Chapter 3

Collective action among virtual selves:

How interaction and identity shape hacktivist participation

Introduction

Why do people engage in collective political action? This is one of the most fundamental questions in political science, and one that has preoccupied scholars of political participation for decades. Framing the problem as a mysterious deviation from rationally self-interested behavior, researchers inquire into the conditions that make some people contribute to the provision of collective goods. Given the ubiquity of political demands and goals, why is it that some people take action to pursue their goals, while others sit on the sidelines?

This chapter uses the case of hacktivism to argue that this formulation of the collective action problem is based on some problematic assumptions. Most crucially, it assumes that political actors – and political action – are essentially purposive. Everyone has an interest in the provision of public goods, so everyone must care about the problem of ensuring these goods are provided. Inquiries into political action are thus inquiries into the mechanisms for dividing up the burden of providing public goods. A variety of selective incentives – like the financial or social benefits of political participation – are invoked in competing explanations.

I use the case of hacktivism to argue that this entire formulation of collective action problems has been assembled upside-down. For perfectly good historical reasons, we have been unable to separate the purposive value of collective action from the

selective benefits it offers. Because hacktivism provides an opportunity for separating political participation from collective action, it allows us to extricate the instrumental goals of collective action from the other rewards it offers. The first part of this chapter is focused on reassessing our picture of collective action as purposive or instrumental, using evidence from the world of hacktivism to rebuff the purposive model.

What results is a picture of political participation in which purposive goals appear to be secondary, rather than essential, in motivating collective action. Once we discard the view of political participation as essentially purposive, we are forced to reevaluate the role of selective incentives – and in particular, the social incentives that have received relatively little attention – as motivations for political participation. The second part of the chapter offers two distinct interpretations of social incentives in the context of the broader literature on selective incentives, while the third part tests each model of social incentives against quantitative and qualitative evidence drawn from fifty-one interviews.

My findings show that social incentives do indeed account for political participation, when they are understood in terms of the benefits of affirming a particular social identity. This notion of social incentives is suggested by previous explorations into "expressive" and "solidary" incentives for participation, but reformulates these as specific identity incentives. In contrast, the notion of social incentives as the demand for interaction is not supported by my evidence; to the extent that hacktivists pursue collective action it seems to be instrumentally driven rather than a pursuit of interaction.

The significance of identity as a driver for political participation is supported by my finding that hacktivists' backgrounds are a good predictor of the type of hacktivism in which they engage. Hacktivists from hacker-programmer backgrounds are

disproportionately likely to engage in political coding (i.e. political software development) or political cracking (e.g. information theft or site defacements) while those from artist-activist backgrounds are disproportionately likely to engage in performative hacktivism (i.e. virtual sit-ins or web site parodies). The correlation between hacktivist origins and type of hacktivism is further supported by a variety of self-categorizing comments, which demonstrate the appetite for identity as label, and a variety of comments about particular forms of hacktivism, which suggest the mechanism whereby hacktivist origins determine the type of hacktivism in which respondents engage. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how this finding helps to resolve the puzzle of hacktivism as a form of activism in which means precede ends.

Collective action and political purpose: Evidence from hacktivism

Political science addresses the purposive dimension of political participation in two ways. The first is to treat political participation as, by definition, purposive. The second is to examine specific purposive motivations as one type of selective benefit. Understanding the limitations of both of these approaches is crucial to appreciating the potential explanatory power of social incentives.

The assumption that political participation is purposive can be found throughout the literature. Verba, Nie and Kim explicitly define participation as "those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions that they take" (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978) – assuming quite specific goals on the part of participants. When White asks "why some citizens choose to act on their political interests and participate in politics, while others

do not," (White 1976) she likewise assumes the a priori existence of political interests. When Chong notes that "political activists, it appears, not only wish to achieve particular political objectives," (Chong 1991) he is looking for variables in addition to the purposive orientation, not in place of it. When Schlozman, Brady and Verba define the problem of participation as "about whose voice is heard"(Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995) they assume that citizens have something to say.

There is nothing problematic about treating political participation as, by definition, purposive; the most intuitive way of categorically distinguishing political participation from other forms of social activity is to define it as activity aimed at achieving a specific political outcome. The problem lies in treating the purposive character of participation as a given – an assumption that is belied by the relationship between purpose and participation seen in the hacktivist movement.

An analysis of the hacktivism.ca listserv (Samuel 2001) showed that in many cases, the decision to participate in hacktivism preceded participant commitment to any specific cause or purpose. Instead hacktivists often seem to shop for a political agenda after they have already made the decision to become hacktivists. This is evidenced by the fact that hacktivists define their movement not by its goals, but by its methods:

> [hacktivism is] strategic activism that relies upon intelligence gathering, public opinion swaying, the erosion of confidence in the economy and technology. It's propaganda, disinformation, advertising, education, manipulation, and machiavellian subversion (batz)

Indeed, the emphasis on method seems to have become an article of faith for some hacktivists. One member of the hacktivist list wrote that

> I used to think I was a hacktivist by virtue of being somebody whose activism and use of tech is intrinsically tied. However, if hacktivism is what is happening on this list, I suppose that I'm not a hacktivist, and that the old saying ""Define yourself by your actions, not by your -ism's"" holds very true. (<pete@tao.ca>)

The priority of movement method (i.e. participation in some form of political hacking) over movement purpose (the choice of cause to which that hacking is harnessed) is further evidenced by hacktivists' explicit allegiance to their common form of political participation, rather than to any common purpose. Hacktivists on the hacktivism.ca listserv were very clear about the heterogeneity of their political orientations:

> There is no point in saying such and such a group are not hacktivists simply because we disagree with them. That brings us nowhere. It is about as helpful as the insistence that hackers are "good" and crackers are "evil". So what do you say we simply concur that "hacktivism" covers a very wide range of activities and concentrate on the real discussion: what the results could be, what we can learn from them, and even whether they are "good" or "bad". But not whether they are "hacktivists".(xdaydreamx 30-Aug-99)

At the same time, it was clear that the lack of common purpose was in no way an obstacle to the construction and consolidation of a collective identity. For one participant, this took the form of a direct exhortation to emphasize group commonality:

> The key is to keep positive, keep thinking, and to concentrate on commonality, so sectarianism doesn't incite us to war with each other, rather than the man. :) (Mike 27-Aug-99)

Another list member seemed to share this implicit identification of a hacktivist movement; he wrote that

> Hacktivism is dangerous, and to some extent requries a high degree of proficency in technical skill. Does this make them a high-tech vanguard or a group of activists fighting the best way the know how? I think this is a debate that is yet to be had. (Jones 1999b)

The fact that hacktivists expressed their first allegiance to the form of their participation, and only a secondary allegiance to its end, suggested that a specific political goal or purpose might not always be at the heart of political participation.

This observation challenges the core assumption of studies of political participation: the assumption that participation is inherently purposive. If we problematize this assumption we can ask a series of intriguing questions about the

purposive orientation of participation: How does the purposive character of participation develop? Are purposive orientations a requirement for participation, or do they emerge out of participation? How does the strength of purposive orientations vary across activities, issues, countries, or time?

The literature on purposive incentives starts to get at some of these questions; however even those authors who examine purposive incentives take the purposive character of participation as a given. This limits the explanatory power of their research, since purposive incentives can hardly offer much predictive traction if we assume that purpose is a universal trait of political participation.

The concept of "purposive" incentives traces back to an influential 1961 article by Clark and Wilson on "Incentive Systems". Clark and Wilson constructed a typology of "material," "solidary," and "purposive" incentives which has structured much of the subsequent literature. They define purposive incentives as intangible benefits that "derive in the main from the stated ends of the association rather than from the simple act of associating. These inducements are to be found in the suprapersonal goals of the organization."(Clark and Wilson 1961) Clark and Wilson use their typology to distinguish between organizations that are primarily driven by purposive incentives, and those that are primarily driven by material or solidary incentives. In their view purposive organizations suffer from inflexibility, due to either the vague or sacrosanct quality of those goals.

In the years since Clark and Wilson established the notion of purposive incentives, scholars have come to understand these incentives in two ways. Some scholars focus on the ends-orientation of purposive incentives, and highlight activists'

interest in achieving certain goals. Others have redefined the notion of purposive incentives to encompass the psychological or moral satisfactions of associating oneself with a set of explicitly stated political purposes.

The ends orientation is manifest in Clark and Wilson's original definition of purposive incentives. Bowman, Ippolito and Donaldson (1969) follow Clark and Wilson, and measure purposive incentives as "concern with public issues" and "sense of community obligation" (Bowman, Ippolito, and Donaldson 1969). Knoke and Wood (1981) also stick closely to the Clark and Wilson model, and measure purposive incentives by whether volunteers mention factors like "opportunity to help those in need" "a sense of community responsibility" and "to accomplish the goals and aims of the organization."(Knoke and Wood 1981) The notion here is that purposive incentives capture the extent to which individuals are motivated by the prospect of contributing to the achievement of specific ends.

The "expressive" concept of purposive incentives places more emphasis on the psychological and personal experiences of participation. It speaks to the idea of participation as voice, and indeed, Hirschman himself emphasized the inherent value of participation as an expressive act, describing it as one of those activities that "carry their own reward" (Hirschman 1982). Salisbury (1969) usefully distinguishes the idea of expressive benefits from Clark and Wilson's concept of purposive benefits by separating the pursuit of goals from the expression of values:

> Expressive actions are those where the action involved gives expression to the interests or values of a person or group rather than instrumentally pursuing interests or values…..one can often derive benefits from expressing certain kinds of values….Whether the expression is instrumentally relevant to the achievement of the values in question is, for the moment, not at issue. (Salisbury 1969)

Others have adopted Salisbury's notion of expressive benefits, although these are often referred to as "purposive" incentives. Finkel and Muller (1998) refer to expressive benefits as activists' "psychic reward from 'standing up' for their political beliefs through collective protest" (Finkel and Muller 1998). Chong describes expressive benefits as "the variety of noninstrumental benefits that one might receive from political participation" including "voicing one's opinions" "the feeling that one gets from doing the right thing" and "the important lessons that once learns from taking part in the political process." (Chong 1991)

Some authors incorporate both ends-oriented and expressive notions of purposive benefits. Moe (1981) sees purposive benefits as playing two roles:

> First, they can shape the individual's evaluation of collective goods; the benefits he attaches to the political goals of a consumer group, say, may reflect his broader concern for other citizens, economic justice, or political equality, and may far outweigh any economic gains he expects for himself…Second, when he believes in a group's political goals, he may also gain a purposive sense of satisfaction from the act of contributing itself; he may feel a responsibility to do his part or do what is right, for example, and he may receive satisfaction from following through. These satisfactions are selective incentives; the source of benefits is not the actual provision of collective goods, but the individual's expression of support for them. (Moe 1981)

The first notion advances an ends-oriented view of purposive incentives; the second, an expressive notion.

Seyd and Whiteley (1992) are more explicit in distinguishing between ends-oriented and expressive incentives, although their terminology is different. Their general incentives theory incorporates both "collective incentives" and "altruistic concerns" alongside "selective incentives" and "social norms." "Collective incentives" are ends-oriented motivations, which take the form of policy goals. Their notion of "altruistic concerns" is similar to the idea of expressive incentives; they define altruistic motivations as " a product of affective or expressive motivations." (Seyd and Whiteley 1992)

Schlozman, Brady and Verba also embrace both notions of purposive incentives. They capture the expressive dimension with their definition of "civic gratifications, such as satisfying a sense of duty or a desire to contribute to the welfare of the community" – gratifications that "derive from the act itself" (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995) They explicitly distinguish these gratifications from the motivation to affect "collective outcomes", which amounts to end-oriented motivation.[26] (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

An explicit distinction between ends-oriented and expressive notions of purposive incentives proves useful to my later reconceptualization of social incentives. Before developing this reconceptualization, I will first review the current scholarship on social incentives.

Understanding social incentives

Selective incentives and political participation

The literature on purposive incentives does not resolve the challenges that the case of hacktivism poses to the assumed purposive nature of political participation. It merely raises new questions. First, how do political scientists understand the role of purposive goals in motivating participation? Second, how do political scientists understand the role of social or solidary incentives – alongside or in place of purposive

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[26] Schlozman, Brady and Verba measure civic gratifications in terms of "my duty as a citizen" and "I am the kind of person who does my share." Their third indicator of civic gratifications blurs the line between expressive and ends-oriented incentives: "The chance to make the community or nation a better place to live." Arguably this speaks more to the desire for an impact on collective outcomes, than to personal psychological gratification.

incentives – in motivating political participation? Third, how do political scientists locate the quest for identity within these notions of participatory incentives?

The first two questions have received some treatment in a common body of political science research on the role of selective incentives in collective action. Collective action theory has primarily emerged in response to Mancur Olson's influential 1965 book, *The Logic of Collective Action*. Olson argued that rational actors would be unlikely to join interest groups in order to pursue public goods, because these goods are non-excludable. As a result, rational actors would be tempted to "free ride" on the efforts of others in creating or protecting public goods, rather than contributing to the effort themselves.

Olson identified two exceptions to this calculus of the costs and benefits of participation: (1) "large members" have an incentive to contribute to interest groups, if their expected share of the public good will be large enough to offset the cost of contributing to the effort, and (2) interest groups can provide "selective incentives" to their members which, unlike public goods, can be limited to actual members of the group. Olson argued that people join interest groups *not* to pursue collective goods, but to receive these selective incentives (Olson 1965).

Olson's model has been widely adopted by scholars of interest group politics, political participation, and new social movements. The idea of modeling interest group participation as a rational cost-benefit decision has become the dominant means of modeling individual participation decisions and organizational dynamics. As part of this burgeoning literature on the political economy of participation, many scholars have sought to broaden Olson's original notion of selective incentives as material rewards for

participation. There is now an established literature that examines not only material incentives but also purposive (or expressive) and social (or solidary) selective incentives.

The results of empirical tests of models that incorporate selective incentives are at best mixed, however. In one of the earliest studies along these lines, Bowman, Ippolito & Donaldson (1969) found that while purposive incentives were very important in motivating party workers, solidary incentives were much less crucial. Hansen (1985) found that as predictors of American interest group membership, selective incentives were less important than perceptions of threat. Chong (1991) found much evidence for the importance of solidary and expressive benefits in his retrospective study of the American civil rights movement. In one of the most methodologically rigorous tests of encompassing selective incentive models, Finkel and Muller (1998) found that selective incentives were a poor predictor of social movement activism in West Germany. On the other hand, Schuessler (2000) finds that expressive benefits are a good explanation for the dynamics of mass political campaigning.

If these mixed results partly reflect the difficulties of fitting "soft" incentives into the hard framework of calculated self-interest, they also suggest that the results might be clearer if we could improve the way non-material incentives are modeled. Seizing on that suggestion, I focus on improving the model of social incentives, and end up building on ideas about purposive and expressive incentives, too.

Social or solidary incentives are motivations that grow out of the social or interactive nature of political participation. Specific incentives include a desire to spend time with interesting or like-minded people, a sense of fun, or the desire to please friends or family. The key distinction here is between a notion of social incentives as the desire

for congenial social interaction, and a notion of social incentives as the pursuit of some sense of belonging (which may emerge out of social norms or pressures.)

In order to satisfy the desire for interaction, participation must necessarily involve some sort of collective action (since it is the collective nature of participation that brings participants into contact with one another). The desire for belonging, in contrast, can be theoretically satisfied by individual (non-collective action) – if that action allows participants to lay claim to a given group membership or identity. It is useful to think of satisfying the desire for interaction through "interactive" incentives, and the desire for belonging through "solidary" incentives, although the literature is equally likely to use the terms "social" or "solidary" in describing either one. Indeed, most authors fail to distinguish between the interactive and solidary motivation types.

Clark and Wilson's original definition of solidary incentives is closer to my concept of interactive incentives. According to Clark and Wilson, solidary benefits

> derive in the main from the acts of associating and include such rewards as socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification, the status resulting from membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions, and so on. Their common characteristic is that they tend to be independent of the precise ends of the association. (Clark and Wilson 1961)

Knoke (1988) also uses a strictly interactive notion of social incentives, defining them as "jointly coordinated social and recreational activities whose enjoyment is also restricted to the membership."(Knoke 1988)

Finkel and Muller (1998) focus on solidary incentives. They consider (though ultimately discard) the possibility that "individuals respond to the norms and expectations of other people within their social network and hence derive benefits from adhering to the

behavioral norms of individuals and groups with whom they identify."(Finkel and Muller 1998)

Chong likewise emphasizes the notion of solidary incentives as a desire for belonging. What he terms "social incentives" include the "desire to gain or sustain friendships, to maintain one's social standing, and to avoid ridicule and ostracism." (Chong 1992) While the desire for friendship might be purely social, the broader thrust of his argument emphasizes the solidary dimension of these incentives. Chong is particularly interested in the reputational benefits of participation, which he sees as a sort of social lubricant for the achievement of private benefits from participation. While this sounds like a very instrumental view of the social benefits of participation, it is one that is also grounded in a notion of social benefits as belonging:

> Our social identities are closely tied to the social identities of the people we associate with, because those who witness our associations will use such information to draw inferences about us. Reputation-building is in this respect based on being with the right people rather than doing something in a more active vein. (Chong 1992)

Salisbury's elaboration on the Clark and Wilson definition shows why the conceptual distinction between "social" and "solidary" is so important. Salisbury gives a hypothetical example of a political entrepreneur trying to attract members with social incentives:

> An organizer can build a clubhouse but he cannot easily guarantee it will be worthwhile to go there. The solidary benefits may develop but the entrepreneur is especially dependent on his customer to help him create his product. Furthermore, it is not clear that for most people sociability is valued highly enough to persuade them to join a new group to get it. (Salisbury 1969)

Salisbury's argument speaks to interactive incentives – to their dependence on critical mass in order to have value. Solidary incentives may be rather more robust – though the value of solidary incentives may also depend on how one perceives other

members of the group. But these are very different kinds of problems – the former quantitative, the latter qualitative – and thus lead to very different predictions about membership incentives. This underlines the importance of distinguishing between interactive and solidary incentives.

We are thus left with two very different notions of social incentives, which the literature tends to confuse or conflate: interactive incentives, which necessarily involve collective action; and solidary incentives, which could account for either individual or collective action in pursuit of a given goal. The latter type – the notion of solidary benefits – still suffers from its vagueness about what belonging to a group actually means or entails, however. As I will show, this problem can be addressed by building on more careful treatments of group identity in the literatures on social identity.

Revising the model of selective incentives: incorporating identity

We have already seen that the literature on selective incentives often incorporates a notion of identity as a type of benefit. When we separate the concepts of purposive and expressive benefits, we see that expressive benefits are themselves related to the pursuit of identity: they are statements about the kind of person a participant wants to be. Indeed, investigations into expressive benefits are often operationalized in terms of individuals' desire to project or express a particular self-concept or identity. Investigations into solidary benefits are often operationalized in terms of individuals' desire to subscribe to a particular collective or group identity.

Considering identity as a type of selective incentive is not a simple matter, however; incorporating identity into any causal model demands an explicit and well-

grounded conceptualization of what identity actually means. By referencing the now-established literature on social identity (which arises primarily out of sociology and psychology) we can develop a notion of *identity* incentives. The idea of identity incentives builds on the intuition behind collective action theories of expressive and solidary incentives, but tries to strengthen their theoretical underpinnings.

That effort depends on separating individual identity (which is the most common colloquial use of the term "identity") from group identity: the part of "an individual's self-concept [that] is derived, to some extent and in some sense, from the social relationships and social groups he or she participates in." (Brewer 2001) This is the dimension of identity that is implicitly captured by collective action theory's notions of expressive and solidary incentives; by the notion of participation as a route to belonging, or as a way of confirming that you are a certain *kind* of person. The notion of being a certain kind of person rests on an implicit taxonomy of kinds of people – i.e. a system of groups. An identity incentive is thus the promise of confirming or enhancing a participant's membership in a particular group or groups.

Social identity theory helps us understand the idea of identity incentives by clarifying both the notion of group identity, and the individual drivers for group membership. It posits a notion of group identity that lets us get beyond the narrow definition of group membership as a formal affiliation with a particular interest group, or a demographic affiliation with a particular ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. Instead, group identity is broadly understood as a way of setting boundaries around or between groups; these boundaries become a cognitive tool that shapes how people perceive themselves, their group, and the world around them. People may have multiple overlapping social

identities, which individuals need to mediate or balance (Vescio et al. 1999). The key insight is that individuals assign "value and emotional significance"(Tajfel 1981) to their membership in particular groups – in other words, to their sense of belonging.

Social identity also helps us to understand the micro-level drivers for group identity. It emphasizes "self-evaluation and the need for self-esteem as the principal motivational mechanism" (Hogg and Mullin 1999), suggesting that individuals adopt a social identity in order to "maintain or enhance self-esteem" (Hogg and Mullin 1999). Uncertainty may be an additional motivation for adopting a given social identity; group identification is a way of reducing the discomfort of uncertainty "about beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviors that one feels are important to one's sense of who one is." (Hogg and Mullin 1999) Or the pursuit of group identity may be a process of alignment, in which participants endeavour to bring their individual identities in line with that of the group (Snow and McAdam 2000). All of these mechanisms share the notion of group identity as a way for people to feel better about themselves. From there it is a short leap to seeing how "collective identities function as selective incentives motivating participation." (Friedman and McAdam 1992)

We are now ready to integrate identity incentives back into the larger family of selective incentives. Beginning with collective action theory, remember that the broader participation literature has considered five distinctive types of selective incentives. Note that the literature generally uses "incentive," "motivation," and "benefit" interchangeably, to refer to any benefit of participation that a rational actor might anticipate, and which therefore could motivate him/her to participate in collective action.

1. material incentives – incentives that can be assigned a dollar value. These are the only kind of incentives conceived of by Olson in his original *Logic of Collective Action*.
2. ends-oriented incentives – participants' desire to accomplish the anticipated collective or public outcomes of collective action. Usually called "purposive" incentives.
3. expressive incentives – the psychological and/or emotional benefit of expressing one's political or social values through political action that reflects those values. Sometimes called "purposive" incentives.
4. interactive incentives – the enjoyment of participating in an activity that involves interacting with other people. Interchangeably described as "social" or "solidary" incentives.
5. solidary incentives – the psychological and/or emotional benefit of belonging to a group that shares one's political or social values, or of fulfilling the expectations of one's social network. Interchangeably described as "social" or "solidary" incentives.

Material incentives alone cannot explain political participation. As Hansen (1985) points out, private companies can offer material benefits; "only interest groups offer political benefits in addition." (Hansen 1985)

The same argument extends to interactive incentives. There are many ways people can obtain social interaction, from work to bar-hopping to joining churches. Social interaction per se is not a distinctive feature of political participation. (Although

interacting with certain kinds of people may be peculiar to political life…but here we enter the realm of solidary incentives.)

The notion of ends-oriented purposive incentives poses a different kind of problem. As used by Clark and Wilson, Schlozman Brady & Verba, and others, ends-oriented incentives constitute an explanatory variable that helps to predict political participation. Used in this way, ends-oriented incentives are tautological. Explaining participation with reference to ends-oriented purposive incentives is like attributing political participation to "the desire to participate in politics." The idea of ends-oriented purposive incentives is more intriguing when conceived of as a dependent variable. Why do some people feel a sense of concern for public issues, or a sense of community obligation, while others do not? Explaining where purposive orientations come from is a lot more promising than demonstrating why they are politically salient.

Our two remaining types of incentives, expressive and solidary incentives, may help to do just that. These two kinds of incentives capture the psychological or emotional desire for (respectively) value affirmation and a sense of belonging. Both types of incentives closely parallel key concepts that emerge from the literature on group identity.

In the collective action literature, social or solidary incentives speak to an individual's desire for group affiliation. Expressive incentives speak to an individual's desire to express what kind of person he is, or what kind of values she holds. If our goal is to explain patterns of political participation, then we are specifically interested in the desire for affiliation with a group that reflects political values or identities; or in the desire to express the political dimension of one's identity or values. In the identity literature, joining a political group would be described as adopting a specific social

identity – the identity reflected by the political group. This type of motivation can be usefully framed by the social identity literature, allowing us to collapse some illusory distinctions between solidary and expressive incentives, and instead focus on their common ground as identity incentives.

We can begin by revisiting the notion of expressive incentives. In the collective action literature, expressive incentives are conceived of as the psychological and/or emotional benefit of expressing one's political or social values through political action that reflects those values. The expressive benefits of participation lie in "voicing one's opinions" (Chong 1991), "standing up for [one's] political beliefs" (Finkel and Muller 1998), or satifying one's "responsibility to do [one's] part." (Moe 1981)

Like solidary incentives, these expressive incentives seem to be implicitly linked to concepts of identity. The expressive benefits of political participation lie in its ability to define who one is, what one stands for – what *kind* of person one is. This notion of expressive benefits is adequate for explaining relatively solitary forms of participation, like letter-writing or voting. As an explanation for collective action or group membership, however, it is problematic. Why join a group in order to express your individual identity?

The answer lies in the relationship between individual and group identity, as theorized by the social identity literature. Group identity shapes individual identity, and individual identity (or its inadequacies) determines the groups with which one affiliates. Seen in this light, collective action seems to offer two forms of political expression: a declaration of one's identity as a member of the group, and an expression of the group's collective values and identity.

This mirrors the treatment of collective identity in the literature on new social movements, which sees collective identity as a process of meaning construction – in other words, a way of expressing ideas about the world around you. The relationship between the individual and collective levels is addressed in some depth by Snow and McAdam (2000), who argue that much of the "identity work" in social movements lies in the challenge of reconciling individual and collective identity; it is through this process that members are recruited to the movement.

Expressive incentives thus look a lot like solidary incentives: a choice one makes about the kind of group that will reflect your sense of yourself. This brings us back to the challenge of re-theorizing solidary incentives, in order to ground our tests of solidary incentives as predictors of political participation. In political science research, solidary incentives have been defined as the desire to adhere to "norms and expectations of other people within their social network" (Finkel and Muller 1998) or as "reputation building… based on being with the right people rather than doing something in a more active vein." (Chong 1992) This parallels social identity theorists' description of the "need for optimal distinctiveness" (Abrams 1994) or the pursuit of "positive in-group distinctiveness" (Kelly 1988). Social identity theory sees group membership as a function of the "desire for belonging associated with the need for inclusion [which] motivates immersion in social groups." (Brewer and Silver 2000) People join groups as a way obtaining a social identity that is distinct from other social identities.

Because identity theory addresses the roots of this urge for belonging, it helps us to improve our model of solidary incentives. The most significant innovation is the recognition that political science distinctions between expressive and solidary incentives

disguise an underlying commonality: both types of incentives are ultimately about individual cravings for group identity.

We can thus replace the categories of expressive and solidary incentive with the overarching category of *identity* incentives. We can further specify that these identity incentives will reflect individuals' desire to confirm or enhance their sense of belonging to a group, where membership in that group enhances self-image or self-esteem.

Now that we have a detailed theory about what identity incentives might look like, we can ask whether they do indeed motivate political participation. We can also compare the explanatory power of identity incentives with the potential explanatory power of interactive incentives – the more common notion of "social" incentives for political participation. To address these questions, I return to the hacktivist universe, to see how identity and interaction play out as incentives for different kinds of hacktivist participation.

Social incentives for participation: testing the hypotheses

Identity, interaction and the phenomenon of hacktivism

We now turn to the challenge of testing hypotheses about identity and interactive incentives for political participation against patterns of hacktivist participation. These tests focus not on predicting *whether* respondents will engage in hacktivism – in this sample, virtually all of them do – but on predicting *which type or form* of hacktivism respondents will pursue. (The distinction between type and form of hacktivism is summarized in the table below). Because there are significant differences among the

different types of hacktivism, the decision to engage in political cracking, political coding, or performative hacktivist has significant implications for the participant's identity. And because there are significant variations in whether particular forms of hacktivism demand or even allow for collective action, a hacktivist's choice of form – virtual sit-in or web site defacement, site parody or DoS attack – sheds light on the role of interactive incentives.

Table 8. Types vs. forms of hacktivism[27]

Types of hacktivism	Political cracking	Performative hacktivism	Political coding
Forms of hacktivism	Site defacements Site redirects DoS attacks Virtual sabotage	Site parodies Virtual sit-ins	Political software development
	Information theft and distribution		

Before we get to the nuances of particular types or forms of hacktivism, however, we can see why the larger hacktivist universe might provide fertile ground for testing hypotheses about identity and interactive incentives. Its unique value to this theoretical challenge stems from two distinct qualities: first, its characteristics as a form of online participation; and second, its capacity for solo as well as collective action.

As a form of online participation, hacktivism constitutes a tough test for any social account of political participation – whether focused on interactive or identity

[27] The discovery that information theft occurs as part of all three types of hacktivism is a surprise that will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

incentives. Research on human-computer interaction has already demonstrated that in many ways, the Internet is the *last* place we would expect social incentives to matter. Sproull and Kiesler (1991) found that computer-mediated communication reduced the effect of status differences on interaction. Aspden and Katz (1997) have specifically demonstrated that discrepancies in offline social skills do not affect the capacity to make friends online, noting that

> we found no statistical relationships between propensity to make friends [online] and a wide rage of measures of traditional forms of social connectedness and measures of personality attributes. This perhaps points to the Internet deemphasizing the importance of sociability and personality differences. (Katz and Aspden 1997)

This online quality of "social thinness" has been widely documented. Sproull and Kiesler (1991) note that the dominance of plain text communications greatly reduces social cues. While Internet users compensate for this lack of social cues by using emoticons to represent emotions, such as :) for "happy" and :-(*) for "about to throw up", as well as textual description for physical reactions ("*falls down laughing*") (Reid 1996), these text-based cues are still a far cry from the real thing. While broader bandwidth technologies (like video and audio) increase the transmission of social cues, research suggests that even video communication is a far cry from face-to-face contact in its ability to create interpersonal connectedness.

For my present purpose, the implications of social thinness go far beyond its effective "flattening" of personality differences across groups. The relatively impoverished social environment of the Internet makes it the last place we would expect social incentives to be decisive for political participation. If the desire for interaction or collective belonging is persuasive here – a place where the location, names, and even

gender of fellow group-members are all ultimately unknowable – then we have every reason to expect these incentives to be all the more crucial in an offline context.

The Internet thus offers an excellent testing ground for testing alternative theories about social incentives. But why focus on hacktivism, when there are so many other forms of online activism available to study? Here, the answer hinges on a quality that, while not unique to hacktivism, is exceptionally pronounced in its case: the potential efficacy of solo action.

If theories of collective action have assumed the universality of purposive goals, while puzzling over differences in individuals' willingness to participate in collective action in pursuit of those goals, it is because collective action and political action have only rarely been separable. For most of human history, effective political action has necessarily involved collective organizing; even the efficacy of elite-level actors (like the political entrepreneurs who lead social movements, or the politicians who lead parties and governments) depends on their ability to mobilize mass followings.

In the case of hacktivism, however, individual actors do indeed have a high level of political efficacy. A single hacktivist can unilaterally engage in the political act of defacing a web site or jamming a server. In many cases there is no collective action problem, because hacktivists can engage in uncoordinated unilateral action and still have a visible impact.

The fact that hacktivists nonetheless *choose* to engage in collective forms of action suggests that something other than instrumental goals are pulling them into collective forms of political participation. By testing hypotheses about identity and interactive incentives against this population, we can therefore isolate the demand for

collective action (the demand for "group-ness") from the interest in pursuing specific political ends.

In testing identity versus interactive incentives as predictors of political participation, we must carefully specify the observable differences between the two types of incentive. Happily, the identity literature suggests several aspects of the demand for identity that make it look very different from the demand for interaction. One aspect is the appetite for labeling: the quest for identity often manifests as self-categorization, whereby people explicitly label themselves as members of a particular group (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Second, social identity is a fact of human existence: whereas we can posit potential participants with very limited ex ante social interaction, we cannot imagine a participant with no ex ante group identity – so when we look at the pursuit of identity, we are always looking at that pursuit in relation to participants' ex ante social identities (Stryker and Burke 2000). A final aspect is positive differentiation: most identity theorists argue that people pursue or consolidate group identities in order to reinforce their self-esteem, not undermine it (Huddy 2001; Klandermans and de Weerd 2000). This means that people will seek to align their behaviors with identities to which they assign positive value.

These observations allow us to maintain a theoretical and empirical distinction between the pursuit of identity and pursuit of interaction with other similarly identified individuals. In political contexts, that distinction is often obscured, because participating in a collective action is usually the only way to lay claim to a specific political identity. Even the minimal case – such as the adoption of a specific party label – demands voting or registering as a party member, behaviors that invoke collective action problems. Any

sort of identity-reinforcing or identity-verifying behavior will similarly involve some type of collective action.

In the case of hacktivism, however, individual hacktivists can participate in activities that enhance or confirm identity, without necessarily interacting with other hacktivists. For example, a political cracker might deface a web site with a message that sends "greetz" to fellow hackers, thereby enhancing his identity as a hacker, without actually working with any other hackers on the defacement.

Hacktivism's unsual capacity for solo activism thus allows us to separate and compare the identity and interaction motivations. If interactive incentives drive participation, we would expect a correlation between the propensity for collaboration, and the selection of a collaborative or non-collaborative form of hacktivism. If identity incentives drive participation, we would expect a correlation between a hacktivist's group identity or background, and the particular type of hacktivism in which he or she engages. If neither incentive is operational, we would expect a random pattern of participation in different types and forms of hacktivist activity.

These tests were conducted against the data gathered from the fifty-one interviews described in the introduction to the dissertation. I use three sets of questions, culled from these interviews, to shed light on the role of identity versus interactive incentives:

1. *Would you describe yourself as a hacker? Activist? Hacktivist? What do these labels mean to you?* This question speaks to the issue of identity motivations. I expected hacktivists to self-categorize in ways that would reflect their alignment with different ex ante identities.

2. *Has any of your political hacking involved working with others?* This question assesses the extent to which hacktivists voluntarily collaborate with other hacktivists, even though most hacktivist activities are at least potentially executed on an individual basis. I expected that this question would allow me to reject the hypothesized interactive incentive by showing that collective action was instrumental rather than desirable. That view would be vindicated if hacktivists only work collaboratively on the forms of hacktivism that demand collaboration – namely virtual sit-ins, and to a lesser extent, political software development. I expected that people engaging in other kinds of hacktivist activities would be doing so without working with others, since hacktivism offers little gain in efficacy through collective action, and few apparent interactive benefits.

3. *What is your view of the following activities? Which of them have you engaged in? (If you have engaged in any of the following, please describe the issue or activity, and your role in it, if possible.)*

a. *Virtual sit-ins (e.g. Zapatista FloodNet, anti-WTO sit-in staged by electrohippies)*
b. *Site redirects (e.g. Nike site redirected to S11 anti-sweatship site)*
c. *Site defacements (e.g. India/Pakistan, Israeli/Palestinian, China/US conflicts)*
d. *Site parodies (e.g. WTO parody site at www.gatt.org)*
e. *Denial of Service attacks (solo, not virtual sit-ins)*
f. *Information Theft (e.g. theft of travel info for participants in World Econ Forum at Davos)*
g. *Political software development (e.g. Hacktivismo project to defeat Chinese firewalls)*

I expected people to describe their involvement in and opinion of different forms of hacktivism in ways that were consistent with their prior identities as hacker-programmers or artist-activists.

Interactive incentives: the results

Does interaction also appear to be an incentive for participation? I answer this question by assessing the rate of collaboration among those interview subjects who have participated in different forms of hacktivist activity. Among the 43 participants, 36 reported working with others in their political hacking – 83% of the sample. As predicted, collaborative activity was particularly high among virtual sit-in participants (all of whom had, by definition, participated in collective activity), but it was no higher among political software developers (28 out of 32, or 82%, had worked with others) than among the sample as a whole. If we exclude virtual sit-in participants, but include political software developers, we have 29 participants, 20 (or 69%) of whom report working with others on their hacktivist activities. In other words, the hacktivists interviewed were *much* more likely to work collaboratively than I had predicted, regardless of the type of hacktivism in which they engaged – suggesting that even in the socially thin environment of the Internet, interactive incentives may be a crucial motivation for participation.

There are several possible explanations for the surprise. The most obvious possibility is that my sample was disproportionately likely[28] to include socially networked hacktivists: the use of snowball sampling increased the likelihood that my subjects had social links to other hacktivists. This bias is compounded by the fact that it was easier to find hacktivists who engaged in collaborative activities like political software development and virtual sit-ins – and indeed, 31 of those who had participated in some

[28] Hacktivists engaged in criminal activity like denial-of-service attacks, web site defacements, and virus distribution are much harder to contact.

sort of hacktivist activity had been involved in virtual sit-ins and/or political software development (although not to the exclusion of other hacktivist activities). This leaves only twelve respondents who had been involved in hacktivist activities, without engaging in either virtual sit-ins or political software development. This is a problematically small sample, but it is worth noting that even among these twelve, eight reported working with others on hacktivist activities. While sampling error *may* account for the high number of hacktivists who report collaborative activity, there is no compelling evidence that it is the source of the finding.

Another explanation is that I may have defined collaboration too generously. With the exception of virtual sit-in participants and Hacktivismo members (who together account for 23 of the 43 participants), most of the "working with others" involved working with somewhere between one and four collaborators. Collaboration on this scale might be explained within an Olsonian model as a "small group" case in which sharing the burden of collective action is facilitated by the small number of actors. In Olson's model, however, the small group exception is explained by the small number of actors capturing a disproportionate share of the benefits of action; since the benefits of hacktivist activities remain public and non-excludable, even when the activity is conducted by a small group of actors, the collective action problem can not be resolved by the small group exception.

This is related to the third possible explanation: perhaps that my theoretical model underestimated the instrumental value of collaborative activity. Perhaps hacktivism is not so readily executed by a lone actor, even though lone actors can have some impact. If this

is the case, hacktivists may choose to collaborate in order to achieve certain ends, rather than shoulder the burden of organizing and executing a "hacktion" on an individual basis.

And indeed, hacktivists do describe their collaboration in instrumental terms – and equally telling, rarely attest to its interactive rewards. Interview subjects made remarkably few allusions to the social experience of collaboration – which in itself suggests that social interaction may not be a big incentive for hacktivism, even in its collective forms. One member of Hacktivismo said that the group "just fit" (Mr. Happy 2002); another said that Hacktivismo leader Oxblood Ruffin "put together a really good, bright team" in which "everyone's respected for what you do" (Ca$h Money 2002). A member of the Electronic Disturbance Theater said that "I respect [fellow EDT members]….They have helped me tremendously. I was a baby Internet artist. I learned a lot from them"; at the same time, she acknowledged some tensions within the group by saying that "we all have our own agendas" (Karasic 2002). A pair of political crackers underlined their commitment to collaboration by refusing to be interviewed separately: "We cannot give separate interviews because we don't consider ourselves separate, a team is a team" (m0r0n and nightman 2002). Other than these few comments, however, interview subjects offered little comment on their social relationships with collaborators.

In contrast, many subjects emphasized their instrumental or purposive reasons for engaging in hacktivism, including collaborative forms of hacktivism. These were most often framed in terms of the sense of efficacy derived from hacktivism; the sense that hacktivist participation yielded a measurable political impact. As one political software developer said, "[t]here are things you can accomplish by going to court and meeting with politicians but you have to remember what you can and can't get done that way."

(Haselton 2003) This was echoed by the stress that several Hacktivismo members laid on the sense of efficacy derived from political software development: "I decided I can change something in the world if I participate," said Jules. "Hacktivismo has the manpower to change things." (Jules 2002) "I'm not avenging the world; I am contributing in however small a way." (Ca$h Money 2002) Another Hacktivismo member was drawn towards political software development because it "produces something tangible, rather than just protest. Something people can use." (metac0m 2002)

A theme that was reflected in a number of these comments was the sense that hacktivism offered a form of political engagement in which the impact of activism could be disproportionate to the number of activists. "The idea that it [virtual sit-in participation] should or should not be meaningful because it takes a minute is ridiculous," said EDT member Carmin Karasic. "It's not as simple as number of deaths versus number of clicks." (Karasic 2002) A member of the Space Hijackers wrote that:

> We are always inspired by the ability of people to bend technology to serve a function other that what it was designed for. The internet has been a great leveller of the playing fields as emails and websites cost so little that a 15yr old girl with time on her hands can set up a convincing spoof version of a website that would cost a multinational thousands. Computer programmers can battle the censorship of governments and create political protests out of a company or governments own work. (Priestley 2003)

The lack of reflection on the social rewards of participation, and the regularity of comments on the efficacy of hacktivism, suggests that instrumental rather than social incentives may indeed provide a better account for hacktivists' proclivity for collaboration. But this finding raises the more fundamental question: why are hacktivists so convinced of the instrumental value of collaboration? After all, the same comments that reflect faith in the efficacy of collaborative hacktivism suggest an underlying impatience with the equation of mass action and political impact. Hacktivists are drawn

to hacktivism because it can be executed at the small group level; why not take this dynamic to its logical conclusion, and act alone?

One possible answer is that hacktivists are negotiating a delicate balance between the benefits of collaboration, and the inefficiency of large groups. Cooperation in small groups yields some of the benefits of group action – not only the instrumental benefits underlined by comments about hacktivist efficacy, but also the identity benefits that are suggested by hacktivist preoccupation with self-labeling – while avoiding the collective action problems associated with participation in large groups.

But this kind of small group engagement should not be confused with Olson's own "small group" exception to the logic of collective action. As noted earlier, Olson's prediction of participation in small groups applies to situations in which that group is able to appropriate a disproportionate share of the benefits of collective action. In the case of hacktivism, however, hacktivist groups would receive only a very small share of the public goods that they are pursuing – if that. In the case of Hacktivismo, for example, coders in non-censored countries are doing anti-censorship; these coders expect no personal benefit from the erosion of information controls. Olson's logic of small group participants as the recipients of disproportionate benefit does not hold here.

This returns us to the original formulation of participation as a collective action problem. This collective action problem may be writ small rather than large, with a relatively few participants collaborating in the production of a public good, but it still confounds our expectations of self-interested behavior. If hacktivist collaboration represents an instrumental strategy rather than the pursuit of interactive rewards, we must

still look elsewhere for a notion of social incentives that explain hacktivist participation. Identity incentives provide a promising alternative explanation.

Identity incentives: the results

Identity incentives turn out to be a major determinant of the particular type of hacktivism in which individual hacktivists engage. The group identity that is being pursued, in this instance, is the identity of hacker-programmer (for political coders and crackers) or artist-activist (for performative hacktivists.) People who come from the hacker-programmer world, with its commitment to safeguarding the Internet, pursue forms of hacktivism that reinforce their identities as Internet guardians, and that leverage their particular technological skills. People who come from the postmodern left world, in contrast, pursue forms of hacktivism that reinforce their identities as strategic activists, and that leverage their tactical creativity. This is reflected not only in the relationship between participant identity and *type* of hacktivism engaged in, but also in the dependent relationship[29] between participant activity and the specific *form* of hacktivism pursued.

A tabulation of the relationship between hacktivist background (hacker-programmer vs. artist-activist) and type of hacktivism (performative hacktivism or

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[29] A reminder: I use "type" of hacktivism to refer to the overarching categories of political cracking, political coding and performative hacktivism; I use "form" of hacktivism to refer to specific activities like virtual sit-ins, site defacements, software development, etc. Note that type and form are related, since different forms of hacktivism are associated with different types (i.e. performative hacktivism focuses on virtual sit-ins and parodies, while political coding encompasses software development) . As a result a relationship between identity and *type* of hacktivism necessarily involves a relationship between identity and *form* of hacktivism. Indeed, when we move from overall patterns in the relationship between identity and type of hacktivism, to specific comments about particular forms of hacktivism, it looks like the selection of particular forms of hacktivism may be the mechanism that produces the overall relationship between identity and type of hacktivism.

political coding/cracking[30]) establishes the relationship between a participant's identity and his or her type of hacktivist participation. A simple chi square test shows that this pattern is statistically significant (see Table 9**).**

[30] Let me emphasize once again that the difference between political cracking and political coding is a significant one – not only in their legality, but in their political effectiveness. But because political crackers are hard to track down, my sample did not include enough crackers to allow for a three-way analysis. While such an analysis might have been enlightening, however, it is not essential to the immediate question of whether ex ante identity (as indicated by the hacktivist's culture of origin) determines the type of hacktivism in which s/he engages. Because both political crackers and political coders come from similar backgrounds of hacking and programming, a binary distinction between performative hacktivism on the one hand, and political coding/cracking on the other, is sufficient to assess the relationship between identity and type of participation.

Table 9.
Relationship between background and type of hacktivism pursued

Type of hacktivism

Background	Performative Hacktivism	Political Cracking and/or Political Coding	Both[31]	Total
Hacker/programmer	0	23	7	30
Artist/activist	10	2	2	14
Hacker/programmer AND artist/activist	0	0	2	2
Neither hacker/programmer NOR artist/activist	1	2	0	3
Total	10	25	11	49

Degrees of freedom: 4
Chi-square = 28.4788199454866
p is less than or equal to 0.001.

The 30 hacker-programmers[32] in the sample all participate in the forms of hacktivism that are encompassed by political coding and political cracking, although a

[31] This category includes hacktivists who have engaged in forms of hacktivism that belong to performative-type hacktivism (such as virtual sit-ins) *and* forms of hacktivism that belong to political coding or cracking-type hacktivism (such as software development or web site defacements). Most of these respondents tend to engage more frequently in one or the other type, however.

[32] This sample includes only those forty-nine respondents who had clearly engaged in at least one activity that qualifies as political cracking, political coding, or performative hacking. The coding of interview subjects as hacker-programmers and artist-activists was based primarily on self-categorization, supplemented by additional information about participants' backgrounds. Most crucially, I categorized participants as hacker-programmers if they had longstanding programming experience, even if they did not self-categorize this way; it was the only way of compensating for respondents' widespread tendency to see their programming skills relative to those of more experienced programmers, such that even people familiar with multiple programming languages would say that they were not "real" programmers because, for example, they had never had formal training.

An additional factor in the categorization process was that a number of participants either fell into multiple categories (most often people with predominantly hacker backgrounds, who nonetheless described themselves as "activists", though not necessarily progressive activists), while several fell into no category at all. In instances where respondents fell into multiple categories, I placed them into the category of their dominant background; in most instances even participants who self-labeled with multiple categories were clearly much more tied to one or the other political culture. In the two instances where participants truly

handful have also done some performative hacktivism. This includes forms of hacktivism like political software development (by far the most common activity among my interview subjects), information theft (more often admitted to than I had anticipated), DoS attacks, web site defacements, and web site redirects.

The fourteen artist-activists were more likely to participate in the forms of hacktivism encompassed by performative hacktivism. This includes organizing or participating in virtual sit-ins, and creating web site parodies. While two people with artist-activist identities had only engaged in the political coding type of hacktivism, each was also extensively involved in non-hacktivist forms of progressive activism online. It is also worth noting that two activists who had engaged in political coding on top of their performative hacktivism were people with significant connections to the hacker community.

The comments of individual interview subjects provide two kinds of support for the finding that participant backgrounds shape the type and form of hacktivism they engage in. First, the way respondents discuss different labels (such as hacker or hacktivist) shows the significance and value that is placed on belonging to particular groups – in other words, to claiming particular identities. Second, the way respondents discuss different forms of hacktivism (such as virtual sit-ins or web site defacements) shows that the form of activism is far from an accidental choice: it is a specific statement of values and identity. By looking closely at the way respondents discuss different forms

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straddled both backgrounds, they were labeled as such; and in the three cases where neither category was applicable, respondents were counted separately.

of hacktivist participation we can unpack the dynamic whereby identity shapes the form participation (and thus, the type of hacktivism engaged in).

The relationship between participation and ascriptive identity is confirmed by participants' discussion of different labels. Most respondents had strong views about the significance and value of different labels, and about the labels they personally adopted or rejected. The intensity of feeling reinforces the conclusion that labeling does indeed play a role in the dynamic of hacktivist – and perhaps other political – participation.

One interesting pattern was that hacker/programmers had just as many reservations about the hacker label as did artist/activists. Both groups often saw the hacker label as low status, and in need of alternative or improvement:

> I would describe myself as a hacker if there was not possibility of the word being misunderstood and associated with malicious actions. (Hocevar 2003).
>
> I stopped using the term hacker in public, since the meaning 'computer criminal' is to much associated with it. (Dornseif).
>
> I don't use it [hacker] that much because rightly or wrongly hacker still has connotations to a lot of people that it is illegal. (Haselton 2003)

Still others adopted the hacker label, but specifically noted that it had been assigned to them by others – treating it as an honorific:

> I am a hacker. I say that because I have been recognized as a peer by people I regard and respect as hackers, and because I use machines and systems more as instruments instead of interfaces or tools. (Reid 2003)
>
> Hackers consider me a member of their community and I am quite proud of that. (Riemens 2003)
>
> I would be pleased to be called hacker by a hacker I respect. (Jules 2002)

These comments demonstrate the way that hacking and/or hacktivism could be used to reinforce a participant's sense of belonging to a particular group – in other words, to reinforce a particular identity.

Discussion of the hacktivist label often reflected a similar concern with external perceptions of the label's meaning and status. Notably, the hacktivist label was for some respondents linked to an artist/activist identity, while for others, it was associated with hackers/programmers – though the association was not always seen in positive terms:

> When I think about it, I can't make a distinction between Hacktivist and Activist, but I tend to take anyone using the former term less seriously. I don't have a good reason for this, either, except perhaps I see the term used more by people who use "h@X0r" speak, which I guess I find a little silly. (Goldstein 2003)
>
> I don't really understand the term hactivist[33] properly….in places like australia - people who do stuff become quite cynical if you describe yourself as a hactivist. so, for me, its not a useful term at all... i think a hactivist seems to be someone who may be involved with real or symbolic actions that somehow involve computer technology and data networks. i certainly wouldn't describe myself as a hactivist! (sam)
>
> When I hear the term hacktivist i first think of silly scriptkiddies looking for a justification for defacements, although I'm aware of the fact that others are called hacktivist, too. (Dornseif 2003).

Even those who engaged in activities that they themselves saw as hacktivism often disdained the hacktivist label. One person who had formerly identified with the hacktivist label gave it up "as soon as it could be seen as military…using military terms, seeing hacktivists as warriors. As a peacenik I don't want to be a warrior." (Hirsh 2002) While another participant was not sorry to hear his work described as hacktivism at a hacker convention, he nonetheless felt "this word is really silly….I won't stand on stage and say I'm a hacktivist." (Paadeluun 2003) One activist carefully distanced himself from others using the hacktivist label: "'Hacktivist' is close to the level we work on, but we certainly don't see ourselves as such. Most hacktivism doesn't really strike us as a

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[33] Some people assign significance to the spelling of the word "hacktivist". Ruffin (2002) argued that the early tendency to spell hacktivism without the "k" was a sign that people did not understand its inherent relationship to the world of computer hacking.

particularly effective or meaningful method of protest. " (Anonymous 2003) Yet another labeled his activity "electronic civil disobedience" (Dominguez 2002a) specifically to separate himself from those using the hacktivist label, and from the relationship to hacking that the label connotes.

But in some cases, the hacktivist label was seen as desirable:

> "I consider myself a Hacktivist by the classic definition. A hacker who has his own agenda. My agenda is to survive and work up to the top 10%."(Eisley 2003)
>
> "[I'm not a hacktivist] yet, but I'm moving in this direction. To me true hacktivism is about hacking systems in order to achieve ideological aims. " (Sandberg 2003a)
>
> Hacktivist – definitely. I am an activist who seeks to use information systems to organise and for action to change social/political perceptions. I know that really annoys a lot of U.S.-based hackers who see 'hacktivism' as action to promote purely computer-based action to promote just computer systems. I see hacktivism as being any type of social or political activism that's enabled by information systems, electronics or mechanics. I see the term as an extension of the MIT 'hacker' idea to activism, not just a subset of the term 'hacker' to describe the promotion of technology. (Mobbs 2003)
>
> Hacktivist: Well I suppose I can agree to that label. If the term means using hacking skills for activism. (Stevenson 2003)
>
> I don't really consider myself a "hacktivist" (which to me is a hacker and activist combined), as I'm just simply an activist... Although, I do obviously provide the tools to hack. (Brown 2003)

These latter comments are notable for establishing that participants see a relationship between the kinds of activities they do, and the kind of label they claim. This reinforces the conclusion that the forms of hacktivism participants engage in help to shape or consolidate a particular identity.

That conclusion is reinforced by the way that hacktivists talk about the particular forms of hacktivism in which they do or do not engage. Artist-activists think primarily in terms of how an activity fits with the responsibilities of strategic activism:

> I think a sit-in or defacement could help a campaign. For instance, i've thought about what kind of impact it would have to do something like that to the notre dame site (over their failure to recognize a lgb [lesbian gay bisexual] group), but i generally think that it

> would cause the lgb rights movement to lose a lot of support from moderates.(Kreider 2003)
>
> What is the good of this [defacement] action? It will just hinder a site for some time. Get a web administrator fired or to work more special shifts. People tend to overestimate what they have done there just by crushing it. (Tangens 2003)
>
> i reckon this stuff is really good - but i also think who-ever is developing this stuff really needs to know what they are doing as lives are often at risk (sometimes i am concerned that this stuff with fancy names are being created by rock-and-roll stars) ... i think the leading political software development is the linux project... often when i hear about projects like hacktivismo - i wonder if… how do these projects continue? i mean - its not right to often judge them - but what is the trajectory of these projects? again, you hear sounds about them - but then the trail drops down... i guess lately, personally, i am getting in to sustainability and longevity of projects.(sam)

Hacker-programmers, in contrast, criticize tactics on the basis of their technological merits, and their impact on the health of the Internet:

> I think the Hippies getting hosed down in the streets was more entertaining then anything they did (more like tried to do) on the Internet. A couple modems vs. the latest in network technology, I laugh. (Murphy 2003)
>
> I have never participated in any DOS activities, nor will I. DOS attacks almost always have innocent, unintended victims in addition to the intended. I once worked at a small ISP which hosted several customers who drew DOS attacks. The attacks took the entire ISP offline, affecting not only the intended victim but many others as well.
>
> it would hurt me too because of network-slowdowns (Dietrich 2003)
>
> Never. I firmly oppose the idea of denying access to any service. This, and points B to D are mostly put under the umbrella of a generic term of people called "Script Kiddies". They like to use tools/techniques they find on the internet in a more or less "ready in 10 minutes"-form in a puberal manner. Mostly to make them look tough in front of/impress little groups of these "Script Kiddies". The majority of "regular hackers" thinks of themself not in this way, and hates to be associated with them. (Mildham 2003)
>
> I've never found one of these to be beneficial. I always thought hackers were supposed to free information flow and spread data, not clog up the lines and shut people down. (Eisley 2003)

It is notable that denial of service attacks are rejected here not on grounds of effectiveness, but rather on the grounds of being counter to hackers' interest in and responsibility to Internet health. It suggests that many hacker-programmers reject denial-

of-service attacks because they are counter to the hacker ethic, and counter to hackers' self-image as the guardians of the Internet.

This is confirmed by the way that hacker-programmers talk about their own involvement in political coding, which underlines that way that coding reinforces their positive identification with hacking. The comment that "cypherpunks write code" (Dornseif 2003) exemplifies the view that writing software is what coders are supposed to do. Or as another respondent put it, even more explicitly: "We programmers have to fight on our own terrain. The forces that rule can rule as much as they want as long as we have our censor-resistant p2p-networks."(Dietrich 2003) The self-image of coder-crusaders is also suggested by the way Ruffin framed both Hacktivismo, and political software development more broadly:

> The technology we're developing is really aimed at helping democracy activists. Any technology can be used for negative purposes. Software developers have to ask: does this fundamentally expand or abrogate the democratic experience? (Ruffin 2002)

Artist-activists, in contrast, evaluate the tactics of performative hacktivism by the aesthetic, political, and experiential criteria of the postmodern left:

> All of our technology is only about mass usage. I could sit by myself in my Zapatista Floodnet all day and it's not going to do shit. But if you get a mass, a swarm, it will disturb…I believe the size of the performance means that it's the product of the multitude….that it is only the outcome of a sort of mass agency.(Dominguez 2002a)

> [The eToys virtual sit-in] was important . It showed the synergy of disturbing collective action on the net; and art, and gaming, and politics. People played it because it was fun It felt like it was part of an epic project.(Galloway 2002)

> [Re: parodies] Much more fun! That I am very much in favor. (Riemens 2003)

By embodying postmodern values of artistic creativity, mass legitimacy, and sheer fun participating in performative hacktivism can thus reinforce one's identity as an artist-activist.

The one surprise in both hacker-programmer *and* artist-activist comments was the prevailing attitude towards information theft – which, as a form of political cracking, I expected would be condemned by this sample of coders and performative hacktivists. But only three respondents unambiguously condemned information theft (though many responded with an unelaborated "no" when asked if they had done it) Seven respondents either explicitly admitted to participating in information theft, or answered in a coy but suggestive manner – a surprisingly high number, considering that they were confessing to an illegal activity. Along with several other respondents who avoided answering the question directly, these respondents provided a consistent picture of information theft as an activity that was instrumentally justified in the eyes of many hacker-programmers *and* artist-activists:

> information theft is a fuzzy concept - and generally theft can be only applied to tangible objects. I have retrived information not meant to be viewed by the public - you might call this open source intelligence
>
> if you cant get into the meeting, is there another option? How about full on Identity theft...
>
> My view on information theft is that it is a necessary evil.
>
> Have done this and find it extremely important. Information is a major tool. Like all resources controlled by the powerful, I believe the only way we can beat them is by taking control of it.
>
> I don't have a problem with this where it's done for the purposes of a public campaign. Information theft to support fraud, or some other activity like targeting people for abuse or violence, I don't agree with. On a related topic, I also have no problem with disclosing any that is not *personal* information as a means of exposing the poor security of computer systems, or any form of political/corporate fraud or maladministration.
>
> is it theft if you find it laying out in the open? :>

Ultimately, however, this consensus need not come as much of a surprise, because information theft is consistent with both types of identity. For hacker-programmers, it fits with the view that "information wants to be free", and that it is a hacker's job to break down barriers to that freedom. And for artist-activists it fits with the postmodern analysis of information as power, and with the artist-activist's duty to disrupt power structures.

The way that hacktivists describe their choice of hacktivist activities thus reveals a number of patterns that together help to flesh out the relationship between identity and form of participation. For artist-activists, choice of form seems to be shaped by an assessment of whether a particular tactic fits with their notion of strategic activism. Artist-activists were more likely to assess particular tactics in terms of their longer-term strategic goals, reflecting a worldview that is embedded in a longer tradition of activism. Hacker-programmers, in contrast, made more comments about how particular tactics affected the well-being of the Internet itself, reflecting a worldview in which hacker-programmers are the guardians of the Internet. Interestingly, both sets of respondents made exceptions for political cracking when it took the form of information theft, which intersects with each worldview: for artist-activists, it is consistent with the idea of politics as leveling the playing field, while for hacker-programmers, it is consistent with the idea of hacking as the liberation of information.

We have now reviewed three types of evidence on the relationship between hacktivist identity and both type and form of hacktivism. First, we have uncovered a statistically significant correlation between a hacktivist's background in either the hacker-programmer or artist-activist world, and his or her likelihood of participating in political

coding/cracking or performative hacktivism, respectively. Second, we have seen that hacktivists clearly differentiate between different labels, and that they describe these differentiations in ways that suggest that they place considerable value on their ability to claim different labels – in other words, different identities. Finally, we have seen that hacktivists talk about their choice of particular forms of hacktivism in ways that suggest an assessment of how well an activity fits with one's identity as either a strategic activist (for artist-activists) or an Internet guardian (for hacker-programmers).

The obvious remaining question is whether differences in identity could explain the choice of political coding versus political cracking. Unfortunately, because political crackers are so hard to track down, the sample does not include enough crackers for us to answer this question. But my suspicion is that while political crackers also have hacker-programmer identities, they are from a different slice of the hacker-programmer scene, and thus, have a very different sort of hacker-programmer identity. Interviews with political crackers suggest that they tend to be younger than political coders, and may thus be less steeped in hacker norms of non-destruction and freedom of speech. The preponderance of web site defacements on issues like the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Indian-Pakistani conflict, and the China-US conflict further suggests that political crackers may come disproportionately from non-Western countries. That raises the possibility of cultural differences, and in particular, of the possibility that even in the English-dominated Internet language barriers may play a significant role. It may be that the inner circle of hackers communicates fluently in English, while the outer circle knows enough English for technical and instrumental communications, but not enough for

engagement in political debate. In other words, these crackers may be able to soak up hacker techniques, without soaking up the subtleties of hacker politics.

Conclusion

The case of hacktivism provides a provocative counterpoint to the conventional thinking on selective incentives for political participation. By sharpening the distinctions among different selective incentives we are able to focus on the universe of social incentives as uniquely capable of addressing some of the shortcomings of purposive accounts. By further distinguishing between types of social incentives – identity vs. interactive – we are able to test very different notions of what social incentives actually mean. And by grounding the very slippery notion of identity incentives in a properly theorized account of identity-seeking, we are able to discern the role that identity incentives play a significant role in at least this corner of the political universe.

What emerged was a picture of collective action that would confound narrowly constructed notions of self-interested behavior. Yes, participants value collaboration – but not because it provides interactive benefits. Rather, they see collaboration as an instrumentally useful way of pursuing certain political ends. Simply looking at incentives for collaboration still leaves the mystery of why self-interested individuals pursue collective action as a means to those ends.

Identity incentives, on the other hand, help us understand the particular patterns of hacktivist participation. Hacktivists engage in collective action – in very particular forms of collective action – because these forms offer very particular rewards. These are the rewards of confirming and reinforcing a valued group identity. For hacker-programmers,

that is the identity of Internet guardian, reinforced by engaging in forms of hacktivism that express one's technical skill – while avoiding forms that damage the Internet itself. For artist-activists, it is the identity of strategic creative activist, reinforced by engaging in forms of playful, mass hacktivism that meet postmodern aesthetic and political criteria – while avoiding forms that lack offline or mass legitimacy.

These findings help solve the puzzle identified at the beginning of this chapter: the puzzle of hacktivism as a form of participation that places means before ends. For hacktivists, the choice of means – virtual sit-in or web site defacement, political software or denial of service attack – is an end in itself: the end of confirming a very particular kind of social and political identity.