

**THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AND THE SYNCHRONOUS  
COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION OF THE INTERNET**

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(ABSTRACT)

The concept of community has been of great importance to sociologists throughout the discipline's history. There has been numerous definitions used in research. However, according to the literature, most agree that community must consist of geographical proximity, regular interactions, and shared goals. These definitions, and any consensus, are again being challenged by the creation of new communicative technologies. In particular, with the creation of new social spaces by computer technologies such as the Internet, the potential exists for community to occur in many new ways.

This paper looks at the types of community that can exist in the various social spaces created by the Internet. These spaces are conceptualized and explained comparing the various ways and types of communication that are occurring in the various facets of Internet. The literature indicates that community is occurring in some of these Internet technologies, such as USENET. However, no such literature exists for IRC networks. This research focuses on an examination of the type of community that occurs on the Internet's synchronous Internet Relay Chat network using computer-mediated-communication. Naturalistic inquiry is used to examine how community exists in two separate channels of an Internet Relay Chat network. The concepts of geographical proximity, regular interaction, and shared goals are examined in relation to this

technology. In a final analysis, the importance in examining the community occurring in these new social spaces is detailed. This type of social space is fast becoming a very important area for researchers as Internet usage is growing daily and becoming more prevalent in everyday society.

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## CHAPTER I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The concept of community has always been of great importance to sociologists. Sociological theorists from Maine and Durkeim to Whyte and Hillery have dedicated a great deal of attention to the sociological phenomenon of community. One need only look at the plethora of publications to affirm such an assertion. Works such as Maine's Village Communities in the East and West (1889), White's Street Corner Society (1955), and George Hillery's A Research Odyssey: Developing and Testing a Community Theory (1982) are testaments to the importance of community to sociology. Also, theorists and many other researchers from the disciplines of anthropology, communications, and other fields have grappled with the concept of community.

Part of the reason that the concept of community is complicated arises from the many types of community that exist. Looking at the various conceptualizations of community that have been used in sociology and other disciplines, it can be ascertained that community exists in many different ways (Hillery, 1982). One of these ways is through a communicative structure, such as a letter-writing community that is organized using written communication. This type of communication, as well as other types, is a central part of any community in that it allows for organizing, strategizing, and maintenance of a group. So inter-linked are these two concepts that both the words community and communication originate from the same Latin root word, *communis* (Fernback and Thompson, 1995). Sociologists, such as Hillery, write of the importance of communication in understanding the concept of community (1982).

Communication has, historically, been enhanced by technological innovation. New ways are created for individuals to communicate. Some technologies allow for the emergence of new communities by allowing individuals to socially interact via electronic communication over great

distances. Examples include Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone and the accompanying social communication that occurs through a telephone wire. Dannefer and Poushinsky, 1977, wrote of a Citizen Band (CB) community that developed by using the technology of the CB radio. Using the social space that was created on the airwaves, individuals regularly participated using CB communication, and worked on various shared goals, such as being aware of state trooper's locations and finding a good place to eat.

Another more recent example of technological innovation leading to a new form of community is the computer. A computer offers yet another social space or medium through which individuals can communicate. Using modems and networking technology, individuals can come together as a group in what has been deemed cyberspace. A cyberspace is the conceptual space occupied by people using computer-mediated-communication technology (Rheingold, 1993). Cyberspace can be seen as an electronic social space. Users of computer networking technology, such as the Internet, can expose themselves to interactions that occur in cyberspace through computer-mediated-communication *on-line*.

Rheingold coined the term "virtual community" to describe what was happening with computer users come together in an electronic social space. He defines virtual community as "a social aggregation that emerges in a Computer-Mediated-Communication environment when enough people carry on public discussions for long periods of time with significant amounts of human feeling, thus forming webs of personal relationships that exist in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993, pg. 5). Other researchers have dropped the virtual and simply begun calling it community (Parks, 1996). One reason might be that such activity may be occurring that looks, superficially



communal, but community researchers are just beginning to look theoretically at this activity.

As a sociologist, Hillery looked at the many definitions of community in his research. Although he feels that community cannot be defined, he does feel that the correlates of community can be defined (pg. 13, 1982). In his work, he put together the most common correlates used in definitions of community. Hillery's definition of the correlates of community consist of a group of people who occupy the same social space, interact, or communicate, on a regular basis, and share a common goal or goals (1982). Using the work of Hillery to provide some common ground to the theories of community, my research will look at how community exists on the Internet's Internet Relay Chat (IRC) system. Hillery's correlates of community will serve as a baseline to assess the extent to which community exists on the Internet. However, the Internet's IRC has many new facets that must be addressed. As much of this technology has progressed since Hillery's work, new ways of community formation, maintenance, and interaction have been developed. These nuances of online Internet IRC community will be observed and recorded to help clarify my research. Data will be collected using ethnographic methods. My researcher will use naturalistic inquiry to provide accounts of interactions occurring on two IRC channels. The interactions, which will be logged, will be both textual and simulated real time in nature. The observations will be conducted over a three month period with analysis occurring with each observation in a separate set of interpretive field notes. Using the methods of naturalistic inquiry to collect and analyze this data, my research will examine the extent to which community exists in the online world of IRC.

## CHAPTER II. RESEARCH ON THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AS IT RELATES TO THE INTERNET'S IRC NETWORK

### **The History of conceptual Community**

Scholars have grappled with the concept of community since the beginning of society. Aristotle defined community as a group of men having values (customs, beliefs, and interests) in common (Friedrich, 1959, p. 3). Sociological concepts such as *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (T'annies, 1988/1887) have differentiated between community and society, and yet, theorists continue to look for a decisive concept of community. This may be an indicator of its importance within the field of sociology. It, also, is an indicator of the diversity of such a concept and how it is viewed according to the various theorists who have worked to try to narrow it down to a single concept. However, the definition of community is still a debated issue among the leaders in the field. Some of the researchers feel that there are many different types of community that are applicable to various social situations. Such an example is would be the differences that exist in rural community versus urban community (Hillery, 1982). One researcher, who is interested in finding some common ground to all of the various definitions contained in all of the books and journals, composed a book entitled: A Research Odyssey: Developing and Testing a Community Theory (Hillery, 1982). Hillery states, "I do not believe that an essential part of community can be defined in scientific terms." He does, however, feel that ". . . one could define the correlates of community. . ." (pg. 13, 1982). He researched the many various definitions of community and then mapped them out to show if indeed any common ground could be found within a large number of the different approaches. Although

what he found was a great diversity of ideas insofar as the general concept of community was concerned, he also found similarities in the many theories of communities. Of the ninety-four definitions from various disciplines, sixty-nine of the theories were in agreement that communities must consist of a geographical proximity, regular social interaction, and a common goal or goals (1982, pg. 23).

By geographical proximity Hillery is referring to a shared social space which members of a community occupy during participation. For the purpose of my research, I will use Hillery's concept of geographical proximity to also include shared electronic social space contained within the Internet. Regular interaction among the community's members will also be addressed by examining how people use the Internet's communication structure to interact on a regular basis. Therefore, interaction occurs as communication and will be referred to as such. This social interaction between members, according to Hillery, must contribute to a shared goal or set of goals for the community. Shared goals, as they may exist among a group of people using the IRC network, will be examined and compared with other potential community goals.

In looking at community as it exists on the Internet's IRC system there will be aspects of community that could not be dealt with by Hillery because the technology was not in existence. Therefore, I will use Hillery's correlates of community to understand the historical focus for community and also look for the new ways in which community exists with the development of the Internet its IRC network.

## **The development of the Internet and the resulting IRC Network**

Before the Internet there was the ARPANET. The U. S. Department of Defense funded and developed ARPANET as a tool for businesses and universities to do defense research. Therefore, use of the Internet's forerunner, ARPANET, was extremely limited (Krol, 1994). The National Science Foundation, having seen the potentials of such a network, later sponsored the creation of the NSFNet. With this creation, the backbone of the Internet was created (Rheingold, 1993). This new infrastructure was made more open to use by universities. With recent advances in computer science and software development, as well as, a drop in the cost of the technology, the Internet has been opened to the public. More recent global initiatives will allow everyone access to the Internet. This will occur in public libraries, schools, and eventually in everyone's home.

The whirlwind of after-Christmas, 1995, retail statistics provides a single indicative statistic of things to come in American culture. In January 1996, CNN, the Cable Network News, reported that for the first time since its inception, the home computer out-sold the television in American retail markets. In American culture the television has been, to date, a symbol of how people spend their leisure time. Perhaps the computer will one-day replace or merge with the television as the way that future generations will spend their leisure time.

Computers are already being marketed as leisure activity devices. When looking through the computer advertisements in a magazine, an important selling attribute of a home computer is its bundled software that promotes leisure activity. Bundled software might include anything from various CD-ROM games to preloaded fun educational games for the children. Another

aspect of all new computers is the built in modem. Whether or not it is a definitive selling point, computer manufacturers now all include a telephone modem that performs at high speeds of 33,600 bps (bits per second) to 56,000 bps. In addition to a modem, manufacturers also preloaded software that makes connecting to an online service such as CompuServe, or America Online as easy as plugging in the telephone line to your computer, pressing a button, and getting out your credit card.

When a large number of people start using a computer for leisure activity with an easy method to becoming networked into an electronic social space, such as the Internet, researchers should take note. Community researchers should pay attention for several reasons. With computers being marketed as leisure devices, one could deduce that computer manufacturers have determined in their marketing research that consumers want to purchase their device for that reason. Keeping this in mind, one must pay attention to the commercials regularly aired for America Online which show how being online with their service is fun while also being productive. An example is a particular American Online commercial showing two men booking airline tickets one minute and checking the sports section another, both while using the American Online service. Of particular interest to community researchers is how this commercial ends by asserting that this service is a community and the commercial host invites new comers to join. Beyond all of this is simply the fact that all new computers marketed for home use come with the hardware and software that will allow easy access to the Internet and it virtual communities.

The computer industry continues to grown exponentially. Now, so too does the interest in the Internet. Whereas academics and the Defense department have, historically, been

attracted to the potentials of such a network of networks, now businesses and public consumers are becoming interested in the Internet. With the increase in home computer users with easy Internet access, there is a drastic increase in the number of Internet users. According to USA Today (1995) the number of registered computers on the Internet in 1981 was 213. In 1991 that number was over 1.5 million (Koehn, 1995). Estimates for 1994 show that the number has grown to 35 million (Welz, 1995). The Wall Street Journal reports that the number of users of the Internet's World Wide Web network doubled between June, 1995 and January, 1996 (1996).

The number of new users of the Internet has conservatively been estimated to be increasing at a rate of five percent a month (Rafaeli, 1996). With these numbers in hand, researchers are quickly moving their research towards the Internet as a new dimension in human interaction. They are looking at the social implications of such a medium used as an information resource, a means of strategic interaction, or just as a leisure activity.

One aspect of the Internet that makes it important for researchers is the enormous amount of information made available to researchers. Individuals using the Internet leave tracks wherever they go and with almost everything they do. From postings on USENET to using the World Wide Web to access various home pages, users leave their mark. According to Rafaeli this has always been an aspect of computer use because the Internet is a network of computers, there is “. . . the inviting empiricism inherent in Net behavior” (1996). Further, she states:

Participant demography and behaviors of consumption, choice, attention, reaction, learning, and so forth, are widely captured and logged. Anyone who has an opportunity to watch logs of WWW servers, and who is even a little bit of a social

scientist, cannot help but marvel at the research opportunities these logs open ( pg. 6,1996).

Such logs are obviously quite rich in behavioral data for researchers, but other types of empirical data become available because of the computerized nature of the Internet. Logs of USENET postings have been used in court cases (Rafaeli, 1996). Users of the Internet Relay chat system of the Internet can have their real-time textual interactions saved to a hard drive or printed. Software for accessing the various parts of the Internet, such as web browsers, newsreaders, and IRC programs, also allow such functions such as “save as” and “print screen” that will allows users to collect empirical data from the Internet.

### **Understanding the Researcher’s Internet**

In order for researchers to study the Internet they must operationalize it, conceptualize it, and identify their unit of analysis. The Internet is a vast network of client/server computers all over the world that use the same command language of TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol; December, 1996). Client software, using the TCP/IP language, is used by an individual who request information be sent from a server computer using the same TCP/IP language (December, 1996). Therefore, it is relevant for researchers to note that private on-line services, such as Compuserve, America Online, and Prodigy, may simulate various aspects of the Internet, and even give access to it, but are not part of the Internet because they do not use the TCP/IP language that is necessary for Internet communication. They use a gateway system which translates their language into the Internet’s so as to allow universal electronic mailing (December, 1996). Private on-line services also offer many proprietary services that are not

available on the Internet. Therefore, only computers using the TCP/IP language to exchange information on a client/server basis are considered to be a part of the global Internet network.

Within this network are server computers set up to exchange information in such a way that they create electronic social spaces. Individual clients using various types of Internet Protocol software can request that the server broadcast their communications to other clients using similar Internet Protocol software. The result is an electronic social space. The electronic social spaces of the Internet can metaphorically be understood as various lanes in a multi-lane highway.

The most popular lane is known as electronic mail (E-mail). Users of this medium use an Internet connection and special client Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) software that allow them to write letters that are delivered in an instant. Users can send their mail to one person or to many people all at one time. The use of E-mail can also incorporate electronic mailing lists or listserves that mail out specific information to a large number of subscribers. There are many interactions occurring here, but it would be very difficult for a researcher to study this type of interaction because of the privacy afforded users of most types of electronic mail.

One lane of the Internet that continues to get much publicity is the World Wide Web. It contains graphical and textual pages housed on different computer servers. These pages are called *home pages* and are, in turn, *hyperlinked* to other *pages* on other computers throughout the world. Thus, the term World Wide Web came into being. One can use various software client programs called browsers (e.g., Netscape, Mosaic) to view the graphical and textual information from a *homepage* and sometimes leave a message (post a message). Users can also



use new Java and RealAudio technology to interact with a program or hear audio contained on the Homepage server site.

Another lane in this highway is the USENET. This lane contains literally thousands of *newsgroups* pertaining to particular interests. Individuals can access this server system through an Internet connection using a client newsgroup program. They can then read messages from other interested parties and post messages themselves. The USENET is an Internet based version of the Electronic Bulletin Board System (BBS). Rather than calling into just one computer housing a BBS, the USENET, by being connected into the Internet, allows users to access thousands of BBSs called newsgroups. Here there is a great deal of interaction, but with some limitations. The communication occurs in a textual fashion and is an asynchronous form of interaction. Messages are posted and later read by other people accessing the newsgroup who may choose to respond to the posting.

The last lane of the Internet contains access to Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Multi-User Domains/Dimension/Dialogue/Dungeon (various MUDs and MOOs are known as MU\* systems; December, 1996). This lane of the Internet is also textual, like the USENET. However, the interaction here is synchronous or simulated “real-time.” One can use their Internet connection and client software such as MIRC or telnet programs to access an IRC, or a MU\* server. IRC is a “talker” program providing access to thousands of IRC channels dedicated to just about any particular subject matter. MU\* programs are similar to IRC in that the interaction is synchronous, but the interaction centers around either playing various role playing games, such as Dungeons and Dragons, or virtual reality programs that use computer generated text to create

environments where users can also interact in real-time. This lane of the Internet, like USENET, was created for interaction among its users. The interaction here, with its synchronous communication, more closely simulates a face-to-face interaction. In order for individuals or researchers to interact in this or any other electronic social space that exists on the Internet they must, at present, use computer-mediated-communication.

### **Computer-Mediated Communication**

Researchers of the Internet's electronic social space have to examine a phenomenon known as computer-mediated-communication (CMC). Communication scholars have extensively researched such phenomenon. Of interest to communication researchers is how CMC will aid, or be detrimental, to human communication (Koehn, 1995). Many communication researchers initially found CMC to be impersonal. Preliminary research indicated that the use of CMC tended to be less socioemotional and personal than face-to-face interaction (Walther, 1992). In later field research, however, there have been findings that regular users can form warm friendships and social bonds using Computer-mediated-communication (Walther, 1992). Once users were no longer constrained by time, Walther argues that subjects adapt to computer-mediated-communication. Therefore, even though it may take longer, CMC can be just as socioemotional as face-to-face interaction. Another observation made by Walther is that users of synchronous CMC, being more constrained by time, can not afford to plan out a response that contains socioemotional information (1992). He suggests that this is the reason for use of lexicons such as "!!!!!!!" in a message. This might also help explain

the creation of emotionicons, such as “:)” or “;,” that add emotional content to text messages by simulating a happy, sad, or other facial expression by using punctuation marks. Specifically, *Internet-based, computer-mediated-communication* (Internet-based CMC) is one area to examine when researching the electronic social spaces of the Internet. In an effort to operationalize such a phenomenon, I will use the definition published by John December. His definition is as follows:

Internet-based, computer-mediated-communication involves information exchange that takes place on the global, cooperative collection of networks using the TCP/IP protocol suite and the client-server model for data communication. Messages may undergo a range of time and distribution manipulations and encode a variety of media types. The resulting information content exchanged can involve a wide range of symbols people use for communication (pg. 24,1996).

December cites the manipulations of time and distribution in his definition. Internet-based, CMC, as it occurs on the Internet, can be distributed in different ways. It can occur as one to one, or one to many, or even many to many. One to one interactions involves a single user communicating with another user. A one to many interaction would be a single user communicating with many users. These users, in turn, could not communicate with the individual who has communicated to them. It is a one-way transaction. Many to many Internet-based CMC, however, involves many users communicating with each other. Interactions occur in every direction. All three types of Internet-based CMC occur in the Internet’s electronic social spaces. However, Internet-based CMC can further be broken down into synchronous and asynchronous communication. The message is time manipulated. Synchronous Internet-based

CMC occurs in a simulated “near” real-time fashion. This means that the communication is broadcast through the Internet in a very fast manner which simulates a synchronous manner common to face-to-face communication. Asynchronous Internet-based CMC is usually posted. That is, a message is left with a server or sent to another Internet user and a quick response is not anticipated. In an effort to conceptualize the types of Internet-based CMC that exist in various electronic social spaces of the Internet, they have been categorized.

<i>Internet-based Computer-Mediated-Communication</i>		
	<i>Asynchronous</i>	<i>Synchronous</i>
<i>One to One</i>	Email	IRC, MU* Systems
<i>One to Many</i>	Listserve, Email announcement lists	Real Audio, World Wide Web
<i>Many to Many</i>	USENET's newsgroups	IRC, MU* systems

FIGURE 1 TYPOLOGY OF INTERNET-BASED COMPUTER-MEDIATED-COMMUNICATION

### **Internet Based Social Research**

Research that has been done involving interaction in various electronic social spaces provided by the Internet have mainly been limited the USENET and Internet Relay Chat. Some researchers have focused on showing how community exists in an electronic social space using

asynchronous communication (Smith, 1992, Kollock & Smith, 1994). Another researcher looked at similar community formation, but focused on its dynamic nature (Gurak, 1994). Other researchers have focused the formation of personal relationships in an electronic social space (Parks, 1996), how users deconstruct physical attributes of society and reconstruct them in an electronic social space (Reid, 1991), and identity negotiation (Bechar-Israeli, 1995). In looking at the community relevant research, by far, more research has done involving the asynchronous communication of USENET.

### **Research on USENET**

Parks performed a quantitative analysis of personal relationship formation on USENET<sup>1</sup>. He argues that personal relationships existing in an electronic social space is part of any community that may exist (1996). Using a random sample of active users of USENET he found that many reported that they had formed new acquaintances, friendships, or other personal relationships as a result of participating in the newsgroups. However, of the respondents who had formed personal relationships, many migrated towards other types of communication such as the telephone, and face-to-face meetings. Using his argument then, community could exist on the USENET, but may migrate from an electronic social space to a physical one.

Marc Smith (1992) analyzed whether a particular virtual community was indeed a real

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm R. Parks' 1996 study consisted of 528 randomly selected users of USENET equally selected from 24 random newsgroups. His response rate was 33.3% with 176 individuals responding to the survey. 60.7% of respondents reported having formed an acquaintance, friendship, or other personal relationship as a result of participating in the newsgroups. 63.7% of those respondents having formed personal relationships also reported that they had used means of communication other than Computer-Mediated-Communication to maintain the relationship.

community. He conducted a study of virtual community using data collected from an asynchronous electronic Bulletin Board System called The Whole Earth Electronic Link or The WELL (1992). The WELL is a relatively old Bulletin Board System similar to the USENET founded in 1986 in Sausalito, California (Smith, 1992). It is available to users locally, mostly in the San Francisco Bay area, through dial up access or via the Internet's USENET system. In his study he used a structured ethnographic account of how virtual communities produce "collective goods," the "processes that maintain those goods," and the "processes that block or disrupt such production" of those goods (Smith, 1992). In essence he argued that virtual community, as it exists electronically through The WELL, cannot be excluded from the category of legitimate or "real" communities. Smith, 1992, looked at how real world forms of interaction are used and altered by their use in virtual space (Smith, 1992).

Peter Kollock and Marc Smith (1994) later teamed up to work on cooperation and conflict in computer communities. They plan to use this work in their forthcoming book entitled: The Sociology of Cyberspace: Social Interaction and Order in Computer Communities (1996). Using Ostrom's research on features of a group that contribute to its success or failure in managing a collective goods, they applied her model to the Internet's USENET system (Kollock and Smith, 1994). These researchers used an ethnographic approach to explore the facets of cooperation and conflict in achieving a collective good. They conclude that because there is cooperation on USENET at all is amazing (Kollock and Smith, 1994). However, Kollock and Smith admit that they also observed that many of the newsgroups continued to be uncooperative (1994).

Another more community conducive example lies in Overby's, 1994, approach to show how communities of USENET can be dynamic. Overby (1994) cites Gurak's 1994 research on the formation of a community to oppose the release of Lotus MarketPlace CD-ROM (1995). The CD-ROM contained detailed demographic information on 120 million Americans (Gurak, 1994). The community that formed believed that such a product, if released, would violate the privacy rights of individuals contained on the CD-ROM. Gurak used Email and USENET postings to show that the community that formed shared a common set of values, common interests, and a common ethos (1994). Once the community had successfully completed their goal of stopping the release of MarketPlace they quickly disbanded (Gurak, 1994). Here, one can see all of the elements of community that were successful in the community's single collective goal.

### **The Research of Internet Relay Chat**

Elizabeth M. Reid has been at the forefront of research on the Internet's IRC network. Her work is widely cited in any research on the Internet. Reid (1991) used a explorative participant-as-observer approach to deconstruct IRC. She notes the challenges that IRC presents for disciplines such as sociology and linguistics. She presents this challenge in a discipline's traditional understanding of spoken and written communication (1991). Specifically, Reid feels that this challenge stems from "how the former written textually based asynchronous communication is now available in a synchronous computer-mediated fashion normally limited to face-to-face interaction" (1991). She also describes how IRC users have deconstructed their physical social cues, rituals, and community and reconstructed this phenomenon in a postmodern

medium. Reid presents a detailed account of how a computer-mediated hierarchy, a system of rewards and punishments, and rituals have been created by IRC users, as well as, a common language and meaning system. All of these, she argues, work towards sustaining the IRC community. Reid is quick to point out, however, the positive and negative aspects and interactions occurring on IRC. The conclusion of this work warns against predicting the societal effects of new technological phenomenon.

In her article “From <Bonehead> TO <cLoNehEAd>: Nicknames, play, and Identity on Internet Relay Chat” Haya Bechar-Israeli, 1995, details the importance of nicknames to users of IRC. She collected data using a participant-as-observer approach to show how users play various games using their nicknames. According to Bechar-Israeli, users of IRC play three very distinct games using their names. First, users play games based upon others names. This games involves the comments that are made in reference to a user’s nickname. A user with the nickname relevant to his or her interests, like “JLennon,” might solicit references to the Beatles, whereas someone with a nickname pertaining to his or her physical characteristics, like Asingle24, would get comments more in line with such personal attributes. Another game users of IRC play involve exchanging one’s online nickname with other members. The members engage in a type of identity switching to create what Bechar-Israeli calls an “identity ceremony” (1995). The last type of game she observed was more of a solo game in which someone has taken a user’s nickname already on the IRC server. This can involve others in that the person who has lost his or her nickname may persuade others to help pressure the person who assumed this person’s nickname to give it up by either signing off or changing it.



In addition to the various types of nickname induced interaction, Bechar-Israeli creates a typology of the various nicknames she observed in her field research. This typology contains six different types of IRC nicknames: (1) people using their real name, (2) self related names, (3) names related to medium, technology, and their nature, (3) names of flora, fauna, objects, (4) play on words and sounds, (5) names related to figures in literature, films, fairytales and famous people, and (6) names related to sex and provocation (1995). Her findings indicated that the fewest people use their real name and most chose to use self related names. Further, by randomly observing several channels she was able to identify that IRC users keep their nickname for long periods of time (months to years). Bechar-Israeli's research shows the importance that users of IRC put into not only their own but also in other user's nicknames. Ironically, in a medium that so easily allows for a nicknames to change, users choose to take another name only in a ceremonial fashion that celebrates others choices of nicknames.

Thus in looking at where community researchers have concentrated their efforts it is apparent that the many to many, asynchronous USENET, has been their target. My research intends to build on the research that has been done on the Internet Relay Chat system of the Internet. This area is being chosen based upon the interactions that make it important researchers of community. The synchronous nature of the many to many communication and the structure of the environment make it qualitatively different from the USENET that some scholars now assert to be community. It should be necessary to apply the same scrutiny to the medium of IRC in an effort to better understand the sociology of community and the interaction occurring on an IRC.

## **Summary**

This review of the literature highlights the difficulties involved in conceptualizing and researching the notion of community. Hillery's work will aid my research in understanding the historical conceptualizations of community using his correlates of community. His research, although not dealing with this new technology, will also help guide me in showing how community exists on the Internet's IRC. The next area I concentrated on was to show how the Internet has developed into a relevant phenomenon for community and other types of researchers. I used December's 1996 distinction of Internet communication as using the TCP/IP language to contrast it from other forms of communication that are important to community.. The next step involved breaking the Internet down into its various aspects using the highway analogy. The focus then became how users communicated using a medium called CMC on these various lanes of the Internet. December's 1996 definition of Internet-based CMC was presented as a concrete definition of the interactions occurring on the Internet. These interactions were then broken down into a time frame, synchronous and asynchronous, and broadcast scope, one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many. The research, having broken down the Internet and the types of interactions occurring on it, began to focus on the research that has been conducted on particular areas of the Internet, USENET and IRC.

Parks (1996) focuses upon the importance of personal relationships in any community that may exist on-line. Smith (1995) attempts to show how virtual community cannot be excluded from a real community classification because the production and maintenance of collective goods on USENET. Smith's research attempts to narrow the scope between virtual

community and community, while Overby (1995) classifies USENET as community up front and seeks to show how it can be dynamic. Kollock and Smith (1996) looked at cooperation and conflict on USENET. Researchers have also been dealing with the concept of community on the Internet's IRC. Reid (1991) examines how users deconstruct physical community and reconstruct it in the synchronous CMC environment of IRC. Bechar-Israeli (1995) studied the importance of nicknames on IRC. Because of the relevance of community correlates present in the Internet's IRC this environment was chosen as the focus of my research.

### **Objectives of this Project**

On a broad level my research seeks show how community functions in the virtual world of IRC using Hillery's correlates of community and new facets of community that have developed with the technology of the Internet. More specifically, several research questions become salient from the literature. Using Hillery's work, how do users of IRC deal with the issues of geographic proximity, shared goals, and regular communication? Some of these issues are also addressed in similar research on other areas of the Internet. From Smith's work with USENET came the question of how users of IRC might establish a shared goal or goals? How will users of IRC reach these shared goals, once they are established? Parks' work brings up the question of relationships and incorporates Hillery's idea of regular communication. What is considered regular communication on IRC? The question of geographic proximity is partially addressed by Reid with how IRC users attempt to reconstruct a physical community in a geographically distant IRC environment. Using the methodology detailed below, my research

seeks to answer these questions presented above and to develop a theory of community for the virtual world of IRC.

### CHAPTER III. DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODS

In my research, I will use the methods of naturalistic inquiry to collect ethnographic data. The method of inquiry will follow Lincoln and Guba's model for the *Flow of Naturalistic Inquiry* (pg. 188, 1985). Using this model involves looking at the importance of the *natural setting* in the research and the *human as the instrument* using a qualitative method that includes *purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, grounded theory, and emergent research design* that lead to a *case report* of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

#### **The Natural Setting**

The *natural setting* is a time and context in which a phenomenon naturally occurs (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This is important because of the relationship of the phenomenon of study to the time and context that spawned it. In my research, I will use the natural setting because of this relationship. Interactions will be observed on actual IRCs in their context and in their real time. To conduct a duplication of IRC interactions in a controlled environment would be difficult because of time and costs and would miss the relationship between time and context of the natural setting. Naturalistic inquiry, by being immersed in the environment, will allow me

to look at all variables rather than a limiting the research. To understand the natural setting of such interactions I will use December's formula to break down the vast Internet system into units of analysis that better detail the interactions that may be conducive of community (1996).

According to this model there are five levels of analysis: *media space, media class, media object, media instance, and media experience* (December, 1996). To better understand the natural setting of IRC interactions, my research will break down the Internet down into specific environments using the first three levels of December's model. The Internet is comprised of *media spaces* (December, 1996). IRC interactions occur in one such media space, called IRC space. This is the Internet's electronic social space that is dedicated to IRC client/servers. Within this IRC media space is the second level, the *media class*. This further narrows the Internet's electronic social space to a particular server of IRC media space. Here the *media class* will be the Quarterdeck (<http://quarterdeck.com>). The third level of December's model, the *media object*, refers to a particular natural setting provided by the *media class* server of the Quarterdeck (1996). In this study there will be two *media objects*, or natural settings, the membership of IRC channels “#!WorldChat” (A) and “#Flirting” (B).

### **The Human Instrument**

Data is collected and analyzed from the media object natural settings of #!WorldChat (A) and #Flirting (B) with a *human instrument*. That is, since there is no formal instrument, such as a survey instrument, I will be the instrument for collecting and analyzing data using both *tacit* knowledge and qualitative methods (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The human instrument,

according to Lincoln and Guba, must have knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. They call this tacit knowledge.

My personal tacit knowledge of IRC interactions comes from personal experience and participation on the Internet and in IRCs. In particular, I have spent many hours over the last four years interacting on IRCs. Along with academic knowledge of the sociological concept of community and previous experience with qualitative methods, I will make decisions about my research based upon this tacit knowledge base in an effort to understand the research objectives and questions. .

Using an observer-as-participant technique, I am immersed in the two media object settings of media class IRC server Quarterdeck in the Internet's media space of IRC. Data is collected within these two environments by engaging in an activity called "listening" by users of IRC and is synonymous with the technique of observer-as-participant. This approach involves entering the media object environment ( IRC channels #!World Chat (A) and #Flirting (B)) without interacting with the occupants. This approach is the most effective for my research because by not interacting with participants there is little chance of reactivity and there is a distance between the researcher and the phenomenon being observed. The communicative interactions of the members of each media object environment will be logged for analysis along with interpretive field notes using myself as a human research instrument.

## **Sampling**

Data for my research is gathered using a *purposive sampling* technique detailed by

Lincoln and Guba (1985). The goal here is to maximize information that can be obtained in these two media object environments until redundancy is obtained. Therefore, using tacit knowledge of the traffic in the IRC media space I will collect data on the interactions occurring in two environments contained on the Quarterdeck Server's IRC channels, #!WorldChat and #Flirting. This data collection method seeks to maximize the number of interactions observed in an effort to achieve redundancy. Therefore, observations are set to initially start during heavy usage times of the IRC media space. Should such observations not allow for maximization and redundancy, the times or *media instances* will be changed to a more productive time..

In December's model, the fourth phase of the unit of analysis is the *media instance*. The fourth phase is actually the *media object* at a particular time (December, 1996). There will be two sets of *media instances*, (a) and (b), in my research. Each will be a subset of the two *media objects*, (A) and (B). The *media instances* will be logged according to their date and time at each sitting. According to Lincoln and Guba, the research design must be *emergent* (1985).

Therefore, the initial observational design may change in an effort to maximize the amount of information that can be achieved. This observational design is based upon my tacit knowledge of IRC media space traffic. Every Monday, Thursday, evening from 10:00 until 11:00 P.M. and Sunday from 6:00 P.M. until 7:00 PM observational field notes are to be taken and logs will be made of interactions occurring. The first thirty minutes of each hour-long observation will be dedicated to #!Worldchat (A). The second half-hour will be spent observing and logging #Flirting (B). The data collected will be analyzed inductively.

## Data Analysis

Because no theory of community exists for IRC media space, I use an *inductive method of data analysis* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pgs. 188-204). Therefore, data must be collected to form an understanding of IRC community. The data and field notes are analyzed by organizing the logs and notes into folders representing ideas of community (Lofland and Lofland, 1984). Hillery's work with physical communities will serve as the basis for the initial folders. Thus, geographical proximity, shared goals, and regular social interaction becomes the main folders (Hillery, 1982). Any ideas that become salient to the functioning of IRC community is added as appropriate to the research. For example, if interactions involving norms and values appear to be contributing to a sense of community, then a folder within or separate of the initial three folders might be added. This process continues throughout the research process as my research uses a *grounded theory approach* where data proceeds theory construction. This continuing analysis of the data collected in the media instances is called the *media experience* by December (1996). A full breakdown of December's units of analysis is included below.



Units of Analysis		
Media Space	IRC Space	IRC Space
Media Class	IRC Server: Undernet USA	IRC Server: Undernet USA
Media Object	The membership of IRC Channel <b>#worldchat</b> (A)	The membership of IRC Channel <b>#the world</b> (B)
Media Instance	(a.1) date/time (a.2) date/time (a.x) date/time	(b.1) date/time (b.2) date/time (b.x) date/time
Media Experience X1	analysis of a.1	analysis of b.1
Media Experience X.x	analysis of a.1-a.x and b.1-b.x	analysis of b.1-b.x and a.1-a.x

FIGURE 2 CONCEPTUALIZING THE UNITS OF ANALYSIS

In my research there are multiple media experiences. Because the research is inductive and uses grounded theory there is a need for an analysis of each media instance built upon the prior media instances. Thus, the media experience changes as the set of media instances increases. Therefore, the purposive sampling of media instances, inductive analysis, and grounded theory will continue to create a fluid media experience until redundancy is achieved and a clear theory is achieved.

A *case report* is the prescribed method of reporting the outcome once redundancy and a grounded theory is accomplished (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This section is included in the

findings section of my research report. It is also necessary to locate the research findings *idiographically*. That is, to acknowledge the findings as only applicable to a particular space and time of data collection and analysis. Yet, since my research is concerned with *verstehen* of a phenomenon, there is relevance to research with limitations such as this one. The final aspect of Lincoln and Guba's model that will not be applicable to my research is related to policy implementation (*tentative application*, 1985,pg. 188). Since my research is about understanding and not policy implementation this topic will not be necessary or covered.

### **A Timetable for the Research**

Using the methods described above, I have collected and analyze data as prescribed by Lincoln and Guba's naturalistic inquiry. Their methods prescribe no predetermined amount of time; but rather, the goal is of redundancy. According to their methods, one should collect data until a clear theory emerges and all the data begins to reaffirm the theory (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Therefore, observations will continue until such a theory becomes salient. From my tacit knowledge, this should minimally last two months and may be longer. The actual times of the observations stated earlier consist of three hours a week. The analysis will be ongoing in the interpretive field notes taken at each observation, and will continue after each observation until the ideas are clear. I tentatively plan to have the final analysis completed and a case report drawn up for committee members by the end of November of 1996. It is not permissible to construct an all-encompassing theory of community for the IRC network because of the limitations of the research. However, I can allow for a better understanding of how community

exists on the IRC network.

### **Starting the Research Process**

In choosing an IRC for my research there are many factors to consider. Some of these involved my tacit knowledge from already having accessed IRC, while others required some creative problem solving. For the purposes of this study I will discuss all aspects of finding, getting connected to, and selecting channels on IRC for research.

First, I had to find client software to use. Since the first IRC client software was written by Jarkko Oikarinen (jto@tolsun.oulu.fi) in 1988 there have been many variations of IRC client software developed by various individuals, computer science students, and even companies, such as Quarterdeck. However, it has been my experience, while interacting on IRC channels, that seasoned IRC users recommend using a client program called mIRC that was written by Khaled Mardam-Bey of mIRC Ltd. (<http://www.mirc.co.uk>). Such recommendations come because of its simplicity and its easy configuration to the various IRC networks. Most importantly it is shareware, meaning that a user could download it and use it for 30 days free of charge before registering it by sending in the purchase price. That way, I could determine whether it would suit my research needs, or if the research were to be done in less than 30 days, which this was not, I could have used it completely for free. Before I could configure this client software I had to call my ISP (Internet Service Provider) to find out which IRC networks, if any, they could connect with. Once I found out which IRC networks I could use with my ISP, I had to find a list of servers to the IRC networks and their IP (Internet Protocol) addresses so I could

configure the mIRC program. This task proved to be much more difficult than choosing the client software.

Doing some research on the Internet's World Wide Web using various search engines with the term "IRC servers" revealed some startling information. There are now literally hundreds of IRC servers located all over the world that I could have chosen to connect to. All of these servers pass messages to and from one of 11 types of IRC networks. Some of these are as follows: Undernet, EFNET, Earth\_International, NewNet, DalNet, HIGHnet, GammaNet, InnerNet, AnotherNet, FefNet, and more are being created each day. The various types of IRC networks work with different types of code structure used to operate their network system. The alt.irc FAQ (IRC frequently asked questions), found on many IRC Web Pages on the World Wide Web of the Internet, explains that a channel on one server should be the same as on any other server on that network. Therefore the channel #Windows95 accessed from any Undernet IRC server would be the same, no matter if it is from the Blacksburg, VA Undernet server or any of the nine Washington D.C Undernet servers. All Undernet users from various geographical servers would be able to interact with one another. The problem is that with this entire interaction from clients to servers to networks there is a problem with crowding. That is, because there is so much traffic, it is not uncommon to get disconnected from your IRC server or even not to be able to connect to your server in the first place. Some IRC users have mentioned spending hours trying to get connected to their servers. This would prove to be problematic for my research. I initially choose to use the Undernet IRC network because it is compatible with my ISP, and there were servers nearby in Blacksburg, VA and Washington D.C. However, after

every occasion of attempting an observation turned up full servers I decided to look at a different IRC network.

An avid IRC user who helps operate a channel on a smaller network that I will, for anonymity purposes, call EarthChat suggested that I try this network because of the reliability of connection on a regular basis and because it was operated by a large corporation with corporate funding to keep the network from overcrowding. XYZ Corporation owns and operates the EarthChat network for testing and using its Internet products (server: irc.XYZ.com). Although the purpose of this network's creation is for using XYZ's products, they still welcome regular IRC users. After some initial observations it became clear that many of EarthChat's IRC users were using the network in similar ways that IRC users tended to use the larger networks like EFNET and Undernet. Once I felt comfortable with the EarthChat network providing a true IRC experience I altered my research design to include the use of this network in my research. I have included below a sample of one MOTD (message of the day) that comes up whenever I connect to Global Chat (see figure 3). Within this MOTD I can see the number of number of client users connected to the server, the maximum allowable clients, and the number of channels on this network. Now that I had found a server and network to do IRC research with, I had to decide which channels to use for my research purposes.

### Example of MOTD

```
Welcome to the Global Stage Network, Trex
Your host is irc.qdeck.com, running version GS 1.4 960723 Stadium Copyright (c) 1995, 1996 XYZ Corporation
This server running since Tue Nov 5 00:20:32 1996
irc.xyz.com GS 1.4 960723 Stadium Copyright (c) 1995, 1996 xyz Corporation
-There are 935 users and 0 invisible on 1 servers
-147 operator(s) online
0 unknown connection(s)
2163 channels formed
I have 935 clients and 0 servers
-Current local users: 935 Max: 1014
-
- irc.xyz.com Message of the Day -
-
- WELCOME TO GLOBAL STAGE!
-
- This server is operated by XYZ Corporation. We are operating
- this server to test our software. We invite you to chat to test our
- software and for informal social discussions only.
-
- We reserve the right to interrupt service or to cancel this offer at
- any time and for any reason.
-
- We assume no liability whatsoever for any occurrence related to use of
- this server.
-----
- If you have questions about using the server, please read
- http://www.earthchat.com/help/slashcommands.html or view
- http://www.xyz.com/~eristone/howto.html for concise
- directions on channel creation.
----
- Be sure to download the latest version of Earth Chat from our Web site,
- http://www.earthchat.com/download.html
-
- To find out about other places to chat on the Internet, visit the Internet Chat Guide at
http://www.xyz.com/chat/schedule.html
End of /MOTD command.
-
[system VERSION]
-
PING? PONG!
```

Figure 3 Example of an IRC Server Message of the Day

During this connection there were 2,163 channel in operation, and although the number of channels will vary with each connection the number of channels remains relatively unchanged. Whenever I logged on I used a “/list” command to list all the channel names. The channel name will pertain to the discussions occurring within them. For example, the “Windows 95” channel typically contains interactions pertaining to Microsoft’s Windows 95 operating system. In

addition to the channel names the “list” command will tell how many users are currently logged on each channel. From this list I could see many channels that had either none or fewer than 2 clients in them, while others had an average of twelve clients in them, and only 3 channels had fifty or more clients in them. I tended to focus upon rooms with a larger number of people in them. For example, when I first began exploring potential channels I found that in channels with fewer than five people in them also tended to have little interaction. In addition, I got kicked and even banned from several rooms because the only interaction occurring was command interactions from the channel operator (e.g., “/kick,” “/ban”). On the other hand, channels with 50 to over 100 clients within them did not seem to notice one more person entering the channel, and made me less visible and therefore less susceptible to being kicked or affecting the interactions. Since it became apparent that the number of clients in the channels was effecting my ability to do research I decided to pick channels based on a client membership criterion. I chose one channel that after several observations had fifty or more clients in it, and another channel with ten or more clients in it. I felt that with the later choice there would be a trade off in the potential of being more visible in a channel with ten clients that would enable me to see how a smaller gathering of clients interacted versus the larger gatherings of channels with fifty or more people. Of the smaller channels I chose “#!WorldChat” because of the consistency of the clients numbers joined in it. The other channels that I originally observed with ten or more clients turned out to have no clients joined. The larger channels were continually filled with 50 members logged on. The larger channels titles being indicative of content offered a choice between a teen chat area, a channel dedicated to the discourse of a foreign country channel which

did not contain any English communication in it, and therefore was eliminated, and a final large channel called “#flirting.” I chose the “#flirting” channel because of the potential difficulties of consent using adolescents in research coupled with the sexual nature of many of the interactions that I had observed there and which I sought to avoid. I then began regular interactions of these two channels on the time schedule outlined earlier. Interactions that occurred in the two channels are particular to IRC and have a unique communicative structure which will require some detailing before the interactions themselves can be analyzed.

### **Description of the Instruments**

Using the mIRC software allows for a visual window to open for each channel that is joined (see figure 4). The window is split into two sections. The main left section is for the synchronous textual CMC occurring within the channel. With this structure of the program there are certain phenomena that is relative to the channel size that can affect the ability of the IRC user trying to see and understand the communication. The amount of communication occurring in a particular channel will relate to the number of members of that channel. Thus, with a large number of members comes the difficulty of being able to read the text as fast as it appears on your screen and even follow multiple conversations. Realize that you can always scroll back up to the text that is missed, but whenever I have done this I have found it difficult to catch up with the new text that is being communicated in a synchronous manner. At other times I, as well as other IRC users will confuse multiple conversations. When vague statements are typed in without putting the nickname of the person intended to receive the message, other IRC users can,



and have, confused the message with other conversations occurring. A practice of many regular IRC users is to always put a name in the interaction. For example, if someone is responding to a funny comment from a particular member of the channel they might type in “LOL Trex” where LOL means laugh out loud and Trex would be the nickname of the person who made the funny comment. With smaller membership in the channel the communication occurs smoother because the text is visible long enough to read it and respond and there is a tendency for only one large conversation to be occurring.

To the right of all of this text communication there is a second smaller section of the window that contains the nicknames of those joined in the channel. These nicknames are listed in alphabetical order. The channel operator appears at the top of the list of members logged onto the channel and is designated “channel op” by the “@” in front of his or her username or “nick.”

Each of the two channels I selected had one or more operators who was either the owner of the channel, or a designated sergeant operator who is charge of keeping order within the channel relative to the channel’s purpose. Underneath the channel operator’s nickname(s) there can be a “bot” nickname. This is a program that helps channel operators maintain control of the channel by performing routine tasks such as greeting newcomers, kicking someone out for using a designated amount of profanity, or even kicking someone out of a channel and banning them from reentering the channel because of behavior such as sending a rapid text messaged repeatedly called “flooding” (see figure 5) or even bringing their own “bot” into the channel. The only “bot” allowed is the one created and used by the channel operators, although I observed some members, favored by the channel operator, sending commands to the channel “bot.” The

channel operator must give these members access to the “bot”. This device serves as an important part of the channel as well as to the functioning of the community of the channel. Many channel operators give names to these ‘robots’ as did the two channels in which I observed. Underneath the “bot” nickname is the members of the channel. On the channels with a larger population all of the members are not visible on the screen. To see all of the members I would have to scroll down. On the smaller channels with under twenty people logged on the nicknames of everyone would be visible during communication. There are important and vast sociological implications of this structure of the mIRC program which relate to group size and anonymity within group interaction which will be discussed later in the paper.

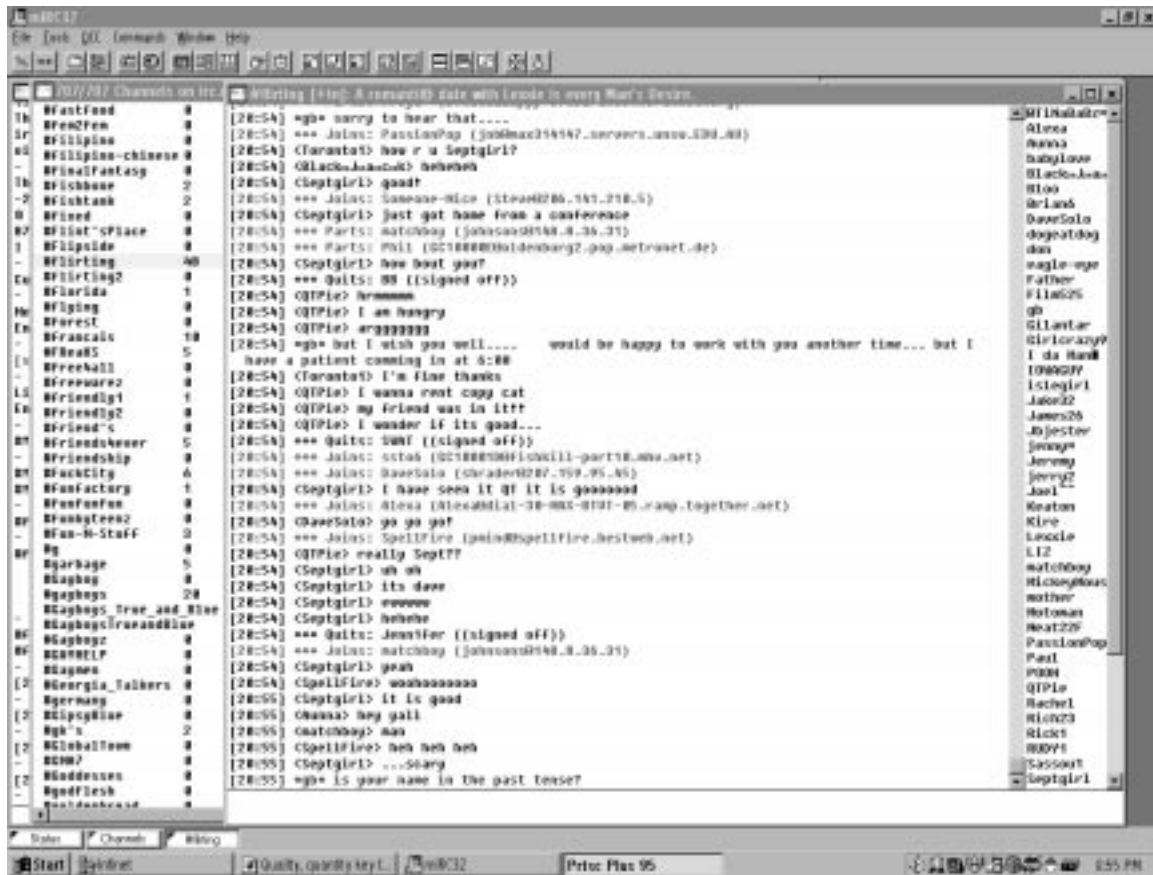


FIGURE 4 EXAMPLE OF IRC PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Session Start: Thu Oct 31 02:39:42 1996

```
[22:29] <TheCrow2> stop
[22:29] <VoMy> va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier
va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier a Maggiel
[22:29] <VoMy> va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier
va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier a Morticia
[22:29] *** Quits: ButchiE ((signed off))
[22:29] <KowGirl20> dang flooding
[22:29] <Irk> ops!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[22:29] <TheCrow2> stop
[22:29] <VoMy> va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier a MustangMan
[22:29] <TheCrow2> Quit it VoMy
[22:29] <VoMy> va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier
va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier a Irk
[22:29] <VoMy> va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier
va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va chier va
chier va chier va chier va chier a Jake
[22:29] *** Joins: Edge°° (hello@pr1-63.probe.net)
[22:29] *** Parts: Morticia (Addams@pml-29.jax-inter.net)
[22:29] *** Parts: Sam- (Sam-@chaucer.cshl.org)
[22:29] *** VOmy was kicked by QTPIe (ass hole shuddup)
```

FIGURE 5 AN EXAMPLE OF FLOODING ON IRC'S #FLIRTING

Below these two windows is a long narrow box which is where IRC users type in their messages. All of the IRC programs that I have seen, including mIRC, have this structure and require that you type in your communication and press the enter button on the keyboard to send it to the IRC server for everyone else to see. Then the message will almost instantaneously appear in the box above and to the left part of the screen containing the communicative interactions of the channel. Any messages I type will appear as a different color text to help differentiate it from other members of the channel. Like most MS Windows programs there are numerous buttons along the top of the window, which operate the program. However, it is three boxes that make up the main structure of the mIRC program that is important to understanding the interaction occurring on an IRC. Having laid down this structure of instruments that will be used, I will move the analysis of the data using Hillery's three correlates of community as they applied to community occurring on IRC's Global Chat network channels of #!flirting and #!WorldChat.

## CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

One of the reasons I started this research was that in reviewing the literature many scholars initially debated whether community existed on-line using the Internet as its medium. As I continued to look into scholarly literature I found that the debates were more centered on a philosophical debate and not on practical research. In the meanwhile newer research was coming out citing online interaction as community without any research to back up the claim. Therefore I decided to do some explorative research in an Internet area I felt that would be most conducive to community development, the IRC. Network. I had strong feelings that to consider, as community, the entire social interaction occurring on the Internet or the IRC network was just too simple an explanation. On the other hand, to disregard all of this social interaction would be premature and naive. My results of three months observations in two Global Chat IRC network channels called #flirting and #!WorldChat are contained below. The results have satisfied my initial curiosity and will open this medium up to further evaluation with practical research.

### **Geographic Proximity**

Hillery detailed the importance of geographic proximity in the traditional definition of a community. Geographical proximity allows for a face-to-face interaction with other members in a common physical space. However, as this medium of IRC space is by no means traditional, I have introduced pertinent modifications here that continue to show the importance of proximity

for community, but not geographically. I will show how the ideas of face-to-face interaction and an ability to meet with other members in a common physical space are both important parts of IRC Network Global Chat channels of #!WorldChat and #flirtingprovided.

One aspect of the Internet that has been heralded is its global nature. When a person is 'surfing the web' it is difficult to determine whether WebPages are being downloaded to your computer from a computer next door or on the other side of the world. The same is true of using IRC. When communicating on an IRC network it is difficult to determine, geographically, where the other people are logging on. Due to the extremely fast nature of electronic signals there is little difference in the time it takes for data to travel 1 mile or 1000 miles. Think of it as a telephone call to someone on the other side of the world. There is only a slight delay, if any, in the time it takes for me to ask a question of the party on the other line and the time it takes for them to receive my question and respond. The difference here is that the communication is textual and yet also synchronous which is problematic for scholars of conventional communication (Reid, 1991). By definition, however, this would be considered synchronous communication.

The implications of this ability for IRC users is to allow groups of people to synchronously communicate to one another not unlike that of face to face interaction cited by many community theorists. Added to this synchronous nature is a common meeting place in which these people can all gather at any time, such as the cyberspace of an IRC network that is always there, 24 hours a day. Looking at these attributes of IRC it becomes all too important

rethink the traditional face to face interactions that occur in traditional social spaces such as the street or meeting hall.

The particularly difficult part of this rethinking occurs because of the idea of a common physical space share by members of the community. Using a technology to overcome geographical proximity in community development was discussed in the creation of letter writing communities and CB communities. The Internet's IRC network is another example of technology's ability to allow proximity occurring in a cyberspace. The actual medium for proximity in a letter writing community might be on the paper in which the communication occurs while the proximity for the CB community is a particular frequency of a channel and its accompanying air space over which the communication occurs. The actual physical proximity for the IRC community is in the telephone lines and computer cable as well as the particular IRC server network and its channels (similar to how the channel is important to CB communities). Therefore, it would seem that the only physical proximity that exists is literally in the hardware of the computers involved, but it is also very important to see the other less salient aspects of this technology and how it leads not only to virtually created geographic proximity but also to a sense of physical proximity for the users of IRC. This sense of a physical proximity to other users takes it beyond the community that exists with CB communities and letter writing communities.

The technology of the Internet and its IRC branch allow for a computer replication of certain physical aspects of geographical proximity. Perhaps that replication is just that, simulating real physical space in an effort to be more conducive to natural interaction. This is certainly evidenced by software programs such as Alpha world, which is a recent outgrowth of



IRC and created because of the popularity of IRC. This program, and many newer ones like it create, literally, a virtual world in which Internet users can meet. These virtual worlds may actually resemble a computer generated three-dimensional city, town, or other social space. To give more power to the illusion, users of this social space are assigned avatars such as human figures, animals, or even abstract characters that can move around in this virtual world and see other's avatars who are there with them. Communication occurs in textual fashion on some programs and other programs use microphones and speakers to even further simulate a face to face proximity. The more common IRC space is certainly not a virtual replication of the physical world in which we live, but there are technological innovations that give it more of a sense of physical geographical proximity.

The mIRC client software program offers some structures that provide a sense of a shared physical space. As I mentioned earlier, there is an interaction window in the mIRC program where the user can see the actual textual communication occurring. There is also another window in the mIRC program that shows the other members present in this shared social space. Members within the channel are shown in this window only while they are logged onto the channel. When a member leaves his or her username disappears from this window in a synchronous manner just as if they have left an actual meeting room. Along with the synchronous nature of IRC is the ability to communicate in every direction with other members in a many to many style of communication that adds to the sense of a physical proximity with other users. Along with structural queues built into the client software users of IRC are exposed

to additional queues to a sensation of an actual physical geographical space when they access the server software used by the IRC networks.

When logging onto the IRC server the user is greeted by a MOTD such as “ WELCOME TO GLOBAL STAGE!” (from figure 3 above) and a list of channels. The MOTD serves as a greeting that reinforces a sense of physical space to the server and particular IRC network. In addition the channels list serves as another level of reinforcement to the sense of physical space. The channels must be entered to communicate with others. To further my point one need only look at the IRC technology used with private online services such as America Online and CompuServe. In their synchronous CMC social spaces they incorporate the term ‘chat rooms’ instead of channels. The user is greeted when they enter the ‘lobby’ area similar to the MOTD from IRC and then may enter particular rooms. The online services have taken the language a step closer in the idea of virtual being real. With IRC being the forerunner of these private service chatrooms the terms provide a similar sensation for the IRC user.

Up until now there has not been any kind of a social space that offers all of these attributes other than a geographic social space. Technology has historically created new social spaces like the air space of CB radio or the one to many social spaces offered by television. With technology, scientists have again created a new social space that adds a new dimension to social interaction. This new dimension, IRC space, is void of most geographic limitations and offers a synchronous attribute as well as a common space to gather for group interaction.

It is the nature of this technology rich social space of IRC space that I will use in a modification of Hillery;s idea of geographic proximity. Because of the attributes discussed

above I see it necessary to consider this new social space as variation of geographic proximity needed for community.

## **Regular Interaction**

I have shown how the structure of the technology of the Internet and its IRC network, the client software used to access it, and the server software needed to run it together add a sense of a physical proximity for users. But geographic proximity is only one aspect of a community. Hillery also promotes the notion that regular interaction is another correlate of community. A critical part of the character of each of the two channels that I observed was the members who frequented them. After having logged into these two IRC channels just a few times and I began to recognize the usernames that appeared in the member window of mIRC. When I would log onto these channels at very different times of the day or week I would find other users who I did not initially recognize their username. For instance, when I curiously logged onto #!WorldChat during the morning hours I found a different set of people are on. After I logged on in the morning several more time I again found that the usernames were similar to previous observations morning observations. The following document is a chart of the users who frequented #!WorldChat during my observations in the evening. The dates are random dates spread throughout my observations. Thus, not every person who participated in IRC is presented below. But rather, all members of both #!Worldchat and #Flirting on randomly selected days are presented below. At the top of each of the two figures you will see the date with the time (military time) in parentheses. The names are organized by alphabetical order to make the

patterns of usernames more salient. I have highlighted users who showed up at least three times in my observations of the IRC channels from July 23 to November 21, 1996. There are many users who appeared at least two times in this random selection of users present during my observations, yet I will consider frequent users of IRC to be listed at least three times. Most of the users highlighted, and some who are not, also appeared in most every observation made.

Different colors are only used to differentiate between more than one user who appeared frequently in the same alphabetical row. Looking at the users this way is important because it not only shows the frequency of usage of these two particular IRC channels, but because it allows me to see their participation over a five month period.

Look, for instance, at the !Worldchat member log in figure 6. One frequent user is *keerf*. This username is present in five of the eight random observations, which span from July 23 until November 21, 1996. Another regular on the IRC channel Flirting (see figure 5) is *Torrey* who is present in four observational periods. Others are also found to be interacting on the channel more than three times during the observations. This is not the only way of seeing patterns of regularity on the channels, but it gives a clear example for these two channels and their members.

This should rule out the idea of random participants in IRC channels who just come to meet new people and then leave for good. With users logging on at particular times for at least a five month duration (my observational period), this information allows me to see an investment into this interactive cyberspace over time.

	7/23 (2230)	8/18 (1842)	9/02 (2016)	9/19 (2224)	10/02 (2218)	10/31 (2206)	11/12 (2244)	11/21 (2253)
a		airman		adept	Apocolypse		brink	
b	Bear, Bard, Becca, babless, breece.	Beethoven, bra infreeze	Beachbum, Belindo	becca, brian, blacknite, brazen	belinda	belinda		
c	cauker, camel, crankyone	<b>crys</b> , corbin, crafty, cravel, crowsfeet, cybersweety, cauker	Cruisin4, chilly	<b>crys</b>	ct, cedric	<b>crys</b> , collossus		crusader, <b>crys</b>
d	Dino, Demona	<b>Dee</b>	Dogg		DeathbyChoc alate, Doug, <b>Dee</b>	demonknight		<b>Dee</b>
e	elfie					elf tyg		
f		fd, footy	fantasy		foxy			February
g	guido	Gonzo						
h	hootch, <b>hacker</b>	<b>hacker</b>			humanitar			
i								
j		Jack, Jubei			Jeff69		jazz	
k	koke	Kittkat	<b>keerf</b>		<b>keerf</b> , koke	<b>keerf</b>	<b>keerf</b>	kitkat, <b>keerf</b>
l	lizzibabe	leno, lasado	Lakota	liz	Lady Duran		lilpumpkin	lilpumpkin
m	markshark, mercedes	moron			MrsGypsi, msmichell, magellan	monte		mangaman
n	<b>necromancer</b>					<b>necroman</b> cer		<b>necromancer</b>
o						Obbear		
p			Paulie, <b>Peachy</b>	<b>peachy</b> , plaidhead	precious lady		<b>peachy</b>	plaid, precious lady, <b>Peachy</b>
q					quipsy			
r		Robin	rascal	rich				rascal, Robin
s	sheika, soma	skonum, sim, ScrewMeDoo, Sunny, Shadie	straycat, snowwhite	scatman, silk, snard, sgtPepper, Septembergirl			screech	
t	tiger, t-bird, <b>Torrey</b>	To peturv, <b>Torrey</b>	Thaiman	Tigger, <b>Torrey</b> , Thantos	<b>Torrey</b> , triple			
u								
v	vw		viper	vixon	vw		vitimina	
w		whybother	whybother, warrior			warez		
x								
y				yuca26				
z			zeke					
#							007	007

FIGURE 6

WORLDCHAT MEMBERS JULY-NOVEMBER 1996

	7/23 Tue (2230)	8/15 Th (2115)	9/2 Mon (2229)	9/18 Wed (0007)	10/02 Wed (2218)	10/30 Wed (2139)	11/11 Mon (2237)	11/20 Wed (2252)
a	Android	Assasin	Amythyst, Audrey	AprilRain, Armand, Akasha	Airborne,Ace0012		Android, AmethYst	Android, Allwomen
b	bigmike69	brock	buh, Bree, bigbudz, Ballgame	BuddyHolly, Ballgame, BadBoy@, Bartender, bdikdoy	Baroness linna@, BoBF4, Blondie, babydoll, Bumpn, Briteeyes,Ballgame	Bree, Ballgame	Banditos, B-REAL, Ballgame, Brainstew, buzz, BigJonBoy, bo	buckgal, Birgitta,BradV, BOBF4,burg
c		canofPeas, curiousM, christine	Cherrie, chicks, chemGeek	Chill, CoolGal, crotchrot	cedric,cryforDawn,Coffee	cryfordaw countrylady ,chi@ki, cowboy1	CrossRoads,carolina,camero	CaptJaneway
d	dilly	Digger	DnKyotie, dilly, Don-	degree	dvs	dave, DHK, dancer3	DVS2, DevilMan+/-, DirkPitt, Bebie, dilly, Dave20 Ezra	Dean, Debie, DVS
e			Elam	EIGuapo, edge12	EverReady			
f	foxy1		foxy1		funny,foxy1	fever2, F@e@kles, foxy1, Froggy, Falconer0		FelixU, fluffy
g			Guchi,GenX	Giggles@	Ghoste2ab1,guchi	GIJoe, GoldBalls	GregBrady	goose
h		HotPink, HeyBaby		HeyBaby	Hardie18, h2onutt, hoosier	Hp	HK HunterKiller, highguy, hp, hey, hennyPenny, hipbud	
i	Irk		Islegirl	Irk, Imzadi	Island, islegirl	Infinity, Irk	Irk, IdaMan	islegirl
j	Just4YouMn, Jbirdy	Janna, Jenni, Jasmine	Jay1,Jane34	Jams, Jenny	Jaybird, Jasmine, JPD	Jake23520,jorules!,Jbjester,Jenny,Jaym2,Jasmine	Jasmine,Jetgirl,James@,JPD,Jewel15,Johns29,Jef f96	Jasmine,jbjester,jbone
k	Kat22		Kristy, Karina, Kimster	Kraven]		Kraven,Kevin1	KULTZAE, KevCan	kykiss
l		La^Femme	Layne, Luke, LI-DUDE	Loverboy	Lawman,Lynn	Lexxus1	LisaLisa1, LadyHesia, Leia, LadyTori, Lexxie2	lori,Lemonade,LadyTori,Larry2
m	maureen	MrNobody, Miles, matchboy, Mai-Li	MaLady, Maharet, moreta, mel	MaryBeth, miles, moreta, mgsddy, mercedeas, Marc, mystery		maggz Marc, moreta	maewest, mark2, Marc, Maggie12, MNGuy, melloMan, monster, miles	maewest, muzzle
n		NewMan Here	Notme4u		noir	Nanci	Nickles, NoOne	nique
o			OrSino, oasis		oldtimer			
p	Princess		Phil9X, Pisser, PeteLeBon	Panaman	PrettyGal	Paris	Phyrst, psmoov, paris	Pinks

q			QTPie				
r		Rob, Rockhard, Rolais	Rumjelly,redhot, Rob	RCA, Romeo	rushfan, RPR, roughcampr, riddlemethis	rest4thewicked	RedLightSpecial, rad, RCA
s	SUpAFREAK , silvia, scoundrel, Shelly, Steph, skiler	sssaz, Stabbing suzanne, Westward, Sundae, soulstrom, surfer,saz, soulsurf, superluva, Smooth	Stoffer, sweetguy1, SodaPop, shane, Saundra@, saz, satan, scooge, shane, scrambledeggs	Sabrina,suzanne 1, Superman	StabWest,Sp anky,Smoo,S kiler	St Sara, SPOON, suirrelnut, STUDinNYC,SirD erek	skent, starseed, spice, smooth99, slick, sundae, SuperStar, Studyly, SodaPop, Sly18
t	TallMnye38, Tick	The Princess, Trish2, Tristan	Tarah, Tori, Tiny-T	Topaz9, TnMan, Teo, Tempress,Toybo y	TinyT,Trish2, Tank141	TheBEEF,tomfles h,tomasino,Turnt odust,TheCrow2	TINABABY, Tick
u							
v		VA-MAN	velvet	von@, vampress			
w		weetabix, Wheedle	WayCool Junior	WayCoolJunior	whisper	willie1	WhiteFire, witefire
x				xenon, Xman, xgirl, xxx	Xman	Xtreme	
y						Yorkie	
z		zas	zuijuran	Zombi1, zoomer		zakk	
#							

FIGURE 7 FLIRTING MEMBERS (JULY-NOVEMBER 1996)

There is, however, another way in which to determine regularity of interaction. Another approach is to see how users who entered #!WorldChat and #Flirting would be greeted by the channel operator and possibly a few of the members of the channel. When a user with whom the other members of !#WorldChat and #Flirting are familiar would enter the channel, there would be hello messages and rituals from all those familiar with the username. The person entering the channel would greet others and they would be greeted also. This not only denotes the user entering #!WorldChat or #Flirting as a regular, but also the greeters because of the feedback coming from the person entering the channel. In the example from #!WorldChat, I observed regular members who entered the channel spark an interesting phenomenon. For instance, in figure 8.1 “Crys” comes into the channel and all communication stops and refocuses

on the entrance of the regular (see figure 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3). This kind of greeting shows the importance of a “regular” to the others and in a way conveys status to any new members of the channel. In #Flirting the same type of greeting can be observed in figures 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3. You can contrast this type of response of a regular user with someone like *Pittsburgh Steeler* who does not receive much attention (see green highlight in figure 9.1). Interestingly, you will not find this person on any of the randomly selected member logs of #Flirting in figure 7. *Dilly*, however is listed three separate times in figure 7. Thus, it appears that my observations do support IRC having regular interaction on the channels of #flirting and #!WorldChat. This is evidenced by a pattern of nicknames found in the channel list of names from random observations of both channels and is also supported by observations of interactions occurring within these two channels when select members of these two channels enter. Additionally, more evidence is found upon exit by frequent users of these two IRC channels.

Upon exiting the channel of either #!Worldchat or #Flirting a similar ritual can be seen. It appears just as important for regular members to say goodbye to everyone as it is to say hello and be greeted by other regulars of the channel. For example, when Jenny is preparing to leave the channel #Flirting there is a meticulous ritual of saying goodbye to all of the other regulars from the channel (see figures 10 & 11).

Finally, there is the issue of names as being important to the perception of regular interaction. As shown earlier in figure 4 above mIRC provides a window showing people logged into the channel at any particular time. What appears is the users online nickname or username.

This is an important point because with regular interaction being important for members of



#!WorldChat, the only way of measuring it from a normal users standpoint is equate the username to the same person each time. This is why IRC users tend to be possessive of their username. Whenever a user sees a name that he or she recognizes they can usually assume to know whom this is. If someone else does assume another's username and that person is already logged onto the IRC server network then they will not be allowed to log on using the username and must change it. Some IRC users even register their usernames with IRC networks to make sure no one else can use that name. If someone does use a name that is already in use they will find that the original user of the name may try to sanction the user of their name if necessary (Bechar-Israeli, 1995). User names are important here because they allow others to recognize other regular users and therefore facilitate regular interaction. In addition, the channel operator encourages regular interaction by rewarding regular with access to the channel bot, which performs the duties detailed earlier. By gaining access to the bot the user can help maintain the community by performing rule enforcement in regards to flooding or deemed inappropriate language by other users. This privilege is another way of showing status within the channel's community. One channel operator of #flirting informed me that they may even be awarded channel operator status after a prolonged membership to the channel. This increased status rewards the regular interaction on the channel, and in doing so shows new members of the channel the importance of regular membership to the channel.

```

Session Start: Aug 15 20:45:32 1996

[20:58] *** Crys (belanger@207.61.129.102) has joined #!WorldChat
[20:58] <Torrey> CRY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] * Wardrobe is dancing with joy because
of his new found knowledge
[20:58] <Crys> hi Y'all
[20:58] <Crys> Torrey!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] * Blade ***** Crys !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] <Wardrobe> hey crys
[20:58] <Crys> Blade!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] <Crys> hiya wardrobe
[20:58] <Bard> CRY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
!
[20:58] <Xanthia> well.....goodbye, all
[20:58] <Crys> precious!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] <Crys> Bard!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] * old is jumping for joy also.
[20:58] <Crys> tigr!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] *** Xanthia (Theodin@206.117.121.92) has left #!WorldChat
[20:58] <Bushido> hey, Crys!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] <FirstAvatar> Yoda, You seek Yoda!
[20:58] <Crys> purp!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:58] <Wardrobe> ha
[20:59] <Crys> Bushido!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[20:59] <FirstAvatar> Take you to him I will!
[20:59] <old> hello crys
[20:59] <Wardrobe> go for it
[20:59] <Crys> hiya old
[20:59] <Wardrobe> Avalter
[20:59] <Wardrobe> ?
[20:59] *** BoatMan has quit IRC ((signed off))
[20:59] <old> What is happening tonight, crys?
[21:00] <Crys> not a whole lot, old, how about
with you?

```

FIGURE 8.1      EXAMPLES OF !WORLDCHAT GREETINGS

```

Session Start: Mon Sep 30 02:51:49 1996

[22:38] *** Joins: keerf@(Leavemealone@fh-ppp32.monmout
h.com)
[22:38] * keerf@ floats down from the sky and lands on
the ground
[22:38] <mikehunt> just call me mike
*** Requested sound [evils.wav] doesn't exist
* Thanatos° *** The specter of Death greets you keerf@.
[22:38] *** Joins: Prince (zheglov@165.238.38.195)
[22:38] *** Joins: Phosphora (Hmmm@cag1.syr.servtech.com)
[22:38] <Totius> Don't even try to make me believe your
parents gave you the name
[22:38] <Belinda> Keerfie!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[22:38] <keerf@> hello all
[22:38] * keerf@ jiji!!!!jiji!
!!!jiji!!!!$ Belinda $
jiji!!!!jiji!!!!jiji!!!!
[22:38] <Belinda> :-)
[22:38] * keerf@ jiji!!!!jiji!
!!!jiji!!!!$ Torrey $ jiji!!!!jiji!!!!jiji!!!!
[22:38] <Totius> hello Keerf!!!!!!!!>>>>>.....
[22:38] <mikehunt> ya there pretty dense
[22:38] * keerf@ jiji!!!!jiji!!!!jiji!!!!$ Dee $ jiji!!!!j
jiji!!!!jiji!!!!
[22:38] *** Parts: Phosphora (Hmmm@cag1.syr.servtech.com)
[22:38] <VIxon> KEERF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[22:39] * keerf@ jiji!!!!jiji!!!!jiji!!!!$ Totius $ jiji!!
!!!jiji!!!!jiji!!!!
[22:39] * keerf@ *()*()*()*()*()*()*()*$ Vixon $*()*()*
()*()*()*()*()*()*()
[22:39] *** Joins: Vorlon (GC1000E@tslp16.net.hamilton.
voyager.co.nz)
*** Requested sound [evils.wav] doesn't exist
* Thanatos° *** The specter of Death greets you Vorlon.
[22:39] <Vorlon> hi everyone
[22:39] <VIxon> how are ya Terry???
[22:39] <keerf@> I am great!!!
!!I have the best news

```

FIGURE 8.2 EXAMPLE OF !WORLDCHAT GREETINGS

Session Start: Tue Oct 08 04:49:40 1996

```
[0:00] *** Joins: Msmichelle (I'mBen's@usr1-dialup24.mix1.Sacramento.mci.net)
[0:00] *** Joins: ArchAngel (tedelman@dialin-26.netacc.net)
[0:00] * keerf@ ;iii!!!!;iii!!!!;iii!!!!$ Msmichelle $
;iii!!!!;iii!!!!;iii!!!!
[0:01] *** Parts: twocats (twocats@Cust99.Max44.New-York.NY.MS.UU.NET)
[0:01] *** Joins: plastic (plastic@207.22.162.137)
[0:01] <Dee^1> hey Necro did your wife tell you what I did by accident the
other day????
[0:01] <Msmichelle> keef!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:01] <Msmichelle> dee!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:01] <Msmichelle> necro!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:01] <Msmichelle> bard!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:01] <Msmichelle> than!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:01] <Msmichelle> vixon!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:02] <Msmichelle> hi everyone else!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:02] <Necromancer^0> no...do i wanna know?
[0:02] <Dee^1> I flooded Pedals off with a redneck jokes flood hehehehe
[0:02] <Necromancer^0> flooded her off?
[0:02] <VIxon> HAHAHA!
[0:03] <VIxon> thats Funny Dee!!!
[0:03] <Necromancer^0> bout damn time
[0:03] <Dee^1> ya it private messages the flood and just keeps going and going
[0:03] <Dee^1> it just took her right off hehehe
[0:03] *** Joins: Thaiman (me@www.blackholevr.com)
[0:03] <Collossus> The Steelers just WON!!!!!!
[0:03] <Msmichelle> thai!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:03] * Bard@ shakes Thaiman hand
[0:03] <VIxon> WB Thai
[0:03] <keerf@> WB Thai
<Trex> Cheers for the Steelers!!
[0:04] <Collossus> The Steelers just WON!!!!!!
[0:04] <Dee^1> hey it WAS a accident I was just learning about this program
[0:04] <Necromancer^0> right on!! Steelers rule!
[0:04] * VIxon was waiting patiently for you Thai
[0:04] <VIxon> LOL!!
[0:04] <Dee^1> GO STEELERS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:04] <Dee^1> now if the penguins could get off their butts and do something
hehehhe
[0:04] <Necromancer^0> well.....
[0:05] <Mick> hello, BrownEyedGirl
[0:05] <Thaiman> hey Vixon, can I have the pic? I'm still holding my heart
[0:05] <Thaiman> hehehehehe
[0:05] <Thaiman> Msmichelle!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:05] <keerf@> hehehehehehehe
[0:05] <VIxon> yep
[0:05] <Thaiman> alright!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[0:05] <Collossus> Are you guys using mIRC, pirch, global?
[0:05] <Collossus> Are you guys using mIRC, pirch, global?
[0:05] *** Parts: jjc (jjc@ascend02-11.icanect.net)
<Trex> mIRC here
[0:05] <Necromancer^0> who guys?
[0:05] <Msmichelle> hows thai????????
```

FIGURE 8.3 EXAMPLE OF #!WORLDCHAT GREETINGS

Session Start: Mon Sep 30 22:00:32 1996

[22:25] <dilly> hi kids  
[22:25] \*\*\* Joins: Tallman (me@ppp80.ore  
gontrail.net)  
[22:25] <dilly> what is up?>  
\*\*\* Requested sound [come2bed.wav] doesn't exist  
[K@S @ SOUND]  
[22:25] <frosty> SORRY ABOUT THE CAPS,  
NEW AT THIS  
[22:25] <warrior> want to chat  
[22:25] \*\*\* Joins: Steph-L (Steph-L@cmo  
eml54.lancite.net)  
[22:25] <Android> hiya dilly  
[22:25] <Foxy1> DILLY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[22:25] \*\*\* Joins: God (Mr@ts63-07.tor.i  
STAR.ca)  
[22:25] <jasmin> brb k?  
[22:26] <frosty> gone I hope  
[22:26] <dilly> foxy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[22:26] <dilly> hi android  
[22:26] \*\*\* Parts: Marriah (askme@ip93-1  
09.tor.interlog.com)  
[22:26] <Android> ok  
[22:26] <K@S @> lol  
[22:26] <dilly> what's up?  
[22:26] <God> bless everyone here!  
[22:26] <warrior> frosty you want to  
chat  
[22:26] <Pittsburgh Steeler> howdy all  
[22:26] <Short-E> Hey all! Short-E is  
here!  
[22:26] <Hey> Do I know you Short-E?  
[22:26] \*\*\* Quits: xPhil ((signed off))  
[22:26] <frosty> ,<warrior> ok  
[22:26] \*\*\* Joins: Suzannel (Suzannel@20  
7.3.2.164)  
[22:26] <warrior> cutiepie whats up  
[22:26] <Tallman> hello y'all  
\*\*\* Requested sound [babydick.wav] doesn't exist  
[K@S @ SOUND]  
[22:26] <God> how are my children doing  
this blessed night?  
[22:26] \*\*\* Joins: Gabe (Gabe@max4-so-ca  
-00.earthlink.net)  
[22:26] <BaronessLinna@> <|:;>  
[22:27] <Short-E> Anyone here from  
[22:27] <Steve2> yes leesburg  
[22:27] <tori> KRS....please send me  
that wav...k?  
[22:27] \*\*\* Parts: hp1 (GC10000E@livdial  
4.fta.com)

```

[22:27] <Gabe> Hello eveyone!
*** Requested sound [getajob.wav] doesn't exist
[K@S @ SOUND]
[22:27] <topcat> anyone from australia
[22:27] *** Joins: CutiePie (GC10000E@newcdbr06.newcomm.net)
[22:27] *** Joins: LITEWAY (LITEWAY@pml-11.nidlink.com)
[22:27] <Tallman> hey angelal
[22:27] <warrior> whats wrong frosty
[22:27] <Hey> What is it, Tallman?
[22:27] <dilly> hi tori
[22:27] <Oddjob> anyone from uk we're alot freinlier than you lot apparentl
Y..
[22:27] <K@S @> tori, which one/
[22:27] <K@S @> ?
[22:27] <Foxy1> cutie is confused tonight...heheheh
[22:27] <CutiePie> Hi!
[22:27] <tori> (((((((((((((((((DILLY))))))))))))))))))
[22:27] <frosty> ,WARRIOR> NOTHING WHY ?
[22:27] *** Parts: Pittsburgh Steeler (hty@sol-p3-108.alaska.net)
[22:27] <dilly> ahhhhhh thanks
[22:27] *** Joins: HunnyBunny (GC10000E@newcdbr06.newcomm.net)
[22:28] *** Quits: duckee ((signed off))
[22:28] <dilly> i needed that

```

Figure 9.1 Example of #Flirting Greetings

Session Start: Thu Oct 31 02:39:42 1996

[21:43] <Ballgameα> Bree!!!!!!!  
[21:43] <foxyl> jc u got pic for foxy  
[21:43] <lexxus1> oops i thought you left  
[21:43] <chi(c)ki> no, anytime now though  
[21:43] <jennyα> chicki...watch out for JC..  
[21:43] <foxyl> i trade u  
[21:43] <Whisper> Anytime X-MAN!!!  
[21:43] \*\*\* Joins: QUEENDIVA (GC10001D@stadams2.campus.vt.edu)  
[21:43] <Bree α> hey Ballgame !!!  
[21:44] <jennyα> whao  
[21:44] <Whisper> ;)  
[21:44] \*\*\* Parts: Lake-K9 (GC10001D@med-0090.dip.cdsnet.net)  
[21:44] \*\*\* Quits: DHK ((signed off))  
[21:44] \*\*\* Joins: feverZ (hutt@203.120.122.19)  
[21:44] <jennyα> whoa  
[21:44] <Whisper> \*giggles\*  
[21:44] <Bree α> Just came in to say hi  
[21:44] <chi(c)ki> why??  
[21:44] <chi(c)ki> nudie??  
[21:44] <jennyα> Ballgame...you got a pic  
\*\*\* Requested sound [badboy1.wav] doesn't exist  
[moreta SOUND]  
[21:44] <Bree α> Hey foxy!!!!!!!  
[21:44] <Ballgameα> Hi  
[21:44] <foxyl> hi bree  
[21:44] <Ballgameα> heheheheheheheheh  
[21:44] \* Data <<ctcp sound detected ( moreta --- badboy1.wav ) >>  
[21:44] <chi(c)ki> BREE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[21:44] <feverZ> hi there!  
[21:44] \*\*\* Joins: roughcampr (GC10000E@206.107.178.237)  
[21:44] \*\*\* Joins: kraven (kraven@206.116.90.81)  
[21:44] <Whisper> Guess what, Jc!?!??  
[21:44] \* Ballgameα has many pics  
[21:44] <jennyα> Bree!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[21:44] <moreta> Bree!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[21:44] <Jcrules1> WATCH OUT FOR ME WHY????  
[21:44] <Bree α> hey chicki did it work?  
[21:44] <Jcrules1> hehehe  
[21:44] <lexxus1> bye x-man  
[21:44] <Irk> bree!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[21:44] \*\*\* Joins: Trish2 (somebodyelse@cnc045091.concentric.net)  
[21:44] \* X-Man says to everyone BE COOL and KEEP COOL!!!!!!  
[21:44] <roughcampr> hi people  
[21:44] <chi(c)ki> yuppers  
[21:44] <foxyl> okie send u pic  
[21:44] \* Ballgameα 's pics just aren't scanned yet  
[21:44] <Bree α> jenny!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[21:44] <Ballgameα> hehehehehehehe  
[21:44] <jennyα> you burn baby  
[21:44] \*\*\* Parts: tboss (tboss@annex-077.llano.net)  
[21:44] <Jcrules1> YEAH WHISPER????





```

Session Start: Mon Nov 11 03:25:28 1996

[23:10] *** Joins: Amethyst (thepitofhell!@ad10-047.compuserve.com)
[23:10] <Ravenσ> i got booted the other nite
[23:10] <Tarah(c)> hehe James
[23:10] <Ravenσ> im sorry
[23:10] <Ballgame°¿°> ok ok
[23:10] <QTPie> Well that is a good thing James
[23:10] <Tarah(c)> good to know
[23:10] <James(c)> yep. sure is
[23:10] <Ballgame°¿°> Heya Ame
[23:10] <Irk> whatever
[23:10] <QTPie> Ame!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[23:10] <Ravenσ> Ame!!
[23:10] <QTPie> Whats up girl!!!!!!
[23:11] <Amethyst> Raven?????????????
[23:11] <QTPie> whoa man I am still freaken out
[23:11] <QTPie> hehehhehehe
[23:11] <Ravenσ> geez
[23:11] <Amethyst> nada!!!!!!!!!!
[23:11] <Tarah(c)> Amethyst!!!!!!!!!!!!
[23:11] <QTPie> It is JEnny AMe
[23:11] <QTPie> heheheheheh
[23:11] <Irk> Amethyst!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[23:11] <Amethyst> Took me forever to get on!!!!!!!!!!
[23:11] *** Parts: Derek (rever@46.san-diego-2.ca.dial-access.att.net)
[23:11] <dvs> AME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[23:11] <James(c)> problem is...i have no women to exercise it on!!!
:(
[23:11] <QTPie> Bg how much is that waw done???
[23:11] <Amethyst> oh no, he's back!!!!!!!!!!
[23:11] <Amethyst> LOL
[23:11] <QTPie> whoa James
[23:11] <Ballgame°¿°> 63
[23:11] <Amethyst> Ex-master dude!
[23:11] <Amethyst> LOL
[23:11] <Jyl> oh, too bad, James
[23:11] <QTPie> hehehhe AMe
[23:11] <Amethyst> Sup?
[23:12] *** Parts: tigerlily (GC10000E@djb.mv.com)
[23:12] <Amethyst> Who the heck is raven??
[23:12] *** Joins: bfree (GC10000E@148.5.23.32)
[23:12] <Witchell> Yup Yup Yup Yup!
[23:12] <James(c)> time to get a new one
[23:12] <Skeptic> thanks mia :- )
[23:12] <Amethyst> Scully!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!HMMF!!!!!!!!!!
[23:12] * Scully hugs and comforts James
[23:12] <GODDESS> Amethyst, Raven is a cool dude...

```

FIGURE 9.3 EXAMPLE OF #FLIRTING GREETINGS

Session Start: Wed Aug 28 23:03:35 1996

```
[23:05] <jenny> Bye All!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[23:05] <Ballgame1> DINGO!!!!!!!!!!
[23:05] <asesino > ha ha ha
[23:05] *** Joins: Erica (Erica@199.234.187.101)
[23:05] <Ballgame1> Bye Jen....take care!!!!
[23:05] *** Parts: m34BayAreaCA (m34BayAreaCA@smx-ca2-11.ix.netcom.com)
[23:05] <QTPie> damn it asesino
[23:05] *** Joins: hondo (paul@j9.brf2.jaring.my)
[23:05] <StabbingWestward> BYE JENNY
[23:05] *** Quits: Topaz9 ((signed off))
[23:05] <Ballgame1> :0)
[23:05] <QTPie> hehehe
[23:05] <asesino > what?
[23:05] <Doug8> What about Ross Perot????
[23:05] <StabbingWestward> I'll MISS ya
[23:05] <Shadowdragon> bye jenny
[23:05] <jenny> bye ballgame
[23:05] <QTPie> Bye Jenny
[Ballgame1 SOUND]
[23:05] <QTPie> see ya later
[23:05] * Data1000 <<ctcp sound detected ( Ballgame1 --- hula.wav ) >>
[23:05] *** Parts: digsy (weallshineon@ubppp-011.ppp-net.buffalo.edu)
[23:05] <asesino > Prott
[23:05] *** Joins: superspot (.@pm084-20.dialip.mich.net)
[23:05] * Data1000 > Later digsy, see ya in a bit dude..
[23:05] <Ballgame1> for Jen!!!!
[23:05] <jenny> bye stabb
[23:05] <jenny> bye shadow
[23:05] *** Joins: tanus (george@port16.cyberus.ca)
[23:05] <Ballgame1> hehehehe
[23:05] <meteman> Piss on ross!!
[23:05] <asesino > Rules
[23:05] <asesino > NOT
[23:05] <jenny> bye QT
[23:05] <jenny> yup
[23:05] <QTPie> yup yup yup
[23:05] <jenny> yup
[23:06] <StabbingWestward> bye now
[23:06] <QTPie> hehe
[23:06] <MagicGirl> yup yup yup
[23:06] *** Quits: BIGDOG ((signed off))
[23:06] <MagicGirl> yup yup yup
[23:06] <QTPie> bye Jenny
[23:06] <Ballgame1> yup
[23:06] <Ballgame1> OI!!!
[23:06] <StabbingWestward> sweet dreams
[23:06] <MagicGirl> yup yup yup
[23:06] <QTPie> see ya girl
[23:06] <asesino > Ross is boss
[23:06] <QTPie> OI
[23:06] <MagicGirl> oi
[23:06] <asesino > lol
```

```

[23:06] <asesino > NOT
[23:06] *** Parts: superspot (.@pm084-20.dialip.mich.net)
[23:06] <QTPie> heheheh
[23:06] <Shadowdragon> perhaps Doug8 is too young to remember the last
presidential election!
[23:06] <jenny> yup
[23:06] <jenny> yup
[23:06] <jenny> yup
[23:06] <jenny> yup
[23:06] <jenny> yup
[23:06] <jenny> woohoo
[23:06] <QTPie> Magic
[23:06] <QTPie> youa re laggin
[23:06] <QTPie> heheheheh
[23:06] <QTPie> whoa
[23:06] <jenny> HAVE FUN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
[23:06] <Doug8> mete who u goin for then???
[23:06] <MagicGirl> we are bad!!!!
[23:06] <asesino > what if Perot won?
[23:06] *** Joins: superspot (.@pm084-20.dialip.mich.net)
[23:06] <QTPie> You too
[23:06] <Ballgame1> hahahahaha
[23:06] <QTPie> heheehheeh
heheehheeh
[23:06] <jenny> bye QT!!
[23:06] <jenny> woohoo!!
[23:06] <QTPie> pobre Magic
[23:06] <QTPie> hehehehhe
[23:06] <QTPie> be girl
[23:06] <QTPie> PEROT is an asshole
[23:06] <Irk> asesino, now i know you are an idiot
[23:06] <meteman> I have to go for dole.....can't stand algore or hillary
[23:06] *system* LIST OF BOZOS for #flirting
[23:06] *system* END OF BOZO LIST
[23:06] <QTPie> who will do anything to get ahead
[23:06] <asesino > He'd be on LARRY KING EVERYNIGHT!
[23:06] <asesino > lol
[23:06] <gogirl2> hey everybody!!!!!!
[23:06] <Shadowdragon> If Perot had won we would be in worse shape than
we
are now!
[23:06] <QTPie> That man scares me
[23:06] <MagicGirl> I'm d/l now...that's probably why the lag
[23:06] <QTPie> hehehehehehe
[23:06] <QTPie> eyap
[23:06] <MagicGirl> dammit!!
[23:07] <asesino > IRK!
[23:07] <asesino > whatever!
[23:07] <asesino > bay
[23:07] *** Parts: jenny (jenny@annex1-decarie-ppp-52.accent.net)

```

FIGURE 10 EXAMPLE OF #FLIRTING GOOD NIGHT

Session Start: Mon Oct 07 03:39:28 1996

```
[22:39] * keerf@ gives Belinda a big hug back
[22:39] * keerf@ runs up to Vixon and gives her big ol hug
[22:40] <keerf@> ?level
[22:40] <Belinda> night all see you tomorrow
[22:40] * Belinda smiles and heads for the door
*** Requested sound [withyou.wav] doesn't exist
* BlacKnite bids Belinda farewell. The force will be with you...
always!
[22:40] <Collossus> Well Guys, I got to go now, Bye bbl
[22:40] <acidburn> Gdnite Belinda!!
[22:40] <keerf@> night Belinda
[22:40] <Belinda> night acid!!!
[22:40] <Vixon> How are ya Keerf??
[22:40] <acidburn> HI jeff!!!!
[22:40] <Belinda> night keerfie
[22:40] *** Parts: Collossus (email@204.227.4.22)
[22:40] <keerf@> GREAT!!!!!!!!!!!!
[22:41] *** Parts: Amanda- (guess@il-33.islandnet.com)
[22:41] <Magui> I do not konw to write right, somobody can help me to
learn it?
[22:41] <keerf@> night Belinda
[22:41] *** Parts: Belinda (Belinda@cnc80489.concentric.net)
```

FIGURE 11 EXAMPLE OF #!WORLDCHAT GOODNIGHT

## Shared Goals

In Hillery's third correlate of a community he stresses the importance of a shared goal that is pursued by all members of a community. That is, members are part of the community because they seek to fulfill this goal and membership in the community is the way of achieving it (Hillery, 1982). With IRC there appeared to be several dimensions to the notion of community goals for the people involved in IRC. On the most basic level is the idea contained within the name behind the acronym of IRC or Internet Relay Chat. Why might this name have been chosen for the technology and could it lead to clues behind real ends sought by users of IRC. Additionally, there are considerations that need to be made regarding the more specific goals that might exist within various channels housed on IRC servers. Some IRC channels have names that hint at or market their goal to potential members. But, is it really the goal of IRC? Some channels might have another goal relating to creating an IRC community.

I will start with the most superficial level of possible goals that might exist for IRC users. The technological name denotes a certain goal built into the technology. Using a dictionary definition of Internet Relay Chat gives one view of the interaction. The first word, Internet, denotes technology with its use of the word meaning worldwide computer network. The second word, Relay, deals with delivery of communication between two or more parties. Most importantly, the third word in the term, Chat, plays on the interaction between people in an informal way. This last word would appear to be the most important of the three. What is chatting versus talking or communicating. I certainly would think that this distinction factored

into the naming of the technology “chat” rather than Internet Relay Communication or talking. This informal word would suggest leisure communication for fun rather than business or work. Thus on one level the goal of IRC is just simply to chat. It is a technology that allows people to chat with other people around the world in a synchronous manner and across time boundaries.

To this same end, looking at the popularity that IRC gained during the Persian Gulf War makes this first goal of chatting becomes clearer. The fact is that soldiers used this technology to communicate with loved ones back at home more regularly than allowed by telephone. However, the popularity was due to the technology’s ability to allow soldiers to communicate with people back home that they already knew. Thus, chatting, using IRC, was not about forming networks of people interaction as a virtual community, but rather, just to communicate with loved ones back home. IRC has evolved since that time with hundreds of channels on servers hosting to thousands of users not involved in a war, but simply chatting. However, simply chatting might be too simple a term for what is occurring within the communications I observed. Thus, a second level of analysis is to look at why IRC users in #flirting and #!WorldChat are participating. What are they chatting about and why do they continue to participate regularly?

This second dimension of a community goal for users of IRC is to look at the communication that has occurred and analyze what each channel offers to users. New users of IRC might observe the various channels of the IRC server such as Quarterdeck and figure that the channel name must have something to do with the interaction occurring within (see figure 12). Herein lies the most obvious collective goal of the various groups of IRC users who reside in

various channels on a regular basis. For example, more specifically named channels such as #MAC OS or #Windows98 would certainly lend weight to this assertion regarding the channel community's goals. By and large the communication that I have experienced in such channels (including the Windows95/98) does in fact revolve around a particular topic, in this case the Microsoft Operating System called Windows98. For example in figure 13 you can see an example of the type of communication that normally occurs within the channel Windows 98. People discuss the finer points, learn about, or teach others about the subject. Whereas the channel #flirting contained interactions centered upon a flirtatious manner (see figure 14). The channel #WorldChat is more difficult to diagnose because of the ambiguous channel name and the smaller number of members, on average. Topics ranged from Monday Night Football to political issues. However, since everyone on this channel tended to know one another, the main topics were about their individual lives, work, and families (see figure 15). In one instance an IRC user did join #WorldChat thinking that the channel name was indicative to the subject matter of the interactions occurring within. This was not the case and members politely let the user know that this was not the goal of the channel (see figure 16). Therefore, while in most cases the channel name is indicative of the type of interactions occurring within the channel, it is not always the case. The goal in the smaller IRC channel is more centered upon personal interactions of individuals who tend to know one another and keep up with one another's lives. This does appear to be a sole goal of this specific channel.

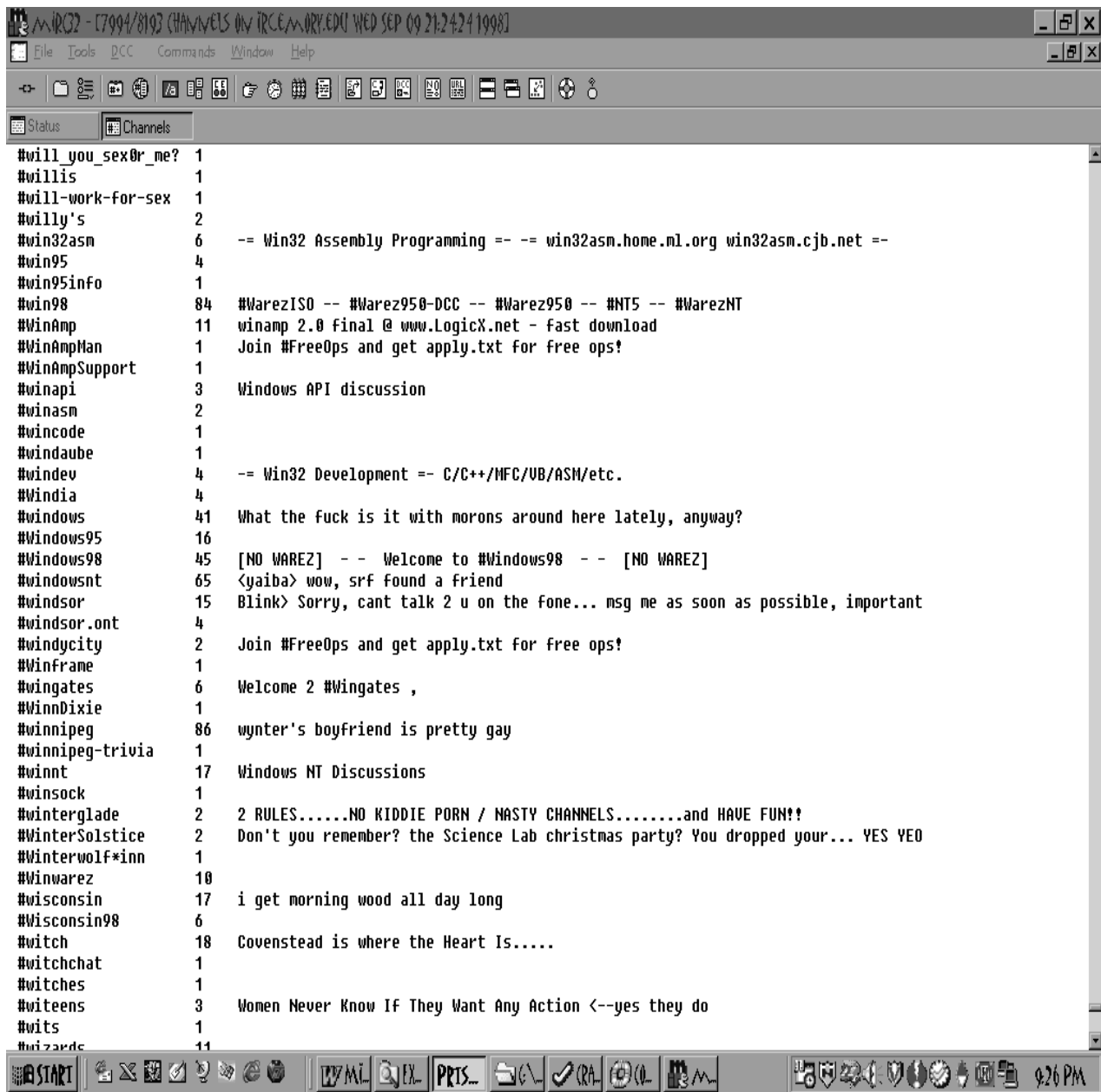


FIGURE 12 CHANNEL NAMES EXAMPLE



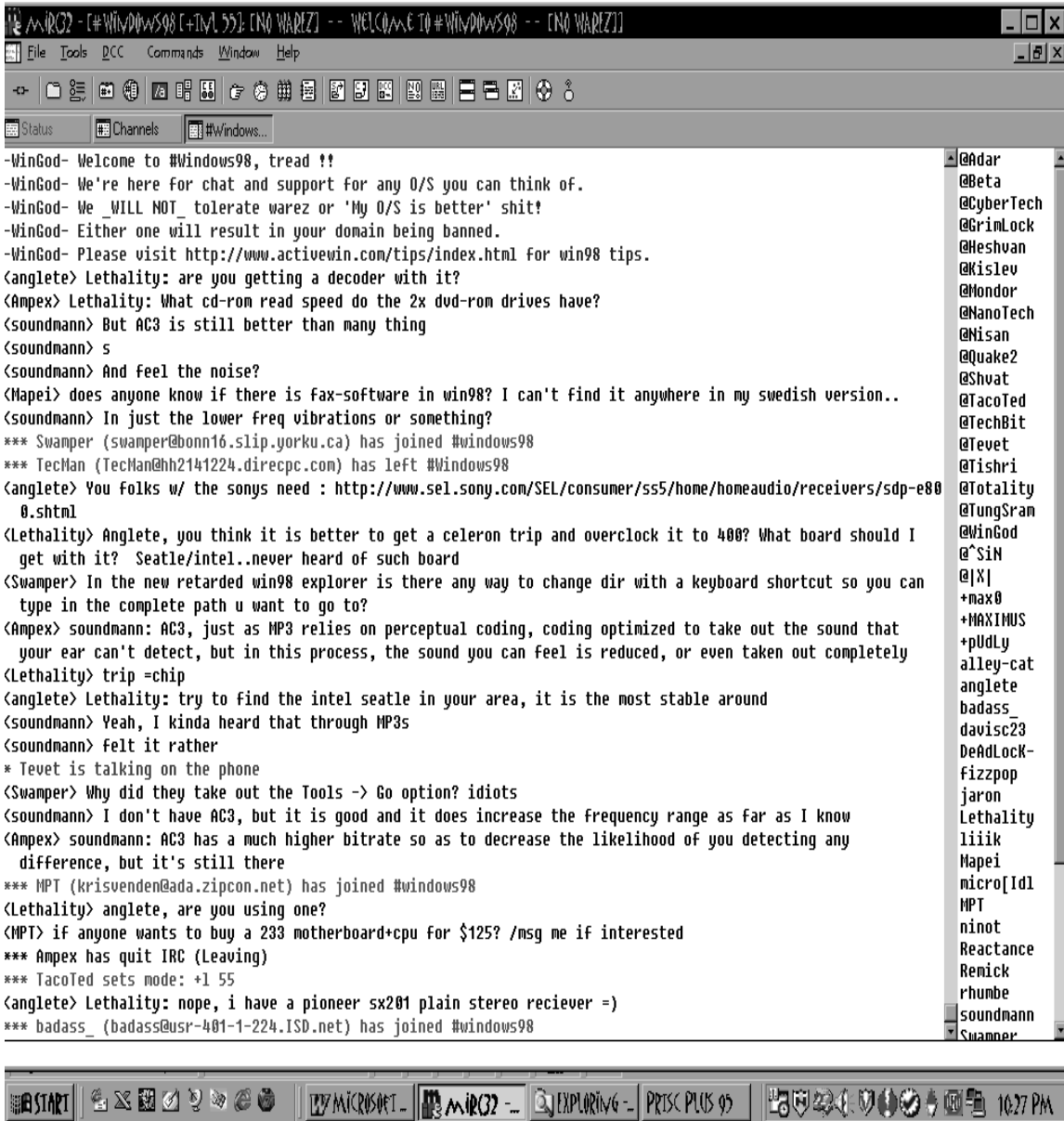


FIGURE 13 CHANNEL NAME AND COMMUNICATION EXAMPLE

Session Start: Wed Aug 28 23:03:35 1996

[23:38] <SmoothOp±> QT don't worry i'll get a better job and I'll be the daddy you can be the Mommy and Dilly can be are son tehe

[23:38] \* Data1000 <<<Badass Op coming online!!!>>>

[23:38] <Blueocean> Salina?? Where

[23:38] \*\*\* Parts: Doug8 (GC10000E@207.51.163.115)

[23:38] \*\*\* Joins: bcwolf2 (wlucas@dial6.pme.CapCollege.BC.CA)

[23:38] <CSC> anyone from TX here?

[23:38] <KuyaSonny> heard of idao

[23:38] <Ballgame1> Da Potato State!!!

[23:38] <RAMDÆN286> don't they have potatoes there?

[23:38] <Erik> what city?

[23:38] <MacGyver> been through there

[23:38] \*\*\* Quits: lemming(c) ((signed off))

[23:38] <QTPiel> Ram how do you know what I look like

[23:38] <QTPiel> hrmmmm.....

[23:38] <Ballgame1> I think I know where it is....hehehehe

[23:39] <QTPiel> hahah SMOOTH

[23:39] <JJMaffia> Hi Pepsi!!!

[23:39] <RAMDÆN286> LOL

[23:39] <QTPiel> NO MARRIAGE for me for a while!!!!

[23:39] <T-MAN> hey robo you've got cpt behind you

[23:39] \* MorbidDeath hAndZ PAM oNe rEd r0se :  
\_@ \_}>-` ,--}----

[23:39] \*\*\* Joins: NYPCadets (user01@199.183.41.70)

[23:39] \*\*\* Joins: bob (1@206.99.104.132)

[23:39] <Blueocean> I grew up there. I live in Tx now

FIGURE 14 EXAMPLE OF CHANNEL NAME WITH LIKE COMMUNICATION

Session Start: Tue Oct 15 04:33:32 1996  
[23:39] <Vixon> How was Work Michael??  
[23:39] <lknvw> happy thanksgiving to all canada!  
[23:39] <FirstAvatar> I spent 8 hours there, and only 2 doing my real job, I helped the whole store with there's, it was fun!!  
[23:39] \*\*\* Joins: putter (putter@207.51.5.143)  
[23:39] <Vixon> HAAAAHA!  
[23:40] <Vixon> Thats you!! You'll be running the place soon!!  
[23:40] <FirstAvatar> The store can't function without me now, I've become a permanant fixture!!  
[23:40] <Crys> thanks lk  
[23:40] <lknvw> so crys, i'm all prepared for the night, got cheese!  
[23:40] <Crys> lol  
[23:40] <Vixon> A permanant fixture to the phone booth outside too!!! Hehehe  
[23:40] <lknvw> whislter intact!  
[23:41] <Crys> good thing, it really helps the crackers  
[23:41] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:41] <Thaiman> job security first  
[23:41] <lknvw> no dew tonight though..."welch's grape" on sale!  
[23:41] <FirstAvatar> Actually the phone is in the Break Room!!  
[23:41] <Crys> now who's going to do the 6 hours of work you didn't get a chance to do, First?  
[23:41] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:41] <Crys> lol lk  
[23:41] <Vixon> really?? hahaha  
[23:42] <Crys> is that your job for tomorrow?  
[23:42] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:42] <Vixon> So I can redial the #?? hehehe! See who randomly answers!!  
Hahaha!  
[23:42] <FirstAvatar> That's wha the helpless non-hussling Courtesy Clerks are for, I've got things to do, and get them done!!  
[23:42] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:42] <lknvw> so no key tonight crys? you "lame duck" kicker?  
[23:42] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:42] <Pongo> brb\_  
[23:42] <lknvw> or are you first runner-up...  
[23:42] <Crys> no, I turned it off tonight  
[23:43] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:43] <Vixon> funny Michael...funny!  
[23:43] \*\*\* Parts: Pongo (Pongo@Cust19.Max9.Seattle.WA.MS.UU.NET)  
[23:43] <Crys> first runner-up  
[23:43] <Crys> hehehe  
[23:43] <Thaiman> I think Crys wants to kick me again  
[23:43] <Thaiman> she seems to like my bum  
[23:43] <lknvw> well i was thinking of a scandal i could conjure up to get you the crown!  
[23:43] <FirstAvatar> So, Bard(c), didn't you have work or something???  
[23:43] <Crys> don't like kicking it though love  
[23:43] <Crys> a scandal?

```

[23:43] <Bard(c)> Nope off today and tomorrow
[23:44] <Crys> this does sound interesting
[23:44] <Crys> hehehe
[23:44] <lknvw> sure remember vanessa williams.....
[23:44] <Thaiman> sounds scandalous
[23:44] <Crys> yeah.....
[23:44] <Thaiman> Ms. America?
[23:44] <Crys> lol Thai
[23:44] <Bard(c)> Gee tryin ta get rid of me already?
[23:44] *** Joins: Snapshot (GC10001D@annex_2_p06.icons.net)
[23:44] <lknvw> ya....her runner up ran her off
[23:45] *** Joins: pim (pim@203.154.110.2)
[23:45] <lknvw> <----thinking jason probably won't be here tonight!
[23:45] *** Parts: pim (pim@203.154.110.2)
[23:45] <Crys> yeah, ok
[23:45] <Crys> hehehe
[23:45] <Crys> no probably not
[23:45] <Crys> hehehe
[23:46] <Snapshot> zx. your web Talk working properly. Mine is not and
I don't
quite know what to d about it!
[23:46] <lknvw> maybe tara spoiled him for others!
[23:46] <FirstAvatar> I was just Curious Bard(c), you know me, always
curious!!
[23:46] <Crys> hehehee
[23:46] <Crys> that could just be
[23:46] <Crys> hehehe
[23:46] <FirstAvatar> So, Vix, pick up your mic yet??
[23:46] *** Parts: putter (putter@207.51.5.143)
[23:46] <lknvw> maybe tonight he'll find love with Barbie!
[23:46] <Vixon> nope! not yet...

```

FIGURE 15 AN EXAMPLE OF CHANNEL NAME WITH UNLIKE COMMUNICATION

Session Start: Mon Oct 07 03:39:28 1996

[22:47] <Magui> Does somebody know where can I learn grammar?  
[22:47] <SilkϠ> school  
[22:47] People watching debates (and now Perot's personalized debate)????  
[22:48] <keerf(c)> lol Silk  
[22:48] <BlacKnite> Why not try the MLA handbook?  
[22:48] <acidburn> Bye all !!!!!  
[22:48] <Magui> What does MLA handbook mean?  
\*\*\* Requested sound [withyou.wav] doesn't exist  
\* BlacKnite bids acidburn farewell. The force will be with you... always!  
[22:49] <BlacKnite> It's THE source for grammatical usage.  
[22:49] \*\*\* Parts: kstevens (kstevens@an16lan.tir.com)  
[22:49] \*\*\* Quits: acidburn ((signed off))  
[22:49] \*\*\* Joins: Screech (4getit@slip1.mergetel.com)  
[22:49] \* BlacKnite greets Screech with a firm handshake and a friendly "Hello!"  
[22:49] <BlacKnite> WB!  
[22:49] <Msmichelle> screech!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
[22:49] \*\*\* Joins: acidburn (acidburn@grolen.com@205.247.203.67)  
[22:50] <Magui> is there a channel in which people can learn to write right?  
[22:50] <Screech> Michelle!  
[22:50] \* keerf(c) ;;;;!!!!;!!!;!!!;!!!;!!!\$ Screech \$ ;;;;!!!!;!!!;!!!;!!!  
[22:50] <BlacKnite> Magui: I doubt it.  
[22:50] <Msmichelle> hows screech???  
[22:50] \*\*\* Joins: Tom (GC10001D@207.96.21.169)  
[22:50] <SilkϠ> Hiya Tom  
[22:50] <SilkϠ> Hello acidbur  
[22:50] \*\*\* Quits: acidburn ((signed off))  
[22:50] <Tom> hi silk  
[20:50] Perhaps MLA has a webpage, try a search on the Web Magui  
[22:50] <Magui> Thanks again Blacknite  
[22:51] <BlacKnite> No problem.  
[22:51] <Jeff> Someone talk to me please!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!1  
[22:51] <Tom> Where is everyone from.....PA here  
[22:51] <BlacKnite> Las Vegas.  
[22:51] VA here!  
[22:51] <Magui> I though this channel was to help people to learn grammar..  
\*\*\* Requested sound [trex3.wav] doesn't exist  
[SilkϠ SOUND]  
[22:52] <Tom> Where in VA  
[22:52] <BlacKnite> Nope.  
[22:52] \*\*\* Joins: MidKnight ([ShyGuy@ppp-06a08.mtl.total.net](mailto:ShyGuy@ppp-06a08.mtl.total.net))  
[22:52] <Magui> Bye Blacknite you were very kind...  
[22:53] <BlacKnite> My pleasure.

FIGURE 16 AN EXAMPLE OF CHANNEL NAME LEADING TO MISCOMMUNICATION

## CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

The initial rationale for this project was to examine why some high publicity people have been proclaiming the Internet medium, in general, to be a community. Other, more scholarly researchers have dealt with more specific parts of the Internet, such as USENET, as functioning as a community. Yet, none of these proclamations or research projects has specifically dealt with the conceptual community. Additionally, no research has been conducted with this IRC network medium of the Internet that most resembles a general and physical interactional form of community. IRC media space is the focus of this project, specifically the media objects of #!WorldChat and #Flirting. My efforts were not to just pronounce or denounce IRC media space as a community. But rather, it was to examine how conceptually this medium might fit into the scholarly definition of community. Finally, I hoped to shed light on how the interactions on these two IRC channels have come to function in a way that has allowed some to consider it community. In my analysis I examined one of the biggest obstacles of community scholars, the jump from geographic proximity to a type of cyberspace proximity. This requires a major rethinking of this aspect of general community. Yet, with the evidence provided here in the two IRC channels of my observation, I argue that the connection between the two is obvious. The structure of the software being used coupled with the synchronous nature of the interactions helps lend weight to my argument. In the next decade similar technologies will grow with the introduction of a speedier Internet “two.” This new form of the Internet will be exponentially faster than the current Internet, bandwidth wise, and there will inevitably be a plethora of new

similar social spaces being utilized in the 21st Century. It is likely that the live video and virtual reality of cyber-proximity will be even more like the geographical proximity that is being dealt with here. Therefore, I feel this is a logical stretch of Hillery's correlate, and one that community scholars will eventually have to deal with. The second and third correlates of Hillery's conceptualization, regular interactions and shared goals, are more closely bound to their original concepts. Thus, I argue that regular interactions do occur while the goals of each channel may vary and are sometimes based upon the channel name.

In the literature review I detailed the many different definitions that existed for the concept of community. It is a concept that scholars have dealt with for centuries. In an effort to inject some consensus to the history of its various conceptualizations, I introduced George Hillery's correlates of community. These correlates brought together the many definitions of community into a more general form. From the data collected in this project it becomes clear that the Media Instances of the two particular IRC channels that I observed do fit into a general conceptualization of community and detailed by Hillery with some allowances made for the new technology. This may not typify the type of community that Hillery would study, but I argue that the evidence does show it to function in a similar way with related attributes. Therefore, it may be considered a very different type of a community, but a community, none the less.

## **Implications**

Although this project is generalizability only to the two IRC network channels analyzed by my research, there are insights gained that might shed light upon other forms of Internet based communication. The idea of creating a new form of community within a network of computer wiring should be intriguing both to scholars and industry. The beginnings of the distance learning phenomena is one way in which academic and business institutions are harnessing a related form of this technology to overcome the difficulties of geographical proximity and limited funds and personnel. The potential for savings and efficiency will increase its use dramatically. The increase in technology's ability to grapple with the geographical proximity issue along with the upcoming Internet Two will lead to an even greater use of distance learning and other forms cost efficient communications. What is at issue is the quality of these forms of high tech communication. Specifically, is the education that the students receive via the technological distance learning method similar to that gained in the classroom? To answer this question I refer back to the distinction made between physical and virtual types of community studied here. I would argue that the community observed during this project certainly differs from the type of community that originates in an actual physical environment. However, the quality of interactions does appear genuine for those who become invested in it. The same could be true for this technology used for other types of communication, such as distance learning. Those who go into it not expecting much are likely not to put much into it and therefore not get much out of it. It can be looked upon as a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. The IRC networks are filled with curious travelers who come to visit and see what the technology offers. They do not



get involved, do not communicate, and do not frequent the same channels and therefore do not get to know the “regulars.” It would be expected that they do not see community happening here.

I think technological communications that involve a type of online or virtual community will always differ from actual geo-physical interactions. That is not to say that the quality of either is better or worse, just different. For instance, some visual queues might be lost to technological interactions now using IRC’s textual communication system because it does not include video or voice. However, down the road, using virtual reality, there might be cues lost to physical interactions because they cannot include a cue available only through virtual reality, like projections of moods through virtual environments or thoughts manifested in visual images projected to one another. For now it does not appear as if the technology is going away any time soon and society, in general, will slowly become more accustomed to the technology. Look for instance at how many people are now using E-mail rather than “snail” mail. This form of cyber communication, or virtual mail, is quickly becoming common place in American Society. Remember that one scholar also spoke of letter writing communities at one point in time. Perhaps that was related to the technological innovations in mail delivery at the time.

The technology detailed in this study, however, is only a starting point for synchronous communication without geographical limitations. Virtual reality and video conferencing that experience severe limitations due to bandwidth issues of the current Internet technology are slowly becoming less of a problem as computer modem manufacturers develop ever faster modems. Also, we are beginning to see cable modems, using existing cable television co-axial, enter the arena with their promise of exponential bandwidth increases. Thus, with technology on

the horizon that will increase the ability for people to utilize technology detailed in this project, as well as, even better forms of synchronous CMC the question remains as to whether people will utilize it. From the evidence presented here it appears that people will indeed use it. IRC users have harnessed this technology on their own and created networks of friendships that eventually developed into a new form of community. Additionally, one of the two channels, #!WorldChat has not only created a community, but pushes the conceptualization further with their attempt to move members to another server due to the potential shut down of their current server. This speaks to the level of investment experienced in this online community. It also shows that these new communities could be very tightly invested as well as resourceful.

Since the beginning of this research project I have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of research being done on the Internet and its various mediums. I detailed the potentials of doing such research because of the inherent sociological tracks that a computer user will leave will leave. This type of research is of great importance to community scholars because of the new types of interactive mediums available for easy study. Additionally, one of the ramifications of this research for scholars is that it complicates an already difficult concept. Much insight into how and when people will communicate, where they will communicate, and why they will communicate is available for research on the Internet. Given the importance of this phenomenon upon the study of community, it would seem that IRC space and other new forms of technological social space should become a major focus for community scholars.

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