

ABSTRACT

“ANONYMOUS” AND FRAME CONSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social movement organizations operate and communicate using new mediums, such as the use of social media. Anonymous is a non-hierarchical online activist group with unidentified members that engages in exploiting technology toward politically motivated goals. This study examined how a group without formal structure or identifiable members frames its activities as “righteous.” Specifically, this study examined the rhetoric of a non-hierarchical online activist group with unidentified members and how it frames its activities as just. This study explored the challenges in maintaining and creating righteous rhetoric for a group with online, non-hierarchical, and unidentified members. Using social movement framing theory and identity framing, this study examined the frames presented by Anonymous on the social media websites YouTube and Facebook. Through the use of content analysis, videos, comments, and wall posts were sampled among groups affiliated with Anonymous. Data was coded and analyzed for emergent frames. Prominent themes included injustice, powerful elite and corruption, as well as the cost and challenges of a righteous rhetoric. This study investigated how a non-hierarchical, online organization with unidentified members exploits technology to create a righteous rhetoric in a way that reflects the interconnection of these characteristics.

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“ANONYMOUS” AND FRAME CONSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social movement activists increasingly operate and communicate using new mediums created with technological advancement, especially related to the increased information exchange facilitated by the internet. This is not to suggest that activists have moved away from tactics traditionally employed by social movement organizations in the past. Rather, these new mediums potentially provide an opportunity for groups to structure themselves in a way that may not have been previously available for activist organizations. Specifically, social media sites created on the internet have simplified participation by allowing individuals to participate from whatever location and method of participation they choose to engage in. These new mediums of communication have allowed for increased information dissemination and communication to a wider group of individuals. It is worth examining how social movement organizations (SMOs) utilize new media to shape their identities. Online activist organizations may shape movements and organizations identities by utilizing internet technology such as YouTube, Facebook, and other various social media available through the internet.

I examined the way in which social media communication is used by a particular group, Anonymous, to frame their organization. One of the most notorious online activist groups, Anonymous is a non-hierarchical online activist group with unidentified members that engages in “hacktivism,” or exploiting technology toward politically motivated action. My goal is to examine how a group without formal structure, leadership, or identifiable members frames its actions and identity to members and non-members alike through the use of social media. Specifically, I hope to shed light on the way in which digital communications with varying

degrees of anonymity shape and are shaped by social movement organizations, particularly SMO's identity framing and rhetoric. What sort of rhetoric does a non-hierarchical online activist group with unidentified members include in its use of frames in social media to manage and present its identity as just?

The SMO "Anonymous"

The group Anonymous originated out of the website 4chan.org, a site that operates through anonymously posting and discussing user-posted content, including images or ideas, on the internet (Olson 2012). This site, launched in 2003, contains different message boards categorizing different types of images and content that are automatically deleted after a period of time. Partially because of its origins on an ephemeral anonymous message board, Anonymous lacks a formally defined group status that many other social movement organizations (SMOs) have. That is, Anonymous consists of individuals identifying with the group, but it has no formal hierarchy or requirements of its members. Anonymous's group structure is democratic and inclusive in that it is non-hierarchical and has no formal leadership, but it may have informal, de facto leaders. While this group operates anonymously online, they also protest anonymously offline by wearing masks in physical protests. To explain how Anonymous views their identity, one can look to a quote from the film *V for Vendetta*, as Anonymous heavily draws its ideology from this film. When asked about who the titular character V was, the protagonist replied, "He was Edmond Dantés... and he was my father. And my mother." The significance of this quote is the protagonist stating V could have been anyone behind the mask, but the identity did not matter

so much as the ideology and actions V stood for.

One of the characteristics of Anonymous is that they take part in “hacktivism.” Khan and Kellner (2004) define “hacktivists” as politically motivated individuals who exploit technology to achieve their goals. Hacktivists can also develop new programs or software in support of their goals. It is also worth addressing the classification of Anonymous as “hacktivists,” as this term may be linked to the negative connotation associated with hacker culture. Turgeman-Goldschmidt (2008) suggests that hackers reject the stigma that hacking is a dangerous misuse of technology. Moreover, some authors go so far as to suggest that hacking is a form of positive deviance; they challenge conventional use of technology and generate new information by hacking (Turgeman-Goldschmidt 2008). In this understanding of the term “hacktivist” the implication is that hacking can be used for a greater good.

Garret (2006) also discusses “hacktivism,” calling it a tactical adaptation of electronic civil disobedience. Garrett (2006) explains an example of hactivism as a “virtual sit-in,” occurring in the form of preventing access to a particular website by quickly requesting data en masse. This effectively halts the server’s ability to send outward communications, blocking the site from use. Anonymous has used this form of hacktivism, known as distributed denial-of-service (DDOS), for one of their first forms of notable, collaborative protests, “Project Chanology” and later protests (Beyer 2014; Olson 2012).

Project Chanology occurred in 2008 and involved a DDoS attack on the website for the Church of Scientology. Anonymous argued that these and other protests were directed at the Church of Scientology to “save people from their brainwashing” (Denning 2011:175). As illustrated by this example, Anonymous could be considered hacktivists, as they use technology

and the anonymity afforded by it to further their goals. This tactic does not just use the internet as a form of communication, but use internet technologies as a means of creating change. Beyer (2014) adds that Anonymous still operates politically, engaging in issues related to freedom of information, especially on the internet. An example might be their protest of the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA), a bill which they argue would allow for increased surveillance on the internet (Anonyops 2013). They used social media to encourage popular websites like Reddit, a site driven by user-submitted content, to “blackout” their site, effectively making it unusable for the duration of the protest.

I used a combination of identity management and framing theory, especially for social movements (Benford and Snow 2000; Goffman 1967, 1974; Snow and Benford 1988) to focus analysis on Anonymous’s identity framing. More specifically, this study determined how Anonymous constructed particular rhetoric to frame identity through social media communications. This rhetoric is framed to make their group’s actions appear just and necessary. Although all SMOs do this the combination of characteristics make the way this group does this unique. (See the appendix for a comparison of similar SMOs that share one or more of the characteristics but not all three.) Not only did Anonymous use frames in an attempt to manage public perceptions of the group but also to manage identity and rhetoric within the group as well. For the purpose of this study, a “righteous rhetoric” refers to the way in which Anonymous constructs an image of the group that illustrates Anonymous’s actions are taken to combat injustice. To understand the construction of these frames, I conducted a content analysis of the cultural objects presented in Anonymous’s use of frames in their social media communications. I examined Anonymous’s use of the social media websites YouTube and Facebook from January

2011 to December 2015 to understand their frame construction on social media.

Anonymous is a non-hierarchical, online SMO with unidentified members. The combination and interconnection of these characteristics create unique challenges to the group's construction of a righteous rhetoric. My study contributes to the literature by shedding light on how Anonymous, an SMO unique because of the interconnection of its characteristics, creates a righteous rhetoric through the legal use of technology (i.e. social media) as well as illegal use and exploitation of technology through hacking and hacktivism.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Three unique and combined qualities of certain SMOs, including Anonymous, have been researched in previous literature: online activity, anonymity and non-hierarchical structure. A review of these qualities in the literature helps to explain Anonymous. While Anonymous is an organization that has recently emerged due to developments in technology, previous literature and theory illustrate that the group is not necessarily unique as an SMO in having these characteristics. Other SMOs have been analyzed that are organized around one or two of the characteristics that shape them. What is distinct is the way in which all of these qualities exist and overlap for Anonymous. There is a growing body of literature on the activities of Anonymous that points to the importance of the three qualities mentioned above. I reviewed the literature on each of SMO characteristics separately: online presence, non-hierarchical structure and anonymous status. Then I turn to the findings which show in detail how these work together to create the unique SMO Anonymous.

Online SMOs

Collective identity of an online social movement group is created through social media interactions. Khan and Kellner (2004) suggest the internet serves as a tool to develop networks and group identity. Applying this logic to Anonymous, communications through YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter webpages may shape their group identity. There may be some cultural objects present through the use of social media that define identity and foster collectivity for the

group. Juris (2005) notes that potential ways in which group collectivity may be fostered include organizing and directing action, sharing and disseminating particular information, and coordinating activities. Through social media, Anonymous can engage in these communication tactics.

Khan and Kellner (2004) also argue that the internet serves as a new space of protest and activism. Porta and Mosca (2005) build on this notion, suggesting the internet allows for a direct expression of protest, as an individual can produce media unfiltered by a large media corporation on the internet. As le Girgnou and Patou (2004) note, the internet allows not just for protest, but uninhibited protest. Despite this freedom, McCarthy and Zald (1977) suggest that SMOs have little control over how the media chooses to frame their claims, although access to social media circumvents this to a certain degree. For instance, an individual can write a blog or post on social media on a particular issue, and it does not have to be written along a specific media outlet's guidelines. Even without the support of a media outlet, an individual can achieve exposure of their ideas on the internet. Le Girgnou and Patou (2004) suggest this is in part due to the internet facilitating the avoidance of physical confrontation with others in a public space. For online and offline expressions and protests, information can be distributed uninhibited through alternative media, like social media.

Khan and Kellner (2004) discuss how the use of weblogs, or blogs, are a useful tool of online movements, suggesting they can be used to discuss issues and even influence decision making. Castells (2013) discusses the combination of virtual and urban space, suggesting that there is overlap between the two. For instance, Anonymous as an online non-hierarchical SMO engaged in physical protest in the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements. Castells

(2013) notes the internet fosters networking of like-minded individuals. In turn, this networking translated to action in a physical sense. However, Anonymous does not only take action in the physical space but also the virtual space through hacktivism. For instance, Anonymous leaked KKK (Ku Klux Klan) members' names online after the KKK threatened the use of violence on protestors in physical space. Castells (2013) focused more on physical action and protest as a result of virtual communication but did not adequately consider the use of information and the virtual space extending beyond communication to achieve action. Anonymous, a unique SMO because of the interconnection of its characteristics, creates a righteous rhetoric through the legal use of technology (i.e., social media) as well as illegal use and exploitation of technology through hacking and hacktivism.

Anonymity Online

To understand the way in which Anonymous frames its identity and actions as just, it is useful to first describe the nature of identity within such a group of anonymous members. To that end, it is useful to discuss some of the research on a group similar to Anonymous: the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas were one of the first groups to successfully use the internet to challenge the status quo and politics through garnering international support (Froehling 1997; Khan and Kellner 2004; Russel 2001). This group focused on civil resistance in Mexico using an informal network created through internet communications and forum discussions such as Usenet groups and Peacenet conferences (Russel 2001). The Zapatistas are a group similar to Anonymous in that they use a certain level of anonymity and maintain online communications with their members.

Couch (2001) notes the Zapatistas claim to mask their identity to prevent glorification of leaders. However, Couch (2001) also points out the masked face of Marcos, an apparent leader of the Zapatistas, is still recognizable. Anonymous uses masks as well, adopting a Guy Fawkes mask for its members, which might be considered representative of the democratic nature of Anonymous.

Both Anonymous and the Zapatistas use anonymity as part of their group interactions, but the way in which Anonymous uses anonymity in leadership and membership differs. Anonymous does not have a core of leaders like the Zapatistas do. Instead, Anonymous functions by utilizing anonymity of its members, allowing any one person identifying with the group to catalyze group action. Members of Anonymous, like leaders of the Zapatistas, are named by pseudonym. Subcommandante Marcos, a leader of the Zapatistas, operates as the group's collective voice (Olguin 2002). Anonymous differs in that it does not have centralized or named leadership.

Anonymous uses “new media” such as Facebook and YouTube to communicate and organize protests or action. Notably, Anonymous participated in the Occupy movement, but previous research (DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun 2012; Thorson et al. 2013;) did not investigate the group any further than the fact that they were an activist group involved in the “Arab Spring” in 2011. Anonymous participated in spreading information about the Occupy movement through social media channels (DeLuca et al. 2012). Similarly, Anonymous participated in “Arab Spring” in 2011 through social media website communications. While some research (Bennet 2012; Thorson et al. 2013) has explored non-hierarchical online activists such as those involved in the Occupy movement, literature discussing such a group that has anonymous members is less

researched but is growing.

The present research will investigate a group identity valuing anonymity of its members. Previous research has not adequately explored how anonymity might be used as part of a non-hierarchical online group's identity. In order to discuss group identity of Anonymous, it is also important to discuss anonymity within a group and how that is incorporated as part of Anonymous's identity. Classic work by Le Bon (1895) discusses the concept of anonymity in the context of a crowd. This is still applicable to online movements to some degree, as there is still a virtual crowd present. Le Bon (1895) suggests that the anonymity afforded by the crowd can lead to individuals feeling less sense of responsibility for their actions. Le Bon suggested crowd anonymity leads to irrationality in a physical crowd. However, the internet allows for the creation of a virtual "crowd." In this setting, individuals do not act as they might have if they felt identifiable as individuals, and in that regard is similar to Le Bon's (1895) theory on crowds. However, Le Bon's (1895) theory discusses a physical crowd's irrationality. In a virtual crowd, members can make individual contributions while remaining anonymous, but this anonymity stems from the internet, not necessarily a crowd. That is not to suggest that irrational contributions never occur online from a feeling of invulnerability through anonymity. However, this is not from crowd anonymity, but internet anonymity. As such, anonymity does not inherently lead to irrationality, although contemporary research notes individuals do act differently online because of anonymity.

Le Girgnou and Patou (2004) suggest that expressions and actions are less inhibited on the internet because of the relative anonymity granted by the internet. That is, the internet affords perceived and real anonymity resulting in individuals expressing themselves differently.

Anonymous digital interaction may be different on the internet than in a physical setting. Suler (2005) discusses the notion of anonymity on the internet creating an effect called the “online disinhibition effect.” Suler (2005) defines this effect as an individual changing her or his behavior based on whether one’s interactions are online or offline. Combining le Girgnou and Patou’s (2004) with Suler’s (2005) arguments, the ability for uninhibited anonymous expression may cause a group to act differently than they might offline. In that respect, online interaction and organizing could be approached, or at least discussed, differently online. Anonymity provides the opportunity to shape the group’s identity in an uninhibited fashion. Because individuals identifying with the group Anonymous may feel some anonymity in their participation, they may shape the identity of the group online differently than if the group was based offline.

To investigate this claim, it is worth looking at Mercea’s (2012) research, which suggests online communications facilitate mobilization for physical protest by providing a way to engage in activism. Participation in an event is encouraged through interacting with organizers of the event. Additionally, the network of possible interested participants is increased due to the comprehensive accessibility of the internet. As such, prospective participants are able to gain access to information about an event without face-to-face interaction. Through online communications, the group is already engaging in planning the event, so extension to physical protest is not without prior commitment. Especially for high-risk events, Mercea (2012) found that the internet encouraged mobilization through a network of like-minded activists. Applying Mercea’s (2012) findings to Anonymous, Anonymous is at high risk because their hacktivism may not be legal. As such, members of Anonymous must conceal identity, both on- and offline.

Communications are relatively anonymous on the internet, and anonymity in physical protest is preserved by wearing masks. These events are high risk because their online identity could be revealed by their offline identity and vice versa. Masks provide a way to avoid linking these two identities and mitigate risk of moving from online to offline protest. As Mercea (2012) points out, high-risk events have a collection of like-minded individuals who organized through internet communications. Further applying Mercea's (2012) findings, Anonymous engages in offline protest because the internet uniquely affords many high-risk, like-minded individuals to communicate ideologies. Subsequently, Anonymous acts on these ideologies in physical action. Anonymous is in the position to engage in physical protest because their organization and members at an event remain anonymous. That is, anonymity is essential to both their online and offline identities and allows movement between online and offline protest while maintaining identity as members of the group Anonymous.

Non-Hierarchical SMOs

Anonymous is a non-hierarchical SMO that could be classified as a radical social movement organization (RSMO). Radical SMOs and non-hierarchical SMOs like Anonymous can also have different goals than mainstream, hierarchical organizations. For instance, RSMOs call for drastic change to existing systems, rather than aiming for change within systems (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000). The leadership in RSMOs differs as well, as they often have non-hierarchical leadership (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000). Change to systems with conventional methods and non-hierarchical leadership are characteristics of Anonymous as well. The group

structure of Anonymous can be better understood by looking at characteristics of non-hierarchical SMOs. Rothschild and Whitt (1986) explore cooperatives, which are collectivist-democratic organizations. They suggest that these cooperatives have a different approach to authority in their organization in that it lies with the collective group. Additionally, the group Anonymous fits this description, as it is a group without formally defined leaders. Barker, Johnson and Lavalette (2001) suggest that democratic SMOs can operate independently of formal leaders. Barker and colleagues (2001) also argue that leadership does not need to inherently be in the control of one individual. They do not need to be identified as a leader to engage and act in the movement. This is characteristic of a group such as Anonymous, as members within the group appear to have relatively equal opportunity to exercise leadership within the group.

Anonymous lacks formally identified leaders, so leadership is contextual and ephemeral. Rothschild and Whitt (1986) also suggest that these collectivist democratic organizations value moralistic appeals to exert social control on its members. Adding to this, new members are recruited with the understanding that there are no formally defined positions or hierarchy (Rothschild and Whitt 1986). That is, members are informally accepted in the group based on their social and political values, but not appointed a meaningful position for the group. As Fitzgerald and Rodgers (2000) discuss, the non-bureaucratic and non-hierarchical structure lends to the organization being egalitarian; shared goals without formally defined positions require cooperation between members.

Ganz (2000) provides a look at democratic and inclusive forms of leadership, noting that democratic leadership allows the open exchange of ideas between any of its members. In turn,

this exchange can lead to more sophisticated strategic methods. Ganz (2000) also suggests facilitating such processes within a group is especially effective when the members' voices are valued. The democratic form of leadership Ganz (2000) describes can be applied to online activism and to groups like Anonymous. More specifically, the internet allows for a democratic exchange of ideas between its members. While this form of democratic leadership has been present in other movements such as the United Farm-Workers (Ganz 2000), social media facilitates such information exchange in a way that may not have been possible before. As such, it is important to investigate a different context in which such democratic leadership can occur, such as online movements headed by groups like Anonymous. The group is able to freely exchange ideas between all members through the same channels of social media. Members of Anonymous can communicate publicly through social media sites like Facebook and YouTube between all its members. Social media presents the opportunity to shape the definitions and identity of many group members at once through democratically shared information.

Fitzgerald and Rodgers (2000) point out RSMOs may not seek to achieve goals in existing systems; an RSMO's goals are not necessarily achieved as part of a prevailing political system. Anonymous's use of hacktivism is an example of operating outside of the political system to achieve its goals. The internet facilitates an availability of information spanning many nations and states. As such Anonymous's use of this information to achieve their goals extends between many political systems. Moreover, this information may be obtained by circumventing existing political systems and institutionalized political practices.

Anonymous's goals are also not clearly defined, perhaps in part due to there being various subgroups within Anonymous. However, there is identifiable homogeneity in their goals.

Rothschild and Whitt (1986) suggest that collectivistic democratic organizations operate with a shared sense of purpose. By extension, the goals of the organization are shared among members. Anonymous has various sects and branches with various goals. Generally speaking, the goals of Anonymous are to fight against “tyranny, conspiracy, oppression, and corruption” (NEO2012Anonymous 2013). These goals might be achieved by targeting specific organizations such as the KKK (NEO2012Anonymous 2013) and even the extremist group ISIS (AnonymousWorldvoce 2015). The goals of an RSMO are often in the name of freedom or liberation and differ from more moderate SMOs (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000). This is true of Anonymous as well, as they have called for drastic changes to systems in the name of freedom (NEO2012Anonymous 2013).

While previous studies have explored online activism (DeLuca, Lawson and Sun 2012; Thorson et al 2013), they did not adequately examine how group identity is shaped through these communications. Anonymous is a group that is not unified and has no formal structure but operates as a collective group. It has a combination of characteristics that have been studied in SMOs separately or in more limited overlap. This provides the unique opportunity to study a non-hierarchical group with anonymous members using social media to manage its rhetoric.

CHAPTER 3: THEORY

Framing

A frame refers to the way in which particular actions and ideas are conveyed or experienced. Goffman (1974:21) suggests that framing and framework “allow its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms.” That is, meaning is organized and assigned to construct a particular way of understanding actions, rules, or events (Goffman 1974). Snow and Benford (1988) discuss framing as it specifically relates to social movement organizations, stating framing is used with the agency or intent to construct the reality of a situation within an SMO, as well as externally to non-members. A collective action frame organizes and constructs shared meanings to guide actions; as such, framing is part of a strategic process of negotiating meaning for an SMO. Anonymous uses framing very much in this sense, adopting revolutionary symbols and speech and incorporating it in social media postings. For example, a YouTube channel affiliated with Anonymous stated in a video they were fighting against “tyranny, conspiracy, oppression, and corruption” (NEO2012Anonymous 2013). These terms are used with intent to construct a particular narrative in which Anonymous is fighting injustice. Injustice frames (Gamson et al. 1982, 1992) are used as part of the group’s attempt to construct a narrative that implies their members are justified in their actions, such as engaging in hacktivism.

Entman (1991) and Scheufele (1999) discuss framing in the media, noting that the media influences the way in which the public perceives a given event. Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) suggest that social media frames function in a similar sense, as individuals act with agency to shape particular perceptions of an event. Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) study the use of framing in social media via content analysis, specifically social media framing of the 2011 protests in Egypt. While social media posts defined the uprising as a revolution for freedom, governmental media outlets framed it as a conspiracy against the Egyptian state (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012). Benford and Snow (2000) suggest that media exercises control over what content they produce and the way in which they portray it. However, social media is used to the same end without filtering of the message that occurs in mainstream media. To that end, Snow et al. (2014) have called for additional investigation for framing processes in social media as well. The authors argue that increasingly globalized social movements warrant further discussion. My study investigates this phenomenon with respect to framing in social media.

Counterframing

Counterframing is the process of developing frames to defend an organization and in doing so, engaging in frame disputes (Benford and Snow 2000). Frame disputes are the process of refuting the claims of opposing organizations (Benford 1987; Benford and Snow 2000). Building on this concept, Benford and Snow (2000) detail the way in which media frames movements, suggesting there is little control over the way in which media frames a particular group or issue. While this is likely true for mass media, social media allows groups an outlet to

provide counterframes to media. That is, an organization can create content hosted on a website like YouTube or Facebook to provide a widely accessible counter frame to how they are framed by outside organizations. Anonymous is able to use YouTube and Facebook to provide a frame that refutes frames from other organizations. To that end, frames and counterframes are used with agency to construct a particular reality. Framing and counterframing encourages and develops possible forms of action to negotiate shared interests and direct action within the group (Benford and Snow 2000). I was able to identify counterframes Anonymous created and examine the rhetoric and content present in these counterframes.

Identity Framing

Identity is constructed with agency via framing (Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994). According to Hunt et al. (1994), framing is used to shape identity in such a way that is relevant to the group's goals and actions. Hunt et al. (1994) describe these as clusters of constructed identities or identity fields. These fields capture three different sets of identities. The first field involves supporters, or protagonists, of the movement. The second is those that oppose the group's goals in some way, or antagonists. The third is observers of the actions of the group. The creation of protagonists and antagonists in movements is referred to as boundary framing (Hunt et al. 1994). I examined framing with regard to how Anonymous constructs these identity fields. Specifically, I examined the content and rhetoric of Anonymous's identity clusters, and how they frame the identity to members of Anonymous, opposing non-members, and observers.

Benford and Snow (2000) suggest there is a linkage between identity construction and

framing processes. Framing facilitates the relationship between individual and collective identity. Frames are constructed by agents with particular identities but are fully realized through negotiation of meaning and identity within the group. The way in which the collective identity is realized is through framing and reframing ideas and action within the group. The process of framing links the group ideologically while encouraging development of particular identities within the group (Benford and Snow 2000). I found that Anonymous created a particular collective identity for its members through framing.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

There is precedent to using content analysis to investigate social media. For instance, Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver (2008) conducted a content analysis of Facebook groups to examine how users portrayed presidential candidates McCain and Obama in the 2008 election. Many other studies have used content analysis to examine Facebook (Bender et al. 2011; Hum et al. 2011; McCorkindale 2010). Similarly, content analysis studies have used YouTube as a source of data (Hussin, Frazier and Thompson 2011; Paek, Kim, and Hove 2010; Yoo and Kim 2012). One example of a study using content analysis to study social media is a content analysis of the way in which vaccination and immunization are portrayed on YouTube (Keelan et al. 2007). In addition to content analysis using social media, studies have carried out content analysis of frames in social media. Groshek and Al-Rawi (2013), for instance, conducted a content analysis of frames presented in social media during the 2012 United States presidential campaign. A useful model was Hamdy and Gomaa's (2012) application of content analysis to examine framing in social media sites, as this particular piece of research examined framing of the Arab Spring. Anonymous also participated in this event, although Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) did not explore their involvement in depth or the way in which Anonymous as a specific group framed this and other events on social media. While Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) only captured the framing of a single event, I captured framing of multiple events from a single group in depth. Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) used social media posts as the units of data and analyzed them by creating coding categories. I followed this method to investigate identity fields and identity framing as described by Hunt et al. (1994) and Benford and Snow (2000), respectively.

I examined Anonymous's use of social media sites, specifically Facebook and YouTube between January 2011 and December 2015. While Anonymous had origins on the website 4chan as early as 2003, they did not have social media pages with many followers for their group until this time. Notably, it was around the time of the Arab Spring in 2011. Pages for the group were not as clearly identifiable until this time frame. Moreover, using this time period allowed for collection of data concentrated on a single page and therefore an increased availability of data for collection spanning multiple events.

Recorded data contained the content of the social media posts as well as videos and comments for Facebook and YouTube. This data was coded and presented in the analysis identifying meaningful patterns or trends present. Additionally, the anonymous nature of this group does not affect content analysis, as there is no need for me to interact with participants or to interact with them in any way. This approach also poses the least risk for the researcher and participants, as this data is publically accessible. This presents less risk to the researcher as it is not necessary to engage in "hacktivism" to gain closer access to the group. Any members of Anonymous are less at risk because they control any private information and can conceal any information they wish to maintain as private.

Network ethnography (Howard 2002), or netnography, is a means to study online interactions in a non-obtrusive, ethnographic way. Howard (2002) suggests that netnography differs from online content analysis in that network ethnography delves deeper into the online community it studies. However, the content analysis I used did not require immersion into the online community it studies, as this is publicly available data on Facebook and YouTube without

subscription or membership. As such, there is no need to gain direct access to the particular community. The study focused on how Anonymous frames their group publicly on social media. Future studies examining interactions between group members might benefit from conducting a netnography, as doing so might gain access to information not publicly available for study.

Additionally, there are no relevant data sets known to the primary researcher to analyze this research question with respect to a non-hierarchical online activist collective with unidentifiable members like Anonymous. If a researcher chose to collect data to create one's own data set, it would be difficult to administer surveys to the desired target population. Because of the anonymity of its members, it would be difficult to even find the target population. Finding suitable participants would be difficult because of the anonymous nature of the group. Content analysis remains the best approach, as it provides the best access to the data needed to answer the proposed research question.

Because Anonymous is a decentralized movement, there is not one particular page to represent the group. However, there are particular pages that have a large amount of subscribers and friends for YouTube and Facebook, respectively. I note that while Anonymous does not have particular leaders in their group, some pages are particularly representative of the group's identity management. Many members identifying with Anonymous communicate with others through these pages. I used purposive sampling to select the pages, utilizing pages that identify themselves with Anonymous that have a large number of friends and subscribers, for Facebook and YouTube, respectively. These are representative because these pages command a greater following on social media, having more potential to shape and manage a group's identity and rhetoric. For YouTube, the following channels were examined: AnonymousWorldvoce,

Anonyops, and NEO2012anonymous. For Facebook, the pages for Anonymous for Justice, ArmyAnonymous and, Wedonotforgive.wedonotforget.expectus were examined. These names are the user names for each page. There are many other pages identifying with the group Anonymous, but these are the most popular pages as determined by subscribers and likes for YouTube and Facebook, respectively.

YouTube Sampling

YouTube videos were randomly selected from the entirety of the videos posted by the selected users. Fifteen videos were randomly selected for analysis and comments on these videos were randomly sampled by assigning a number to each video in the specified date range, then randomly selecting 15 numbers. Videos that were not in English, those longer than 10 minutes and those that were videos not by Anonymous were resampled. The first two reasons were practical to facilitate a quicker data collection process. Videos that were not Anonymous would not necessarily contain the rhetoric that Anonymous constructs, even if they agreed with ideologies present in the video. The top ten comments on a video were sampled. The reasoning for sampling the top comments is that they would be those a user is most likely to see and contain content worthy of discussion, based on other users liking or commenting on it. In addition, 10 additional replies per comment were selected every tenth reply up to 10 replies on a given comment.

Facebook Sampling

One Facebook administrator wall posts from each month between August 2014 – October 2015 were sampled. The day of the month was randomly selected by assigning numbers to posts from a given month, then randomly selecting a number attached to the post. The specified date range was a result of the ability to consistently sort comments by “top comments” on all Facebook pages to match the way in which “top comments” were sampled on YouTube. Additionally, further matching the sampling methods of YouTube, 10 replies were selected by every tenth reply up to 10 total replies. In addition, comments in response to these posts will be randomly sampled based on availability and quantity.

The initial coding frame examined frames with specific attention to counterframing and identity framing. The study examined themes of rhetoric and content present in frames produced by Anonymous on social media. This study used a grounded theoretical inductive approach, so only possible themes and sub-themes were identified prior to research. These included addressing negative frames and producing counterframes to others’ representations of Anonymous, framing the group as just; identity frame work; and use of imagery to frame a particular narrative. As themes emerged, the present study was re-evaluated and revised with coding frames to match the data. By using an inductive approach, this method was used to create mutually exclusive and exhaustive coding frames.

This study did not face issues of confidentiality, as this information is publicly available without any restrictions to access. While many users may be anonymous, some did have identifiable information on their posts. Because they may not have considered the use of this

information in this study, identifying characteristics were excluded from the analysis. This was only applied to individual users. Real names and user photos are not included in the findings to protect the identity of any individual posting to these pages.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Anonymous addresses many issues based on what a particular administrator (admin) of a social media page identifies as important. That is, user accounts are not necessarily controlled by a single individual; there is the possibility that the group has the necessary login information such that multiple users are curating a page. Even if it is the case that a given social media page has a specific administrator, the content they post is created collectively in addition to non-admin users making contributions and posts. For YouTube, the administrator(s) of a page selects or creates videos to be posted to the page. Many Anonymous videos are posted to more than one page, so there were duplicate videos across pages. For Facebook, admin(s) curating a given page as well as the users may post content. However, it would be possible for admins to remove user-contributed content if they chose to. In other words, administrators or curators of a page may select content to be posted, and it may be original content to the page, but it is created and moderated collectively. This is due to their non-hierarchical nature, not having an official set of goals, leaders, or ideology. However, there are recurring themes present in how Anonymous defines their identity as just. In the course of data collection, three themes for how Anonymous presented their identity as just were found. These themes are injustice, powerful elite/corruption, and consequences of a righteous rhetoric. This study defines Anonymous's righteous rhetoric as the way in which Anonymous constructs an image of the group that illustrates Anonymous as an SMO that combats injustice. Moreover, this righteous rhetoric is created uniquely due to the online, non-hierarchical and anonymous nature of the organization.

Injustice

Under the theme of injustice, there are three subthemes: humanitarian injustice, environmental injustice, and police injustice.

Humanitarian Injustice

“Humanitarian injustice” covers a wide array of issues because of the varying issues Anonymous groups address. As such, the group is flexible in what it defines as injustice. This study describes humanitarian injustice as involving the perception of a peoples rights or freedoms being restricted or oppressed.

This passage from the Anonyops video transcript for “Anonymous: Operation Bahrain” outlines how Anonymous suggests their views are supportive of human rights activists while asserting that the government has committed crimes against the Bahraini people and condemning these actions. (This video uses dramatic imagery and background music that sounds much like a piano requiem. Some of the imagery includes crying children, individuals on stretchers clutching wounds):

People have been imprisoned for the crime of “advocating human rights.” Citizens whose families have been murdered by the government are arrested, women are raped, tear gas is fired in to [sic] homes at night and infants lay dead. We demand the Bahraini government stop killing its people. We demand they put an end to their Human Rights violations, stop arresting and torturing their citizens, and stop the use of mercenaries against their own people. We demand the immediate release of all human rights activists and all those jailed for political “crimes.”

Here, Anonymous appeals to morality, suggesting that the Bahraini government is committing crimes against its own people, specifically noting the rape of women, murder of infants, and

jailing of human rights activists. Anonymous conveys that the Bahraini government is actually committing these acts and that these acts are morally reprehensible. Anonymous elevates themselves by condemning these acts.

Anonymous does not stay focused on only one country in this regard, either. Another instance of Anonymous identifying and condemning government actions against its people is outlined in this passage from the June 1, 2015, admin post on Anonymous for Justice's Facebook page:

While the world is still thinking about Indonesia and their executions, attention should also be given to #SaudiArabia who are beheading people who steal among the many. They are no different to ISIS and their involvement in killing and bombing innocent civilians in #Yemen is also a concern.

Anonymous suggests that the government in Saudi Arabia is no different than the terrorist group ISIS. Here they equate perceived government injustice to terrorist activities. Anonymous opposes injustice by condemning "bombing of innocent civilians."

It is also important to note that Anonymous identifies perceived injustices perpetrated not just internationally by governments but domestically by individuals as well. The example provided was Neo2012Anonymous's OpDeathEaters, which was a video aimed at explaining how to expose pedophiles on the internet. In this case, they believed it an act of justice to expose those they believed to be pedophiles. (This video is very much a slideshow akin to an animated PowerPoint. Simple animations and silhouettes of stick figures are shown while outlining this op):

What is the objective of operation DeathEaters? The objective of opdeathaters is an independent, internationally linked victim-led tribunal/inquiry into the trafficking and paedosadism industry.

This passage identifies the actions Anonymous took against individuals involved in pedophilia. Anonymous takes action against perceived injustices not specific to governments, targeting individual persons as well as groups involved in perceived injustices. This passage demonstrates the scope of what issues Anonymous concerns itself with; it opposes issues that span across borders as well as those that may be more individual or local concerns.

Internet Rights

Rights related to the internet are a very important concern to Anonymous. Anything less than a free, uncensored internet is seen as injustice. Anonymous suggests that a free internet allows for free speech and communication. Freedom of expression and information are two things that Anonymous values as a group. Anonymous would argue that freedom of speech is a vital element to other rights, as it provides a means to expose truths and ideas. Anonymous constructs a just rhetoric by creating an image of a group defending the rights of others.

Anonymous identifies its role in protests and suggests that they are fighting for peoples rights in their actions. In this excerpt from Anonymops's OpEgypt video, Anonymous describes their involvement in the Egyptian spring as well as the perceived injustices perpetrated by the Egyptian government. This video shows images of riot police confronting protestors, often outnumbering and confronting a single protestor. The location appears to be footage from Egyptian city streets:

The Egyptian Government has taken away all cell phone service and internet use from its people. There are many protestors in Egypt, but they are being tear gassed and severely beaten and in many cases killed. These people have a right to free speech, and a right to free knowledge. Anonymous will not stand for this injustice. These people need to be saved, and Anonymous needs to play its part.

Anonymous condemns the government injustice and suggests that they must do what is necessary to save the Egyptian people from this perceived injustice. They justify their actions as part of an attempt to secure rights, specifically free speech and access to knowledge.

Anonymous suggests that they are justified in their actions to fight for a free internet. The following passage from Anonyops's op anti-sec video suggests a continued effort at a free internet. This video shows wooden naval warships on fire, and individuals wearing Guy Fawkes masks exchanging business cards with the Anonymous logo, which is a black suit silhouette with a question mark for the head:

For the past decade, the government has tried to take control of our internet ocean. In an effort to stop these acts of injustice, Anonymous has joined collective forces with LulzSec in our newest operation, #Antisec. We are sending our fleet to fight alongside the Lulz boat to reclaim what is rightfully the peoples. We encourage anyone and everyone, to man their vessels and charge their lazars.

Anonymous specifically notes that the "internet ocean" is "rightfully the peoples." In phrasing it this way, Anonymous make their actions out to be justified in that they are rightfully reclaiming a free internet for people.

Anonymous also suggests that they take action for fundamental rights. In this passage from Anonyops's Op Italy video, Anonymous suggests that an uncensored internet is a fundamental human freedom. This video shows photos that appear to be governmental officials speaking with each other:

We share a responsibility to defend fundamental human freedoms. Now it is time to act and Anonymous will always be present in the places where human rights are in jeopardy. The political and economical situation in Italy has become untenable. The Italian government has made it a priority to censor the internet and to turn the judicial system into a tool of corruption.

By suggesting that they are fighting for a fundamental human freedom, the internet, they promote themselves as fighting to secure human rights. Identifying the Italian government as perpetrators of injustice allows Anonymous to attach an unjust event to a responsible party.

Anonymous does not limit these statements to specific governments. In the following passage from Anonyops's OpTennessee video, Anonymous addresses lawmakers in Tennessee. This video uses legal imagery, such as the scales of justice, jail cells, as well as implied corruption by showing exchange of \$100 bills between hands:

Recently your lawmakers have been attempting to pass a new bill. This bill would allow anyone to be punished for posting an image on the internet that might frighten, intimidate, or cause emotional distress. The images that might be harmful are deemed as harassment. Those that are caught disobeying this law will either be sentenced to a year in jail or have to pay a fine, or receive a punishment of up to 30 hrs of community service. This is clearly a bold attempt to crush our freedom of speech.

Anonymous equates censorship on the internet to an attempt to limit free speech. By addressing what they call government attacks on free speech, Anonymous creates an image of themselves as promoters and securers of freedoms.

Anonymous suggests that if they do not act, peoples' rights will be limited by law and legislation. Anonymous calls for free speech on the internet, outlined in the passage from Neo2012Anonymous's Op Chain Reaction below. This video uses imagery from the film V for Vendetta where the titular character hijacks a government newsfeed: "We are running out of time. Laws and legislations are accelerating as well. Soon our voices will be censored and isolated from the internet."

Anonymous suggests that an absence of action would lead to limitation of free speech.

By highlighting a need to act, Anonymous creates a sense of urgency for this issue. This urgency justifies the need for Anonymous to act.

Environmental Injustice

Anonymous also expressed their concerns in regards to environmental injustices. These involved public health and ecological concerns, extending the notion that Anonymous is concerned with a wide array of injustices, including environmental and public health concerns. Anonymous spreads information as to what they perceive as unjust treatment of public health and environment as part of their just rhetoric. In a Facebook post by Anonymous for justice, Anonymous highlight supposed dangers of the artificial sweetener aspartame:

Aspartame Side Effects: There are over 92 different health side effects associated with aspartame consumption. It seems surreal, but true. How can one chemical create such chaos?

This excerpt highlights Anonymous's concern with various issues, not solely those tied to a strict definition of human rights specifically but also indirect harm to humans in society. Additionally, this excerpt shows that Anonymous does not solely take action through hacktivism but also through exposing information anonymously through social media.

Anonymous also shares information in regards to who supports potentially harmful health practices. The following passage from a Facebook post by ArmyAnonymous suggests genetically modified organism (GMO) foods are dangerous and that they should be properly labeled. Anonymous shares a link to a list of politicians supposedly paid off to block a bill to support GMO labeling:

“Extensive List of Politicians Paid Off To Make GMO Labeling Illegal: <http://...>”

The link asserts that large campaign contributions from pro-GMO businesses and organizations were given to particular House of Representatives members. In this example, Anonymous creates a just image of themselves by highlighting the injustice of others.

While these are cases of Anonymous identifying injustices related to health, they also identify environmental injustices. In the following excerpt from text in a video from Neo2012Anonymous, Anonymous identifies a myriad of perceived environmental injustices. (This video shows images linked with each “I see” quote, for instance, barrels with the biohazard symbol paired with a quote about toxic chemicals):

I see 100,000 synthetic toxic chemicals mixed with organic compounds to create poison food, merchandise and product. I see 100,000 years of toxic depleted uranium. I see the earth being sucked dry of her lifeblood, oil. I see 4 billion pounds of toxic industrial pollution every year. I see the massive corporate exploitation of natural resources. I see the oceans and seas being raped of life merely to provide more unnecessary consumption and profit. I see that 80% of the Earth’s original forests are now gone.

Anonymous suggests that these are untenable environmental conditions. Additionally, in describing these supposed conditions, they use charged language like the oceans and seas being “raped of life for unnecessary reasons.” This suggests a severity in the injustice of these environmental injustices. By embellishing the injustice, Anonymous attempts to persuade the viewer of the severity and seriousness of the injustice.

Anonymous also connects environmental injustice to humanitarian injustice. In the following excerpt from the Facebook page, ArmyAnonymous linked an article detailing the government’s intent to build a copper mine on Apache land in San Carlos: “Last week, members of the San Carlos Apache Native American tribe traveled to Washington DC to protest the desecration of their sacred property.” In this case, Anonymous points out both environmental and

humanitarian injustice are enacted on a marginalized group, the Apache people. Anonymous constructs a righteous rhetoric by aligning with the notion that they defend marginalized groups unable to defend themselves from injustice. Anonymous engages this issue virtually, not participating in the protest themselves, but disseminating information as an internet ally to the tribe.

Police Injustice

Police injustice is another concern on which Anonymous focuses very much. Specifically, Anonymous is concerned with police brutality and violence against protestors. Anonymous expresses contempt that police are the ones charged with protecting people and makes the case they categorically fail in that regard. Anonymous creates a righteous rhetoric by opposing police violence and injustice, especially when applied against protestors. In this excerpt from the transcript of AnonymousWorldVoce's video on #opTurkey, Anonymous highlights riots against police injustice. (This video uses dramatic music, sounding much like a requiem while displaying images of protestors in Turkey): "The riot police responded to the protests with brute force firing water cannons and dispersing rallies by throwing tear gas at peaceful protestors." This passage implies injustice by suggesting brute force is applied to "peaceful protestors. Using the term "peaceful protestors" implies a certain level of innocence, or at least that they did not provoke the use of force to disperse protestors. Anonymous considers this an excess use of force, and by extension they consider it injustice.

Anonymous also suggests that police injustice is not limited to a particular area. In this excerpt from AnonymousWorldVoce's #opCopWatch video, Anonymous suggests that police

injustice is global. This video uses heavy brass instruments with hip-hop-style instrumental music along with images of confrontations in streets between groups of police and civilians:

We must also stress that police brutality is a universal problem.
This operation is not solely based in Ferguson. This message goes
across every border.

Anonymous suggests that the police injustice is a problem not limited to a particular location. As such, Anonymous notes that there are locally addressed problems but distributes such information globally through the internet. In this case, the injustice identified is local, but Anonymous broadcasts this particular observation globally. Specifically, Anonymous suggests that this injustice is generalizable globally and the means in which they distribute this message is global due to the message being online in a public space. They can operate virtually to enact physical consequences. However, Anonymous does this in a unique way. They uncover information, including personal or private information, and often do so illegally through hacktivism. Anonymous cultivates the image that they are tech-savvy hacktivists, operating as unidentified vigilantes fighting injustice of established authorities. Members can organize online for the retrieval of illegally obtained private information publicly through social media. Moreover, members of Anonymous can obtain such information globally; they do not have to be locally present to engage in hacktivism specific to a given location. In other words, any member of this group can obtain private information of individuals without needing to be geographically near these individuals and release it anonymously on social media. They can engage in hacktivism from any geographic location, with any member able to organize the group online.

Anonymous also addresses injustice by the police against individual people as well. This excerpt from AnonymousWorldVoce's #opBaltimore video details police injustice against

Freddy Gray, an individual from Baltimore whom Anonymous alleges was a victim of police brutality resulting in his death. (This video uses clips of riot police in full gear including shields as well as the use of tear gas being thrown in streets):

The global collective of Anonymous is outraged at the vicious murder of Freddie Gray. Not a week goes by that some young person, usually within a minority background, is slaughtered by police officers in charge of protecting the citizens of the United States.

In this excerpt, Anonymous suggests that the police are committing unjust acts by specifically targeting particular individuals. In this instance, Anonymous suggests police injustice is often aimed at marginalized individuals. Anonymous also uses powerful language, saying police officers slaughter young, minority individuals. Previous research (Girgnou and Patou 2004; Suler 2005) suggests individuals express themselves differently online than offline. Because of the anonymity that the internet provides, members of Anonymous can invoke powerful or even polarized language and images that they might not otherwise be comfortable expressing offline. Moreover, the way in which they achieve this expression can involve hacktivism. Anonymous engages in illegal activity that they would or could not otherwise in the form of hacktivism.

In this video from AnonymousWorldVoce, “Operation Shock Drop” can be investigated. This video outlines different strategies Anonymous intends to employ or has already begun enacting with regards to events in Ferguson:

We also ask each member of their community organizing these rallies to demand that looting and rioting will not be a problem. We need to show those in power that we are more in control than they are. Riots and looting will only undermine the cause, and it will give the powers that be an excuse to apply [sic] further force. From now on, those who are committing such low life act will be considered members of the counterintelligence program.

Anonymous engages in illegal activism online but encourages peaceful, legal protest offline. This video highlights the claim that Anonymous acts differently online than offline. Online, Anonymous engages in illegal activism through hacktivism, but offline encourages peaceful, legal protest. From the same video, Anonymous specifically calls for hacktivism:

Operation Ferguson. We will proceed to dismantle websites that are connected with the Ferguson police department. At a given time, we will also expose and release information of high ranking police officers if they keep committing or engaging their barbaric attacks on protestors. Yet the end result is for the FPD to fully cooperate with protestors in a diplomatic, patient, and open minded matter. Even if these protestors are from another city, if the FPD don't alter or modify their unjust tactics, we will not halt our actions and engagements.

Anonymous furthers their righteous rhetoric by noting that they engage in dismantling websites and exposing information only to secure their right to legally protest. Anonymous suggests that they are fighting unjust tactics of the police, which is part of their righteous rhetoric. Here Anonymous demonstrates they act differently online and offline and specifically frames their online actions as justified, although hacktivism, because it secures justice in the form of the ability to protest.

Anonymous also calls for justice while they describe police injustice. In this excerpt from AnonymousWorldVoce's #OpBaltimore video transcript, Anonymous calls for action against police killings:

This is no longer a protest. This is an uprising. The time has come for more than simple justice for these atrocities. The time has come to draw a line in the sand and say, no more police killings, no more beatings, and no more deaths. Anonymous stands with the people of Baltimore. We stand with the people united and together we say no more. Operation Baltimore Engaged.

Here Anonymous identifies general instances of injustice and in doing so clarifies what police injustices they wish to address. Killings, beatings, and deaths resulting in police injustice are violations of what the group supports as just.

Moreover, Anonymous asserts that these actions of police injustice are very much intentional. In this excerpt from Anonymops's video on #OpWallstreet, they suggest intent and consequences of that intent. (This video uses Anonymous symbols throughout, such as the Guy Fawkes mask, but also includes images of protestors holding signs protesting "the 1%"):

To the police who wish to remain tyrannical, we will continue to show our support for the peaceful protesters. You will be exposed for the inhumane offences you commit, and everyone will know just who you are and what you have done. Your information will be posted everywhere and mirrored everywhere.

Anonymous calls the police tyrannical, implying a cruel intent to maintain oppression. In that sense, Anonymous suggests that police are the oppressors, and they will face consequences from Anonymous. These consequences involve exposing information about specific individuals believed to be perpetrating acts of injustice against peaceful protestors. Anonymous cultivates the image of being hacktivists, engaging in activism through hacking.

Anonymous also holds police more accountable, suggesting that if a non-police officer were to commit the same act, he would face different consequences. In this excerpt from an admin post on the "Anonymous for Justice" page, the admin expresses shock that acts of injustice are committed by police, not people generally considered:

We are NOT talking about crazy people who want to kill people or police we are talking about cops who shoot unarmed suspects, handcuffed suspects, children with toy guns, FFS what is wrong with these cops these days .

In this statement, Anonymous suggests that police are not held equally accountable for their actions. Were an individual unaffiliated with police to shoot unarmed suspects or those in handcuffs, they would seem mentally unfit to be in that position. This excerpt expresses disdain for a perceived normalization of police committing acts of injustice.

Powerful Elite and Corruption

Anonymous constructs the image of a powerful elite responsible for the injustices they oppose. To that end, Anonymous suggests that the powerful elite in governments, media, and corporations abuse their position of power. To Anonymous, the powerful elite are responsible for many injustices. Anonymous makes mention of specific news outlets and public relations (PR) firms when discussing media bias or a particular individual when discussing corporate corruption. While Anonymous certainly does identify specific parties responsible for corruption, they also blame a faceless elite. Opposition framing based on a faceless elite facilitates Anonymous's own frame of a righteous rhetoric, specifically, parties they oppose as unjust if they are not given an identity beyond the powerful elite or government. It is easier to frame one's actions as just when there is no clear opposing narrative party they argue is committing injustice. While Anonymous themselves are faceless, they do so to avoid retribution from the faceless elite they blame. In that sense, Anonymous adopts the characteristics of their perceived oppressors to oppose them. Anonymous frames their actions as opposing the powerful elite to secure rights and oppose injustice and are able to do so through technological means not previously available to groups. That is, the use of the internet and social media allows Anonymous to publicly oppose

the powerful elite in a public space while remaining unidentified. The exploitation of additional securities of the internet and anonymity it provides allows Anonymous to cultivate a particular rhetoric in a unique way. Anonymous is aware of internet insecurities and uses these to their advantage, exploiting such insecurities to illegally obtain information. Additionally, they use the internet to maintain their anonymity. Anonymous cultivates a virtual identity through pseudonyms and other technological means, such as use of proxy servers to hide the origin of internet activity or masking identifying network signatures (MAC addresses). Anonymous mitigates internet insecurity by careful use of securities available to those aware of how to use them.

Government and the Elite

Anonymous illustrates government injustices as injustices committed by the powerful elite. In many cases, Anonymous suggests these injustices are related to government corruption. That is, a government commits injustice by acting in its own interests or the interests of a select few instead of the interest of its people. Anonymous highlights perceived corruption among governments.

Anonymous identifies governmental abuse of power as far reaching and very much an international issue. The following excerpt from an admin post shared on the “Anonymous for Justice” Facebook page links to a video suggesting that genocide is occurring in West Papua. In the Facebook post, Anonymous accuses the American, Australian, New Zealand, and Indonesian governments of not taking action against genocide occurring in West Papua.

The following governments know what is going on in West Papua, but refuse to do anything about it, because they want Indonesia to be friends with them and have good ties, they also know they will reap rewards from the resources they are STEALING, similar to

how the Australian government are stealing the land and resources off the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The following governments and the UN have the BLOOD of the West Papua people on their hands...

Anonymous suggests that these governments should intervene, as they are aware of the events in West Papua. However, Anonymous also suggests that they have the power to intervene but choose not to do so. By not intervening, Anonymous is stating these governments are culpable. Furthermore, Anonymous alleges that these governments benefit by reaping rewards of these events. In this case, it is not the active use of power against those without, but Anonymous asserts that governments choose not to act because they do not benefit from action.

Anonymous also identifies other instances where they believe governments should do more to intervene in unjust events. In this passage from an admin post on the Anonymous for Justice Facebook page, the admin criticizes the UN for not intervening in Saudi Arabia for human rights injustices:

SO MUCH FOR THE UNITED NOTHINGS - THAT IS BECAUSE, THEY DO NOTHING, they just get paid to do what the most powerful countries tell them to do.

Here Anonymous suggests that the United Nations fails to act against injustice due to the powerful elite buying them off. This suggests government corruption on international levels and that these governments actively obstruct the potential to intervene in human rights injustices. This supports the narrative that Anonymous creates to suggest they act where others cannot or will not. Anonymous is able to exploit technology and information available through the internet to a particular end. They are able to disseminate information that may be private and illegally obtained through hacktivism in a public space, including exposure of perceived corruption of governing bodies.

Anonymous notes that government corruption is not limited within a country's borders. According to Anonymous, government corruption spans between and beyond borders. In the following passage from the AnonymousWorldVoce video "Uncovering the Truth," Anonymous suggests that the United States is responsible for arming the same terrorist groups they publicly oppose. (This video shows clips of news anchors speaking on newscasts but also uses a looping clip of the Anonymous silhouette suit with a rotating question mark for the head as well as a rotating globe behind this silhouette, which are two symbols used in several Anonymous videos):

The United States has been arming these very same rebels even when they were openly aligned with ISIS and al-Qaeda for over a year. The United States was funding and arming these rebels through 'Arab League' proxies, while they slaughtered and razed some of the oldest Christian communities in the world.

Anonymous links the US government to terrorist activity. Anonymous suggests that the government is not always benevolent, even going as far as assisting terrorist groups.

Anonymous also suggests that governments use the excuse of pursuing terrorism to keep its citizens under surveillance. The following excerpt from an admin post on Anonymous for Justice's Facebook page suggests that a proposed Australian bill could be used against its own people:

As you can read, listen and see, these laws are starting off as terror laws, but because they are not directly defined they can be manipulated and abused so that our government and their agencies can use them against us anyway they see fit. These laws will also be abused because they are ambiguous and it will be easy for these agencies to use them to their benefit and power to achieve whatever they want against YOU and I and everyone else living in Australia.

Anonymous suggests that the Australian government gives itself the potential to act against its people if it should serve their interests. In doing so, Anonymous highlights the potential for increased corruption within a government.

Anonymous suggests that governments are guilty of acting under the guise of democracy in instances that benefit them. In the following excerpt from Anonymops' #OpItaly video, Anonymous suggest that the government argues that it acts in the interests of democracy, but it is actually the case that governments act in the interests of gaining more power and money:

For too long they have fooled us by masking their dirty deeds with the word democracy. For too long they have poisoned our environment, the same environment that will be inherited by our grandchildren. For too long we have been kept divided by false ideologies of left and right - all in the struggle to gain more power and more money.

Anonymous suggests that the government actively divides its own citizens to acquire more power. In this sense, Anonymous is saying the powerful elite act under the pretense that they do so in the interest of the people, or democracy, but are unjustly acting in the interest of the select few. Anonymous suggests that their group aims to unite the interests of people collectively, saying “we” and “our” to create the notion that the viewer’s goals and interests are aligned with those of Anonymous.

Media and the Elite

Anonymous takes to social media to identify themes of corruption of mainstream media. Anonymous suggests that mainstream media is responsible for ignoring news or even spreading misinformation. As with the government, Anonymous suggests that the media are controlled by a select few to serve their interests. When Anonymous discusses media corruption, they identify mainstream media generally, but on occasion they identify particular media outlets as culpable in

media bias. Anonymous notes a lack of coverage they perceive as unjust, and take it upon themselves to shed light on the event. In doing so, they suggest they account for news that mainstream media does not or cannot cover. By opposing injustice through their actions, these actions are framed as just.

Anonymous suggests that the “richest 1%” subvert power from the other 99%, a slogan that was heavily used for the Occupy Wall Street movement. The following excerpt from Anonyops’ Op Wall Street video highlights how this applies to mainstream media:

As many of you are aware, over the past several days, significant demonstrations have been held in protest of the [sic]corrupt financial system that favors the richest 1% of our nation; while the remaining 99% have to deal with things such as abuse of our civil rights, overseas outsourcing of our jobs, and living off minimum wage while gas hovers around \$3.50 a gallon. The minimal attention given to these demonstrations has caused [sic] growing concern, with rumors of media blackouts and repealed news coverage becoming increasingly harder to deny.

Anonymous suggests that the media is purposefully choosing to avoid coverage on stories related to the unequal distribution of wealth. They also tie the richest one percent to mainstream media manipulation in the same point. Anonymous speaks about the lack of coverage at the same time as speaking about the powerful elite, or “richest one percent.” No specific group or individual is accused for the lack of coverage, but Anonymous suggests there is certainly some level of media coverage blocked or subverted by mainstream media. Anonymous further cultivates their righteous rhetoric by suggesting they not only fight injustice but also support other groups through voicing their claims of injustice. Moreover, Anonymous furthers the narrative that what another group calls injustice is indeed injustice. They provide a non-hierarchical means for these groups to have their claims of injustice heard as well. That is, any member of Anonymous can

bring a particular issue to social media and identify it as important. In doing so, Anonymous creates an image that they oppose injustice while helping others to do so.

Anonymous also takes it upon themselves to pread information they believe mainstream media actively undermines. The following excerpt from AnonymousWorldVoce's video Op Shock Drop shows how Anonymous identifies the actions of mainstream media in obfuscating news on instances of police injustice in Ferguson, MO:

Operation Ferguson Blackout. Its cause is simple and straightforward. Expose any mainstream outlet and affiliate that may be spreading misinformation, propaganda, or falseness.

This excerpt shows how Anonymous identifies what they believe to be media corruption and calls for action against it. As such, Anonymous states that they report the truth, something that mainstream media is unable or unwilling to do. Again, they do not identify any particular responsible party for the corruption in this passage, speaking about corruption in media generally. However, they do believe that mainstream media takes part in spreading what Anonymous believes to be inaccurate information, if they even report on such things at all. Anonymous frames themselves as a righteous media outlet by suggesting they reveal truths that mainstream media does not or will not, adding to the rhetoric that their group and actions are righteous.

Anonymous further identifies what they view their role to be in providing information in cases where the media does not. The following excerpt from Anonyops' OpItaly video shows how Anonymous views mainstream media reports on the state of internet freedoms in Italy, which Anonymous suggests is threatened by their government:

The electronic information network has moved to fill the void left by traditional media, providing citizens with the information and means necessary to push their governments to act. We share a responsibility to defend fundamental human freedoms. Now it is time to act and Anonymous will always be present in the places where human rights are in jeopardy. The Italian government has made it a priority to censor the internet and to turn the judicial system into a tool of corruption. It is involved with prostitution and it uses its links with the Mafia to corrupt and manipulate the free flow of information.

This is another instance of Anonymous taking it upon themselves to spread information where they feel mainstream media has failed to do so. In this instance, Anonymous does not blame a particular party for the state of mainstream media, but they do suggest that the government wishes to limit information shared on the internet.

Anonymous spreads information they feel mainstream media fails to cover and outlines specific means and methods of doing so. In this excerpt from the transcript of the Neo2012Anonymous's Anoncast video, Anonymous explains that they are setting up an independent news site. (This video heavily draws from the genre of "cyberpunk," a science fiction subgenre focused on technological dystopias. There are clips of CRT TVs with static, individuals in Guy Fawkes masks and urban camouflage pants, as well as protestors and riot police standing off):

In 2014 the next phase of the evolution of [A]nonymous had arrived [A]nonymous [H]eadquarters went online with one goal: to bring independent investigative news to the same people being lied to on a regular basis by mainstream media outlets. In less than one year [A]nonymous [H]eadquarters has grown to over three million likes on Facebook. That is more than MSNBC, Fox and [F]riends and the Young Turks combined.

Anonymous makes the point that they are addressing misinformation provided by mainstream media. Additionally, Anonymous suggests they have a large following on social media with

which they can share this information. This is another instance of Anonymous suggesting mainstream media is actively spreading misinformation. While Anonymous does not explicitly accuse a specific party of being responsible for spreading misinformation, they do highlight particular networks when discussing a coverage bias. There is an implication that these networks engage in media manipulation, but they are explicitly saying that these stations have fewer likes, which may simply mean that Anonymous Headquarters has a large following. However, Anonymous is implying that their message is righteous and that people are receptive to this. This passage highlights how Anonymous has been disseminating “true” news to subvert lies on mainstream media that includes networks like Fox or MSNBC. Anonymous builds on the image that their organization is just because it provides the truth where mainstream media actively subverts it.

Anonymous also targets corporations and institutions, rather than simply mainstream media. To give context, Qorvis is a media relations group based in Washington D.C. In the following excerpts, Anonymous suggests that the following groups are concealing events in Bahrain regarding suppression of information and harassment of activists by American-based public relations firms:

We also demand the Qorvis Corporation and other American P R firms stop working on behalf of the Bahraini government and stop their active campaigns of disinformation, lies, and harassment of activists.

Anonymous highlights a specific group and overseas involvement in media misinformation. While many of the examples above highlight Anonymous speaking of the manipulation of media in general terms, this is an instance where Anonymous places responsibility on particular parties for corruption of media. In identifying a particular group, Anonymous demonstrates that it is

capable of providing specific responsible parties for manipulating the truth to their own ends. Ironically, Anonymous shapes a particular truth in identifying groups they believe responsible for doing the same. The difference according to Anonymous would be that they provide the actual truth through hacktivism and social media, where other institutions do not.

Corporate and Economic Elite

Anonymous identifies various instances of what they believe to be corporations abusing their power. According to Anonymous, this abuse of power leads to various injustices and often has economic consequences. Anonymous identifies a general disdain for capitalism and the economic oppression of the powerful elite. Anonymous functions as a non-hierarchical organization, which likely explains and contributes to their disdain for power consolidated in particular individuals. These powerful elites range from large banks, corporations, and the government that is complicit in such corruption.

Anonymous suggests that banks and politicians are complicit in maintaining power over the general public. This excerpt from Anonyops' OpCashBack video suggests moving money from big banks to local credit unions. (This video uses dramatic, epic-sounding music while showing images of large groups of protestors gathering, along with Anonymous symbols like the Guy Fawkes mask periodically shown throughout):

Help us restore the power to the people and rid the big banks of their power over us and politicians. As the saying goes "money is the root of all evil" so let us take the money away from the evil.

Anonymous suggests that the big banks and politicians have power, and Anonymous wishes to take that power back. Anonymous also explicitly calls "big banks" and politicians evil in this statement. By suggesting these things, Anonymous justifies themselves in taking power back

from evil entities. By taking money from the “evil” institutions, moving money from big banks to local credit unions, Anonymous suggests power is removed from the powerful and redistributed to local parties. However, this message does not adequately explain why Anonymous believes local credit unions better serve the interests of people. A possible explanation is that Anonymous believes a credit union is less willing or able to exploit the interests of the individuals it locally serves because it is owned by its members, not privately. Moreover, this highlights Anonymous’s view that the government is not so different than big banks without explicitly tying them together. That is, politicians and big banks are held in similar regard, but this video does not explicitly say that the two are working in concert. To that end, Anonymous identifies a specific route in which they have the ability to take power from the powerful. The image Anonymous propagates is they can and do fight the powerful who exploit the less powerful. In doing so, Anonymous identifies a righteous cause in which they are able to accomplish change.

Anonymous also expresses a general disdain for capitalism and how it only helps the powerful elite. The following passage from Neo2012Anonymous’s Christmas Shoppers video highlights this disdain, suggesting that banks benefit from engaging in Christmas shopping. (This video shows news clips covering people camping out for “Black Friday” sales. Additionally, panic and chaos at these sales are shown with large groups of people pushing others and fighting over merchandise):

Greetings Christmas shoppers, you only have 6 days left to buy all the gifts for the people on your shopping lists. But that should be the very least of your worries. It's really quite a shame how we can no longer express how much we love one another without giving a material gesture. But nobody is stopping you from loving the people close to you in the way you wish to do so; but we'd like to

make a request: While you scramble across retail stores that capitalize on this holiday, and help bankers grow more powerful, we want you to note that Anonymous has a Christmas wishlist for everyone this year; and the gift we ask for is priceless. We simply want no more lives torn apart, and wars would never start, and time would heal all hearts, and everyone would have a friend, and right would always win, and love would never end...
 ...We are Anonymous, we are legion, we are expecting you all next year to care more about these life threatening issues.

Anonymous suggests that materialism and consumerism lead to banks having more power. This notion suggests that banks are powerful and will continue to grow more powerful through Christmas shopping. This excerpt portrays Anonymous in the light that they are not judging people for engaging in this act but wishing to spread information about the consequences of such acts. By expressing some level of concern for the viewer, they elevate themselves above those who capitalize on Christmas, specifically corporations and banks.

Banks and corporations as general groups are not the only concern of Anonymous. In some cases, they also identify individuals they believe responsible for using corporations for acts of injustice. In the following excerpt from Neo2012Anonymous's video on the Malaysian Airliner, Anonymous suggests that Jacob Rothschild orchestrated the disappearance of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370 for personal gain. (This video is a clip of an individual with a black hoodie and Guy Fawkes mask that loops while an automated voice speaks):

With the disappearance of those on Malaysian Airlines MH370 billionaire, [sic] Jacob Rothschild becomes the sole owner of an important semiconductor patent. Coincidence? I think not! The mysteries surrounding Malaysian Airliner MH-370 continue to grow with each passing day and Mr. Rothschild is smack dab in the middle. Illuminati member, Rothschild, is believed to have exploited the airliner to gain full Patent Rights of an incredible KL-03 micro-chip.

The video suggests that Jacob Rothschild was responsible for the airline crash and did so in order to secure a patent. Anonymous highlights the consequences of how a particular member of the powerful elite manipulated corporations for personal gain. Additionally, Anonymous alleges that this individual is part of the Illuminati, a secret conglomerate of global elite.

According to Anonymous, government institutions can be controlled by corporations. In this passage from Neo2012Anonymous's Million Mask March video, Anonymous argues that this control creates the illusion of freedom. (This video also uses cyberpunk imagery, such as the green code used in the film "The Matrix," as well as images of space, galaxies, and the Earth):

Far too many of us struggle in this cacophony of deceit that our corporate owned government institutions force upon us. We are indeed not free, but servile to financial institutions that have their website cast upon every facet of civilization. The money of those in power used to propagate your slavery is a mere illusion. They create your work, your fiber of being, and the majority of us are kept under heel. This needs to change.

One point Anonymous makes in this passage is that the government is corporate owned and that this ownership keeps people from being truly free. More directly, Anonymous equates this difference in power, money, and control to slavery. That is, Anonymous is stating that corporations control governments, which extends control to its citizens. Anonymous suggests that they oppose this control and make use of social media to do so. Anonymous creates the image that they are revealing some unknown truth to the viewer and that this truth is subverted by corporations and government institutions. Anonymous implies righteousness in their cause by revealing these truths to enlighten the viewer.

The Cost of a Righteous Rhetoric

Members of Anonymous often associate the group with a vigilante image. Like the character V in *V for Vendetta*, Anonymous identifies as vigilantes fighting for justice and freedom. In that sense Anonymous frames their actions like those taken by V. In the film, he uses illegal methods to expose corruption and injustice. However, framing their group as a vigilante justice group risks romanticizing the risks of such involvement. To that end, there are real and perceived consequences of involvement with a vigilante group. Related to the perception of a vigilante group, some believe involvement with Anonymous can be dangerous in itself.

Engaging with Anonymous in hacktivism can be dangerous, the group suggests. In this passage from Neo2012Anonymous's video Op Chain Reaction, Anonymous suggests that there is danger in activism via hacking:

Hackers are people and they can be arrested. Activists now are being hunted down. Any protest against any government is being treated with violence from both sides. We do not encourage violence, but we believe in the right to defend yourself.

Anonymous suggests that both hacking and activism can result in being tracked down by the government and that violence against activists can occur. In this regard, Anonymous acknowledges that there is danger to what they do. However, they believe what they are doing is just, calling it activism.

While Anonymous acknowledges potential consequences for involvement, they do not necessarily believe that consequences are inevitable. In this video from AnonymousWorldVoce, OpSaveGaza, Anonymous calls for continued attack on Israeli websites to show support for Palestinians, noting that it is not an anti-Jewish movement, but their actions are for an oppressed

people. (This video uses Anonymous symbols throughout while displaying Jack Rackham's Jolly Roger with the Guy Fawkes mask instead of the skull over two crossed scimitars):

We are calling upon the entire [A]nonymous collective, and its hidden factions, to continue attacking Israel cyberspace and to always be cautious on the sites you attack and the tools and equipment you use to leak or destruct. We need to show Gazans and Palestinians that they are not alone against this horrific evil.

Anonymous suggests that the risk can be mitigated by maintaining technological security, especially when the actions of the group are illegal. Anonymous justifies the cyber-attacks by suggesting they are supporting people they believe to be oppressed.

There is also perceived risk in simply following Anonymous. In this YouTube post from a user replies with his real name to AnonymousWorldVoce's Remember the 5th of November video. This video contains images of hijacking electronic signs and newsfeeds. One example is the video showing the entirety of Times Square signs changed to an image of a Guy Fawkes mask over two crossed swords, reminiscent of the pirate flag of Jack Rackham's Jolly Roger. The comment itself expresses the user's belief that any connection to Anonymous can be dangerous: "God help me I love this movement and might be putting myself in danger by just using my real name but only time will tell."

Further explaining the video's context, Anonymous used pirate imagery and showed hijacking billboards in Times Square. The video uses deviant imagery, which seems to encourage views like the user/s comment that involvement with Anonymous can involve illegal acts and potentially dangerous consequences. The user explicitly states that he supports Anonymous but fears consequences of involvement. Anonymous has stated that there are risks of involvement with the group. The user suggests that engaging and supporting Anonymous's

rhetoric is dangerous simply from association. The dangers the group invites through enacting their righteous cause, which might include consequences of hacktivism, does not dissuade the user from supporting it. However, the user is cautious of fully embracing and engaging their rhetoric for the fear of consequences Anonymous potentially faces for their hacktivism.

Additionally, by using his real name, the individual worries about his ability to support Anonymous because the individual's identity is unmasked. By not being anonymous, but supporting the movement, the individual fears retribution that would otherwise be protected by anonymity. The loss of the key element of the group, anonymity, affects this individual's perceived ability to act with the group or support its righteous rhetoric.

While some videos and Facebook posts acknowledge risks associated with involvement in Anonymous, some individuals within Anonymous suggest that involvement does not equate to illegal activity. In Anonyops's How to Join Anonymous video, contacting other members in Anonymous as well as concerns for security and privacy of being in Anonymous are detailed. The following excerpt highlights how being in Anonymous does not mean engaging in illegal activity, but there may be people watching within the group for those engaging in illegal activity. Anonymous frames surveillance as an important part of their group's operations, both in the form of being surveilled by others and engaging in the surveillance of others. Anonymous suggests they are watching with phrases like "we are legion" and "expect us." However, Anonymous acknowledges the possibility they are also being watched. (This video loops the Anonymous suit silhouette over a globe while captions for what is said are occasionally highlighted):

It is not illegal to be Anonymous. Nor is it illegal to wear Guy Fawkes masks. Keep that in mind. If you personally have not been

involved in illegal activities, you have nothing to worry, no matter whom you talk to; [sic] If you have, it is wise not to talk about it. To no one.

In this passage, Anonymous notes that being in Anonymous is not illegal in nature, but some in Anonymous do engage in illegal activity. Those who that do engage in such activities are at risk. On one hand, some Anonymous videos embrace deviant and illegal activity like Anonymous-WorldVoce Remember the 5th of November video. However, this video suggests that doing such things is possible but not required to identify with Anonymous. In regards to consequences of righteous framing, Anonymous suggests that engaging in their pursuit of justice is not inherently illegal, but you may be watched should you engage in illegal activity. Notably, the video does not condemn illegal activity, just that one should be careful so as to not get caught doing so. While Anonymous champions that their cause is righteous, it may not always be legal.

Challenges to Anonymous' Righteous Rhetoric

To create and maintain a righteous rhetoric, Anonymous has to address elements of their group. Specifically, Anonymous is an online, non-hierarchical group with unidentified members. As such, they are in a unique position to address all three of these components at once. There are many groups with one or two of these aspects to their group, but having all three creates new challenges the group must address to maintain their rhetoric.

Online

Internet freedoms are valued by Anonymous because they are essential to their operations as a group. However, there are some challenges to being an online group, such as the way in which they are criticized and how they must deal with “fake” members or infiltrators.

One example of criticisms many people accuse Anonymous of is impotence in their action. The following passage is from a user commenting on Neo2012Anonymous’s Do You See What I See video. In this video, Anonymous lists many environmental, social, and economic injustices they believe to be occurring:

Complaining without proposing a solution is just bitching. Don't just make a video pointing out all the bad things in the world so you can feel better about yourself and feel like you're a good person. Actually do something about it and/or make a proposition of solution to your viewers.

This comment criticizes Anonymous for not doing enough about issues they raise. The commenter suggests that simply pointing out issues does not equate to doing good. This is something often referred to as “slacktivism” on social media. Generally this involves mentioning concern for particular issues but not taking action on said issues.

Anonymous also faced criticisms on social media related to other aspects of the group. The Op Paris video from AnonymousWorldVoce suggests that Anonymous will retaliate for the terrorist attacks on Paris November 13, 2015. The following commenter criticizes the group, suggesting that Anonymous will not succeed in doing so:

They are part of a "movement" that has accomplished nothing. If you have no ideology, nor plans, nor goals, nor means of achieving those goals, you will not affect anything.

This user criticizes Anonymous, suggesting that their non-hierarchical group cannot accomplish goals because these goals are not clearly outlined or universally supported by the group.

Anonymous does not issue a response to such criticism directly, and instead users who may or may not be a part of Anonymous discuss these opinions. That is, Anonymous has a very lax approach to addressing criticisms and instead allows the discussion of ideas to do it. No YouTube video had an administrator of a page actively engaging discussion in user comments. If they did so, it would have been as a user, not an administrator. This highlights their nature as a non-hierarchical organization, allowing everyone to discuss ideas equally.

In order to interact online, members need not link their online profiles to their real identities to interact on social media. This excerpt from Anonyops' How to Join Anonymous video identifies how members can join and interact in the discussion with Anonymous:

Invent an alias, a nick, [sic] a pseudonym ... call it as you will, just invent something. Then register a mail account in that name with one of the big mail providers. Use this email address to register your Twitter, Facebook, etc. accounts. Make sure to clear all cookies before you start using your new identity, or better use a different web browser for Anonymous than for your other activities.

This passage alludes to certain components of interaction on the internet, notably social media. As many of the above excerpts point out, there is some level of perceived danger in involving oneself with Anonymous. Whether that danger is real or perceived does not particularly matter, as the perception or reality of the danger leads to certain steps; Anonymous encourages avoiding such risks. More importantly, this perceived risk contributes to members participating anonymously online.

This then leads to another issue that Anonymous faces: the anonymity tied to the internet. While the anonymity can be an advantage, it also creates the opportunity for individuals to claim membership with Anonymous only by identifying as such. In the following excerpt from an admin post on Anonymous for Justice's Facebook page, the admin warns against individuals taking advantage of Anonymous identification:

Firstly Anonymous does NOT profit, everything we do is for the love of mankind and from our hearts, there are those on social media who may have legitimate fund raising needs such as Free Anons for our brothers and sisters who have been arrested. There are those Anons who use fundraising as a way of providing certain services for those online and this is a safe mutual method for them to arrange for payment. However, Anonymous pages who profit from using pop-up adds, fake surveys and the selling of merchandise can be questionable.

While there is no set charter or requirements for being in Anonymous, this passage highlights some of the shared ideology of the group. This Anonymous page suggests that Anonymous does not act for profit, but that there are those who would use the name Anonymous for taking advantage of others within the group.

From the same post, the admin calls those who are only posing as Anonymous for their own ends "Fake Anons.":

Then there are those who are definitely not Anons amongst us, such as those who work for government intelligent agencies who even make videos or join in our marches only to be found out that they are in fact Fake Anons.

In this case they believe government agencies to be infiltrating Anonymous for information on its members and activities. Because of the anonymity the internet provides, it is difficult for members of Anonymous to discern what a user's intentions toward the group may be. This may be supporting them in whatever way they choose, or it could be someone's intention to deceive

and disrupt. Anonymous points this issue out, encouraging its members to take caution when interacting with suspicious persons in the group. Notably, this post goes on to discourage this type of behavior, suggesting that exploitation of other members within Anonymous will result in punishment from the collective:

Anonymous and our collective should be united as one, therefore no division or hostility towards our fellow brothers and sisters should occur. Sadly, we have found, that there are those who wish to lead certain groups, pages, operations and many within the collective being leaderfags as we call them. This type of leaderfag is not welcomed amongst the collective and he or she will eventually find themselves having to face the consequences of being exposed and losing all support from the collective.

This post suggests Anonymous will face retribution from the larger Anonymous collective should they engage in activities Anonymous as a whole does not agree with. This could be the loss of support or being singled out by the larger group. To clarify the term, a “leaderfag” is a leader of an Anonymous group whose actions are not in line with the Anonymous as a whole.

Another concern of Anonymous is its own members working against them. Sabu, a member in the Anonymous sect calling itself Lulzsec, began working with the FBI and provided them with information. Members of Anonymous found out and censured him as a traitor. The following excerpt is from Neo2012Anonymous’s video Anonymous vs. Lizard Squad where a narrator with an automated voice denounced the hacker group Lizard Squad for using DDoS attacks on gaming networks. While doing so, the video also suggests that members of Anonymous do not work with the FBI, with the exception of Sabu:

It has come to our attention that despite our continued warnings you have decided to disregard our requests to stop promoting propaganda such as "Anonymous has joined up with the FBI". The only Anon that ever worked with the FBI is Sabu, the former Lulzsec's leader and now he's known as the biggest traitor and

scumbag that shopped his friends to the police in order to save himself among all Anonymous parties.

This passage highlights Anonymous's value to not sell out one another. Anonymous develops the frame that members of Anonymous should not turn on other members of Anonymous. This is part of their righteous framework which suggests, even in the face of legal consequences, do not betray the members of the group or its interests. Working with the FBI is seen as betraying the group, and Anonymous opts to correct perceptions that it would do so. It is also worth noting that in this instance, Anonymous points out something of a "leader," though it was for a now-defunct sect of Anonymous.

Unidentified Members

Another challenge Anonymous faces is that not just possible "fake" members but the group's actual members are unidentified. While there are some exceptional cases, such as Sabu, the majority of members are not publicly known. There are advantages to this, such as having a level of increased personal security if a member is engaging in hacktivism. However, while masking the identity of members can be useful, there are also challenges that come with it. Anonymous suggests that its members could be anyone or anywhere. In some instances, members even choose to disclose personal information, such as posting with one's real name on Facebook or YouTube. Anonymous's collective identity is that its members mask their identities, but it is possible that individual members choose to disclose particular components of their actual identities.

Anonymous cultivates virtual identities without inherently exposing actual identities. While Anonymous often encourages maintaining anonymity within the group, one does not have to be completely anonymous to be a member of Anonymous. Members of Anonymous are only

as anonymous as they choose to be; disclosing personal information is not prompted or expected, nor is it required to maintain absolute secrecy. Members might know personal details of other members, but only insofar as one chooses to reveal such details. However, for those who choose to reveal personal information to others within the group, Anonymous stresses that there are risks in doing so. That is, members of the group must be cautious of other assumed members of the group, as they may not have the group's or other members' interests in mind.

Answering the question as to who composes Anonymous can be a difficult question, but Anonymous asserts that its members are hackers with an agenda of justice. This passage from Anonyops's How to Join Anonymous video highlights who its members are, generally speaking:

They are not teenagers sitting in their parent's [sic] basements hacking Walmart. They are fighting for justice. So what they break a few laws in the process. Anonymous is a group of Vigilantes, if you will.

This speaks generally to who Anonymous considers its members. Anonymous considers its members vigilantes, or self-appointed guardians of justice. Notably, this organizes members of Anonymous by ideology, not identity.

Anonymous points out that because its members can be anyone, they can have various goals or intentions toward the group. The following passage from Anonyops's How to Join Anonymous Video gives examples of who might be in Anonymous and what their goals might be:

“If you talk to another Anonymous, you will never know who he is. He may be a hacker, cracker, phisher, agent, spy, provoker -- or just the guy from next door. Or his daughter”

This passage notes that people identifying as Anonymous could be anyone with a wide range of goals and interests. Because of this, it can make creating shared goals difficult. Some may be

trying to organize and take action, some may antagonize that action, or some may just have neutral interest in Anonymous's activities.

Non-Hierarchical

There are also challenges for Anonymous as a non-hierarchical group. This component of Anonymous leads to additional challenges in creating a righteous rhetoric. Because Anonymous is non-hierarchical, it is sometimes difficult for the group to define itself. Anonymous is aware of its non-hierarchical nature and offers general guidelines to what the group should do or accomplish. While there are some shared ideologies, many of the examples above show one group for Anonymous expressing one view, while another sect may disagree or offer alternative views.

Joining Anonymous is often spoken about with ambiguity due to their non-hierarchical nature. However, the following video from Anonyops titled How to Join Anonymous sheds light on how one becomes part of Anonymous despite its lack of formal membership:

You cannot join Anonymous. Anonymous is not an organization. It is not a club, a party or even a movement. There is no charter, no manifest, n[o] membership fees. All we are is people who travel a short distance together -- much like commuters who meet in a bus or tram: For a brief period of time we have the same route, share a common goal, purpose or dislike. And on this journey together, we may well change the world. Nobody could say: you are in, or you are out. Do you still want to join Anonymous? Well, you are in if you want to.

This excerpt suggests Anonymous is not an organization that one joins. However, it would be more accurate to say that Anonymous is a non-hierarchical label under which its members operate. As such, groups may emerge to address an issue they view as important. Groups may continue to identify as Anonymous beyond a specific event should they choose to.

Another challenge Anonymous faces because of its non-hierarchical nature is that who or what Anonymous is may not be clearly understood. AnonymousWorldVoce's video Uncovering the Truth condemns the United States for arming rebels and funding violence in Syria. A commenter expresses he/she feels there is a certain level of ambiguity in Anonymous's actions and message:

Hack Facebook. Hack worldwide TV Stations. Can't you? We have been expecting the Anonymous already. But really is something being done at the forefront at all? Enough of the documentaries, the truth videos, the facts about ISIS videos. Please use the technology of which you are the masters, to let the masses know once and for whole that something is terribly wrong in the world. How many YouTube channels do you actually have? How many of them are we supposed to remain connected to? ANONYMOUS? Anonymous Official? Anonymous Loyalist?

Because of Anonymous's non-hierarchical nature, their capabilities, goals, and actions are not clearly identifiable or outlined. This commenter questions what Anonymous claims to do as well as what it actually does. To that end, this commenter also expresses discontent at how Anonymous does not have a single channel for information. That is, there is not one mouthpiece for Anonymous; whoever chooses to share news under the label of Anonymous news may choose to do so. In this case, the commenter suggests Anonymous's non-hierarchical nature obfuscates the many goals of the various sects and muddles unified rhetoric and action. Again, Anonymous does not respond directly, allowing discussion between users.

For Anonymous, the online, non-hierarchical, and unidentified characteristics of the group also combine in a unique way that other SMOs do not observe. Specifically, the group embracing its online characteristic facilitates being a non-hierarchical group. The internet, especially social media, serves as a platform to democratically discuss ideas and actions.

Because it is online, Anonymous is able to better secure its anonymity through creating virtual identities that are not inherently tied to physical identities. Comparing Anonymous to other SMOs (see the appendix), a given SMO may share one or two characteristics with Anonymous but not all three. For instance, the Zapatistas were an online group with unidentified members, but they were not a non-hierarchical group where leaders directed action. They engaged much more local interests, and despite cultivating a global support for causes, their causes were more locally focused. The leaders of the Zapatistas are locked to a geographic location, unlike Anonymous which can have pseudo and ephemeral leaders who emerge wherever they are needed. Additionally, Anonymous embraces each of these components as essential to the group and how it engages in framing. These connections are explored at length in the discussion section.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Injustice

This study examined how an online anonymous group without formal structure, leadership, or identifiable members frames its activities as “just” and “righteous” to members and non-members alike. Anonymous creates their own righteous or just rhetoric through identifying various forms of injustice. By demonstrating that particular events or conditions are unjust, they justify their actions against them. That is, if their actions are suggested to be taken against injustice, their group is righteous when engaging in hacktivism, disseminating hacked information, and democratically highlighting important causes through social media, and they remain anonymous to do so. Even when their actions might be considered morally ambiguous at best, creating a narrative that they fight injustice makes their actions seem more justified. These come in the form of various humanitarian and environmental injustices, as well as a focus on internet rights and police injustice.

In regards to humanitarian justice, Anonymous tends to identify instances of injustices that are more serious, often involving loss of life. For instance, they highlight many injustices such as the terrorist attacks on Paris in 2015 and torture, beheadings, and various other injustices in the MiddleEast. By opposing these things, they create an image of the group as fighting against humanitarian injustice. By identifying the issues they perceive as unjust, they begin to

craft a picture of just ideology and actions. Identifying serious injustices allows a more favorable use of actions if they are alleged to be in the name of justice. Anonymous attempts to shape their image in a way that makes any illegal activity they might commit justifiable, especially when the events they act against are illustrated as worse than any action Anonymous would take.

Anonymous argues the injustice they suggest they combat is much more damaging than illegal activities they commit. That is, torture and human rights violations are arguably worse than DDoS attacks and information exposure.

In the case of the terrorist attacks on Paris in 2015, Anonymous specifically threatens action of exposing those responsible for the attack. This narrative highlights their disdain for violence against people they believe to be innocent as well as their approach to justice. That is, they feel that they are able to do things that authorities cannot or will not for those who are innocent. As such, they believe in vigilante justice, or going outside legal means to obtain justice. They justify their own actions by suggesting they fill a void that law enforcement at various levels cannot or will not. International injustice is one of the injustices they claim to address, but there are other humanitarian concerns that are not tied to international justice. One example provided was Anonymous's OpDeathEaters, which was aimed at exposing pedophiles. In this case, they believed it justice to expose those they believed to be pedophiles. This addresses injustices across all borders, including those that may be closer to home. The just rhetoric Anonymous creates is that there are many cases of international injustice, but that does not make national or domestic injustice any less relevant. By addressing domestic and international injustices, Anonymous crafts an image showing they are willing to seek justice for a wide range of what they believe are relevant issues. Anonymous uses the line "Expect us" at

the end of many of their videos and posts. This line is used with the intent to state Anonymous can reach even those who feel unreachable. When Anonymous perceives an injustice, they call attention to such an event and say they will seek justice for it. Anonymous suggests by using the internet (and in an anonymous way), no responsible parties are entirely out of reach.

Anonymous also expressed their concerns in regards to environmental injustices. These involved public health and ecological concerns. This extends the notion that Anonymous is concerned with a wide array of injustices, such as environmental and public health concerns. One way in which Anonymous constructs a narrative that they seek justice outside of hacktivism is by spreading information as to what they perceive as unjust treatment of public health and environment.

Rights related to the internet are a very important concern to Anonymous. Anything less than a free, uncensored internet is considered by Anonymous to be unjust. Anonymous suggests that a free internet allows for free speech and communication. Freedom of expression and information are two things that Anonymous values as a group. Anonymous argues that freedom of speech is a vital element to other rights, as it provides a means to expose truths and ideas. Anonymous constructs a just rhetoric by creating an image of a group defending the rights of others. However, Anonymous requires the internet to be free and open to operate as a group. Unimpeded information flow allows the group to discuss ideas and actions anonymously and non-hierarchically.

Anonymous's highlighting and taking action against perceived injustices in regards to the internet serves a dual purpose. Anonymous calls for a free internet in the name of protecting others' freedoms, but certainly it serves Anonymous's interests as well. Anonymous views the

internet as a means for Anonymous to communicate as a group with little restriction. An unimpeded, uncensored, and equally accessible internet is essential to Anonymous's operations as a group. With increased surveillance, censorship, as well as decreased access and availability of the internet, Anonymous would find it difficult to organize. This is especially true on social media. Anonymous gathers its members in a virtual, public space to which access is widely available and discussions are sanctioned. While it is not impossible to circumvent some of the restrictions they are concerned about, it certainly would make it more difficult to discuss injustices in a public space without fear of retribution. In addition, restricted access to the internet would not make it impossible to communicate online. Anonymous demonstrated in the Arab Spring by providing information about how to use proxy servers and other technologies to get around government censorship and restrictions. However, when it is more difficult to access the facilities and technologies Anonymous uses to communicate, it would at the very least require additional motivation of interested parties to become involved with Anonymous. That is, it would not be impossible for Anonymous to gather and communicate online, but restrictions would limit the group to highly motivated individuals with technological expertise to circumvent these restrictions. To reiterate, a censored internet may be something Anonymous ideologically opposes, but it requires the internet to be uncensored for practical reasons related to group operations.

Police injustice is another concern on which Anonymous focuses very much. Specifically, Anonymous concerns itself with police brutality and violence against protestors. Anonymous expresses contempt that police are the ones charged with protecting people and makes the case they hugely fail in that regard. Anonymous creates a righteous rhetoric by

opposing police violence, especially when applied against protestors. This creates the rhetoric that Anonymous protects others where those tasked with doing so fail. Anonymous constructs an image of the police being oppressive because they commit acts of injustice against those who promote justice and rights. Anonymous suggests the police have little accountability for their actions. That is, police do not face justice for their unjust actions which Anonymous deems police brutality. The lack of accountability is something Anonymous promotes as unacceptable and calls for action as noted in the OpBaltimore and OpShockDrop videos from AnonymousWorldVoce. Anonymous suggested that the police were responsible for acts of police brutality but did not face consequences as they should have. Anonymous argues that police brutality is a worldwide problem, supporting the notion that Anonymous concerns itself with justice around the world. In arguing this, Anonymous adds to their just rhetoric, suggesting that their actions defend others. That is, Anonymous claims to take action through hacktivism as well as exposing individuals and uncovering information to oppose police brutality. In doing so, Anonymous protects protestors from the police. This rhetoric is righteous in the sense that they fill a void left by those failing their task to support justice, but also they do so for protestors fighting unjust causes. Anonymous suggests that they are righteous for opposing what they perceive as injustice but also for supporting those who fight injustice. Anonymous supports these groups in the form of social media postings, videos, and information obtained through hacktivism. Moreover, Anonymous champions their causes as their own, applying a frame of righteousness to it.

Powerful Elite and Corruption

Anonymous ties the powerful elite to government, media, and corporate corruption. Specifically Anonymous makes the case that these institutions operate for their own benefit, committing injustices to serve their own ends. When Anonymous perceives an event as unjust, they often lay blame on the powerful elite and government. In that sense, the blame is placed upon a faceless elite, not necessarily the specific individuals responsible. A large group of individuals could be responsible for the injustices Anonymous identifies, but Anonymous blames injustice on a non-descript group. There is the exception of Anonymous blaming Jacob Rothschild for the Malaysian airliner crash. It is worth noting, however, that Anonymous would consider him one of the powerful elite.

Anonymous is also faceless, as they recognize that exposure of individuals assigns accountability to a particular individual. By identifying and outing a particular responsible party, they are exposed and vulnerable. This applies to the faceless elites Anonymous opposes as well as their own group. Anonymous demonstrates that there is safety in remaining unidentified. By removing the veil of anonymity, this safety is removed. Perhaps because Anonymous recognizes their own vulnerabilities, they are able to turn it on the parties and organizations they believe to be responsible for injustice. Anonymous's facelessness is not different in the sense of safety it provides, but it is different in execution. That is, Anonymous provides a very overt message while remaining covert themselves. The powerful elite Anonymous identifies are covert in their message and identity. Anonymous aims to expose both through hacktivism and information dissemination. Anonymous's facelessness is different in that they use it to prevent risk in

exposing truths, as opposed to being part of the unknown elite that mask truths. In maintaining anonymity, Anonymous also emphasizes the notion that any member can take an action and have an effect. Anonymous heavily draws from the film *V for Vendetta*, in which the film stresses that it did not matter who the vigilante was, as it could have been anyone who supported his ideals. Similarly, Anonymous generally maintains a low profile of its members, avoiding celebrity status or identifiable characteristics of particular members. Anonymous's facelessness serves the purpose of mitigating risk of exposure from outside parties and establishing the notion that any member is able to effectively execute actions supporting the group.

The Cost of a Righteous Rhetoric

Anonymous embraces the notion that they are vigilantes fighting for justice. As such, they address consequences of involvement in illegal activities. Some view simply communicating with Anonymous to be dangerous. As a result, they encourage internet and personal security. Anonymous suggests that they operate outside the law to achieve justice, albeit vigilante justice. To that end, Anonymous would not deny that some of their actions might be considered illegal, but these actions are justified because they are taken against injustice.

Anonymous creates a just rhetoric by suggesting that their actions are taken against what they define as injustice. For complex issues, Anonymous identifies a somewhat ambiguous responsible party, often the faceless elite or government. For instance, Anonymous often condemns the United States for not intervening when they have the power to do so. However, these statements do not address potential consequences of international action and intervention.

That is not to suggest that if the United States can intervene and stop injustice, they should not. Rather, the statements made by Anonymous allow them to act where they suggest governments or elite do not. In other words, suggesting that a responsible party does not do enough about an event allows room for Anonymous to take action such as exposing personal information of responsible parties accused or revealing unknown truths hidden by responsible parties. Because the parties with the power to act do not, Anonymous argues their group acts to address the injustices. As such, Anonymous's actions are taken under the notion that they are part of justice.

Challenges to Anonymous's Rhetoric

One component of the research question asks, what are the challenges in maintaining and creating righteous rhetoric for a group with online, non-hierarchical, and unidentified members? As a non-hierarchical online group with unidentified members, Anonymous faces additional challenges to creating a just rhetoric as well as maintaining it. These components are not necessarily detrimental to establishing a righteous rhetoric, but they do introduce some additional considerations. These components each affect their rhetoric in ways that are unique to that component but are interconnected with other aspects of the group. For instance, being online affects the unidentified and non-hierarchical aspects of the group. This combination of group elements also interconnects in a way that makes Anonymous unique as a group.

Unidentified Members

Other groups, like the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), are non-hierarchical, radical, engage in illegal activity, and have secret identities. However, Anonymous is different than ALF,

as the latter organization members' identities are not secret to each other, where Anonymous identities may be secret to people within and outside of the group. Anonymous, by its namesake, has unidentified members. The primary purpose of maintaining anonymity is that it can serve to protect identities of members whether they engage in legal protest or hacktivism. Anonymous very much draws from the idea in *V for Vendetta* that *V* could have been anyone, suggesting that a member of Anonymous could be anyone, such as a "hacker, government spy, or the guy from next door." as Anonymops's How to Join Anonymous video points out. Its members' identities do not necessarily matter, but what they stand for does. In that sense, Anonymous believes its righteous rhetoric is based on an ideology supporting justice and does not come from a single individual. In that sense, Anonymous differs from a group like the Independent Media Center (IMC) in suggesting a sense of righteousness in reporting truths actively concealed by mainstream media. Also, Anonymous catalyzes this righteous rhetoric through hacking, going beyond just reporting events mainstream media conceals.

The Occupy Wall Street movement, a movement that was enacted online and non-hierarchically, might have benefited from utilizing the anonymity to keep its members unidentified. The movement was criticized for vague claims against parties that were not clearly outlined. Embracing anonymity would have encouraged these individuals to make bolder statements against specific parties without the same risk of consequences.

Having unidentified members introduces additional challenges. Anonymous encourages being extra careful when engaging in hacking activities, as videos like *Op Save Gaza* and *How to Join Anonymous* point out. But this also makes establishing rapport with other members difficult. Without the accountability of being an identifiable individual, it would be difficult to

seek recourse if a particular member of Anonymous wronged another by exploiting the other's trust. The KKK, a group with members who are secret to non-members, but known and unmasked to members, differs from Anonymous in this respect. Members within the KKK are accountable to each other. It follows that it is possible to seek recourse of a member, as the actual, physical identities of members are known within the group.

Another challenge of having unidentified members is that it is difficult to tell who exactly is a member of Anonymous. Without members self-identifying as Anonymous through the use of symbols like the Guy Fawkes mask or using Anonymous phrases like "We are Anonymous. We are legion. We do not forgive..." it is very difficult to identify members of Anonymous from a research standpoint, but also for members of Anonymous. That is, not even Anonymous members will necessarily know who is Anonymous unless they identify as such. It is not impossible that someone in Anonymous knows someone else from other means, but that would still require them to identify as Anonymous elsewhere. While this may serve to protect members' identities, finding other members to communicate with could prove difficult. Social media provides a good starting medium to discuss Anonymous with its members. However, because they are unidentified, even those self-identifying as Anonymous may not actually be Anonymous. Because of this, it is possible to establish differing accounts of what justice is while identifying as Anonymous.

To that end, Anonymous faces criticism from within the group as well as beyond it. They face criticisms from members and non-members alike, but the membership is not necessarily clear. Several of the videos and posts sampled noted what Anonymous for Justice called "Fake Anons." These are people who identify as Anonymous but may be outsiders with a different

agenda than Anonymous. This may be to disrupt Anonymous, exploit members, or even work with government agencies to expose activities of other members. Because of the unidentified nature of Anonymous members, the group and its just rhetoric may be disrupted or compromised from within.

Non-Hierarchical

Other non-hierarchical radical groups, like the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), have historically pursued radical change as Anonymous does, even employing similar methods. That is, SNCC organized physical sit-ins the same way Anonymous organized virtual sit-ins (Garret 2006) via DDoS attacks. However, Anonymous is able to engage in virtual sit-ins without being tied to a geographic location. Additionally, Anonymous is able to remain unidentified while engaging in such protests, allowing the group to protect themselves from legal consequences. As a non-hierarchical group, Anonymous allows any member to direct action and voice concerns with the identification as part of the group Anonymous. De facto leaders and ephemeral groups can emerge to serve a purpose but may disband or disappear soon after. This is a strength in that a group can emerge and address a particular event or concern. However, sometimes their message is met with criticism by nature of being non-hierarchical. Because they are non-hierarchical, their message can seem disjointed, and their actions can lack a unified momentum. One needs only to identify as Anonymous to be part of this group. Because of this, the actions as well as concerns voiced by Anonymous are varied but not necessarily conducted by identifiable groups. Anonymous has unidentifiable members, so one group in Anonymous is not necessarily distinguishable from another Anonymous group unless such a group purposely distinguishes themselves. The logical extension of this criticism as it relates to

construction of their rhetoric is that the righteous rhetoric may not always be focused on the same issues. While this allows the group to address a wide array of issues, it can make their goals seem too varied or disjointed.

The types of justice Anonymous seeks are not uniform; enacting justice can range from DDoS attacks, doxxing, or even just raising awareness about a particular issue. To that end, the righteous rhetoric can be molded by groups and members as they see fit. The only recourse for such actions is if the larger collective of Anonymous deems such a group “leaderfags,” as seen in the Anonymous for Justice August 2015. A “leaderfag” is a leader of an Anonymous group whose actions are not in line with the Anonymous as a whole. However, distinguishing a group in such a way and issuing some sort of response may be a slow process because of the non-hierarchical nature of the group. There is no identifiable group within Anonymous in charge of policing the group in such a way, as it would be against the principles of Anonymous’s non-hierarchical nature in the first place. Because of that, Anonymous can only craft its righteous rhetoric as the larger collective sees fit. This allows for the rhetoric to be very malleable, as it has to be generally agreed upon by members as to what constitutes injustice and justice.

As an example, Sabu and his group Lulzsec engaged in hacking activities that the larger Anonymous collective deemed unjust and was censured as a result of this as well as Sabu’s involvement with the FBI. It is possible for the group to come together to rectify or maintain a particular rhetoric of justice, but it cannot occur unless the various, unidentified members agree on what constitutes justice. Even where they do agree particular members have violated the rhetoric of justice, it would be difficult for Anonymous to permanently bar these members from the group. They would only need to mask their identity again, using different pseudonyms and

taking different security measures to mask their identities. This is only possible because the group is online, allowing for ephemeral identities not necessarily tied to one's actual identity.

Online

As an online group, members of Anonymous can say whatever they want with a drastically reduced fear of consequences. Online, what individuals say or do is not necessarily tied to their personal identities. Whether these real and virtual identities are linked or not does not necessarily matter because the perception that their identities are not connected allows individuals to act as though they are not linked.

Being online allows personal security through the use of pseudonyms to mask one's identity. In other words, being an online group facilitates the unidentified aspect of the group. Additionally, being online facilitates the non-hierarchical aspect of the group. Social media serves as a public meeting space for members of Anonymous where anyone can discuss, organize, and take action with other members of Anonymous. An access point for all members to communicate on equal levels is by nature non-hierarchical.

Of course, there are many individuals other than Anonymous that can interact and participate on these Anonymous social media pages. This may be disruptive to the organization because of its non-hierarchical, unidentified, and online group elements. Breaking this statement down further, being non-hierarchical necessitates that its own members organize and interact with one another of their own initiative. The internet and social media afford Anonymous a place to do so, but this is a publicly accessible place where anyone can participate. As such, if members wish to maintain anonymity, they must use Anonymous symbols attached to their accounts while using pseudonyms. When these criteria are all met, Anonymous is effectively

gathering its members in an online public space where members are only known when they self-identify. Anyone can participate in these meetings spaces, which means they can facilitate or disrupt actions and discussions by Anonymous. Unless Anonymous members self-identify, establishing shared rhetoric may be difficult as it is potentially under constant criticism from members and non-members alike without knowing from whom the criticism comes.

Anonymous is in the unique position of being able to congregate in a public space while maintaining anonymity. In a physical space, that would be like masked individuals meeting and discussing ideas in a heavily trafficked commons area of a university. Like a commons area, social media does not restrict access, and various people may happen upon it and participate in whatever event is being conducted at any given point. Continuing the analogy, a virtual space can accomplish what physical space cannot: people passing through the commons would have the option to remain unseen if they choose not to participate in the discussion or if they choose to only listen. They would also have the option to participate anonymously without necessarily being a member of the group. There is, however, a key difference from this analogy. Because Anonymous gathers in a virtual space, they are able to keep their virtual identities and actions separate from their physical identities. This means that one's anonymous identity is crafted and operates as a stand-in for one's real identity. Essentially, Anonymous creates a virtual public space in which they maintain anonymity to discuss ideas and actions in a democratic fashion.

Because of this unique position Anonymous occupies, they are in a place where they can craft their rhetoric in a specific way that other institutions and groups cannot. Anonymous can democratically craft a rhetoric solely in virtual space by assuming online anonymous identities. Anonymous does engage in physical protest, but they craft their rhetoric in the virtual space.

Recalling Suler's (2005) online disinhibition effect, individuals say and act differently online than they might physically. Members of Anonymous can assume an identity to construct an idea not linked to their persons. Instead, they can assume an ideal identity by which they can discuss and contribute without being tied to a geographic location. That is, Anonymous allows individuals to discuss ideas with others that they could not or would not with individuals in a physical space. With these ideal identities not anchored by physical boundaries, Anonymous can operate democratically and anonymously on an international level.

The internet affords individuals the ability to craft an ideal identity and ideology. With this crafted identity, they are able to operate anonymously and internationally, participating in discussions on what constitutes injustice. Anonymous often poses lofty ideology and rhetoric which can be attributed to allowing an individual being able to say whatever one wants without having the inhibition resulting from physical expression. Anonymous poses the lofty goal of addressing injustices ranging from environmental and public health injustices to terrorism and international disputes.

By extension, their rhetoric is crafted in the same way. Practically, they may not find like-minded individuals if they are limited to a physical space. The virtual space allows for anyone in the world to participate in discussions of what constitutes injustice internationally and domestically. Through their ideal virtual identity, Anonymous can speak to a righteous ideology uninhibited by physicality. In this sense, physicality dually means a physical location and the inhibition of expression that Suler (2005) suggests is less present on the internet. Additionally, the rhetoric is crafted democratically because anyone around the world can participate and discuss what is just at an equal level. Individuals can participate in whatever capacity they

choose, as it is non-hierarchical and without formal requirements of members. Because there are no formal requirements, individuals are able to remain Anonymous and potentially less accountable for their ideas and actions. This can detract or disrupt a just rhetoric when individuals engage in activities that do not align with the larger Anonymous collective. What is deemed as unjust is decided democratically by Anonymous as a whole. This provides some measure of rhetoric management without having individuals specifically tasked with such management.

Notably, the virtual actions of Anonymous translate to physical action by way of protest and physical consequences for hacktivism. Anonymous can anonymously organize a physical protest virtually. In other words, through online, unidentified and non-hierarchical components of the group, this group organizes physical action through virtual interaction. Physical protest, DDoS, and doxxing all have physical consequences linked to them. Anonymous transcends the virtual world through virtually establishing a rhetoric that ultimately translates to physical action against injustice. While Anonymous may hold their virtual and physical identities distinct, their virtual and physical actions are less distinguishable. That is, whether Anonymous engages in injustice with their physical or virtual identity, these actions against injustice have consequences not limited to the virtual or physical world. As an example of virtual action transcending to physical consequence, protesting virtually via DDoS can cause damage to website servers or disrupt services provided by websites. Physical protest has a similar result, disrupting services or causing damage should the protesting escalate. In either case, members of Anonymous mask their identity when engaging in actions argued to be taken against injustice. They maintain anonymity while engaging in democratically led group protests. As such, Anonymous maintains

its non-hierarchical and unidentified components both online and in cases where they organize offline. In sum, Anonymous remains non-hierarchical with unnamed members whether in a physical or virtual space. To create a righteous rhetoric, Anonymous utilizes a virtual public space to construct an image of the group whose actions are taken to oppose injustice. This rhetoric transcends to consequences in a physical space regardless of physical or virtual action.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

Anonymous creates their righteous rhetoric through identifying what constitutes injustice, and standing against it. These injustices include humanitarian, environmental, and public health with a specific focus on freedom of speech (internet) and police brutality; Anonymous acting as a righteous ally in media to others opposing injustice is not different than other SMOs in identifying and opposing injustice, but they do differ from other groups by engaging in hacktivism to combat it. Anonymous shares characteristics with other SMOs but remains unique in how the characteristics affect the group. Additionally, Anonymous as a non-hierarchical online group with unidentified members shapes the way in which it creates a righteous rhetoric that they use to combat injustice.

Anonymous identifies responsible parties on which they place the blame. These parties are often faceless powerful elite, though there are a few exceptions, such as blaming the head of a corporation. Anonymous suggests that the powerful elite in government, media, and corporations are corrupt; they act in their own interests instead of the public's interests.

Being a non-hierarchical online group with unidentified members allows Anonymous to craft a just rhetoric in a particular way. These elements contribute something unique to the construction of the rhetoric but are also interconnected. As such, they place Anonymous in a unique position resulting from the culmination of these elements. That is, Anonymous is able to create their righteous rhetoric through utilizing all three aspects of the group. Being online allows members to remain unidentified and communicate democratically.

Anonymous creates a virtual public space in which they can publicly discuss issues while remaining unidentified. Additionally, in this virtual public space, everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in these discussions. Additionally, this space allows Anonymous to publicly shape rhetoric while receiving input, criticisms, and comments from both members and non-members of the group.

This study contributes to the overall body of literature in several ways. One of the ways in which this study contributes is by identifying thematic elements of constructing a just rhetoric on social media. This study explored the suggestions of Snow et al. (2014), which called for additional research on how social movement groups utilize social media. The present study engaged research suggested by experts in the field (Snow et al. 2014), as social media communications are a nuanced and increasingly researched topic. Internet-based groups like Anonymous change with the existing technology, as does their ability to operate as an organization.

Additionally, this study explores increasingly globalized social movement organizations while building on Hamdy and Gomaa's (2012) research investigating framing on social media via content analysis. By studying YouTube videos, Facebook posts, as well as their replies and comments, this study was able to sample a wider array of content and interactions of an SMO on social media. Specifically, this study shed light on the rhetoric Anonymous espouses through social media as well as the way in which people interact and react to the rhetoric in the videos and posts.

The present study contributes to the literature by addressing the way in which contemporary internet technologies are utilized by non-hierarchical, anonymous SMOs. More

specifically, this study explores how these components shape the way in which such a group creates a just rhetoric. The online, non-hierarchical, and unidentified components of Anonymous create unique conditions for the group to create a just rhetoric. More specifically, these components interact in a way that allows Anonymous to create rhetoric democratically and anonymously in a virtual public space. Notably, this virtual public space extends to actions in a physical public space through protesting and physical consequences of hacktivism.

Future studies might further explore the visual component of Anonymous's use of social media. There are many symbols and motifs used in their videos and posts that may warrant further investigation. The way in which members of Anonymous interact outside of social media may also warrant additional study. By gaining access to smaller groups, a researcher might be able to identify characteristics of smaller groups within anonymous. In smaller groups, it is possible members know one another's identity since the group could be more intimate. It might also be the case that within these groups there might be clearer roles for members. That is not to suggest that smaller groups certainly would have these characteristics, but further research could explore whether they differ from the larger Anonymous groups.

Anonymous shapes the landscape for social movement groups online in that they utilize the characteristics facilitated by online interaction to engage perceived injustice while cultivating the image of themselves as a righteous group. As a non-hierarchical online SMO with unidentified members, Anonymous has created a righteous rhetoric through internet technologies. These individual characteristics contribute individually and together in creating this rhetoric. Although these characteristics present challenges, Anonymous has actively utilized all three characteristics to engage in framing their rhetoric as righteous. While previous groups

have had similar group characteristics to Anonymous, they did not experience the interconnection and consequences of these group characteristics. Anonymous is a unique organization, and it embraces technology as part of its identity. However, it does so uniquely using technology legitimately through social media such as Facebook posts and YouTube videos but also by exploiting technology in the form of hacking. Members of Anonymous illegally obtain personal information and distribute it on a global scale, as such information can be obtained virtually and globally. To that end, members of Anonymous can identify particular targets or issues as important. As a result, members democratically select important issues because of their non-hierarchical nature and engage in hacktivism to oppose perceived injustices.

Anonymous maintains that their group consists of unidentified members, a faceless virtual crowd of vigilantes fighting injustice. Anonymous has the capacity to evolve and change with technology, but that does not discount the possibility that other similar SMOs could emerge. Research should be meticulous in considering the ways in which SMOs exploit technologies and how the characteristics of such groups shape the way in which they frame their group. To that end, it is important to consider the way organizations change the existing social movement landscape by exploiting new technologies and how characteristics of the group affect the way in which organizations engage in framing a righteous rhetoric.

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APPENDIX: ANONYMOUS AND OTHER SMOS

SMO	Non-hierarchical	Online	Anonymous	Secret	Radical
Anonymous	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupy Wall Street (OWS)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Industrial Workers of the World	No	No	No	No	Yes
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Landless Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, or MST)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Ku Klux Klan (KKK)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Animal Liberation Front (ALF)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Weather Underground Organization (WUO)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Zapatistas	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Zeitgeist movement (TZM)	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Independent Media Center (Indymedia or IMC)	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Wikileaks	No	Yes	No	No	No
Tor Project	No	Yes	No	No	No
*Characteristics based on how a group describes their goals and actions					

OWS: Non-hierarchical radical group whose primary concerns are economic and social inequality. Utilized social media to further organization's goals.

Occupy Wall Street was a movement facilitated through social media to protest economic and social inequality. As goals in this movement aligned with Anonymous's, they supported this movement. While online, non-hierarchical and radical, members of the movement were not anonymous or secret.

IWW: Radical group concerned with labor unionism. Historically considered radical, but have since moved to non-radical SMO tactics.

IWW was historically a radical group focused on labor unionism. They have ideology similar to Anonymous in that it is anti-capitalistic. While they may share some ideology, Anonymous engages the issues differently, employing hacktivism and utilizing anonymity of the internet.

SNCC: Non-hierarchical radical group whose focus is racial equality.

SNCC was heavily involved with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, and employed non-hierarchical, grass roots style leadership and action. Anonymous is similar to SNCC in that there may be group organizers, but that organizing is democratic in nature. SNCC organized physical sit ins, while Anonymous organizes virtual sit-ins through DDoSing websites. Anonymous differs in that their leaders have the potential to be more ephemeral, organizing a specific group for a specific event, and disappearing afterwards.

MST: Non-hierarchical Social movement out of Brazil focused on issues surrounding land ownership as well as unequal distribution of wealth and power.

The focus of this group is similar to Anonymous in that they are both concerned with unequal distribution of wealth and power. Additionally, this group takes a non-hierarchical, grass roots approach to mobilizing, similar to Anonymous. Anonymous differs in their methods to accomplish mobilization, heavily using technology to coordinate and organize their group.

KKK: Radical white supremacy group with anonymous members.

While this group and Anonymous drastically differ in ideology, they share concealing member's identity via masks. However, KKK members are likely known to each other, whereas Anonymous members may not know one another beyond the pseudonyms they use. It is worth noting that Anonymous has targeted the KKK and unmasked them virtually via posting KKK members' personal Facebook accounts and announcing that they were members of the KKK.

ALF: Non-hierarchical radical animal rights group whose members' identities are secret.

Anonymous does concern itself with a wide array of issues, and this spans to environmental and ecological concerns. Additionally, ALF members' identities are secret, but known to each other. Anonymous members may be unidentified even to each other. ALF engages in potentially more violent action than Anonymous, as ALF members have been accused of arson.

WUO: Radical anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist group whose members' identities are secret.

WUO and Anonymous have left leaning ideologies, but WUO is perhaps a bit more radical in their views, supporting a world communism. While Anonymous is anti-capitalistic, they do not necessarily call for communism. WUO, like ALF, differs from Anonymous in that they use more violent methods of protest, including arson and bombings.

Zapatistas: An anonymous radical group concerned with economic and social inequality.

Utilized online technologies to further organization's goals.

Zapatistas and Anonymous are likely the most similar of these groups, using the internet to maintain anonymity with an ideology that supports changing systems rather than using the

systems to create change. However, Anonymous differs in that they are less hierarchical and the online tools they utilize for their group, such as social media.

TZM: Internet-based movement to opt for an alternative global economic system without a monetary basis.

This group, like Anonymous, wish to address what they feel are economic injustices. TZM organized events online, as Anonymous does. However, TZM is hierarchical in nature, and its members are not secret.

IMC: Non-hierarchical group focused on non-corporate media coverage. Utilized online technologies to further organization's goals.

Like Anonymous, this group offers independent news sources that circumvent mainstream media. Anonymous also independently reports media, but that is not necessarily the group's focus. Anonymous also engages in action against injustices they identify through social media.

Wikileaks: Online organization focused on information sharing and whistleblowing.

This website serves as an organization to publish secret or classified media by whistleblowers. Like Anonymous, this organization is focused on free flow and maximum exposure of information. However, Anonymous also acts on this information, rather than solely leak it. Additionally, they may do leak information through social media, not Wikileaks.

Tor Project: Online organization focused on internet anonymity and internet security.

The Tor Project focuses on internet rights and security, two things Anonymous greatly values. However, the Tor Project mostly serves as a tool to remain truly anonymous on the internet, which Anonymous may in fact use. While their ideology is likely shared, Anonymous focuses more on using the anonymous technology rather than creating it.