurring in the offline world from those occurring primarily in the online world.
action was to continue online attacks in order to drive media attention, hopefully bringing scrutiny to Scientology as individuals, upon receiving this coverage began to ask why scientology had been targeted.

As discussion continued, taking offline action grew in popularity and individuals began formulating plans and ideas for how individuals could draw attention to Scientology. Most suggestions involved using tactics developed by guerilla performers and activists, such as culture jamming (Carducci, 2006), graffitti, and flashmobs (Duran, 2006). Users began posting designs for fliers and posters for others to distribute in their communities and others designed and uploaded stickers that other users could download, print, and then use in their communities. Shortly after, individuals began uploading stories and images of their efforts, often stressing that they were successful and, above all else, fun. Many of these individuals also noted that they had previous experience with these forms of activism, yet others stated that this was the first time they had ever engaged in such actions.

On January 26th members of Anonymous in the Orlando, Florida area of the United States successfully staged a flash mob demonstration against the Church of Scientology in Orlando. A flash mob is a relatively novel form of collective social action in which a number of individuals gather together at a specified point in time and space, perform a planned action, and then disperse (Duran, 2006). What is truly unique about flash mobs is that they are planned extremely fast and oftentimes large numbers of those
involved do not know one another. The rise of networked, asynchronous communications and continued development of internet linked mobile communications devices has allowed the organizers of flashmobs to rapidly disseminate plans for action without maintaining any kind of official relationship to those involved in the mob. As a result, flash mobs are extremely flexible, nimble, and difficult for law enforcement agencies to track or disrupt.

The Orlando flashmob was planned on 711chan and IRC channels on the Partyvan Network. A small group of individuals announced their intention to hold a small demonstration in front of a Scientology Org, posted when and where the event would take place, and encouraged others to participate. According to those participating in the mob, between 50 and 100 people showed up to demonstrate, many of them carrying signs highlighting the alleged abuses of the Church. The demonstration lasted for several hours with the demonstrators mainly standing with their signs, explaining why they were there to curious passers by, occasionally shouting out internet memes or singing songs familiar to Anonymous. In keeping with the concepts of anonymity and protection of one’s true identity which pay a central role in the normative order of Anonymous, many of the protesters wore scarves, bandannas, hats, and sunglasses to conceal their identities. After several hours, the demonstrators dispersed.

After this flash mob demonstration, videos and still images of the demonstration were uploaded to YouTube and the Partyvan Wiki with a brief account of events. News of the demonstration was greeted with a high degree of praise and approval from other

\[83 \text{ Ibid.}\]
members of Anonymous involved with Chanology. Those advocating offline action seized on news of the demonstration and started to suggest that members of Anonymous in other cities execute the same type of demonstrations. Throughout the next three days, Anonymous debated the merits of holding offline demonstrations. As with previous debates, framing played a vital role in creating consensus around the idea of having offline protest actions. During this time, another successful flash mob demonstration was executed in Montreal, Canada, bolstering those calling for offline demonstrations.

Those calling for offline action felt that the best course of action would be to take on the outward appearance of a protest movement and to focus their message on the tax exempt status of the Church of Scientology and the alleged abuses of the Church. In doing so, we again see Anonymous carefully constructing the image of Chanology in order to make their cause appear sympathetic to the public and to draw positive coverage by news media. With an increasingly clear agenda and a growing offline repertoire of collective action, Chanology increasingly began to resemble established definitions of social movements (Tilly, 2004). Yet despite these appearances, the core intention of Chanology was still understood by its constituent members to be primarily driven by the desire to retaliate against Scientology for their attempts to suppress freedom of speech on the internet and, above all else, to have fun by enraging the Church of Scientology.

There were still dissenters who objected to taking Chanology offline. These dissenters were primarily alarmed by the increasingly moralistic and altruistic tone that participants in Chanology were taking. To these people, Anonymous had always acted in a morally neutral space in which entertaining oneself was held up as the sole acceptable
reson for Anonymous, as an entity, to take part in collective action. They felt that the
would be protesters were turning Anonymous into something foreign and undesirable.
For the disenters, the intentions of the protests were an instance of “white knighting,”
which is a derisive term used to refer to individuals and groups (primarily in online
settings) who want to see themselves as saviors and heroes. They relished the image of
Anonymous as a group of skilled trolls and feared that the protests would transform
Anonymous into the very type of group they once targeted.

Those calling for protest countered by insisting that the discourse of justice and
fighting abuses was solely a façade to gain public favor and cause damage to the Church
of Scientology. Furthermore, they explained, convincing the public that they were
fighting in the name of justice while in reality simply trying to provoke the Church and
have fun, was in and of itself highly humorous. Essentially they framed the protests as an
elaborate instance of trolling, with the public, the media, and Scientology being
manipulated and not let in on the ultimate joke. Finally they noted that the detractors had
violated one of the most basic norms of Anonymous and had begun to take Anonymous
seriously. They went on to note that, as Anonymous had no official leadership structure,
those not wanting to protest did not have to. By framing the protests as being done for fun
and existing as an elaborate joke, detractors were essentially outflanked and their
arguments did not receive wide spread support. In contrast, consensus began to coalesce
around staging protest demonstrations in front of Scientology orgs.

General consensus was reached that the protests would be most impactful if they
were held on the same day. Indeed, a global turnout would constitute a display of both
unity and numbers (Tilly, 2004). The agreed upon date for the protests was February 10th, with each protest beginning at 11 AM in its respective time zone. Individuals began creating subsections within the Chanology articles on Encyclopedia Dramatica and the Partyvan Wiki, providing information on the protests scheduled to take place within their respective communities. These subsections typically began with general suggestions of where to hold the protest and where protesters should meet. After a period of discussion typically lasting twenty four hours, the finalized details of where the protests were to take place were posted in these sub sections. Protesters were encouraged to plot their own course to the meetup spot by using free services such as Google Maps.84

As locations for protests were established, there was a concurrent debate as to the methods Anonymous should use in their protests and how protesters should conduct themselves. While some balked at what they perceived to be an effort to impose leadership and hierarchy on Anonymous, most members of Chanology agreed that the protests would be most effective if there was some level of consistency among the protests and that remaining peaceful and non-violent was vital for creating a positive public image. Once again, protesters demonstrated their keen awareness of managing their public image; and they turned to existing models of protest for inspiration and guidance on how to conduct their own protests. Some members who had participated in other protest demonstrations shared their experiences and knowledge.

84 Google Maps is a popular, free service from Google that allows users to view detailed maps of worldwide locations and can also generate travel directions between two street addresses. More information can be found at http://maps.google.com.
As the date of February 10th approached, consensus began to be reached on a general set of guidelines for personal conduct at the protest event and what measures protesters should take to protect themselves from potential harassment from Scientologists and how to avoid trouble with law enforcement. On February 1st, a video was uploaded to YouTube, entitled “Anonymous Code of Conduct,” that contained a set of behavioral guidelines. This was not presented as a rigorous code of conduct to be strictly enforced, but rather as a set of guidelines intended to allow protesters to create a sense of cohesion at protests and to avoid problematic situations that could diminish the potential impact of the protests. Based upon stories and information from websites maintained by longtime critics of Scientology, the protesters were advised to be careful to conceal their identities and to be aware of attempts at infiltration, harassment, or disruption on the part of Scientologists.

Many members of Chanology began to produce and upload flyers and sticker designs to be used during protests. Recombinatory cultural production had been the dominant form of creative production within Anonymous and this tradition was reflected in the visual and aural materials developed for the protests. Protesters created signs and

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85 The original upload of this video has been removed. An identical copy of the video, as well as a transcript, reuploaded on March 29th, 2008 can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_OEn1K4FtI.
86 There are multiple instances of alleged attempts on the part of Scientology to actively subvert the actions of critics through harassment and disinformation campaigns. In particular, the doctrine of “fair game,” which Scientologists claim was discontinued but which critics maintain is still in effect, establishes the morality, within the Scientology moral system, of harassing and slandering critics of Scientology. In addition, the Church has an internal division called the Office of Special Affairs, or OSA, which acts as an intelligence gathering arm of the Church and which has been implicated in covert actions against critics in the past. Protesters were advised to be aware of the possible use of these tactics and to take measures to guard against them. For further information see Atack (1990).
flyers that combined well established memes within the Anonymous community with slogans and phrases critical of the Church of Scientology. In addition, many protesters uploaded collections of songs popular within Anonymous to be played at protests.

As the global day of protests approached, there were a handful of detractors that expressed their belief that the protests would see abysmal turnout and would be considered failures. A second flash mob raid in Orlando on the 2nd of February, presented as a “dress rehearsal” of sorts saw a significant increase in turnout, helping to quell concerns that the protests would not produce significant numbers. In the week leading up to the 10th, final preparations were made with individuals communicating on IRC channels, discussing minutiae, such as what supplies individuals could supply for the protests, as well as individuals volunteering to open dialog with local police departments to ensure smooth relations with police on the day of the protests, to have legal issues, such as the wearing of masks clarified, and to obtain any permits necessary for protesting. This type of ad-hoc role development was typical in the early phases of the protests and set a precedent for the development of an unofficial, cell like organizational and leadership structure within Anonymous.

During this week Chanology articles on Encyclopedia Dramatica and the Partyvan Wiki were formatted to provide an organized space for the cataloging of photos, videos, and first hand accounts from the protests. This week also saw the establishment of
Enturbulation.org, which was initially structured as a traditional online forum, with sub forums dedicated to the planning and archiving of information from local protests. Notably, users at Enturbulation were able to take a specific user name, which would be used to identify their posts to other users. This presented an important difference from the chan sites and the Partyvan Wiki where much of the development of Chanology took place. Enturbulation.org was also developed with the intention of providing a positive, public image of Anonymous to augment the framing efforts of the protests and to draw public inquiry away from the chans, and the often times vulgar culture of those sites.

On February 10th, the protests were executed as planned. Due to time zone differences, the first protests got underway in Australian cities. Despite hot summer weather in many protest locations, initial reports were that turnout was significantly higher than expected, with an estimated headcount of 300 in Sydney and 200 in Melbourne (Anonymous, 2008c), and an estimated total turnout in Australia of 854 people in seven cities. News of the higher than expected turnout spread rapidly through, Enturbulation.org, Encyclopedia Dramatica, and the IRC channels dedicated to Chanology. On #xenu, the primary Chanology IRC channel, the mood was one of jubilation and triumph. This excitement drove turnout in countries across Europe and North America, with turnouts of 270 in Boston, 600 in Los Angeles, 300 in New York

87 “Enturbation” is a neologism coined by Scientology founder LaFayette Ronald Hubbard and generally describes the act of agitating and sowing discord in others (Hubbard, 1998). The creators of Enturbulation.org saw this as a fitting name for their site.
88 Unless stated otherwise, all attendance estimates are based upon unofficial headcounts listed at http://www.encyclopediadramatica.com/PROJECT_CHANOLOGY/IRL_PROTEST_PAGE.
89 ibid.
City, 300 in Toronto, and 500 in London. Significantly, 200 protesters demonstrated in Clearwater, Florida, often described as the spiritual Mecca of Scientology (Lamont, 1986). World wide attendance was estimated at 8,418 people (Anonymous, 2008c). Throughout the day, partyvan.fm, a streaming internet radio station affiliated with the Party Van network, provided live updates from protest locations around the globe and offered a mix of popular music and songs related to the Chanology protests. There were no reports of arrests related to the protests, nor were there any reports of significant harassment or subversion by Scientologists.

The protests received significant mainstream media coverage, with many local news stations running stories on the protests and several print sources featuring stories on the protests (Abel, 2008; Barkham, 2008; Clarkson, 2008a; Forrester, 2008). Reports from protesters indicated a generally bemused, but supportive public reaction. These reports also indicated that Scientology, for the most part, did not stage any kind of coordinated counter demonstration, with most Orgs keeping their doors shut and curtains drawn across windows. The protesters’ accounts also indicated generally cordial and neutral relations between the protesters and police officers present to keep order if necessary. Based upon high turnout, positive public reaction, and the seeming inability of the Scientologists to do anything to cause disruption, the protesters declared Chanology’s initial demonstrations a resounding success.

While there was no official response from the highest echelons of the Scientology organization, several lower ranking church officials gave similar statements to the media regarding Anonymous. The Church responded by trying to frame Anonymous as a hate
group, casting themselves as victims of religious persecution. The head of Scientology in Canada labeled members of Anonymous “bigots” and described the actions of the protesters as “hate mongering [and] religious hate crimes” (Clarkson, 2008a; pg. 6). Other church officials drew comparisons to the Nazi Party and the Klu Klux Klan (Farley, 2008). In general, the Church sought to frame themselves as frightened victims under siege by a dangerous and violent hate group of religious bigots. However, the carnivalesque nature of the demonstrators and the protesters careful emphasis on criticizing the policies, not beliefs, of the Church stood in stark contrast to Scientology’s description of Anonymous as a group of hardened, dangerous bigots. The Church was simply outflanked and caught off guard by the protests and failed to mount any sort of effective resistance against the protests. More importantly, Anonymous clearly won the battle over the discursive shaping of the protests in the eyes of the public and the media—marking a key victory in the struggle over the pivotal resource of public perception.

The protests greatly raised public awareness of Chanology, causing traffic at websites hosting Chanology to swell as curious members of the public investigated the origins of the protests, as can be seen in Figure 7. Many of these new members stated that they had explored documentation of Scientology’s alleged abuses provided by the protesters and had decided to become a part of Chanology. As Chanology relied on numbers for success and Anonymous lacked any formal membership status or initiation procedures, these individuals were rapidly integrated into Chanology and were encouraged to learn more about Scientology and to learn more about the culture of Anonymous.
As noted earlier, it is the cultural code of Anonymous that serves as the primary agent of cohesion within the group, making the socialization of new members of paramount concern. In comments to newer members, some within Anonymous took a distinctly hard edged approach that can be compared to hazing or the harsh instruction present in many military training regimes. Those adopting this approach answered most questions from new users by demanding that they lay low and observe and learn the culture of Anonymous on their own before contributing. Commonly this attitude was embedded within the sharp rebuke of “lurk more!” Some said these harsh methods were

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90 These graphs were generated from publically available information by Alexa Internet. Note that the scale of the y-axis is different for the two charts. The intent of these charts is to display spikes in traffic.

91 To lurk is a term that describes being present within an online community or forum, but not participating in the activities of that forum. Oftentimes lurkers are viewed with scorn and decried as voyeurs by active members of online communities (O’Connor & Mackeogh, 2007), which is understandable given the importance of active user participation for the successful maintenance of an
counter productive as they would scare away potential new members; however others countered by noting that new members would have to become accustomed to the abrasive, sarcastic culture of Anonymous in order to learn the culture and become productive members of Chanology. These harsh responses dominated the socialization of new users, given the abrasive nature of the culture and the attitude of Anonymous towards not taking online interaction too seriously.

Many of the new users stated that they had never heard of Anonymous or the *chans before the protests. As a result, everything these new users knew about Anonymous, they learned from the media coverage of the protests and the carefully constructed public image of Anonymous. Thus, as far as these users knew, Anonymous was an altruistic group fighting for human rights and freedom of speech, and not an online group that reveled in a dark sense of humor and trolling other individuals and groups. For newcommers then, the façade constructed by Anonymous was mistaken as being real, as intended. However to the consternation of many existing participants in Chanology, this façade had now been turned inward, being expressed in earnest by a growing number of new members drawn to Chanology by a desire to be a part of what they assumed was a fight for human rights.

Some existing members themselves began expressing moralistic sentiments towards Chanology. These Chanologists tended to remark that while they had become involved in Chanology strictly to troll the Church of Scientology, they had been surprised online community (Irriberry & Leroy, 2009). For Anonymous however lurking is seen as a positive and even necessary action for new users.
and angered by what they had learned about the past crimes and abuses committed by the Church. For these individuals, Chanology served as an enlightening experience that revealed Scientology to be what many Chanologists would come to label as a dangerous cult. From my observations I noticed that these people still stressed that their primary motivation was trolling, but that they now recognized harming Scientology, which they now viewed as a truly sinister organization, as a beneficial result of their efforts. While my investigation suggests that these individuals still did truly see trolling as their primary motivation, they also clearly felt the need to frame their newly developed outrage within the existing normative framework of Anonymous.

Despite the efforts of those who wished Chanology to remain strictly a complex trolling operation, moralistic motivations continued to spread throughout the Chanology userbase. The dramatic increase in users at Chanology websites and the increasing acceptance of moralistic posturing by existing members of Chanology began to overwhelm the efforts of those who sought to contain the spread of what were now being called “moralfags.” The purists were alarmed by the influx of moralfags but recognized the value of such a large increase in the size of Chanology. Thus at the Chanology sites, moralfags were not openly embraced, but their existence was tolerated.

92 Within Anonymous, the term “fag” is commonly used as an epithet, similar to the word’s everyday use. However, starting with the term newfag used to derisively label neophytes, fag began to be added to a given descriptor so as to create a word describing a group of people. This use of fag came to embody a less derisive tone and served more as a self referential nod to the “nothing is sacred” nature of the sense of humor within Anonymous.
Following the success of February 10th, Chanologists established March 15th as the next date for protests and decided to name the protests “Party Hard.” In order to increase the consistency of the protests and to combat the Church’s efforts to portray Anonymous as a hate group, the protesters decided to give the protests a theme and to have that theme be the celebration of the birthday of Church founder L. Ron Hubbard. Protesters were encouraged to use birthday party elements in their demonstrations and to focus on the alleged and documented crimes and bizarre behavior of Hubbard. Many long time critics responded to the February 10th protests positively and expressed their intentions to participate during the March 15th protests.

As their numbers increased, the moralistic Chanologists increasingly made their presence felt, leading to growing resentment and hostility among the established 711chan user base. These users became increasingly hostile towards Chanology, which they identified as the source of the sudden influx of unsocialized users on their boards. With the community growing increasingly hostile, the moderators of the site responded by removing public links to the #xenu board, hoping to give the impression that discussion of Chanology was no longer welcome at 711chan without getting rid of the Chanology board all together. However this did little to stem the tide of Chanology discussions and so the moderators of 711chan formally removed the #xenu board and announced that any users mentioning Chanology on 711chan would be banned.

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93 Party Hard is a meme, originating on 4chan that typically consists of a two frame animated image of some sort of convulsive movement, along with the text Party Hard. The meme is a reference to a song of the same name.
On the remaining Chanology sites, the Chanology purists lashed out at the moralists and blamed them for having Chanology exiled from its birthplace of 711chan and lamented that the moralists would slowly kill Chanology. The moralists countered saying that Chanology did not have an official mission statement or leadership structure and so the purists had no normative justifications for saying that a moralistic approach was incompatible with Chanology. Furthermore, the moralists said, their numbers were important in making Chanology a success and that while their motivations may have differed from those of the purists, their goals were still the same. An uneasy and unofficial truce was reached, whereby the Partyvan Wiki would serve as a site for the purists abrasive, troll driven approach to Chanology and Enturbation.org, already intended to be the “public” place of Chanology, would serve as a home for the moralistic Chanologists.

The March 15th protests were executed as planned and were considered to be more successful than the first round of protests. With the influx of new members, reports of increased turnout came in from multiple cities. Worldwide, turnout was estimated at 9,666 (Anonymous, 2008c). As with the first protests, there was no violence, and no visible attempts at subversion on the part of Scientology. And as with their counterparts in February, the March protests received media coverage. For their part, Scientology officials reiterated their claims that Anonymous was a dangerous hate group and that they had taken a number of precautions to protect their parishioners from Anonymous.

Following the March 15th protests, Chanology again experienced an influx of new members. While much less dramatic than the increase following the February 10th
protests, the influx of new members needing to be socialized upset the fragile balance between the purists and the moralists. In addition, several long time critics had become integrated into the moralist community, driving another wedge between them and the purists. As this continued, the purists became increasingly agitated, with many feeling as though Chanology was being taken from them and transformed into a moralistic crusade instead of a complex trolling operation. During this time, the Partyvan Wiki also went offline for issues unrelated to Chanology,\(^{94}\) stripping the purists of their primary gathering place.

With the increasing influence of new and idealistic Chanologists, the theme for the April protests was highly moralistic, focusing on reuniting families broken up by Scientology practices. Increasingly outnumbered, many purists began to leave Chanology in disgust, feeling that it had become over run with moralists and had been transformed from something fun into “serious business.” As purists left, the moralists were left to carry on Project Chanology. Thus, in the end, Project Chanology, at least from the standpoint of the purists, became a victim of its own success. With no official definition of the goals and strategies to be employed, the purists were ultimately unable to withstand the rise in prominence of the moralists.

As of April 2009, Chanology is still active. While numbers appear to have declined significantly, monthly protests are still held. Chanology has become highly decentralized, with remaining participants having developed a cell like structure based on

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\(^{94}\) The owners of the server on which the Partyvan Wiki was hosted could no longer afford their bandwidth costs and took the server offline.
geographical proximity. At the beginning of May 2008, purists made one last attempt to return Chanology to its online warfare roots by launching another DDoS attack on Scientology websites. Despite launching a relatively strong attack, the DDoS protection of the Church mitigated the effects of the attack and the majority of Chanology participants condemned the attacks. Since this incident, the Moralists have officially split from the community centered on the *chan websites. While many members of Chanology still visit the *chans, most now acknowledge that Chanology is separate from the *chans. I turn now to an examination of the data gathered from encyclopediadramatica.com.

Network Data

Data from Encyclopedia Dramatica was gathered as described in the methodology section. Here I report the characteristics of the gathered data and discuss the implications of this data in the following section. After removing missing and duplicate values, 393 individuals remained in the sample. From this sample, a network, $G$, with nodes $\mathbb{N} = 1,259$ and edges $\mathbb{L} = 2,836$. An analysis of the cumulative frequency distribution of the in and out degrees of nodes within the network revealed that the network is scale free, suggesting that the sample sufficiently captured the general structure of the network existing among the users in the sample (Newman, 2003).

The network graph has a diameter$^{95}$ of $d = 7$ and a density of $\Delta = 0.00179$. The mean clustering coefficient of the network is $\mu_{CC1} = 0.18$ ($\sigma = 0.263$), and a complete triadic census revealed 427 cyclic triads. The network had an average in degree of

$^{95}$ The diameter of a network graph is defined as the longest geodesic present in the graph and serves as a general indicator of the connectedness of a graph (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).
\[ \mu_{IN} = 19.58 \ (\sigma = 60.81) \] and an average out degree of \[ \mu_{OUT} = 11.25 \ (\sigma = 44.88) \]. Taken together, these values characterize the network as moderately connected with noticeable cliquishness, but which is still capable of efficient information flow and shows some degree of resistance to breakdown caused by users leaving the community. Yet despite this connectedness and efficiency of information transfer, the relatively low density of the network indicates an overall lack of completeness within the graph, meaning that many users do not have a large number of direct ties to other users. While it is true for most users that their removal would not lead to severe breakdown within the network, there are a small number of users whose removal could cause many other users to become isolates within the network. Further analysis revealed that most of these users were moderators at the site.

Network variables were also gathered for each individual in the sample. As a general measure of the flow of communication through a node on the graph, in and out degrees were collected. A full set of centrality measures was collected to characterize how embedded users were within the network of their immediate neighbors. Collected centrality measures include in and out degree closeness centralities, betweenness centrality, degree centrality, and the proximity prestige index for each node.\(^96\) Hub and authority weights, which serve as indicators of the relative importance of nodes for the dissemination of valued information were also collected. Finally, the clustering coefficient for each node was collected. Measures of community participation were also

\(^{96}\) A description of the derivation of all network measures and their purpose is contained in the Methodology section.
gathered, including the amount of activity spent creating user pages, the total number of article edits made, the total number of Chanology related article edits made, the quality of the Chanology related edits, and whether the user name appeared in other Chanology related communities.

After reviewing the variables, out degree and out degree closeness centrality were dropped as the measure of out degree within the sample was not robust.\textsuperscript{97} Hub and authority weights proved reliable in detecting moderators within the community but values for other community members were very low and demonstrated very little variance. As centrality measures provided indicators of similar nodal attributes and possessed higher variance they were kept and hub and authority weights were dropped. In degree closeness centrality, degree centrality, and proximity prestige index were retained as measures of centrality and the role played by individuals for the transmission of information throughout the network.

Total user page activity and number of Chanology related article edits were subjectively determined to be the best indicators of community involvement and Chanology related activity, respectively based upon a consideration of the operationalization of the traits to be measured and a comparison of these values with known important Chanology contributors within the sample. Visibility was dropped as the measure was considered too highly subjective and produced very few instances of

\textsuperscript{97} Since degree was computed from the number of messages left on user talk pages, in degree could be accurately measured for those in the sample. However, in order to obtain an accurate measure of out degree using this data gathering technique, the user talk pages of all individuals within the Encyclopedia Dramatica community would have to be analyzed.
individuals identified as visible. Thus total user page activity, Chanology related edits, and quality of Chanology related edits were retained as metrics of community participation. A complete list of descriptives of all collected variables, including rejected variables, is included in Table 1. All network calculations were preformed using Pajek and statistical opperations were preformed with R. The script used for these analyses can be found in Appendix A.
Figure 7: Network from Encyclopedia Dramatica.
Table 1

*Selected Network Attributes*

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<th>Measure</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Edges</td>
<td>2,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graph Density</td>
<td>0.00179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graph Diameter</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Cyclic Triads</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Figure 8*: Distribution of selected variables.
Table 2

_Degree Related Network Measures_

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Standard Deviation (σ)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Degree</td>
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<td>60.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out Degree</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>44.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>In Degree Closeness Centrality</td>
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<td>0.056</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out Degree Closeness Centrality</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.055</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree Centrality</td>
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<td>0.014</td>
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Table 3

_Influence Related Network Measures_

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<tr>
<td>Hub Weights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority Weights</td>
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Table 4

*Clustering Measures*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean ($\mu$)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation ($\sigma$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clustering Coefficient</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Clustering Coefficient</td>
<td>0.0055</td>
<td>0.0077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Community Involvement Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean ($\mu$)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation ($\sigma$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total User Page Activity</td>
<td>3404.04$^{98}$</td>
<td>10226.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Article Edits</td>
<td>178.35</td>
<td>184.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanology Related Edits</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>19.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility$^{99}$</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanology Edit Quality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{98}$ In bytes.

$^{99}$ As they are discrete variables, the mean and standard deviation for Visibility and Chanology Edit Quality are not given. In place of the mean for these variables, the mode is listed.
CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS

Having examined the data, conclusions may now be drawn allowing for answers to be formulated for the questions that have guided the present research. Along with providing answers to the research questions, the broader implications of the findings shall be explored. Following this explorations, potential weaknesses of the data are discussed along with methodological suggestions for mitigating these weaknesses. Finally, possible avenues for future research are explored.

First Research Question

The first question to be addressed is how the social context in which Anonymous exists has influenced the emergence and continued development of Project Chanology. In examining Anonymous, it appears that the most important aspects of this social context regarding the growth and development of Chanology are the decentralized and networked structure of Anonymous, characteristic of Web 2.0, and Anonymous’ self identification of the Internet as its domain or “turf.” In addition, the lack of formal leadership and formal conditions of membership within Anonymous contributed to the development of Chanology. These factors did not appear to influence Chanology directly. Rather this influence was mediated by the group structure. In a simpler formulation, the social contexts in which Anonymous operates shape the structure and self identity of Anonymous, which in turn shaped the growth and development of Anonymous.

Without doubt, the most important contextual factor contributing to Anonymous is the fluidity of identity enabled by online technologies. The earliest academic inquiries into online life noted this fluidity as a defining characteristic of the internet and as
something that truly made online interaction unique (Antaki, Ardèvol, Nùñez, & Vayreda, 2006; Cornetto & Nowak, 2006; Schiano, 1999). As Online Communication Technologies continued to evolve, the maintenance of stable online identity became easier and scholars noted a trend towards the increasing importance of identity creation and maintenance within online communities. Anonymous however actively resisted this trend and embraced software that allowed for the creation of an online community in which no user could ascertain the identity of any other user within the community.

This embrace of and dedication to anonymity fostered a culture in which markers of individual identity were absent, resulting in the diminished importance of identity for interaction among members of Anonymous and the absense of social structures and heirarchies based upon markers of identity. As a result, identity related features of interaction, such as prestige, stigma, or cliquishness were not observed at the *chan sites or at the Partyvan Wiki. As Anonymous evolved at 4chan in the absense of these traits, they came to be identified as undesirable or illegitimate motivating factors for action or for classification of others. Thus, even on Chanology related sites such as Encyclopedia Dramatica and Enturbulation, powerful norms remained that held that the contribution of individuals to Chanology should be evaluated based not upon the reputation of those individuals but rather upon the quality of those contributions.

These attitudes contributed to a culture that strove towards an ideal of meritocratic contribution to and participation in Chanology. As a result, suggestions made by members of Anonymous participating in Chanology were evaluated primarily upon their perceived efficacy, potential of success, and the degree to which they felt within the
normative order of Anonymous. This normative order held that Anonymous acted to troll others and amuse itself. In addition, this normative order stressed that matters on the internet were not to be taken too seriously. Finally, this normative order sanctioned those who tried to act as leaders of anonymous or those who tried to elevate themselves in importance over other members of the group.

Throughout my investigation of Chanology, I discovered instances where members of Anonymous asserted these norms in the course of debate over proposed courses of action for Chanology. In response to the initial call to action against Scientology, one poster at 4chan said “4chan is not Fight Club, raids are fucking stupid.” Another user countered this statement and the implication that Chanology was something Anonymous would not do by saying

   You don’t get it do you. We are the true face of the human race. We are the anti-hero, we will do good, and fuck anyone, good or bad, who happens to be in the way. The world is a fucked up place, and apathy and weak willed liberal fucks won’t change it. We will, or we’ll all die trying, you too.

In this case, the second poster is drawing upon the preferred construction of Anonymous as a group that does what ever it wants and does not care about how others perceive it. The poster also appeals to Anonymous’ vision of itself as a group that is able to achieve it’s goals when it endeavours to accomplish something.

Another user responding to attempts to frame Chanology as something outside the normative borders of Anonymous responded by again appealing to the idea of
Anonymous as a group that always achieves its objectives, but also made use of the dark humor which is pervasive throughout Anonymous.

I disagree, we can do this. We are Anon [abbreviated form of Anonymous], and we are interwebs superheroes. Who if not us will take on this abomanation (sic) of faith and capitalism (sic)? What would JFK say? He would probably say something like ‘Hey Maralyn (sic), its (sic) not gonna blow itself.” But he would probably also want us to do this.

In this statement, the poster tempers the seriousness of his statement with humor, in order to avoid being accused of taking things too seriously. Another poster responded to these challenges by drawing upon the history of Anonymous and its past actions saying

I know raids are stupid, but this is different. The pool’s been closed\(^{100}\) for a long time and we have grown stagnant. We need this.

In saying “The pool’s been closed” this poster implicitly references popular actions from Anonymous’ past and frames Chanology as a Chance to return to this idealized past. These examples are typical of the ongoing struggle to define and frame Chanology that existed throughout the life of the movement, a process that continues today. The following post, taken from WhyWeProtest.net, which replaced Enturbulation.org, is a response to someone criticizing the manner in which members of Chanology were conducting themselves.

Clearly you’ve taken this waay (sic) too seriously, keep in mind that Anon also does this for the lulz...\(^{101}\) You clearly

\(^{100}\) This is a reference to past attacks launched by Anonymous on a large online community known as the Habbo Hotel. These are considered by members of Anonymous to be some of the most successful attacks launched by the group.

\(^{101}\) Doing it for the lulz is a common phrase used by Anonymous and refers to undertaking actions in order to have fun at someone else’s expense.
are butthurt\textsuperscript{102} because you have taken this way to (sic) seeriously.

In this case the poster responded by attempting to mark the origional poster as someone taking Chanology too seriously and thus as someone acting outside the accepted normative order of Anonymous.

Another aspect of Chanology influenced by the structure of Anonymous was that, due to the lack of durable identity markers individuals could not rely upon personal credibility or alliance building to gain support for their ideas. Instead, they had to frame and present their ideas in a manner such that they were deemed acceptable and desirable by other members within the group. Thus one of the most noticable impacts of the context in which Chanology operated was the reliance upon proper framing of proposed courses of action.

As noted earlier the lack of official leadership structures within Anonymous meant that there was no individual or group of individuals in charge of the agenda of Anonymous; nor was there any sort of committee charged with approving proposed actions. Finally, individuals participating in Chanology were not required to participate in Chanology nor were they forbidden to act in the name of Chanology by their own accord. The decisions of when and how to act were reached through consensus, with participation strictly voluntary.

\textsuperscript{102} Butthurt is a derisive term used by Anonymous to describe those who become upset and angry in online settings. To label one as butthurt is to label that person as easily offended and as such is a way of marking that person as an outsider.
This reliance upon consensus building combined with meritocratic evaluation of ideas created an environment within Chanology that was deliberative, collaborative, and at times contentious. Debate was a hallmark of the conversations among members that I observed. Many Chanologists relished the debate, seeing it as a sort of process of natural selection whereby only the best ideas would survive the debate and come to be embraced by large numbers of people within Anonymous. Based upon my observations, this process did appear to provide an effective method by which the group was able to filter out unpopular ideas without the presence of an official committee tasked with performing such a function. While such deliberative processes are hardly unique to Anonymous, the near total reliance upon these processes for arriving at decisions regarding what action to take is a unique feature of Chanology. Members took pride in this unique quality, often times citing it as evidence of the superiority of Anonymous for engaging in collective action.

Another key contextual aspect that I found to have influenced the growth and development of Project Chanology was the decentralized and collaborative structure of the chans that spawned Chanology. Communication on the chan websites is rapid and often chaotic (Grossman, 2008), with ownership over posts and produced content rendered near impossible due to the ubiquity of anonymous posting. Because of this information at the *chans was routinely taken, altered, and reposted by different individuals. It is this decentralized, collaborative mode of cultural production that has made the chan sites such efficient producers of internet memes. Cultural products and
information evolve, mutate, and propagate throughout these websites as Anonymous posters continually communicate to one another.

This communicative process was adopted to Chanology. From the beginning, members of Anonymous participating in Chanology felt strongly that no individuals should expect to be singled out for their contributions to the larger cause. Those that demanded such recognition were labeled “egofags” and were strongly sanctioned by the group. This lack of ownership over ideas meant that all members within Chanology were free to build upon existing ideas and could modify those ideas as they saw fit. Furthermore, multiple individuals could engage in this process simultaneously, sharing their insights and changes with one another and continuing to refine ideas based upon the inputs of others.

This type of collaborative interaction is a hallmark of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2007), and it allowed Anonymous to act extremely rapidly. As O’Reilly notes, the decentralized collaborative interaction of Web 2.0 communities can be viewed as an analog to the manner in which the human brain processes information. Rather than information and ideas having to circulate through a rigid, bureaucratic process, Anonymous is able to focus the collective intellectual and creative resources of the group upon specific issues, with multiple individuals working independently to solve the same problem. This was a key adaptation that allowed Anonymous to respond rapidly to challenges and obstacles thrown into the path of Chanology by Scientology.

While the Church of Scientology had superior monetary resources and the apparatus needed to produce slick public relations campaigns, Anonymous was able to
adapt and alter it’s message at a rapid pace, continually mutating and making themselves a difficult target for Scientology to pin down. This can be understood as a key evolutionary aspect of group behavior enabled by Web 2.0. One could argue that as the assembly line was a key adaptation of cooperative action brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the decentralized structure of groups such as Anonymous is a key adaptation enabled by the growth and spread of Web 2.0.

An example of the key advantages provided by this decentralized work process is evident in the method by which Anonymous produced public statements regarding Chanology. From what I observed, the production of such statements followed a fairly standard process beginning with the suggestion of a public statement to be released regarding a specific issue. If someone believes there to be sufficient support for such a statement, he or she may decide to create a rough draft and post it on one of the websites used by Anonymous for Chanology. Once uploaded, other members of Anonymous would review it and make suggested changes, posting their revised versions. In this way, multiple individuals could work independently and concurrently on revising the same draft. This process was extremely fast, with my observations revealing that the creation of public statements in this manner seldom took longer than 48 hours, with most statements going from proposal to finished product in several hours. I contend that the collaborative mode of production endemic to Chanology provided a key advantage to Anonymous as the group was able to rapidly respond to challenges and continually mutate to successfully resist attempts by the Church of Scientology to label them as a hate group, or as religious bigots.
Another aspect of the contextual setting of Anonymous that left it’s mark upon Chanology was the attitude of Anonymous towards issues of privacy and open exchange of information online. Anonymous, as a group is firmly situated within a constellation of online communities that see the Internet as a space of free and open exchange of information and as a place where corporate interests should be subordinate to the needs and desires of internet users themselves. Common cultural traits among these groups are a celebration of technologies that subvert traditional media elite and severe hostility towards entities which are perceived to threaten free and open information exchange. This cultural ethos reflects a broader distrust of authority and suspicion of corporate power present in younger Western generations.

While Anonymous, with no official goals, never saw itself as a defender of online freedoms, observation of the *chans makes it clear that to a large degree, members of Anonymous embrace the idea of the internet as a radically open forum for information exchange. Among other observations, I noted a high degree of support for sites such as The Pirate Bay, a popular file sharing hub, or YouTube, that allowed internet users to efficiently share cultural products or to present their own cultural products.

In addition to the prevalence of this culture within Anonymous, group members, as previously noted, tended to embrace the mischevious and sometimes nihilistic world of trolling and online warfare. Many members of Anonymous, and most of those participating in the early phases of Chanology, embraced this culture and saw themselves as skilled trolls, often jokingly referring to themselves as the “Internet Hate Machine.” For them the Internet was meant to be a playful space and those easily offended by online
interaction were deemed emotionally weak and deserving of harassment. This underlying
tension between a carefree attitude towards online interaction and the emotional
investment many members of Anonymous had regarding protecting online space from
perceived threats served as the underlying cause of the schism between the Chanology
moralists and purists, as both sides were able to draw upon salient cultural frameworks to
support their respective positions.

These cultural orientations played a profound role in shaping Anonymous’
approach to Chanology. In order to gain support, the early proponents of Chanology
needed to present Chanology in a way such that other members of Anonymous would see
it as valid and desirable. The availability of these cultural factors meant that Chanology
was conceived publicly as a fight against censorship and privately as a massive trolling
campaign. As Chanology continued to grow and develop, members would return to these
cultural tropes again and again, drawing upon them in order to continually frame
Chanology in such a way as to maintain high levels of support. The cultural origins of
Anonymous, as an online community, informed their approach to the actions of the
Church of Scientology and, throughout the efforts against Scientology, served as the core
frame around which Chanology was built.

Thus the cultural context in which Chanology developed had a profound impact
upon the internal and external justifications of Chanology and the way in which members
of Chanology came to understand their own actions and goals. In this way, Chanology
can to some extent be understood as a product of the same cultural milieu from which
Anonymous emerged. In addition the necessity of and dedication to meritocratic debate
of ideas and the decentralized, networked structure of Anonymous had a lasting and noticable impact upon the internal functioning of Project Chanology. Members of Chanology engaged in vigorous debate, pitting contesting ideas against one another. Through this process of debate, supported by rhetorical framing, group consensus was achieved and proposed plans of action were put into place.

The collaborative nature of Anonymous also meant that ideas flowed relatively freely among members of Chanology, with the concept of “ownership” of ideas largely absent. This collaborative process also allowed Anonymous to respond rapidly to changing situations. In sum, the context in which Chanology developed produced an instance of social movement activity that was highly democratic, agile, and possessing dual goals- with an external emphasis upon fighting against censorship and an internal focus of harassing a deserving target.

Second Research Question

The next research question to be answered is how Anonymous is able to maintain stable group boundaries in the absence of formal group membership or code of conduct. As seen, Anonymous has been able to perpetuate its own existence and develop a shared culture despite the absense of formal definitions of insider and outsider status or any sort of mission statement. As other authors (Mead, 1934) have demonstrated, the ability for groups to establish a sense of “us,” along with a corresponding sense of “them,” plays a vital role in the ability of those groups to create and maintain stable boundaries and a collective sense of self.
Members of Anonymous do not have access to traditional signifiers crucial for the establishment of stable online identities that can be viewed by others. The ubiquity of anonymity and normative sanctions against separating oneself from the group mean that individuals remain unknown and are unable to distinguish other members from one another. As others have noted (Irriberrri & Leroy, 2009), the creation and display of identity are important precursors of the establishment of trust and solidarity within online communities. Once again, Anonymous lacks traditional resources necessary for this and thus must find other ways of establishing insider and outsider status.

Based upon my observations of Anonymous at the chans and at the insurgency wiki, I noted that, for Anonymous, the esoteric shared culture of the group became the primary resource used for the establishment of insider and outsider status. Anonymous has always taken a certain sense of pride in their somewhat odd, ideosyncratic sense of humor as well as pride in their knowledge of a wide variety of internet memes. Conversations among members of Anonymous were often filled with memes; and some interaction consisted solely of members continually mutating a stated meme or combining it with other memes in new forms. Group members who inappropriately used memes or professed ignorance of aspects of Anonymous’ culture were harshly rebuked.

In the following exchange, taken from the talk page of the Encyclopedia Dramatica article on Scientology, a user is asked to stop reverting (essentially deleting) the edits to the article by another user.

To the user Ecuador and to any other users whom it may concern. This is coming from an outside party. Please stop reverting every one of Chunkymunky’s edits. I think it’s
pretty clear that he’s not a Scientologist, or at the very least, isn’t vandalizing the Scientology article. It seems that he’s just trying to keep order, which is something this article desperately needs. So lay off, and learn to differentiate between vandalism and editing.

In response, the user Ecuador insinuates that the user Chunkymunky is a Scientologist.

Every single edit “Chunkymunky” has made REALLY, REALLY SUCKS and makes Scientologists look better. Chunkymunky hasn’t denied that he/she is a Scientologist or that they’re censoring info in the article. They say that silence signals agreement. I also thought that it (sic) their edit summary... was pretty suspicious, because they really removed those secret documents.

In his response Chunkymunky defends himself by asserting his superior knowledge over the use of Encyclopedia Dramatica and the culture of Anonymous and implies that the user Ecuador is unfamiliar with these issues. In his response he also displays the harsh confrontational language that typified many disputes within Chanology.

You’re (sic) a fucking faggot. I removed the links at the top because they are old news and there’s (sic) duplicate links in the External Links section. If you want to restore them then that’s (sic) fine but you need to chill the fuck out and lurk moar, retard.

As the preceding exchange displays, the establishment of insider status played an important role in Chanology, even at Encyclopedia Dramatica where users had semi stable identities.

Another example of the enforcement of group boundaries comes from an exchange at the Partyvan Wiki. Here a user made a post expressing concern over high levels of anti-semetic comments on the articles regarding Chanology.
Hey, I like this place overall. But whst (sic) up with all the Jewish bashing on her (sic)? I thought Anon was about fighting for justice. But this makes Anon sound like a bunch of Nazis.

The use of highly offensive humor is one way in which Anonymous maintains boundaries. Those who are offended by this humor are considered to be easy targets for trolling and are marked as outsiders. This post received several replies, the first of which was “Get back in the oven kike!” Other users made similar anti semetic comments and one user posted a picture of dead bodies from the Auschwitz death camp with the comment “lulz.” Another user explicitely referenced the use of humor to mark insider status by saying

If you don’t get it then you need to lurk moar niggerjew (sic). Seriously if this bothers you then STFU and GTFO\textsuperscript{103} of my internets you stupid faggot.

As these quotes clearly demonstrate, the responses were intended to further offend and upset the initial poster. In doing so, these members of Anonymous established themselves as insiders while marking the initial poster as an outsider unfamiliar with the culture of the group. In doing so, the distinction between insider and outsider was maintained, furthering the maintenance of group boundaries within Anonymous.

It is through the display of mastery over the culture of Anonymous that a member of the group may signal his or her insider status to other members. This was of great importance in the debates over Chanology for two primary reasons. First, implying insider status was important for imbuing one’s ideas with credibility. Second, members of

\textsuperscript{103} STFU is a commonly used acronym online and is short for “Shut The Fuck Up,” while GTFO is another such acronym which means “Get The Fuck Out.”
Anonymous were highly sensitive, particularly in the early days of Chanology, to efforts on the part of Scientologists to gain access to the sites where Chanology was being planned and to actively disrupt and subvert the activity there. Through their investigations of the alleged abuses of the Church of Scientology, members of Anonymous had become aware of the disruptive online tactics deployed by the Church in past conflicts (Grossman, 1995). The ease of access to the sites used in the planning of Chanology heightened these fears. Thus it was important that members of Anonymous possessed a means of demonstrating to their fellow group members that they were not Scientologist disruptors.

In understanding the manner in which Anonymous is able to maintain stable boundaries it is useful to draw upon the concept of social fields and cultural capital formulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Recall Bourdieu’s definition of a social field as a conceptual arena containing a specific set of institutions, cultural products, and interactional rituals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Perrotta, 2006). Cultural capital is constructed and maintained through the interactional logic of the field, leading to stable patterns of relations and interactions among individuals within the field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The ability of individuals to successfully navigate these fields results in differential hierarchies within societies and the ritualized interactions within these fields, described as habitus, maintains these structures of inequality.

Perrotta’s (2006) application of Bourdieu’s notions of social fields and cultural capital to the analysis of an online psychologists’ forum provides a useful theoretical

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104 ibid.
foundation for understanding the role of culture within Anonymous. Anonymous itself can be understood as a small scale social field that intersects with the broader social field of Internet culture. Viewed in this manner Anonymous is defined entirely by the shared culture of members and the ritualized interactions that take place among members within the group. While these are features common to most groups, what makes Anonymous unique is the near total dependence upon these aspects of group structure for the maintenance of group boundaries.

Within Anonymous as a social field then, knowledge of the culture of Anonymous and successful deployment of signifiers of such knowledge (often in the form of the use of memes or references to past actions taken by Anonymous) represent the accumulation and use of cultural capital. It is this knowledge that serves as the primary source of cultural capital within Anonymous. Thus possession of this knowledge is vital for an individual within Anonymous to signal his or her insider status and to display his or her competence within the social field that is Anonymous. As this competence was of the highest importance for gaining support for one’s ideas within Chanology, knowledge of the cultural code of Anonymous became an important resource for those seeking to influence the development of Chanology.

Because different members within Anonymous possessed differing degrees of mastery over this cultural code, a defacto hierarchy within Anonymous developed despite the emphasis by members of Anonymous that no such hierarchies existed. While Chanologists were adamant that ideas and plans were pitted against one another on meritocratic even ground, in reality members of Anonymous with a greater mastery over
the esoteric culture of Anonymous were able to present their ideas in a way such that they were more likely to be accepted by other members of the group. Members of Anonymous familiar with the history of the group and those who were adept at weaving memes and the argot of Anonymous into their textual communications were better able to successfully frame their ideas and suggestions.

When understood in this way, it becomes clear why Anonymous is so protective towards the idiosyncrasies of its culture. As knowledge of this cultural code serves as the most important source of cultural capital within the group, it must remain a guarded resource which can only be accessed through proper socialization within the group. This is why lurking is so important for members of Anonymous. The necessity of lurking before contributing creates a sort of price for admission to Anonymous. All are free to claim to be a part of Anonymous, but it is expected that those wishing to do so will take the time to learn the culture of the group such that they may serve as a positive contributing member of the group.

One of the factors contributing to the eventual schism within Chanology was an influx of new users unaware of the true nature of Anonymous. This large group of new members pushed the socialization resources of Anonymous well beyond the breaking point. Many of these new members felt that they already knew what Anonymous was based on media coverage of the protests and thus made little to no effort to learn the culture of Anonymous before contributing. The traditional social capital of Anonymous began to be devalued by these new arrivals. Because of this, the ability of Anonymous to differentiate insiders from outsiders was gravely compromised. Ultimately, the only way
for Anonymous to retain group cohesion, to save itself, was to detach from Chanology. Thus among the *chans, Chanology is often viewed as an interesting idea that ultimately failed and brought unwelcomed hoardes of unsocialized users into Anonymous.

Thus, as we see, despite a near total lack of traditional markers of identity, Anonymous was able to maintain stable group boundaries based upon a separation of insiders from outsiders. In viewing Anonymous as a social field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Perrotta, 2006), the identification of insider status can be understood as a process whereby members of the group amass and deploy cultural capital in the form of knowledge of and skillful manipulation of the cultural code of Anonymous. The structure of the group is maintained through habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), as members continually participate in ritualized processes of interaction with one another, continuously reaffirming the identity of Anonymous. The necessity of lurking, or learning the culture of the group, provides a cost of entry, helping to ensure that only members willing to learn the culture of Anonymous will end up as contributing members of the loose collective known as Anonymous. This serves as a vital mechanism of enforcement of cultural norms in a group that does not possess a formal code of conduct.

Third Research Question

The final research question to be answered is whether or not any form of leadership exists within Chanology and, if such leadership exists, what form it takes. As noted, one of the beliefs held most strongly by members of Chanology was that there was no form of leadership whatsoever within Chanology. Many of these group members also expressed their belief that Chanology was a superior form of social movement because of
this unique facet of their group structure. Based upon my observations and quantitative
data gathered from Encyclopedia Dramatica I can state conclusively that there was no
official leadership within Project Chanology, nor were there any individuals unofficially
recognized by leaders by other members of the group. In addition, in rare instances where
individuals tried to explicitly claim leadership status within Chanology, they were
rejected and harshly rejected by the group.

While I did not find any evidence of a formal leadership structure within
Chanology, I did find that an informal, ad-hoc, and fluid leadership structure did develop,
largely due to external pressures. In addition to this unofficial leadership structure, early
on there were several individuals who were clearly more important than others in
successfully initializing Chanology. These were the individuals who owned and operated
711chan and the Partyvan Wiki. Without their initial support for Chanology in the form
of allowing their sites to be used for planning and coordination, it is questionable whether
or not Chanology would have progressed past the conceptual phase. However as
Chanology gained momentum and established a dedicated space at Enturbulation.org,
funded by donations from Chanology members, the operators of 711chan and the
Partyvan Wiki declined in importance.

What is relevant to the present research is the unofficial leadership structure that
developed within Chanology. During the online attacks and the time leading up to the
first offline protest, Chanology was largely an undifferentiated mass, with many
individuals hesitant to reveal their geographical location to others as a result of the norms
of Anonymity and fear of legal reprisals from the Church of Scientology. However this
structure made even the bare minimum of coordination necessary for offline interaction difficult to achieve.

In response to the need for agreed upon meeting times and locations for the offline protests, some members of Chanology began to post their own suggested times and places within threads at the Partyvan Wiki and on Encyclopedia Dramatica. Following these initial postings, other members in the same geographical area would find these threads and join the conversation, adding support to the suggested meeting times or offering their own suggested locations. Members of Anonymonous with experience from previous public demonstrations shared their knowledge, noting that the protests would be much easier if local police departments were contacted beforehand and all necessary permits were obtained. This was handled by individuals volunteering to make the necessary contacts and to then relay that information back to other protesters. Other individuals volunteered to provide other services, such as bringing water or making extra protest signs for others to use.

These threads were the precursors of the dedicated websites that were eventually established for planning protests in different cities. Following the first protests, many members of Anonymous began to embrace a policy of decentralization. Posts appeared on the Partyvan Wiki urging members of Anonymous to set up their own websites for coordination of local protests. This was intended to both reduce the load on the servers at the Partyvan Wiki and to make it more difficult for the Church of Scientology to keep track of activities related to Chanology. As the total numbers of protesters at each geographical location was relatively small, members of Anonymous could set up low
cost, affordable websites. This policy of decentralization was successful and planning and
cordination of local actions were moved off the central sites. These central sites
continued to be used for coordination between local groups and served as inimportant
centers for discussion of the overall direction Chanology should take.

As a result of this policy of decentralization, the structure within Chanology
developed into a networked collection of semi-autonomous cells responsible for
executing offline protests. Coordination between cells was handled at the main
Chanology sites at the Partyvan Wiki and, later, Enturbulation.org. As time continued
members within these local cells started to perform the same duties at each protest action,
largely due to experience and personal preference. As individuals within cells became
accustomed to the performance of these roles, they began to calicify and developed into
habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). While these roles were not official, some
individuals became more important than others for important functions such as
coordinating with local police officers or ensuring that local websites were updated
regularly with current information. Based upon analysis of conversations members of
Anonymous had about their local cells and the coordination of their local protests, it also
became evident that many individuals came to rely on others for key planning and
coordination activities.

In this way, an unofficial, ad-hoc leadership structure developed within the
different local cells that came to comprise Chanology. These leadership positions were
not absolute as individuals were free to act as they saw fit. However the importance of
coordinated collective effort for saftey and success meant that most individuals willingly
sought out and defered to group consensus. I also did not find evidence that individuals in these positions of heightened importance saw themselves as being more important or elevated above other group members. Yet one can reasonably conclude that their removal from their respective cells would be particularly disruptive as the remaining members would have to regroup and assign new members to perform the necessary tasks.

Ultimately, the leadership structure within the Chanology cells developed in an organic manner, primarily driven by external pressures. Members of Anonymous found that delegation of responsibilities to different individuals provided the most efficient way of ensuring the success of the monthly protests. Some of these individuals came to take on particularly important functions, such as coordinating with local law enforcement or ensuring that local websites were updated with information related to the monthly protests. Yet, participation and coordination of Chanology remained highly participatory, voluntary, and democratic, due in large part to the commitment of Anonymous to democratic ideals of participation within Chanology.

Analysis of the community at Encyclopedia Dramatica revealed more about differing levels of participation and leadership activity within Chanology. The intent of the analysis of this data was to explore the nature of the relationships among users at Encyclopedia Dramatica that made edits to Chanology related articles. Specifically, I sought to explore whether observable differences in these users’ relations would emerge. Of the sampled users, most did not possess a high number of edits to Chanology related articles. The average number of Chanology related edits among sampled users was 8.08 (σ = 19.42), compared to the average number of total article edits among sampled users,
which is 178.35 ($\sigma = 184.30$).\footnote{105} In addition, most sampled users appear to devote more time to non Chanology related articles than to Chanology related articles. The average ratio of Chanology related edits to non Chanology related edits was 0.15 ($\sigma = 0.24$).\footnote{106}

What these results show is that, for the most part, users involved in the construction of Chanology articles at Encyclopedia Dramatica were not there solely for the creation of those articles. As the average number of Chanology and non Chanology related edits demonstrates, for most of the sampled users, Chanology activity comprised only one aspect of their participation at Encyclopedia Dramatica. At the same time, there is also evidence that those sampled users devoting a larger proportion of their efforts to Chanology related articles made fewer numbers of overall edits at Encyclopedia Dramatica. As Figure 10 shows, a comparison of the proportion of Chanology related edits to the total number of article edits reveals a moderate to strong negative correlation ($r = -0.5$) between the two variables. Thus we see that most of those working on Chanology articles at Encyclopedia Dramatica devoted only a portion of their efforts towards Chanology, but those devoting the highest proportion of their efforts to Chanology tended to display a lower level of overall participation at Encyclopedia Dramatica.

\footnotetext{105}{The standard deviation of the total number of article edits is substantially higher than that of the number of Chanology related edits because of a much larger range of values comprising the total edits variable.}

\footnotetext{106}{The proportion of Chanology related edits to non Chanology related edits was calculated. However, there were several undefined quantities within the variable resulting from users having no non Chanology edits (resulting in division by zero). Excluding these results would have been problematic as they were not randomly distributed throughout the sample. Users with zero non Chanology related edits represent a specific class of user. Thus the variable representing the proportion of Chanology to non Chanology edits was discarded.}
Findings from an examination of the measure of the amount of work users put into their respective user pages fit well with the data regarding edit activity. As expected there is a strong, positive relationship between total number of article edits and the volume of edits to a given user’s personal page \((r = 0.61)\), indicating that users who devote more time and effort towards maintaining their identity within Encyclopedia

\[ x_i' = \log(x_i + 1). \]

\(^{107}\) Note that in Figure 10 that the number of total article edits has been transformed in order to account for a marked positive skew in the distribution of the number of total article edits as well as to more closely match the range of values comprising the measure of proportion of Chanology related edits. Specifically, the following logarithmic transformation was applied to each data point comprising the total edits variable: \(x_i' = \log(x_i + 1).\)
Dramatica are more likely to have a large volume of editing activity. This finding echoes the findings of Irriberri et al (2009) who noted that the ability for users to maintain a visible identity is an important predictor of those users actively contributing content to the online community.

Given the relatively strong relationship between editing activity and user page activity then, it is not surprising that there exists a moderate negative relationship ($r = -0.4$) between the proportion of Chanology related edits and total user page activity. Thus we see that users making Chanology related edits displayed a wide range of activity on their respective user pages ($\mu = 3,404.04 \text{ KB}^{108}, \sigma = 10,226.26 \text{ KB}$), but users with the highest proportion of edits to Chanology related articles were more likely to have devoted less time and effort to their respective user pages.

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108 “KB” stands for kilobyte. One kilobyte is equivalent to 1,000 bytes.
Figure 10: Comparison of proportion of Chanology related edits and total user page activity.\(^{109}\)

Taken in consideration with the findings regarding editing activity, the following can be stated concerning participation in Chanology at Encyclopedia Dramatica. Most users making Chanology related edits at Encyclopedia Dramatica were already involved in the community and added in Chanology related edits to their existing day to day activity at Encyclopedia Dramatica. In other words, these existing users who were also

\(^{109}\) The same logarithmic transformation applied to the total number of article edits was applied to total user page activity in Figure 11.
involved in Chanology played an important role in bridging Encyclopedia Dramatica and Chanology by adding Chanology related information to an online community with which they were already familiar. There are also a smaller number of users who came to Encyclopedia Dramatica primarily to contribute to information related to Chanology at Encyclopedia Dramatica. These users were not as well integrated into the Encyclopedia Dramatica community. Thus in general, users devoting a proportionately greater amount of their time towards Chanology activity were likely to be less integrated into the Encyclopedia Dramatica community.

Analysis of the relationship between the users making the largest absolute contribution to Chanology at Encyclopedia Dramatica (operationalized as the number of Chanology related article edits), reveals more about the nature of participation in Chanology. Overall the network formed from the sampled users was well connected and resilient to the removal of individual members, and a relatively low level of cliquishness as measured by the clustering coefficients ($\mu = 0.14$, $\sigma = 0.27$) of each node within the graph.

In visualizing the overall network (Figure 8), the most noticeable overall structural features are a more densely connected region within the middle of the graph surrounded by a more sparsely connected exterior portion of the graph. There are several nodes that serve as important bridges between these two areas of the graph. By and large
these nodes correspond to sysops. Within the sample, two types of sysop, corresponding to two unique structural forms, emerged.

The first type, of which Chunkymunky, Arguecat3, and CrazyConan are exemplars, consists of more established and powerful sysops that are not as directly engaged in the minutiae of governance of other users. This type of sysop possesses a more complete ego network with a lower number of direct ties to other users than that possessed by the second type of sysop. This second type, typified by WhiteMystery, OldDirtyBTard, and Jasper, is more directly involved with interacting with site users. This type has a less complete ego network but is connected to a larger number of users. The second type of sysop plays an important role in connecting users in the periphery region of the graph to the central region of the graph.

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110 Sysop is a term that refers to users of a Wiki site that have been granted certain authority by site administrators to manage the day to day affairs of the wiki and to maintain order among the site’s user base. Sysops can accurately be described as the wiki’s analog to forum moderators.
Investigation of the structure of those users making the highest absolute number of Chanology related edits revealed that they were not well connected and integrated with other top contributors. Figure 14 displays the ego graphs of three exemplars of users with
a high number of Chanology related edits and sparse ego graphs. These users are contrasted with three exemplars of users with lower numbers of Chanology related contributions and denser ego graphs. These structural features are expected when considering the findings that users devoting more energy to Chanology related activities tend to be less well integrated into the Encyclopedia Dramatica community. On average, within the entire sample, sparsely populated ego graphs were more common than dense graphs; however the most active Chanology contributors possessed particularly sparse graphs.

Figure 13: Highly active Chanology contributors.
Figure 14: Low activity Chanology posters.

Figure 16 displays the four types of ego graphs seen most commonly in the sample. The simple dyad, exemplified by the first cell, was one of the most common ego graphs observed. The second type, demonstrated by Campus101, was primarily observed among low level Chanology contributors and is characterized by a small number of direct ties but a high degree of connectedness among those ties. This second type exhibits a high degree of cliquishness (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The third type, demonstrated here by Girlvinyl, consists of a high number of direct ties and few connections among those ties. This type of graph was relatively uncommon and corresponded almost exclusively to sysops. The final type is a hybridization of the second and third types and consists of a core of well connected users, as well as a number of weakly connected users themselves not connected to the core. This configuration was somewhat uncommon and primarily observed in connection with higher ranking sysops.
The relative dominance of dyadic ego graphs\textsuperscript{111} within the sample indicates that many users contributing to Chanology content did not invest a great deal of time and energy into maintaining ties to multiple other Chanology contributors. This is somewhat understandable given that the information related to Chanology was centrally located and publically visible in the form of articles at Chanology. Because of this, communication on user talk pages was not the only channel used for disseminating Chanology related information at Encyclopedia Dramatica. In particular, those users coming to Encyclopedia Dramatica specifically to edit Chanology related articles had less of a need to develop links to other members within the community.

\textsuperscript{111} A dyadic ego graph is one in which the graph contains only one alter.
These findings are further supported by an examination of the subnetwork formed by the most active Chanology editors at Encyclopedia Dramatica. Figure 17 shows the network formed by the most active Chanology editors at Encyclopedia Dramatica. What immediately stands out is the near total lack of direct ties among these contributors. For comparison, Figure 18 shows the network formed by another group of posters united in cause, the sysops within the sample. It is clear that the sysops are well connected to one
another. By contrast, the most active Chanology editors appear to be isolated from one another, relying on intermediate ties (not pictured in Figure 17) to reach one another.

Figure 16: Top Chanology Editors at Encyclopedia Dramatica

Figure 17: Sysops at Encyclopedia Dramatica.
The relative lack of connectedness among top Chanology contributors and the dominance of dyadic ego networks within the sample indicate that there was no formal or informal leadership structure among Chanology posters at Encyclopedia Dramatica. Users largely acted autonomously, not relying upon communication at user talk pages to coordinate their actions. As a result of this autonomy and lack of identity markers, Chanology developed as a strong meritocracy in which users needed to produce strong ideas and properly frame those ideas in order to convince other group members to endorse these ideas. This is typical of action throughout Chanology.

Unofficial leadership structures existed within the local cells of Chanology; yet, beyond this, users acted relatively autonomously, relying upon observation of group norms and consensus in order to guide their own actions. Ultimately it was through this process of consensus building and repeated, increasingly habitual action (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) that participants within Chanology were able to effectively self regulate their behavior and produce coordinated action. And so it is this combination of organically developed leadership within a cell like structure and autonomous action outside of these cells, moderated by group expectations, that defines the structure of Chanology.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

Chanology provides an instance of a new and emergent instance of social interaction with important ramifications for our understanding of social movements. Project Chanology certainly fits within the working definition of social movements provided by Charles Tilly (2004). Tilly notes that key characteristics of social movements are that they exist as collaborative projects, they combine program identity and standing claims, they are nurtured by democratization, and they assert popular sovereignty. Collaborative interaction has been one of the hallmarks of Chanology. Since its inception, Chanology has grown and developed as a joint project made possible by its constituent members.

As Project Chanology continued to evolve, members continuously produced claims of program, identity, and standing. From the very first “Message to Scientology” video, Anonymous made its goals clear. Scientology was labeled a danger to society and Anonymous was determined to dismantle it. Specifically, Anonymous identified the removal of the Church’s tax exempt status within the United States and exposure of the crimes committed by the Church as goals of Project Chanology. These statements of purpose were backed by proposed plans of action.

Anonymous was highly proactive in making identity claims. Tilly (2004) notes that the primary means by which social moments make identity claims are through displays of worthiness, numbers, unity, and commitment. Anonymous made displays of worthiness by framing themselves as defenders of free speech and crusaders against the abuses of the Church of Scientology, which they framed as a dangerous, totalitarian cult.
In taking to the streets and emphasizing the image of Anonymous as an amorphous, widespread social awakening, members of Chanology directly made displays of numbers, striving to create the image of a widespread groundswell of support and activity. Anonymous characterization of itself as a faceless legion of individuals bound by cause constituted a display of unity. Finally Anonymous constantly asserted that they would not abandon Chanology until they had achieved their goals. This served as an assertion of unity.

As Tilly (2004) notes, democratization tends to foster the development of social movements and lead to a general increase in social movement formation. The internet itself is undergoing democratization as access increases and individual users are increasingly able to share their thoughts and communicate with others in an online setting. Chanology then, can be understood as a product of increasing democratization of the World Wide Web. Project Chanology, like other social movements, also asserts popular sovereignty (Tilly, 2004). Anonymous has framed Project Chanology as a popular movement of individuals from all walks of life coming together, united by a common cause. This is tied directly into Anonymous’ claims of worthiness, as they claim to represent what is right and what is most beneficial for society.

In examining the future of social movements, Tilly (2004) predicted a continual evolution of the social movement marked by two processes: internationalization and professionalization. Internationalization is a process whereby social movements expand

112 One must still remain mindful, however that differential access to the internet among the world’s poor sets an upward bound on the democratic potential of the internet.
in scope, eventually crossing international borders; and professionalization is a process whereby social movement organizations become increasingly specialized, with power and authority within those movements increasingly centralized (Tilly, 2004). Tilly argued that internationalization would be a likely response to globalization. As the logic of transnational capitalism continued to shift power towards international entities such as the WTO, social movements would have to adapt by growing beyond the confines of national borders. A byproduct of such a change is the decline of movements representing national and ethnic identities in favor of more broad identity politics, often grounded within a framework of human rights.113

Professionalization is seen as a necessary byproduct of internationalization (Tilly, 2004). As social movement organizations increase in size and complexity due to internationalization, an increasingly bureaucratized and centralized organizational structure becomes necessary to coordinate action.114 Tilly sees professionalization as an unfortunate development as it cuts against democratic representation and participation within social movements. Furthermore, local movements may die out, as they become increasingly unable to compete for resources and attention with large professional social movements that command large resources and connections to political elites. Ultimately Tilly fears that social movements may become subject to institutional capture as they become increasingly integrated within the power structures of the elites that dominate social institutions and have a vested interest in perpetuating the status quo. Social

113 ibid.
114 ibid.
movement leaders may become hesitant to push too hard for change, being wary of damaging their access to elites.

Chanology provides some degree of hope in the face of Tilly’s pessimistic predictions. Certainly Chanology is an international movement, with members in multiple countries participating and targeting an international entity. Chanologists are bound by shared goals, not national or ethnic identity. At the same time, Anonymous was able to remain organized and coordinate action within Chanology without having to institute a centralized leadership structure. Chanology was able to mobilize international participation while still maintaining norms of democratic participation within the movement. What allowed this was the proliferation of internet communications technologies that allowed Anonymous to communicate quickly and efficiently. In addition, the networked structure of Anonymous allowed the group to leverage the full extent of its creative and intellectual resources without relying upon a bureaucratic organizational structure.

Chanology also shows the shift in resource mobilization for social movements, and the asymmetrical contention made possible by internet communication technologies. The Church of Scientology possesses a vast advantage in material and financial resources over Chanology, yet the Chanologists were able to successfully take on the Church and spread their message in the face of opposition from the Church. The primary resource in this conflict was public opinion. Anonymous sought to turn people against the Church, encouraging them to demand action taken against the tax exempt status of the Church and the alleged abuses of Scientology. Anonymous proved to be extremely savvy in
managing its public image and effectively taped the networked structure of online communities to spread its message outside of traditional media channels. The success of Anonymous in doing this should be noticed by disenfranchised groups seeking to move public opinion and challenge more powerful, vested interests.

Ultimately, Chanology proved to be uniquely well suited to challenging the Church of Scientology. Anonymous did not have important visible leaders that the Church could seek to attack or discredit. In addition, Anonymous was highly mobile, constantly shifting tactics and occupying new places online, always staying one step ahead of the Church. Chanologists effectively leveraged websites such as Wikileaks dedicated to free exchange of information to host documents and other materials the Church wished to keep censored. Most importantly of all, Anonymous was able to consistently subvert and circumvent the efforts of the Church to label themselves victims of an anti-religious hate group. The resistance of Chanology to the efforts of the Church holds promise for other social movement groups. Leveraging the strengths and unique aspects of online interaction opens up new modes of organization and new methodologies of resistance for traditionally disempowered groups around the world.

As the present research shows, online communities provide vibrant objects for study and hold the promise of greatly expanding our understanding of human social life, both on and offline. The online setting, while providing unique opportunities and challenges, ultimately exists as an exciting new frontier to be probed and mapped by social scientists. Furthermore, the present research has demonstrated the utility of quantitative methodological investigation of online interaction, particularly the use of
network analysis. However, this research is not without its potential shortcomings. I address these now and provide potential remedies.

Caveats

The present investigation of Chanology shares the methodological concerns inherent in all qualitative research, mainly the problem of representation. Quite simply, it is impossible for any researcher, no matter how dedicated, and no matter how much time and resources he or she possesses, to ensure that a social group has been represented with complete accuracy and fidelity (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Any ethnographic observation is ultimately an act of interpretation, and meanings can become distorted, radically modified, or even lost as they pass through the observers analytic and theoretical lenses (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). Furthermore, the complexity of social life is such that no observer can recall all that he or she experiences, thus making the inscribed record of that life an limited facsimile. The act of deciding what is important enough to merit inclusion in field notes and analysis in and of itself is an act of interpretation in which the observer potentially reshapes the reality of the group under study (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). At the same time, the role of the researcher is not to act as a mere mouthpiece for the group in study but rather to bring theoretical insights to bear upon empirical observations in order to better characterize and understand those observations. It is through this interpretive process that sociological knowledge and understanding is developed.

While the online setting alleviates some of the problems associated with ethnographic research (Fay, 2007), the issues mentioned above still remain. While these
problems cannot be avoided entirely, they can be mitigated by proper methodological procedure (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). In spending time observing Anonymous, I endeavoured to learn as much as possible about the group in order to achieve the highest possible accuracy in my representations of this group. In comparing my own assessment of events with those of members of Anonymous participating in Chanology, I am confident that I have accurately captured the widely accepted understanding of Chanology within Anonymous.

The norm of Anonymity itself presented unique challenges. At the *chan sites and the Partyvan Wiki, it was essentially impossible to keep track of who said what due to the lack of identity. To cope with this I avoided focusing upon the role of individuals and instead focused upon observing Anonymous as a whole, following the general ebb and flow of interaction rather than drilling down on the minutiae of that interactional setting. Combined with this norm of Anonymity the norms sanctioning speaking on behalf of Anonymous meant that interviews with individual members or asking individual members to provide information on behalf of the group. Thus I was unable to check with individual members to ensure that my observations matched up with the proper interpretation of events by the group. However, given the lack of official mission statement or goals within Anonymous, this may have been a futile pursuit, even if members could speak on behalf of the group.

Since there were no official sites designated for the planning of Chanology and since members acted largely autonomously, it is possible that my observations missed one or more important groups within Chanology due to those groups acting in secrecy.
The sites I chose for observation were the most active sites, but it is possible that there were other locations, unbeknownst to me, used for planning. This only becomes highly problematic if this possible unknown activity was significant enough to noticeably influence the growth and development of Chanology. As the observations used for the present research remained at a relatively high level, exploring overall structure and action, the potential impact of secret groups upon the present research is greatly attenuated.

There are also caveats regarding the quantitative aspect of the research which must be addressed. When representing something as complex as human behavior in terms of mathematical abstraction, one always runs the risk of oversimplification as well as the risk of substituting mathematical formalism for empirically grounded observation. These issues were largely ameliorated by the marriage of ethnographic observation with quantitative formulation. It is also important to bear in mind that network analysis essentially creates its own object of study - the network (Knox, Savage, & Harvey, 2006). In interpreting the results of the present study one must not reify the concept of the social network. While network analysis provides a powerful means of conceptualizing relations and positional structure, it still remains an imperfect representation of complex phenomena. In interpreting the network analysis contained within, the reader should bear in mind that network analysis has been used to augment empirical observation, not to replace it.

Another important caveat regarding the network analysis is the potential for ties among sampled members that have been missed. In sampling, a specific communication
channel was analyzed to produce edge lists, specifically user talk pages. It is possible that users communicated and formed ties with one another at Encyclopedia Dramatica via other channels, such as posting comments to one another on article talk pages. If a significant proportion of communication and tie building took place outside of user talk pages this could potentially alter the observed structure of the network and necessitate a reconsideration of findings. Based upon my investigation of Encyclopedia Dramatica and the nature of communications among members, I am relatively confident that the majority of communication and connection among members was captured via the utilized methodological techniques. Nevertheless, future research must account for the possibility that a significant portion of communication may be taking place outside of user talk pages.

There is also the possibility that the experience of Chanology was significantly different than at other sites, making comparison of data from Encyclopedia Dramatica with other Chanology sites problematic. However based upon my observations, I feel that despite the unique aspects of Encyclopedia Dramatica, these qualities were not profound enough to render comparisons unusable. Still, when interpreting the results of this study, the reader should remain aware of the possibility that results from Encyclopedia Dramatica may need to be modified or may even be incompatible with those from other Chanology related sites. While these and other caveats are inevitable within any research, they have been reduced as much as is possible through proper methodological practice.

Recall that an edge list is a list of directed connections between units of analysis used to construct a directed network.
Future Directions for Research

The present study is but a tentative step towards establishing a new research agenda that seeks to explore and better understand the potential provided by online social action. As I have shown, online communities have much to teach social scientists and currently available research techniques are ready to be deployed to chart these exciting new frontiers of the social world. Project Chanology is just one interesting instance of online action. As technology spreads and becomes increasingly integrated into our day to day lives, we should expect to see the boundaries between the online and offline world blur as action on the internet overruns its buffer and manifests in the “real” world (Jones, 1999). Good research creates as many questions as it answers (Cohen, 1988). There is much that remains unknown and so here I propose potential directions for the present research to follow.

The largest question remaining unanswered is how Chanology has continued to evolve. As of April 2009, Chanology is still active and still consists of a group of individuals dedicated to fighting against the perceived abuses of the Church of Scientology. Based upon my informal observations, participation in Chanology has decreased significantly, but those that remain are highly dedicated and driven by a sense that what they are doing is just and of the utmost importance. The culture of Chanology has also seemingly changed much from that which permeated its early days. There also seems to be a lingering conflict between the desires of Chanologists to stay connected to their chan based origins, while at the same time distancing themselves from the perceived negative aspects of that culture. Chanology appears to be in a liminal position, trying to
establish a culture and sense of self separate from the chans, while still retaining the identity of Anonymous. The most obvious direction for future research is to follow these developments in Chanology. Of particular interest is the ongoing process by which members of Chanology continue to shift their own perceptions of Project Chanology and how the movement continues to respond to new challenges.

Also raised by the current research is the question of whether or not we can expect to see the continued emergence of social movements structured like Chanology or whether the emergence of Chanology is unique to Anonymous. Future research should return to the structural aspects of Chanology and ask to what degree these unique aspects, such as its fluid, decentralized structure and high levels of democratic participation are made possible by online communication technologies and to what extent they were enabled by the cultural orientation of Anonymous. This line of inquiry is of vital importance for our understanding of online social action and for the potential of these new technologies for social movement mobilization.

In addressing the potential of Chanology for other social movements, future research should address the rather apolitical nature of Chanology. Anonymous has displayed, in Project Chanology, a rather remarkable ability to unite individuals across gender, racial, religious, and political barriers in common cause. In my observations I noticed a broad degree of gender equality within Chanology and the lack of identity markers made race almost a non issue within Chanology. I also observed individuals put aside political differences in order to remain focused on the goals of Chanology. A broad array of political orientations was present, ranging from members identifying as strident
conservatives all the way to others identifying as radical anarchists.\textsuperscript{116} It remains to be seen whether Chanology would have been able to draw such a broad based coalition of participants with a highly politicized agenda such as abortion rights or government funding of social programs.

A final exciting avenue for research is the continued refinement of network analysis in online settings. As has been seen, the techniques of network analysis have shown success in elucidating structure within Anonymous, a largely undifferentiated group with a highly nebulous internal structure. Thus the potential of network analysis for online communities in which individuals are easier to observe and track is immense. The inscribed, durable nature of online interactions makes network analysis particularly well suited to investigation of online communities (Welser, Smith, Fisher, & Gleave, 2008).

Combining network analysis with regression analyses provides the potential for even greater understanding of structure within online networks. With proper operationalization of various behaviors and social roles in online settings into descriptor variables, network attributes of individuals can be regressed as predictors of these behaviors. Through different regression techniques it may be possible to isolate different network attributes that serve as reliable predictors of certain behaviors or social roles. From this information it may be possible to build predictive models of certain behaviors based upon the position of individuals within online communities. It may also be possible to build algorithmic filters that draw out certain types of individuals within online communities.

\textsuperscript{116} Of course, the limitations of identity display present within Anonymous also militate against the display of political affiliation and thus against the formation of political cliques within Anonymous.
communities. Such techniques would be of immense use to those needing to quickly and efficiently locate certain types of individuals within online networks. Regardless of what direction it takes, future investigation into online life is likely to yield fruitful results.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Ultimately the original vision of Chanology became a victim of its own success. Anonymous succeeded in its goal of creating a positive public image and framing Chanology as a virtuous fight for freedom of speech against a sinister, totalitarian cult. Yet, Anonymous found itself unable to adequately socialize the sudden influx of new members brought on by media coverage of Chanology. Without any official leadership or agenda, the Chanology purists had no recourse against the growing tide of moralists. The barriers that encircled Anonymous began to weaken and it can be argued that Anonymous saved itself by abandoning Chanology. A wall was built between the chans and Project Chanology. And though individuals were free to pass through that wall, it was understood that they were to not try and bring Chanology back to the chans.

Conversely, it is arguable that it was necessary for Chanology to break free from the cultural milieu of the chans if it was to survive as a social movement. Both moralists and purists benefited from this. With Scientology seemingly unwilling or unable to mount any kind of coordinated response to Anonymous, those looking to Chanology as a trolling operation saw diminishing returns for their efforts. As interest waned, the moralists took over, substituting legitimate moral outrage for the desire to troll. By shifting focus to actually fighting against the alleged abuses of the Church, Chanology was able to stay alive. At the same time, the purists were able to retreat from the moralizing of Chanology and preserve the normative boundaries of Anonymous.

What Chanology does is show the potential offered by the continued proliferation of internet communications technologies. Anonymous was able to effectively mobilize
thousands of individuals across the globe in a relatively short span of time, all without a centralized leadership structure. This created a form of participation that was highly fluid, democratic, and resistant to targeted attempts at disruption. By leveraging these technologies, members of Chanology could communicate rapidly and efficiently with one another. In addition the collaborative structure of Chanology enabled participating members to rapidly formulate strategies and enact tactical approaches. The low cost, high impact nature of Chanology’s protests may well serve as a useful model for future social movement development.

The present study sought to better understand the growth and development of Chanology and the group behind its creation, Anonymous. The most important findings from the present research are as follows. First, the online setting in which Chanology developed produced a movement that was dynamic and highly fluid. Project Chanology was a continually evolving movement that shifted from website to website as circumstances changed. The lack of formalized leadership structures and norms of anonymity among members of Chanology meant that achieving consensus among members was essential. It was through consensus that coordinated group action was planned. Thus participation in Chanology was highly democratic.

The emphasis on consensus building, combined with the lack of identity markers contributed to a meritocratic arena in which competing ideas were pitted against one another. Members of Anonymous took pride in this and believed that it ensured that only the best ideas were acted upon, instead of a situation in which popular or powerful individuals could dictate the course of the group’s actions. Norms of anonymity also
militated against a sense of ownership over ideas or plans on the part of participants within Chanology. As a result, participation was highly collaborative, with individuals free to take existing ideas and modify them as they saw fit before suggesting these modified forms to other members. This same collaborative process allowed members of Anonymous to rapidly produce public statements and responses to challenges put forth by the Church of Scientology.

A second key finding from the present research is that Anonymous was able to maintain stable group boundaries in the absence of traditional markers of individual and group identity. It was the esoteric cultural code of Anonymous that served to bind group members together by serving as a resource to be used in the signaling of insider status. In characterizing Anonymous as a social field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), this cultural code becomes valued social capital, which is accumulated through its mastery by members of Anonymous. By displaying this mastery, members of Anonymous were able to signal insider status to one another and maintain group boundaries. The necessity of learning this culture for interaction served as a de facto cost of entry into the group.

The final key finding was that while Anonymous and Chanology did not possess any form of official leadership structure, unofficial leadership positions developed organically within local Chanology cells, primarily due to external pressures such as the need to coordinate with local law enforcement during protests. Those occupying these leadership positions did not identify themselves as such and their importance was due not to being selected as leaders but rather developed from the habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) of local cells. As individuals grew accustomed to repeating actions and roles, these
roles ossified somewhat, leaving durable leadership positions. However this leadership structure was not present beyond the level of local cells.

An analysis of Chanology activity at Encyclopedia Dramatica further supports these findings. Investigation of the social network formed by Encyclopedia Dramatica users making edits to Chanology related articles revealed a high level of autonomy on the part of these users. While the overall network was well connected, individual users did not maintain many direct ties with others and there were almost no direct ties among the most active Chanology users. As these findings demonstrate, participation in Chanology was highly decentralized, with participants relying upon normative structures to guide their participation, rather than continued communication with other members of Chanology. This resulted in a structure that was highly fluid and resistant to disruptive efforts on the part of the Church of Scientology.

In the end, Chanology itself does not appear to be a social movement that will have a noticeable impact upon society at large. Its selected target, the Church of Scientology, is relatively powerless and unimportant and the ability for Chanology to function over a lengthy period of time remains in question. At the same time, Chanology presents an exciting new form of social movement mobilization that holds out hope for scattered and disenfranchised groups around the world to rise up and leverage the strength of online communications technologies to raise their voices in unison and demand change. As Anonymous has demonstrated with Project Chanology, the effective use of these technologies can allow groups to effectively challenge groups much more powerful than themselves. Chanology also demonstrates the power of the internet for
uniting peoples scattered by vast geographical distances. Finally, Project Chanology
displays the potential for true democratic social movement participation, even in
movements that span continents.

Ultimately, technologies are no more and no less than what we make of them. The
rise of the Internet has already produced profound, lasting change in cultures and
civilizations across the globe. What’s more, there is no reason to believe that the spread
of these technologies and the changes they engender will halt. The decisions we make
today on how we will wield the awesome power inherent in internet communications
technologies will have profound implications that will echo across generations. It is for
this reason that we must constantly explore and evaluate these technologies and their role
in our lives. This is why research into the social impacts of the internet is every bit as
important as research into network infrastructure and computing technologies. We must
ensure that our decisions are guided by wisdom, for this is the only way that we can truly
ensure that we use these technologies to create better worlds for all.
WORKS CITED


http://www.alexa.com/help/traffic_learn_more

Internet: http://www.alexa.com/company/technology

We Protest: http://www.whyweprotest.net/en/


from Encyclopedia Dramatica:
http://www.encyclopediadramatica.com/PROJECT_CHANOLOGY/IRL_PROTEST_PAGE

2009, from Encyclopedia Dramatica:
http://www.encyclopediadramatica.com/Talk:PROJECT_CHANOLOGY/Archive_1

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http://www.encyclopediadramatica.com/Encyclopedia_Dramatica:ED_Is_Not


http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1821435,00.html


http://www.prolexic.com/admin/sources/editor/assets/PDF/Prolexic_Overview.pdf


APPENDIX A: SCRIPT FOR ANALYSIS OF NETWORK DATA

The following script was used to analyze collected network data. It is included here to demonstrate the specific methodological procedures used in the analysis. The contents of this script are license free. Any or all parts may be used freely without attribution.

```r
library(lattice)
testData <- read.delim("F:/Thesis Related/Network Data/R/TheRealDeal.txt", header=T)
attach(testData)
summary(testData)

histNorm <- function(x){
  M <- mean(x);
  SD <- sd(x);
  hist( x, freq=FALSE, col="light blue",
        main=(paste("Histogram of",deparse(substitute(x)))),
        xlab=deparse(substitute(x))
    );
  curve( dnorm(x, mean=M, sd=SD),
```
#---Scatterplot with Regression Line---<
# Generates a scatterplot and an OLS regression line.

corPlot <- function (x,y) {
    plot(
        x,y,
        xlab=deparse(substitute(x)),
        ylab=deparse(substitute(y)),
    )
    abline(
        lm(
            y~x
        ), col="red"
    )
    mtext(
        paste("r=",
              (strtrim
               (toString(cor(x,y)),
                4)
              )
        ), side=4
    )
}

###======================###
###               Define Variables       ###
###======================###

#---In and Out Degree---<
InDeg <- In.Degree
OutDeg <- Out.Degree

#---Centrality Measures---<
InCloseCent <- In.Degree.Closeness
OutCloseCent <- Out.Degree.Closeness
Between <- Betweeness.Centrality

#---Prestige Measures---<
DegCent <- In.Degree.Centrality
ProxPrest <- Proximity.Prestige.Index
HubWgt <- Hub.Weight
AuthWgt <- Authority.Weight

#---Clustering Coefficients---<
CC1 <- Clustering.Coefficient
CC1Std <- Standardized.Clustering.Coefficient

#---User Page Activity---<
TotAct <- Total.Activity
PreAct <- Pre.Chanology.Activity
PostAct <- Post.Chanology.Activity

#>---Article Edits---<
AllEdit <- Total.Edits
ChnEdit <- Chanology.Related.Edits
OthEdit <- Non.Chanology.Edits
ProChn <- Proportion.Chanology.Edits
ProOth <- Proportion.Non.Chanology.Edits
Ratio <- Chanology.to.Non.Chanology.Ratio

#>---Discrete Variables---<
Visible <- Visible
Quality <- Edit.Quality

###=========================###
#### Variable Transforms ####
###=========================###

#>---In and Out Degree---<
InDegLN <- log(1+In.Degree)
OutDegLN <- log(1+Out.Degree)

#>---Centrality Measures---<
InCloseCentLN <- log(1+In.Degree.Closeness)
OutCloseCentLN <- log(1+Out.Degree.Closeness)
BetweenLN <- log(1+Betweenness.Centrality)

#>---Prestige Measures---<
DegCentLN <- log(1+In.Degree.Centrality)
ProxPrestLN <- log(1+Proximity.Prestige.Index)
HubWgtLN <- log(1+Hub.Weight)
AuthWgtLN <- log(1+Authority.Weight)

#>---Clustering Coefficients---<
CC1LN <- log(1+Clustering.Coefficient)
CC1StdLN <- log(1+Standardized.Clustering.Coefficient)

#>---User Page Activity---<
TotActLN <- log(1+Total.Activity)
PreActLN <- log(1+Pre.Chanology.Activity)
PostActLN <- log(1+Post.Chanology.Activity)

#>---Article Edits---<
AllEditLN <- log(1+Total.Edits)
ChnEditLN <- log(1+Chanology.Related.Edits)
OthEditLN <- log(1+Non.Chanology.Edits)
ProChnLN <- log(1+Proportion.Chanology.Edits)
ProOthLN <- log(1+Proportion.Non.Chanology.Edits)
### Variable Binds ###

#>---Degree Measures---<
DegVars <- cbind( InDeg, OutDeg )

#>---Centrality Measures---<
CentVars <- cbind( InCloseCent, OutCloseCent, Between )

#>---Prestige Measures---<
PrestVars <- cbind( DegCent, ProxPrest, HubWgt, AuthWgt )

#>---Clustering Coefficients---<
ClusterVars <- cbind( CC1, CC1Std )

#>---Article Edits---<
PageAct <- cbind( AllEdit, ChnEdit, OthEdit, ProChn, ProOth )

#>---Independent Variables---<
IndVars <- cbind( InDeg, OutDeg, InCloseCent, OutCloseCent, Between, DegCent, ProxPrest, HubWgt, AuthWgt, CC1, CC1Std, TotAct, PreAct, PostAct, Quality, Visible )

#>---AllVariables---<
AllVars <- cbind( InDeg, OutDeg, InCloseCent, OutCloseCent, Between, DegCent, ProxPrest, HubWgt, AuthWgt, CC1, CC1Std, AllEdit, ChnEdit, OthEdit, ProChn, ProOth, TotAct, PreAct, PostAct, Quality, Visible )

#>---Logged Degree Measures---<
DegVarsLN <- cbind( InDegLN, OutDegLN )

#>---Logged Centrality Measures---<
CentVarsLN <- cbind( InCloseCentLN, OutCloseCentLN, BetweenLN )

#>---Logged Prestige Measures---<
PrestVarsLN <- cbind( DegCentLN, ProxPrestLN, HubWgtLN, AuthWgtLN )
#>---Logged Clustering Coefficients---<
ClusterVarsLN <- cbind( CC1LN, CC1StdLN 
)

#>---Logged Article Edits---<
PageActLN <- cbind( AllEditLN, ChnEditLN, OthEditLN, ProChnLN, ProOthLN 
)

#>---Logged Independent Variables---<
IndVarsLN <- cbind( InDegLN, OutDegLN, InCloseCentLN, OutCloseCentLN, BetweenLN, DegCentLN, ProxPrestLN, HubWgtLN, AuthWgtLN, CC1LN, CC1StdLN, TotActLN, PreActLN, PostActLN 
)

#>---Logged AllVariables---<
AllVarsLN <- cbind( InDegLN, OutDegLN, InCloseCentLN, OutCloseCentLN, BetweenLN, DegCentLN, ProxPrestLN, HubWgtLN, AuthWgtLN, CC1LN, CC1StdLN, AllEditLN, ChnEditLN, OthEditLN, ProChnLN, ProOthLN, TotActLN, PreActLN, PostActLN 
)

#>---Combination Logged and UnLogged---<
ComboVars <- cbind( InDegLN, OutDegLN, InCloseCentLN, OutCloseCentLN, BetweenLN, DegCentLN, ProxPrestLN, HubWgtLN, AuthWgtLN, CC1, CC1Std, AllEditLN, ChnEditLN, OthEditLN, ProChn, ProOth, TotActLN, PreActLN, PostActLN, Quality, Visible 
)

###===================###
### Scatter Plots        ###
###===================###
#These scatter plot scripts are adapted from
#a script produced by Howard Welser

#>---Independent Variable Matrix---<
pairs(IndVars,
gap=0, 
diag.panel = function (x, ...) { 
par(new = TRUE)
hist(x, 
col = "light blue", 
probability = TRUE, 
axes = FALSE, 
main = "")
lines(density(x), 
col = "red", 
wd = 3)
rug(x)
})

#>---All Variable Matrix---<
pairs(AllVars,
gap=0,
diag.panel = function (x, ...) {
    par(new = TRUE)
    hist(x,
        col = "light blue",
        probability = TRUE,
        axes = FALSE,
        main = "")
    lines(density(x),
        col = "red",
        lwd = 3)
    rug(x)
})

#>---Logged Independent Variable Matrix---<
pairs(IndVarsLN,
gap=0,
diag.panel = function (x, ...) {
    par(new = TRUE)
    hist(x,
        col = "light blue",
        probability = TRUE,
        axes = FALSE,
        main = "")
    lines(density(x),
        col = "red",
        lwd = 3)
    rug(x)
})

#>---Logged All Variable Matrix---<
pairs(AllVarsLN,
gap=0,
diag.panel = function (x, ...) {
    par(new = TRUE)
    hist(x,
        col = "light blue",
        probability = TRUE,
        axes = FALSE,
        main = "")
    lines(density(x),
        col = "red",
        lwd = 3)
    rug(x)
})
#>---Combination Variable Matrix---<
pairs(ComboVars,
  gap=0,
  diag.panel = function (x, ...) {
    par(new = TRUE)
    hist(x,
         col = "light blue",
         probability = TRUE,
         axes = FALSE,
         main = "")
    lines(density(x),
          col = "red",
          lwd = 3)
    rug(x)
  })
###End###
APPENDIX B: CHANOLOGY RELATED WEB SITES

Site: 4chan
URL: http://www.4chan.org

Based upon the popular Japanese imageboards at Futaba Channel, 4chan was founded in 2003 by Christopher Poole, who goes by the name “m00t” online. Only 15 at the time, m00t intended for 4chan to serve as a site for the discussion of Japanese animation (also known as “anime”). However, as the popularity of the site grew, a large number of imageboards catering to a diverse array of subjects were added to the site. Of these imageboards, the most popular is the “Random” image board also known as /b/. It was on this board that Anonymous originally emerged and it is from this location that Anonymous developed its culture. In addition, many popular internet memes originated on 4chan before being spread to other online communities. While 4chan was not used extensively for the planning of Chanology, it was the primary source of members of Anonymous participating in Chanology. 4chan also had a tremendous indirect influence upon Chanology via its impact upon the cultural development of Anonymous. As of April, 2009 the /b/ imageboard is highly active.

Site: Encyclopedia Dramatica
URL: http://www.encyclopediadramatica.com

Encyclopedia Dramatica is the spiritual successor to LJ Drama, a group of users of the social networking site Live Journal that documented conflicts among users of the site and occasionally provoked such confrontations for the sake of entertainment. After being banned from Live Journal and having articles related to the group deleted from Wikipedia, the members of the group established Encyclopedia Dramatica as a satirical version of Wikipedia that would focus upon internet culture. Due to the origins of the site, it initially focused upon Live Journal and Wikipedia, but news of the site’s existence quickly spread to other online communities, including 4chan. Large numbers of 4chan’s regular user base adopted Encyclopedia Dramatica as an unofficial archive of the history and culture of Anonymous. Over time Encyclopedia Dramatica became closely associated with Anonymous and served as an important site for the planning of the early phases of Chanology as well as an archive of information relating to Chanology.
Site: 711chan
URL: http://www.711chan.org

711chan was formed after the “invasion” or /i/ imageboards at 420chan and 7chan were shut down. An invasion imageboard is primarily used for the planning and execution of attacks against online targets. Thus 711chan early on became a popular site for members of Anonymous interested in online attacks. This site has a wide array of imageboards catering to diverse subject matter, but the most popular by far are the invasion image board and the local random imageboard. Running on the same software as 4chan, 711chan was where Chanology was first formulated and was a major hub of activity and planning throughout the early phases of Chanology. The administrators of 711chan also held good relations with the administrators of the Partyvan community, providing an important link to the Partyvan wiki and IRC network for Chanology.

Site: 315chan
URL: http://www.315chan.org (inactive)

After 711chan forbid the discussion of Chanology, members of Anonymous wishing to still have a chan environment in which to discuss Chanology founded 315chan. The numeric portion of the name’s site was taken from the date of the second Chanology protest, March 15th. 315chan had several imageboards, but was dwarfed in activity by more popular chans such as 4chan and 7chan. The most active boards at 315chan were those related to Project Chanology. The site eventually went offline as Chanology moved increasingly in a moralistic direction and Enturbulation.org developed into the hub of Chanology activity. In August, a spiritual successor to 315chan named 888chan would be established as part of an effort to return the chan culture to Chanology.

Site: Something Awful
URL: http://www.somethingawful.com

Something Awful is an online community similar in many ways to Anonymous. The primary difference between the two groups is that members of the Something Awful forums possess durable and visible user identities. The founder of 4chan, m00t, was originally a member of the Something Awful community. While the forums at Something Awful were not used for the planning of Chanology, a moderate number of members of the Something Awful community were recruited for the early phases of Chanology.
Site: Partyvan Wiki
URL: http://www.partyvan.info/

Also commonly referred to as the “/i/nsurgency wiki,” this wiki based site served as an archive of information related to historical and ongoing online attacks carried out by the Partyvan community and Anonymous. The talk pages of articles related to attacks also serve, to a limited degree, as locations for discussion and planning of such attacks. Finally, the site at one time hosted software used in online attacks. As awareness of the site has increased, this software has been moved to more hidden locations. In the early phases of Chanology, the Partyvan wiki served as an important hub for planning. In addition, Chanology used the IRC network for real time group communication.

Site: Enturbulation.org
URL: http://www.enturbulation.org (inactive)

Enturbulation was established early in Chanology as a set of forums for the organizing and planning of offline protests in different cities. The site also served as a location for the discussion of overall strategy. Unique in that users created visible user identities, the culture of Enturbulation was a modified version of the culture of the chans. Over time, Enturbulation developed as the “official” or public face of Chanology designed to echo the public image of Chanology. As such, it became the natural home of the moralists with Chanology and became the hub of Chanology activity following the schism between the moralists and the purists. Near the end of 2008, Enturbulation.org went offline and was replaced by a new site, called Why We Protest, which serves the same function as Enturbulation.org.