SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, IDEOLOGY, & AYN RAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Department of Sociology
Abstract

of

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, IDEOLOGY, & AYN RAND IN THE 21st CENTURY

by

Paul Mark Robertson

This thesis attempted to explore the interaction between Ayn Rand and her theory of Objectivism in relation to social movement organizations in the online environment. The data for the research included comment sections from two online publications; 100 from The New York Times and 43 from Forbes. Seven pre-identified research outcomes were considered and four main themes emerged from the data: debate, SMO linkage, cultural influence, and the Randian crossover. The goal was to determine how individual actors relate Objectivism to specific social movement organizations and also to explore more specifically how society perceives Rand’s work. The data revealed only weak associations between Rand and social movements in the online arena and showed a lack of commitment for individuals in their implementation of her ideas within society.

________________________, Committee Chair
Kevin Wehr

________________________
Date
DEDICATION

A special thanks to my wife, Sheree’ for all those mornings she spent at Starbucks listening to me talk about sociological theory. I couldn’t have done it without you.
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INTRODUCTION

With the completion of *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957, Ayn Rand released her fourth and final novel, which gave life and structure to her philosophy of Objectivism. The book both delighted and enraged the public and hence began the discussion of her beliefs in mainstream society. In his New York Times review, Granville Hicks stated that, “Its spirit, regardless of the specific doctrines it preaches, is calculated to appeal to those who feel that life could and should have more meaning than they have experienced. Yet, loudly as Miss Rand proclaims her love of life, it seems clear that the book is written out of hate” (Hicks 1957:266). It is no surprise that not everyone agreed with his opinion; in the coming months, people began to express their own opinions via letters to the editor of the New York Times. Dorothy Callman said, “The book was not written out of hate for life but out of a deep understanding for the consequences manifested by the distortedly placed values so commonly found in our present society” (1957:283). Barbara Brandon suggested, “the fact Mr. Hicks did not choose to consider the philosophical ideas in *Atlas Shrugged*, is a confession of philosophical inadequacy” (1957:283). From her earliest works, Rand’s philosophies have been debated within our culture and this continues today; albeit in a different form than in 1957.

Ayn Rand’s importance in popular culture has been debatable, yet her ideas are still a topic of discussion within society. Some social movements have taken Rand’s ideas and adopted them into their own philosophies or possibly used them as a guidebook for their movements. I believe the relevance of Ayn Rand and her philosophy can be thought
of as a type of influencer of social movements within society that seek to persuade people
to adopt their beliefs and in turn, take action on those beliefs. Most directly, the Ayn
Rand Institute, “ARI seeks to spearhead a cultural renaissance that will reverse the anti-
reason, anti-individualism, anti-freedom, anti-capitalist trends in today’s culture” (Ayn
Rand Institute 2013).

Several current day politicians have claimed to have been influenced by Rand and
her ideas. Ron Paul, Rand Paul, Paul Ryan, and Ron Johnson have all stated publicly that
her ideas have had an impact on their lives and careers as politicians. Even Ronald
Reagan admitted to being an admirer of Rand. Although Rand herself did not claim to be
affiliated with any specific political party, Objectivism has tended to lean more towards
the libertarian and conservative mindset. She always publicly rejected any affiliation with
conservatives and libertarians alike; mainly on the grounds of her religious beliefs, as
Rand was an atheist. Regardless, some of her ideas and philosophy has had a major
impact on libertarian and conservative policies. One of the more recent extensions of the
conservative party that Rand had provided major inspiration for is the Tea Party
movement. Created in September of 2004, TeaParty.org gathered followers and
momentum by organizing members, rallies, and finances to promote their message.
Located on their website you can find information on how to start your own group, host a
Tea Party event, and donate to the movement. Of their fifteen non-negotiable core beliefs,
some of them seem to have been influenced by the Objectivist philosophy; such as:
government must be downsized, bailout and stimulus plans are illegal, and intrusive
government must be stopped. Just as with conservatives and libertarians, I do not think
Rand would agree with their religious beliefs either, yet her individualistic ideals have been well represented within the foundational ideology of the Tea Party movement. Although these ideas are classic free market capitalist ideas, the common theme is individualism; Rand was highly passionate about the individual being more important than the group.

The internet is quickly becoming the preferred source of the media, as well as the public, to express their thoughts and ideas. Instead of writing a letter to the editor of the newspaper, today one simply clicks on “post a comment” and begins to pour out his or her outrage and/or agreement on the topic at hand. In my research, I will analyze these comments in reference to two articles about Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism; using content analysis, this research will explore how people have been discussing her ideas in our current economic and political climate. My primary question is; how is Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism, as one who believed that the individual is more important than society, perceived by current society? Further questions will be addressed, such as; how do these discussions of Rand’s philosophy help or hinder her ideas in regards to how social movements and individuals may interpret and implement her ideas in their strategies and action plans? How does religion factor into the debate? How have her followers presented their arguments to opponents? What master frames have been uncovered in these discussions? In a general sense, master frames work at the most basic level of analysis to sum up ideas and concepts in order to catch the attention of social movement participants (Oliver and Johnston 2000). How were Rand’s ideas framed to appeal to existing social movements and individuals? Do these
discussions have an impact on the collective action of the movements and political parties? By studying the comments, I hope to uncover the underlying beliefs and arguments that people have in relation to how society views an individualist and individualistic ideas. From a sociological standpoint, it could be interesting to find out how society views a person who does not believe in society. In finding out what people believe, I may discover valuable concepts to answer my questions. Content has been examined via social movement theory, new social movement theory, and conceptual tools from social movement framing theory to better understand how people have related to these ideas. In addition, the distinction between collectivism and individualism has been considered in regards to the findings and Rand’s influence, or lack of, in society.

Because the World Wide Web has become one of the major forms of communication in the last two decades, it was sociologically important to study, the effect technology has on how people may interact within the framework of social movements and different ideologies in the online arena. As it is now possible to communicate ideas and theories to the world with lightning fast speed and efficiency, a better understanding of how people interact to social ideas of change could be relevant to anyone seeking to better communicate and distribute their own beliefs. In addition, the body of literature on social movement organizations, or SMOs, does not include Rand; rightfully so, as she is only loosely linked by her influential ideas to social movements. Yet, as Marx had an impact on many social movements of his time as well as current movements, I believe Rand and her ideas to be connected to social movements as well. As Marx was considered the face
of communism, could Rand be seen as the face of capitalism? Although my goal was not to support or oppose the ARI as an organization, I believe this study could uncover some important information for the ARI and followers of the Objectivist theory. I do not completely agree nor oppose their ideas and seek only to understand better the social implications of Rand’s philosophy. Sociologically, the significance was twofold; first, how people perceive ideological beliefs (such as individualism and collectivism) that could have an impact on interactions and policy within our society and second, how they approach these discussions and ideas in online discussion boards. I believe it was important to understand the role the internet has played in regards to SMOs and how ideological social movements were framed in the online arena. I intended to contribute to the social movement literature and help advance findings regarding the topic of social movement framing theory by analyzing these discussions on the internet. It could potentially play a part in determining the direction of the United States as well as the global economy in the coming decades. As Rand’s philosophy has been around for approximately 80 years, this research could be beneficial to find out where society stands today on the ongoing collectivism vs. individualism debate.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The Tea Party movement claimed its actual founders as the brave patriots who protested the British in 1773, better known today as the Boston Tea Party. In recent decades, sociologists have began to study the various ways in which these movements were organized, talked about, and perceived by followers as well as opponents. It was important to note that, in the pursuit of this knowledge one could uncover a great deal of information that could be used to influence what happens in a society via organizational strategies and social or political influence. Generally, the goal of a social movement has been directed toward public awareness of a certain issue; to the end of mobilizing participants to take action and produce change. To reach this goal, many factors are considered by the organization or movement. They must decide what their own views and beliefs are, the goals they wish to reach, how to get their message out, and how followers as well as people in opposition to their beliefs may discuss them. Ayn Rand used her fiction novels as a way to get her ideas and philosophy on capitalism and individualism out to the public. Her ideas were embedded in a very long running debate between individualism and collectivism as competing philosophies. There are many contending arguments all resulting in different opinions, which have been taken into consideration for this research. Studies have been done, although not on Rand, about these various topics and they have uncovered many different theories. To start, the Objectivist
philosophy has its own unique blend of values to contend with which were shaped from the life of Ayn Rand.

Background & Theories of Ayn Rand

On February 2, 1905, Alisa Rosenbaum (who later changed her name to Ayn Rand on her trip to America) was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. When she was only six years old, she taught herself to read and later became an admirer of the writings of Victor Hugo. In 1917, as the Bolshevik Revolution raged, her family moved to Crimea where she was first introduced to American history and completed high school. At the end of the Revolution, the Communist party confiscated her father’s pharmacy; which lead to hard times for Rand and her family. She later studied philosophy and history at the University of Petrograd and went on to the State Institute for Cinema Arts in 1924 where she studied screenwriting. In 1926, she made her way to Hollywood where she found a job as a script reader and met her soon to be husband. After several years of odd jobs, she completed and published her first novel, *We the Living*, in 1936. Her first major novel, *The Fountainhead*, was rejected by twelve publishers before it was finally accepted and published in 1943 and within a few years Rand became a well know supporter of individualism. By 1957, she had completed her most impactful work, *Atlas Shrugged*, which integrated her views on metaphysics, epistemology, economics, politics, and ethics; the Objectivist theory had finally taken shape in her final work of fiction. From 1962 to 1976, she published the Objectivist Newsletter and lectured on her philosophy of Objectivism until she died in March of 1982. A few years later in 1985, the Ayn Rand
Institute was created to carry on her ideas and philosophy. Not organized specifically as a social movement in the technical sense, yet the institute is instrumental in spreading the ideas of Objectivism started by Rand. (Ayn Rand Institute 2012 http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_ari).

Ayn Rand (1964) believed that the foundation of capitalism was the principle of individual rights. She defined individual rights as, “the means of subordinating society to moral law”, and without these rights, man can have no individual freedoms (Rand 1963:108). The concept of individual rights was very important to understand. Many political systems that have been used throughout history have been organized based on the “common good” of the people and have purposely focused on the good of the majority. Rand explains, “under all such systems, morality was a code applicable to the individual, but not to society. Society was placed outside the moral law, as its embodiment or source or exclusive interpreter-and the inculcation of self-sacrificial devotion to social duty was regarded as the main purpose of ethics in man’s earthly existence” (1963:108). The individual was subordinated to moral law, and as such must follow the rules set up by the socially constructed systems of society. However, the institutions that were setting these moral laws are somehow exempt from participation. The very laws that the individual was forced to comply with somehow do not apply to the institutions. This idea attempts to take away the individual rights of man and therefore makes the rights of society omniscient. Breaking this down further; “there is no such entity as “society,” since society is only a number of individual men”, the individual is
the only entity with rights and as such, these individual rights must be protected by
society. In other words, society is made up of individuals, therefore making the individual
the most important part of the system (Rand 1963:109).

When speaking about the principle of individual rights, Rand (1964) was referring
to rights as the moral principle of a man’s freedom, which was defined and sanctioned
through action within a social context. She (1964) goes further to say that the only
fundamental right a man possessed was the right to his own life. Man must have the right
to his own life, otherwise nothing else is possible. We must be free to take action on the
principles that we believe in order to produce the results that we seek without the
physical interference of other men. Without this right, there are no others. This view did
not take into account the welfare of others or the common good of the majority. Man’s
right to his own life is not subordinated to anything or anyone. However, these rights do
have their limits. We must be careful to observe the rights of other individuals. If our
goals and pursuits infringe on another man’s rights, they cease to be individualistic and
begin to take another’s right to life. The governments’ only task is to ensure that this does
not happen. If the rights of the individual are violated then there are not rights at all.

What is the purpose of the individual and how does one achieve his or her
purpose? Rand (1959) believed the highest moral purpose man could achieve was his
own happiness. Man’s life was the standard of value and the purpose of it was to
contribute to this standard. This could be achieved using the concepts of value and virtue.
Value was that which we seek to gain and virtue was the way that we do it. The
objectivist theory has three main values with corresponding virtues: reason and
rationality, purpose and productiveness, and self-esteem with pride. Together, this is how one can realize the ultimate value of one’s own life.

Objective reason was the foundation of man and the act of thinking was how this was accomplished. Rationality was the source of all other virtues and the basic virtue of man; “the virtue of rationality means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge, one’s only judge of values and one’s only guide to action” (Rand 1961:28). Basically, this was the act of rational thought, which an individual must use in order to value his/her own life. The alternative of rational thought was to not think. To not think was to not value one’s own life and to turn it over to anyone who does wish to use rational thought. “Productive work is the central purpose of a rational man’s life, the central value that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all his other values” (Rand 1961:27). Through productive work, man was able to sustain life and get the resources to live in however manner he sees fit. It was productive work that enabled us to have control over our circumstances to some degree and not be controlled by them. Productive work with a purpose allowed us to put our rational mind to work in order to dream and achieve what we think is possible. Productive work was a major driving force in most people’s life because we must have some way to acquire resources. Usually, work was the means to this end and pride was the result of productive work. Rand (1961) describes the virtue of pride as a “moral ambitiousness” meaning that one must earn the right to hold his/herself as the highest value by achieving one’s own moral perfection. Accomplishing a goal or achieving a dream lended itself to the virtue of pride, which in
turn, lead to the value of self-esteem. In her view, the fastest way to self-esteem was through accomplishment.

Now, putting these three together; “the basic social principle of the Objectivist ethics is that just as life is an end in itself, so every living human being is an end in himself, not the means to the ends or the welfare of others-and, therefore, that man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself” (Rand 1961:30). Essentially, this statement sums up what Rand believed in that, the individual was the highest priority in one’s own life and the freedom to pursue one’s own happiness was the purpose of life. There is no such entity as “society” to which the individual must subordinate one’s self. With the protection of individual rights (freedom) and using rational thought, productive work, and self-esteem we can achieve happiness.

How do we, as a group of people living together, integrate these ideas into a set of rules for everyone to agree on and live by? Rand defined a social system as “a set of moral-political-economic principles embodied in a society’s laws, institutions, and government, which determine the relationships, the terms of association, among the men living in a given geographical area” (1965:9). She believed there were two fundamental questions that determined the nature of a social system; did the system recognize individual rights-and did the system ban physical force from human relationships? The freedom of man was the key component of both questions. In her opinion, capitalism was the only social system that could answer yes to these two questions. As a social system, capitalism was based on the recognition of property rights wherein property was privately owned by the individual (Rand 1965). In theory, a capitalistic society involved the
concept of voluntary relationships. The individual does not have the capacity to force people to do what they want them to do. Rational thought and reason were the tools with which one dealt with another in a capitalistic society. It was up to each individual to make a voluntary choice in any situation to the mutual benefit of all involved. It was this freedom of choice, that should be protected by the government, that would lead to the free exchange of resources and ideas. The philosophy of capitalism was what must be accepted in order for these voluntary exchanges to take place.

Rand stated, “corresponding to the four branches of philosophy, the four keystones of capitalism are: metaphysically, the requirements of man’s nature and survival—epistemologically, reason—ethically, individual rights— politically, freedom” (1965:11). These were the fundamental principles to understanding capitalism and its philosophy in her view. Again, the common good, in her opinion, was an indefinable concept and could only be equated down to the individual person or unit. The good of the majority could only be achieved against the good of the minority or individual, therefore the common good could only be defined as the good of the individual person. The common good could be achieved through this idea because it was not at the expense of any other individual.

The nature of good could be viewed intrinsically, subjectively, or objectively. (Rand 1965) The intrinsic theory said that certain things were inherently good, actions regardless of context or results are good. The good was good, in and of itself. The subjectivist theory stated that good was essentially up to what someone thought was good. There was no basis in facts or reality and no way to really know. Man socially
constructed good. The objectivist theory disagreed with both and stated that the concept of good must be discovered, not invented, by man and it was only an aspect of reality in relation to man (Rand 1965). Rand believed that the objectivist theory was crucial to any social system and that capitalism was the only system based on this theory of values. The main reason this was important was that the objectivist theory was the only philosophical theory that was incompatible with rule by force, it was this incompatibility that was a key component in a capitalistic society. If good was objective, there was no reason that it must be forced upon any rational individual. This would make the idea of rule by force undeniably irrelevant. This idea was of major importance in that it provided the foundation for freedom and the individual rights of man. This concept was crucial in the free market.

In regards to the free market, there was one main question in which context everything was considered; relative to the free market, value only matters in terms of value to whom (Rand 1965)? It was within the establishment of this question of value and how to calculate it that must be clarified. The market value of a product or an idea was determined in two ways; there was the philosophical objective value and the socially objective value (Rand 1965). Philosophical value was understood as, a sort of actual value that something possesses. Take for example; the idea that an airplane was more valuable than a bicycle. Objectively, an airplane was a much better way to travel across the country than a bicycle, yet the question of better to whom still lingers. It was in this that the idea of social value takes root. In the free market, social value usually takes precedence over philosophical value in that it was the “sum of the individual judgments
of all the men involved in trade at a given time” (Rand 1965:17). Social value takes account of context and value to whom. Said differently, social value was what a person was willing to pay for an idea or product, not what it was objectively worth. Most recently, the value of real estate has suffered the wrath of social value. A certain property may be philosophically valued at a certain price, but in recent current context, the price one will receive from it was the social value of the immediate free market. This does not necessarily mean that value is subjective; value is taken only in context of one’s own life and under one’s own rational choices at any given point. This idea of social value brings to light the idea of competition within the free market. Within this market, men are not ruled by dominating ideas of the power elite or of society; but only by the limitations of their own rational mind and innovative ideas to which they either aspire to or choose to submerge within their own being. Men are not leveled to the ordinary, but have the choice to be extraordinary. Rewards were commensurate with the social value one wished to provide or create by receiving the voluntary consent of others in society who wished to trade via supply and demand.

Rand (1965) believed that there was a moral component to the law of supply and demand, in a free market the single principle of the economic value of a man’s work was determined only by the voluntary consent of those who are willing to trade their work or product for his. In order to trade with others, we must be directed by our own rational self-interest; this cannot involve or presuppose the expected sacrifice of others rights for our own benefits. To this end, the major criterion of trade was to be the free, voluntary, and uncoerced value judgments of the traders. To achieve this, one must act selfishly, or
in one’s own interests; “the Objectivist ethics is a morality of rational self-interest—or of rational selfishness” (Rand 1964:xi). To exist, we must work, or in some way, get resources to support the material aspects of life. Hence, the evidence of rational thought was obtaining what was best for the individual; this could be achieved through the voluntary trade between rational individuals to the end of each person’s own best interest. It was not in one’s own best interest to trade unfairly with others; this was a short sighted non-rational thought, long-range planning was the mark of a better mind, the man with the better mind was the one who rules the free market (Rand 1965). The invisible force guiding the free market was not only the competition, but also the cooperation between traders which, in essence, was achieved only by the degree one engaged his/her mind and rational thoughts; this was the benchmark which determined the degree to which each individual rose in regards to social value and competition.

Being a proponent of capitalism, Rand was firm in her belief that capitalism has been the linchpin for the improvement of the condition of man’s existence on earth; this she believed to be a historical fact. Progress could only be achieved out of individual surplus, i.e. “from the work, the energy, the creative over-abundance of those men whose ability produces more than their personal consumption requires, those who are intellectually and financially able to seek the new, to improve on the known, to move forward” (Rand 1965:21). In her opinion, there was no such concept as social surplus, but only individual surplus. Progress was achieved out of purposeful sacrifice, not some involuntary sacrifice to society; but a perfectly planned orchestration of living and working in the present to enjoy the current moment and achievement towards one’s
immediate future. To attain one’s own happiness in the present moment through the use of rational thought and work was the main goal. Capitalism was not a static system and therefore cannot be handled as such through the implementation of social structures and institutions created to secure the comforts of society. It was man’s right to pursue his own good that represents the moral justification of capitalism.

Wealth was not to be redistributed, but to be created. Man could only move forward when new ideas and resources were created, not when they were forcibly taken from one person and redistributed to another; “the view that wealth is the result of some undifferentiated, collective process, that we all did something and it’s impossible to tell who did what, therefore some sort of equalitarian “distribution” is necessary—might have been appropriate in a primordial jungle with a savage horde moving boulders by crude physical labor” (Rand 1965:23). There was a difference between the ability of men who used their intelligent focused competent minds and those who choose not to; this was evident in humanity, the best way to handle these differences is still the subject of much debate. Rand believed that the capitalistic system was misunderstood because it was never properly given a philosophical base. The Objectivist epistemology was her answer to the critics of capitalism and, given this base philosophy, what she hoped to be the future, not the past, of America. Although Rand and the theory of Objectivism was rooted in the individual, there are others who believe differently.
Social Movement Theory

What exactly is a social movement? In an attempt to define social movements, McAdam and Snow compiled the most crucial elements into this definition, “a loose collectivity acting with some degree of organization, temporal continuity, and reliance on noninstitutional forms of action to promote or resist change in the group, society, or world order of which it is a part” (2010:1). In other words, a social movement is a group of people, in some form, organized in some way for the purpose of changing something within a group or society. Also, this movement must sustain itself over a period of time in a fashion that makes it not just a onetime gathering of people or discussion but a continuing and ongoing discourse for the purpose of social change. Going further; Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) have suggested that there are various actors related to social movements that fall into three basic categories: protagonists, antagonists, and bystanders. The protagonists were all members or supporters of the group who represent the same basic principles of the organization. This could include organizers and participants of group events and other people that share the same values and objectives and may also identify themselves as part of the group. On the other side, the antagonists are anyone standing in opposition to the protagonists’ goals and objectives. Last, we have the bystanders who represent members in the community who do not take either side. The bystanders can be influenced by the SMO’s actions in either a good way or a bad way. At a very fundamental level, a social movement is collective or joint action with a common
purposes that includes people who are for, against, and neutral to the purpose of the movements objectives.

Of utmost importance was the issue of why anyone would join in a social movement in the first place. As it relates to the emergence of social movements, normally they coincide with some form of societal breakdown or disruption that people have experienced in their lives. As Cress, Downey, Jones, and Snow put it; “The traditional orienting premise of breakdown theory holds that all varieties of collective action-including riots, civil disorder, social movements, and revolution-are by-products of rapid social change and disintegration” (1998:15). They argued that the main link in the chain from breakdown to movement emergence was due to the disruption of the “quotidian” which derives from Latin and means routine daily life. As long as the actions we routinely take for granted in our everyday life, both behaviorally and cognitively, are not disrupted, we tend to be happy and go about our business. When are normal routines do not go as planned, we tend to get upset. Cress et al. (1998) have identified four types of events that they believed can lead to quotidian disruption and social movement emergence: any accidents or disasters within the community, actual or threatened intrusion into culturally defined zones of privacy and control, alteration of taken-for-granted subsistence routines due to a disparity in available resources and resource demand, and any changes in major structures of social control. For instance, the BP oil spill in the Gulf created a major quotidian disruption within the community; it also lead to a disparity in available resources for many of the residence in the area. SMO’s such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and MoveOn.org sprang into action to help participate
in the Hands Across the Sand movement in protest. It is very easy to remain a bystander until the everyday routine of the individual is disrupted. Once this occurs, it seems it is much easier for the individual to be involved in a more collective and organized form.

Although in the past, social movement theory has appeared to be based largely on structuralist arguments and views, a slow migration has begun in regards to this type of thinking. Can we seek change and create it at will? Some new developments in social movement theory over the years points to a poststructuralist consensus in theory and possibly the dawning of a new era.

New Social Movement Theory

In the study of social movement’s post-1960, many new avenues were explored; one of which included better ways to explain movement participation via the ways in which participants were embedded in their respective communities and networks and not necessarily socially alienated from those communities (Flacks 2004). It seemed that the cultural aspects and implications of movements had been taken into consideration in these new explanations and theories. New movements, such as the feminist and environmentalist movements were looked at with a different perspective and new focus. “New social movements can’t readily be understood by trying to examine their ‘strategies,’ since what they are about is the fostering of new consciousness and identity rather than objectifiable goods” (Flacks, 2004:137). In a sense, this was no longer the traditional examination of how movements worked and what they did, but more about how they thought and what some of their values may be in order to make a change in
society. I believe this new consciousness started laying the foundations for the poststructuralist consensus in theory and the new emphasis on constructionism.

Regarding constructionism, Charles Kurzman stated the following; “It announces the view that people construct their own history-not under circumstances chosen by themselves, certainly, but under circumstances they have the power to change. Opportunity, ultimately, is what people make of it” (2004:117). In a way, this new view of social movements and participation lent itself to the idea of individual beliefs and values coming into play. It took some of the power back from the traditional structures of society and began to shift the power to the individual. As Kurzman points out, many times our circumstances are chosen for us, yet the individual can play a part in shaping their past and present, as well as their own future. He went on to say that constructionism does not change the structures within society but the epistemological foundations of the patterns at work (2004:118). Essentially, he focused more on the individual perceptions people have of the political environment and the opportunities that may lie within for change, as well as their own social networks and cultural norms they may have an impact on. In this way, I believe followers of the Objectivist philosophy may have began to play a more prominent role within society and social movements as they realize they are able to construct their futures and possibly influence cultural change to the extent of their social connections and networks.
Social Movement Framing Theory

How ideas and beliefs are perceived is in large part determined by how people look at them. In order to change the way the public perceives an issue or social injustice, social movement organizations must change the way people think about it, this is referred to as framing. Once altered, these social frames are then carefully scrutinized by collective actors representing the movement as well as the existing counter movements (Noakes 2000). By examining the construction and promotion of official frames created by the FBI in regards to the communist threat in Hollywood during the 1940’s, Noakes provides some valuable insights into the official framing process. Master frames were used by the FBI in order to construct an anti-communist frame for them to promote. Briefs written by J. Edgar Hoover and guidelines from a report written by Ayn Rand for the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideal (MPAPAI) were used to construct a countersubversive anti-communist frame. The FBI identified two major themes for determining communist propaganda in films. Surprisingly, It’s a Wonderful Life made the list for the negative portrayal of bankers as “scrooge” like and uncaring. Other themes identified by the FBI’s countersubversive frames were: the belittling of the American form of Government, the depiction of the Catholic religion as “revoltingly cruel”, and attempts to discredit the American military (Noakes 2000). In the end, the FBI did not make major attempts to promote their countersubversive anti-communist frame to the public. This study showed just how important and influential framing by SMOs and other organizations can be used to influence and to counter influence public perception.
In order to participate in social movements, participants must in some way have their ideas and values aligned with the basic principles of the movement. Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford refer to this as frame alignment; “the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary” (1986:464). Using empirical data such as literature and interviews from leaders and participants of religious movements, the peace movement, and an urban neighborhood movement from prior research done by the authors, they were able to identify six different concepts pertaining to this process. First, participation in SMOs is contingent on individual frames aligning with SMOs. Second, this process can be broken down into four framing processes. Third, in the beginning, frame alignment cannot be assumed based on individual grievances. Fourth, once frame alignment has been achieved, it must be constantly monitored as it is subject to change. Fifth, frame alignment is crucial to movement participation. And sixth, each frame alignment requires somewhat different processes to achieve (Snow et al 1986). They found out that it is indeed a tough and complicated process for both the SMOs and the individual participants to maintain their relationship. It does not happen automatically and must be constantly adjusted to changing ways of thinking and framing of social situations. I believe Rand’s followers as well as opponents will make use of these concepts in my data.

Social movement participation and recruitment is very important when it comes to getting ideas to the public. Just as Rand used her novels to construct “collective action
frames” other social movements have done the same. Robert Benford (1993) studied the nuclear disarmament movement and found that they used the allegory of “The Hundredth Monkey” to represent their basic ideas and to motivate movement participants to take action. He found that the allegory highlights four generic vocabularies in order to mobilize collective action from the movement: severity, urgency, efficacy, and propriety. These vocabularies provide participants with rational reason to take action. Collective action frames were defined as “emergent action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns” (Benford 1993:199).

Collective action frames have three main tasks: to diagnose the social problem as problematic and in need of change, to identify a solution, and to make a case for action (Benford 1993). The study involved data collected from 18 nuclear disarmament movements mostly via participant observation from 1982 to 1986. Roughly 2,100 hours of field notes were taken and recorded within 24 hours of the observations. Additionally, interviews were conducted with 21 leaders and 132 participants of the movements. He found that four major motivational frames which coincide with the four vocabularies already mentioned were prevalent. By analyzing how SMOs use collective action frames to identify and communicate their beliefs, researchers are able to further empirically study SMOs and their participants. Although I will not be doing research on a specific SMO, the participants in the message board discussions can be linked to Objectivist theories, whether in agreement or opposition. These collective action framing elements are all included in Rand’s novel *Atlas Shrugged* and can be used to analyze discourse among followers. Within the study of social movements, ideology is generally used as a
code word for beliefs, values, and goals associated with the movement and used as a way to provide the reasons for individual as well as collective action (Oliver and Johnston 2000). Rand had many beliefs and values that she expressed in order to guide followers of her philosophy. Her ideology will be used in the analysis of content for my research to better understand and compare what people are discussing in reference to her original ideas.

Perception of Social Movement Ideology and Internal Processes

How are ideas and beliefs perceived by society when it comes to social movements and the ideas that influence them? Are all ideas about the same topics considered similar? Utilizing data from an April 2000 Gallup Poll, McCright and Dunlap (2008) analyzed a national random sample of 1,004 phone interviews with adults in the US between April 3 and 9th 2000. In this instance, they were looking for the degree to which the public supported environmentalism and how people perceived this movement as a whole. Respondents were asked questions about their views on seven progressive movements and to give their opinion on how much of an impact these movements have had on the nation’s policies. In all, the sample totaled 987 respondents. They found that the majority of people agreed with the overall progressive movement goals and that they thought they were moderately impactful on national policy. The similarities in ideology of the seven movements were seen as cohesive and therefore participants were able to adhere to the idea of a progressive social movement ideology (McCright and Dunlap 2008). Predictors of conformity were identified as political ideology, political
partisanship, education, sex, age, and religion. Political affiliation, level of education and
what religion one belonged to (or lack of) all played a role. According to this research, it
appears as if people group similar ideas together in order to form their opinions on certain
topics pertaining to society. Are libertarian, the Tea Party movement, and Rand’s
ideology perceived as a cohesive family unit, it turns out the research may lead us to this
conclusion. However; Wallis (1976) identified, through interviews on the perception of
the ideology and goals of the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFOL) movement, that there
were widely differing perceptions of the movement and its adherence to other religious
movements of similar beliefs. He found that for SMOs to interact as a family of similar
ideology, internal goals of participants must remain the same; this was not the case with
the NFOL and other religious movements of the time. It is possible that Rand’s followers
may suffer from these perceptions as well.

Big business has their own set of beliefs and values: doing business is part of the
American culture. Business is usually associated with capitalistic ideas and values that
most business people tend to agree upon; yet there are variations in what they say and
why they say it. In a study done by Maynard Seider (1974), content analysis was used to
analyze 474 speeches from top people in eleven different industries to compare the
similarities and differences between capitalistic ideologies and to find out which of these
would prove most prevalent. The speeches were taken from Vital Speeches magazine
from 1934-1970. The unit of analysis was broken down into general themes that were
identified during the coding of the speeches. Three common themes were identified.
First, the classical theme; which was associated with profit, free markets, and the self-
regulating aspects of economics. Next, nationalism was identified as holding the country in high regard. Lastly, social responsibility; meaning firms that are more consumer oriented such as retail and service industries that show concern for groups outside of business. The hypothesis being that the social position of the executive speaking plays a significant role in the representative ideology. Seider (1974) found that ideological differences did exist among the different industries studied and this seems to be acceptable within big business. Internal goals within the capitalistic ideology are flexible within that family of ideology. Perceptions of the public begin with how they perceive the specific person who delivers the speech. For instance, would Paul Ryan’s explanation of Rand’s philosophy be more influential than a less known individual? Does this apply to internet message board conversations as well? There could be certain individuals that are perceived as having more knowledge and thus, better arguments either for or against Rand’s ideas. I will look closely at this in my research.

Do society’s perception of ideas change over time? Are they influenced by social movements along the way? Research done on the ideas of individualism and conformity suggest that the SMOs of the sixties and seventies had an impact on society’s perception of these two ideas. The concepts of individualism and conformity and how they are considered have each played alternate roles in the history of the United States. Each decade develops its own individual culture. Thompson (1992) did a comparative analysis of self-help books from the decades of the 50’s and the 80’s, additionally articles on general social commentary in Harper’s and The Atlantic were examined during the same time periods to determine differences in these decades in regards to individualism and
conformity. To measure the two concepts, four questions were examined in a content analysis of 16 self-help books from the time periods mentioned. In addition, 33 magazine articles were also studied. Conformity was more prevalent in the 50’s with a shift to individualism occurring in the literature of the 80’s with three main changes emerging: institutional constraints to interpersonal ones, maturity as an end game to an ever-changing self, and determinism about the individual to anti-determinism and constructionism. With Rand’s philosophy being highly individualistic, could this shift in values be connected to her writings and the work of the ARI or is it a sign of something else? At least in this research, it was evident that SMOs do influence a society’s culture with their underlying ideologies and beliefs. I’m not sure if Ayn Rand has had this affect, but with my analysis I hope to uncover pieces of this puzzle.

Social Movements and the Internet

The internet has transformed the way people communicate within society over the last two decades. So, how have SMOs and their participants view the internet? According to Stein (2009), there has not been a great deal of study by social movement researchers in this area. In her study on SMOs within the US, she examined the content of 80 SMO websites over a four month period between February and May 2006 using content analysis. In total, there were 63 items coded from the websites pertaining to specific topics such as interaction and dialog and lateral linkages to other websites. She found that, while 95 percent of SMOs participated in interaction and dialog, only 13 percent did
so at a medium or high level. Comparatively, 81 percent made lateral linkages to other websites with nearly 49 percent doing so at a medium or high level (Stein 2009). This showed that, although SMOs use the internet to get their message out, they have not doing it at a very high level or to the extent that they could be to make a larger impact. Stein (2009) believed there are three reasons for this: the organizational intent of the SMO, not having enough resources, and lack of networking with other organizations. Considering the internet is still relatively new, only time will tell if SMOs make better use of this avenue of communication to get their message out to participants and others for discussion. The discussions of individuals on message boards could be a possible source to drive people to the sites of SMOs but in and of themselves are not considered content of the specific organizations.

In a case study of three internet message forums, LabourStart Web forum, ATTAC forum, and the Indymedia forum, Cammaerts and Van Audenhove (2005) found that the degree to which participants of these movements interact in real debate is rather weak. Of the three forums examined, a total of 1134 postings were studied to determine just how active participants are and to what extent the comments were seriously debated. Of the participants registered at the sites, a low number turned out to be participating in the forums with only one of the sites identified as producing a high level of discussion and debate among users. They also found that the sensitivity of the issue played a part in participation and the level of debate. In other words, the emotional connection to certain topics seemed to increase participation. Although this study is recent (2005), it shows that SMO participants are not actively involved in a major way in online discussions.
However, given that seven years have passed since this study was done, even longer considering postings from all forums were from 2002, the salience of the issue seems to factor into participation and discussion rates and given the expansion of the internet as a means of communication, this study could be somewhat culturally dated.

Although the internet is a major form of communication, it did not seem that SMOs were taking proper advantage of the situation at this time. I believe that the more narrow focus of the individual on outside boards of discussion could possibly be more in tune with what social movement influence is all about. Less discussion on the boards of the organization could be expected being that most people on the site agree with what is being said. It may be interesting to see how the Objectivist theory was presented on outside discussions with people that have opposing views.

Individualism and Collectivism

Generally speaking, the US is thought to be a very individualistic society in many respects. In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that “Anyone living in the United States learned from birth that he must rely upon himself to combat the ills and obstacles of life; he looks across at the authority of society with mistrust and anxiety, calling upon such authority only when he cannot do without it” (2003: 220). Although thought of as a mainly capitalistic society which individualism plays its part, collectivism is also seen in many ways in the US. In a cultural study on collectivism and individualism, Vandello and Cohen (1999) created an index using core aspects of collectivism and individualism to examine where the US stood in respects to these two ideas. Their index consisted of eight
items: percentage of people living alone, percentage of elderly people (65+) living alone, percentage of households with grandchildren in them, divorce to marriage ratio, percentage of people with no religious affiliation, average percentage voting Libertarian over the last four presidential elections, ration of people carpooling to work to people driving alone, and percentage of self-employed workers. Hawaii ranked number one with Montana coming in at number fifty. Essentially, they found nine cultural regions in which to group the fifty states. One hypothesis that was supported by their findings was that affluence was associated with individualism. In addition, they found that individualism was correlated with higher suicide rates and binge drinking. In Suicide, Durkheim (1979) called this type of suicide associated with excessive individualism egoistic. His study also supported the findings of Vandello and Cohen in the correlation with higher suicide rates and individualism. Collectivism was associated with higher population density and higher rates of minorities in a state.

The idea of the individual, as opposed to society, has its’ origins in the systems created by, and for society, in order to establish a normal way of behavior in which to judge and classify people. Individualism has been a much-discussed topic since World War II in the United States with the civil rights movements of the sixties and the evolution of American popular culture. For individualism to surface, society needed to set up social structures that began to differentiate and isolate certain aspects of behavior or achievement from others in order to distinguish one person from another. This in turn, made possible the idea of separation of classes of individuals and therefore created visible strata among society. Michel Foucault (1977) observed that discipline is the
specific technique of a power that makes individuals into both objects and instruments of its own use. The individual is “made” by discipline through many different institutions of power such as hospitals and schools; in this sense, the individual is under the power of the disciplinary system. Institutions created by society, were used to create the individual within society. It was these hierarchical systems within which individualism has taken root. However; this is not the same individualism Tocqueville observed in his travels to America in 1831.

Foucault (1983) said that the objective of his work was to map out a history of the ways by which our culture has turned human beings into subjects. There are three modes of objectification which have been used to transform human beings into subjects; inquiry, objectivizing, and people turning him or herself into a subject on their own (Foucault 1983). Inquiry was accomplished by the creation of the social sciences and the objectification of the productive subject, objectivizing through the comparison and contrast of the subject in relation to other subjects, and the third in the respect of how people have learned through different modes to recognize themselves as subjects. The conceptualization of the individual can be reduced down to the “Conceptual Common Denominator” and is defined as “the means of which man differentiates two or more existents from other existents possessing it” (Rand 1979:15). To study the individual, there must be a way to observe and archive the differences between subjects in order to create hierarchies of existents. This has been done through the power relationships and systems within society.
In consideration of collectivism and individualism, there are many variables to be considered and many ways to approach the subject in terms of how they fit into social systems. Presented here are only a few of these variables in regards to how they relate to the objectivist theory of Rand.

Objectivism as a Social Movement

Ayn Rand and her philosophy may have been adopted and used as a part of many social movements within society. There is no specific Objectivist social movement organization you can join, yet many groups and associations have appeared that allow people to discuss her ideas. Recently, her novel *Anthem* was turned into a play and had a limited 10 week off Broadway run accompanied by a discussion session after the play for anyone who wished to stay. The Ayn Rand Institute offered many discussions and lectures on Objectivism and helped students set up Objectivist groups on college campuses. For the tech savvy Objectivist, you can even go to the popular internet site Second Life and attend a lecture at the New Objectivist Institute if you chose. Recently, Rand caught major attention as Paul Ryan, a self proclaimed fan, ran for Vice President in the 2012 presidential election. In a 2005 speech, Ryan said “I grew up reading Ayn Rand, and it taught me quite a bit about who I am and what my value systems are and what my beliefs are. It’s inspired me so much that it’s required reading in my office for all my interns and my staff.” I have to believe that her ideas run through our government and have some influence on policy in our nation. One new social movement that began in
2004, the Tea Party movement, has begun to make waves within political and social discussions.

According to statisticbrain.com, as of March of 2012 there had been six million people who had attended the Tea Party movements’ events nationwide. Was the Tea Party movement started by the Ayn Rand Institute or any other Objectivist organization? No, they were not directly started or even affiliated with this new movement, however; Rand’s philosophies were seen in some of the guiding beliefs of the new movement. Of their fifteen non-negotiable core beliefs, some of them seem to have been influenced by the Objectivist philosophy; such as: government must be downsized, bailout and stimulus plans are illegal, and intrusive government must be stopped. Rand (1963) believed that the proper function a government should have falls into three distinct sections: the police-to protect us from criminals, the armed services-to protect us from foreign invasions, and the courts of law-to settle the disputes of men in regards to the objective laws. When the government is only responsible for these three areas, it cannot possibly have time to be creating stimulus plans and bailing out companies among other things. Rand stated, “if a society is to be free, its government has to be controlled” (1963:128). It is no surprise that Rand would have this opinion of government; it coincides with her individualistic idea of how the world should work. No doubt, these ideas have found their way into some of the fundamental beliefs and values of the Tea Party movement.

I believe that Objectivist theory, although not a social movement in itself, has helped to lay the foundation for some social movements who have adopted her ideas into political thought and in turn, has had an influence in our culture. Further, some of Rand’s
foundational principles may have been adopted by individuals to form specific social movements within society. This individual influence of beliefs and values that originated from the bottom up is what my research was focused on. Although, it is true that social movements are, by definition, groups of people that band together to make a change; my view was that Rand’s influence on individual thoughts and beliefs have a trickle up effect. Objectivism provides the foundation for more individualistic social movements much like Marxian theory provides the foundation for many collectivist movements.

Conclusion

Social movements have adopted and used Rand’s ideas and Objectivist philosophy to shape their own movements in such a way that may have had an impact on their results within society. From the protagonists, antagonist, and bystanders related to social movements, to the collective action frames created by some, people within movements have integrated her ideas into their organizations beliefs and action plans. How future movements are shaped can be directly related to how individuals’ ideas and values are framed and aligned with Rand’s ideas; as a result, these individuals can contribute to the actions and strategies of social movements. Former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan was a friend of Rand; although he did not seek her council in Federal Reserve matters, I cannot help but believe that her ideas had some influence on the decisions he made while chairman. I do not know if her ideas will continue to influence people in society, but she still remains a topic of debate in the 21st century as
technology gives society new ways to communicate their beliefs and opinions to the rest of the world.
DATA AND METHODS

In order to examine how individuals within social movements may have adopted Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism into their cultural movements, I selected comments sections from two major online publications. Although I found many articles, I chose two specific articles for the lively discussions that followed by the message board participants. There were no specific criteria for the articles save one; they must insight a good debate on the message boards. The first comments section was from a brief quote by Paul Krugman on 08/27/2012 entitled “A Is Not A, It Seems” from the online version of The New York Times. This comments section contained one hundred different posts of various lengths on different topics pertaining to the philosophy of Ayn Rand such as individualism, collectivism, and capitalism. The second set of comments were taken from an article found in Forbes online that was written by Steve Simpson on 11/08/2013 entitled “Atlas Shrugged is a book about pride in one’s work, and the success that results”. This section contained forty-three posts of various lengths in which people gave their opinions and thoughts about Ayn Rand. My unit of analysis were the posts in the comments sections and not the specific article; with this in mind, the article was not the most important factor in choosing these sources. However, what was considered in the selection process was the type of online source used. The New York Times was selected because, generally, it tends to lean toward the moderate viewpoint, whereas Forbes was more favorable to business and conservative lines of thinking. Paul Krugman is well known for his liberal ideology and Steve Simpson is the director of Legal Studies at the...
Ayn Rand Institute. By choosing sources from different ends of the political spectrum, I hoped to somewhat negate the effects of one specific line of thinking dominating the comments in order to obtain a broader view of the topic at hand.

My analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis. I analyzed the comments sections from the articles previously mentioned in order to find out how and what people thought in regards to Ayn Rand and her theory of Objectivism as a potential social movement. I began by doing open coding to explore general themes that came up in the data, and continued with a more in depth examination of line-by-line coding and categorizing of the main themes and relations using axial coding techniques to make better connections between categories and subcategories. Conceptualizing ideas and thoughts into specific themes and categories was accomplished by asking questions in terms of phenomenon, context, and action/interaction strategies between the message board participants. Interpretations and uses of Rand’s ideas were identified via participant dialogue in terms of general topics based on how they may or may not extract her philosophy from actions and interpretations implemented by various social movements and political parties. The posts need not specifically specify Rand or Objectivism; they need only to contain the main concepts of her philosophy. It seemed to be difficult to identify the differences between Rand and general capitalistic ideals yet interesting to see how this was approached by both protagonists as well as the antagonists. My extensive literature review of social movements, Rand’s philosophy, and opposing views on individualism and collectivism was used to formulate in-depth questions in my analysis of the data. I used quotations to present my themes within the analysis. ATLAS.ti was
used for the coding and processing of the material. I believed qualitative research was the best way to study this subject because it can be used to explore questions pertaining to definitions and meanings of discourse and the processes associated with collective action. In addition, it was a good way to examine how people construct, experience, and disseminate the particular beliefs of their social movement (Gongaware and Benford 2003). Validity was somewhat of a limitation as the findings were to be subjective to the researcher although qualitative studies are not necessarily valid in the true sense of the word or concept. I believed I could proceed with an unbiased and fair interpretation of the data. My study was also limited in respect to specificity of what I could find out about Rand and her philosophy as a social movement through these comments. There was good discussion on the ideas themselves, yet what remained elusive was in the broader sense of collective action and the perception of the ARI. In a sense, the ARI is a school of sorts with the mission of spreading the Objectivist philosophy throughout society. The extent to which specific social movements and individuals implement these ideas is ultimately up to them. Although I do believe her ideas have had an impact on current day culture and social movements, such as the Tea Party, Rand and the ARI are not in and of themselves SMO’s. My research was a very intricate look at how people may have perceived and related her ideas to their everyday thoughts and beliefs. As a result, through individuals whose beliefs and values seem to be aligned with Rand’s ideas, some social movements and political parties may have adopted her philosophies into their own organizational ideals. A more focused study on the ARI and how it mobilizes participants and functions as a possible SMO could be done in order to answer the broader SMO
question. This could open up possibilities for further research in regards to Objectivism and the ARI and the role they may play in current society.

Some of the potential themes that I believed could have emerged from the data are as such, but not limited to: political culture, individualism, collectivism, economics, religion, and personal views on the life and actions of Rand herself. Within these topics, I believe I found certain types of categories emerge around Rand’s ideas and how they have been adopted or rejected by social movements as well as individuals. For a beginning point of analysis, I decided to use seven possible hypotheses with which to base my research on. The following is a list of possible research outcomes that have served as my genesis of analysis:

- People do not really believe it is possible to create the utopian world of Atlantis that Rand created in her novel *Atlas Shrugged*.
- Many people *discount* her ideas and Objectivist philosophy in its entirety.
- Many people fully *accept* her ideas and Objectivist philosophy.
- There will be a general, but not fully understood disconnect between accepted Christian thought and Rand’s philosophy of Objectivism. As Rand was an atheist, the antagonists *may* use this discrepancy to discount her followers.
- Her ideas on individualism will be a topic of heated debate and lead to polarizing theories from both the left and the right side of the political spectrum.
- Her thoughts and philosophies have been embedded into political and economic theory as a type of social movement in ways we do not yet understand. (or see the consequences as of yet)
• Few people are willing (or know how) to put concrete actions to her philosophies and ideas due to the potential cultural and social implications they would encounter. (for better or worse)

Conclusion

I will introduce the concepts of social movement theory and social movement framing theory as it relates to participants of social movements as well as individuals and how they may or may not adopt and use Rand’s ideas and how these ideas are perceived by society in regards to the theory of Objectivism. Social movement theory is largely based on a body of many different variables that attempt to explain how social movements work from the inside as well as the outside. More specifically, this research will made an attempt to uncover how our society discusses the ideas and beliefs of Ayn Rand in regards to her philosophy being viewed as a possible social movement or at the very least, an influence on social movements. This research was strong in that; there has been little other research done on the topic as it relates to Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism.
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Predicted Research Outcomes

This section outlines the results for any linkages found pertaining to the predicted research outcomes given in the methods section. I will then comment on the specific thematic trends found during my analysis following this section. The first predicted research outcome essentially made the statement that people do not believe that Rand’s ultimate vision of her own utopian society to be possible. The data in this study was inconclusive on this outcome. Interestingly, there were no specific references made in regards to implementing her thoughts and ideas into mainstream society in the data I examined. The Objectivist theory could be too complex to actually have a place within society; however, there were many statements made about how these ideas are interconnected with other ideas in society with linkages in the political arena as well as the realm of economics. In all, there just was not enough discussion about actualizing the Objectivist theories into our current day social system; with the exception of the influence on certain political parties such as Libertarians and Republicans. It could be that the lack of discourse on the subject meant that Rand’s ideas are not readily converted into practice in the real world. The lack of references to specific actions taken in accordance with her theories poses a difficult task to Objectivists for the future. In order to have achieved social change, ideas must be converted into actions and this did not seem to be the case according to this research. It is unclear what people believe about this reality coming to fruition as there were no specific comments on the subject.
The second predicted research outcome, that many people discount the Objectivist philosophy in its entirety, was supported in the data as there were many people that were eager to point out what they perceived as the flaws of Rand’s ideas. They approached the rejection of Objectivism and Rand herself from many different angles. Not surprisingly, there were many personal attacks on Rand as an individual and her own personal life choices. She was referred to as a sociopath, hypocrite, and a liar. Many were quick to point out the fact that, in her older years, Rand collected social security. This seemed to give adequate backing to the label of hypocrite in the opinions of the writers. Her writing skills, or lack of, were definitely a popular topic on the message boards. *Atlas Shrugged* was referred to as a poorly written and boring book on many occasions and the length seemed to be a problem for most. Also, many believed that Objectivism as a standalone philosophy was unacceptable and had little merit as a way to run a society. The general line of thought was that it had too many gaps and was entirely unworkable as a complete philosophy; one writer stated it was “pathetic sentimental tripe”. The rejection of Rand was apparent, but it also extended to her followers. Labeled as cultists, obsessives, and radical capitalists’, writers were not afraid to unleash personal attacks on others who seemed to oppose their views.

The third research outcome took the other view; that many people liked and accepted Rand and her philosophy. This outcome was supported by the data, but not in the way that may have been anticipated. For every post attacking Rand, Objectivism, and its followers, there appeared to be a defender of the faith so to speak. I made the assumption that the writers who were defending Rand also accepted and believed in
Objectivism as a philosophy based on the fact that their responses seemed to be laced with many of her ideas and knowledge of her work. Yet, for all this knowledge, they were always on the defensive against the criticisms of the other writers. For example, in regards to her perceived poor writing skills, it was pointed out that she was an “English as a second language writer” and that, in essence, her writing skills should be overlooked. The social security argument was handled only by the reply that she had paid into the system and that she deserved it. The data supported the outcome that there are people who believe in Objectivism, yet they were spending most of their efforts in the defense of it rather than taking an offensive stance. There were little references made to specific ideas and opinions on why they were workable from the Objectivist point of view; the followers writing was mainly about the defending the attackers.

The topic of religion surfaced in the data in a different way than expected; the fourth outcome related to religion and Rand’s ideas being intertwined in a misunderstood fashion. I believe the data supported this idea in that; there was little discussion on how religious ideas and Objectivism worked together (or not). Primarily, religion surfaced in the discussions in reference to the hypocritical nature of Rand’s atheism and current day self proclaimed Christians believing in her ideas. Political figures were named in this regard which relates to the seventh potential research outcome. The data suggested that, if you like Rand and the theory of Objectivism, you have to be a hypocrite because she was an atheist. There was little discussion on specific ideas from both perspectives and how they may, or may not, be compatible. Obviously, atheism and Christianity are exact opposites, yet this topic was only referred to in the social implications it had on self-
proclaimed believers of both Objectivism and Christianity. I believe this supports my hypothesis that the connection between the two is misunderstood. However, the data did not go into enough detail to bring to light the exact causes of the misunderstanding.

The long running debate of individualism and collectivism, the fifth research outcome, was not supported by the data. Although the general theme was present, there were rarely any discussions specifically related to individualism and collectivism. The social frames of these two perspectives were evident in the responses yet there were no instances in which the discussions ever fully morphed into a debate on the topic. An interesting side note being; one writer pointed out that once you become an Objectivist and subscribe to their beliefs it is difficult to make evaluations according to an individualistic line of thought. The irony lies in the implication of a group of individualistic thinkers still retaining their individualism. This did seem to be an interesting contradiction for the Objectivist theorist to handle.

The sixth research outcome of Rand’s thoughts and philosophies being embedded into political and economic thought was supported by the data so much so that it is difficult to separate her ideas from general capitalistic and individualistic ideas. There were several references made pertaining to economic ideas in a way that sounded like they were Rand’s original ideas. Rand herself was influenced by Aristotle, Nietzsche, and others; this data seems to support the hypothesis that her ideas are embedded to the point where the writers were referring to general economic and political ideas as belonging to Rand. Penalizing ability and rewarding inability, removing remunerative incentives, and trust are not exactly new material that Rand came up with on her own yet these were all
referenced in the comments in regards to *Atlas Shrugged*. There were also references about personal characteristics of fictional characters from her novels such as; standing for something you know to be true, working hard for success, and quality workmanship. These are all general concepts attributed to Rand and what she stands for surfacing in the discussions as if they were her ideas. Economically, one writer mentioned “Rand’s notion of basing money on gold” which was not her own but an idea of many. Undoubtedly, the Objectivist philosophy is not entirely original yet it has become intermingled with the ideas of individualism and capitalism to a large extent. As Rand presented these ideas in her work, there is little doubt that she has put her own view on them to the extent that many people do not distinguish the origin of the ideas from Objectivism.

Finally, the seventh predicted research outcome was only partially supported by my data pertaining to one specific topic. Few people were willing to put concrete actions to the Objectivist theory due to the potential cultural and social implications they may encounter as it relates to religion. Specifically, political figure Paul Ryan took a great deal of criticism from antagonists of Ayn Rand and the topic of religion. It was pointed out on several occasions that Ryan attempted to distance himself from Rand when it was publically revealed that she was an atheist. This contradiction with the association of Ryan to Rand was enough for him to change course and allude to the notion that he did not believe in the Objectivist philosophy. There are few other instances in current culture of persecution due to being associated with Rand; Ryan/Rand being the only situation mentioned in the data so I do not believe there is enough evidence at this time to fully support this hypothesis to its’ full extent. However, due to the fact that there are few
instances to support this claim may indeed be the reason that it is correct; although there is not enough supporting data to back this claim.

Thematic Trends

During the coding process, the following themes emerged in the data: debate, SMO linkage or lack of, cultural influence, and the Randian crossover. The debate theme obviously centered on the protagonist/antagonist debate of Rand and her theories. SMO linkage pertained to Rand and Objectivism relating to any linkage or relationship to SMO’s. It also included influence or linkage with political parties and political thought. Cultural influence was any and everything that had to do with Rand and the perception of her in popular culture. There were many references made towards her novels and the fact that people still read her work; which can have a continued influence within our society. The fact that there are people discussing her on the internet shows she has had some sort of cultural impact. Also, many Randisms were identified within this theme. Randisms are the term I used to describe the labels created by antagonist and protagonists alike referring to anything related to Ayn Rand. Lastly, the Randian crossover theme referred to her ideas being assimilated into general economic and capitalistic thought within society. The data made it evident that people have a hard time finding the line between the two if indeed there is one. All quotations given are from data taken from The New York Times and Forbes online comments sections after the respective articles in those publications.
The thematic debate the writers engaged in seemed overall to revert to childish name-calling and personal attacks on the comments themselves, not particularly focused on intelligent theoretical debate of the subject at hand. The pattern identified in the data would always begin with the antagonist sounding off his/her opinion and the loyal protagonist coming to the defense of Rand much like the article in 1957 from the New York Times. It did not seem as if much has changed as the debate goes on. Disciples of Rand were referred to as “cultists” and Rand herself was given the label of “sociopath”. Her philosophy was attacked, mainly at a surface level, as an inadequate theory with far too many shortcomings to be taken seriously. For example:

Mark Plus: Rand tried to create a “philosophy for living on earth,” but after reading both her writings and everything I can find about her ideas, I can see that she lacked the goods to pull it off.

Mark Plus: Objectivists have bet their lives on a philosophy which looks kind of like a 1950's UNIVAC, and it apparently hasn’t even developed to the level of a late 1970's Apple II yet.

Mark Plus: Rand simply did not come up with an adequate model of reason and acquiring knowledge.

The implication of “tried” to create a philosophy and the comparison to old computer technology, while telling, did not give any specifics to back up these claims. After all, Rand did create a philosophy to be judged; whether or not it is agreed with is a different argument. It is apparent that they did not believe her philosophy to be adequate, but in what way it was inadequate was not specifically discussed. These comments lead to others in defense of Rand and these were just as inadequate and surface level as the criticisms:
Sam Weaver: As to your second criticism, I recommend that you read Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology if you have not yet. In it, Miss Rand lays out a very extensive model for concept formation (the acquisition of knowledge).

Michael Smith: Oh, so now you want to claim that the philosophy in Atlas Shrugged can’t be valid because no one has come along with a better philosophy?

_wendy_: You should have known all this, if you are indeed as thoroughly educated in her philosophy as you claim you are.

The first comment referred to an extensive model for the acquisition of knowledge but did not elaborate on this model. It is difficult to make a logical argument when one leaves out the specific details needed to back it up as this contributor does. The next two comments were nothing more than quick, biting reactions directed back at the previous comment with no details towards any argument whatsoever. Throughout the entire conversations, there seemed to be little specific intelligent theoretical and philosophical debate; the central theme always being very shallow and critical of the other point of view. However, the data suggested that many of the comments coming from both views were driven by some personal knowledge of Rand’s work. There were many references towards specific works, which infers that the writer has read the work; although there was no way to know in order to validate this claim. Many of the defenders used the argument that the criticisms come from a lack of understanding of the material, yet it did seem as if that may be untrue; again, there was no way to validate this from the data alone.

The second theme that emerged in the data was the extent to which the participants were linking their comments to SMO’s. The overwhelming evidence in this data suggested that they are not linking Rand or Objectivism to specific SMO’s but more
often to specific political parties. Although the Tea Party movement has similarities to the Republicans, Rand was never specifically associated with the Tea Party or any other specific social movement in the data. She was mainly associated with Libertarians and Conservatives, which is interesting as she never associated herself with either of the two parties. References linking Rand to political parties were made as follows:

R.Law: the high priestess of conservatism

James Igoe: As 'libertarians' cite Rand

Smitty: She is only referred to because her books can be used as an intellectual prop for the selfish and wealthy serving politics of the new Republican party.

Moose Williams: I think one dirty little secret of the Republicans is they praise Rand but don't read her.

Rhersh12: patron saint of Libertarianism

Continuing with the previous theme, the connection made to Republicans using her as an intellectual prop for their politics is shallow and does not give any detail or evidence to support the premise. It would have been a better argument if the statement had been supported with specific details on the participants thought process yet the link to the party is present. However, it did make sense that Libertarians would cite Rand if they consider her their patron saint; that would only be logical. These references suggest that the Objectivist philosophy is, at best, loosely associated with SMO’s via perceived connection to specific political parties and ideologies. As with the debate, the comments were very shallow references to her being linked to these parties and there is little in-depth discussion pertaining to the topic of her association with them. Rand never specifically associated herself with Libertarians or Conservatives and on many occasions
criticized the two parties. Interestingly, the social perception from the comments said that, regardless of her efforts to disassociate from political parties; people in society still associated her with the two parties. This was true for the antagonists as well as the protagonists making comments. As far as Rand or the Objectivist movement being referenced as a social movement in and of themselves, there was only one comment that referred to the “Objectivist movement” which leads me to believe that people do not think of them as such at least in this data.

*Atlas Shrugged, The Fountainhead,* and other works of Rand’s were referenced many times throughout the comments and this seemed to suggest the continued popularity of her work in modern day culture. Although not mentioned in the data, Rand’s novels have been prominent in popular shows such as South Park and The Simpsons over the years and it seemed to be clear that, according to the comments, many people have read or are aware of her work. Her cultural presence as a writer was a common theme throughout:

John: So far in this thread she's been compared to JRR Tolkein, called a Nietzsche "for the mediocre", and compared to Aldous Huxley, Isaac Asimov, Carlos Castaneda, Herman Hesse, Kurt Vonnegut.

John: Better writers-perhaps. But consider as well that Huxley, Orwell, and Asimov wrote books that were vague and inoffensive to anyone. 1984 may have seemed somewhat provocative when written - but its time has come and gone - we've conceded our privacy for social networks, etc. - Big Brother seems antiquated and irrelevant. Rand's work however is still divisive and strikes at the core of our political and philosophical disputes.
The comparisons to other people such as Tolkein and Nietzsche were evidence that she is perceived, at least in the minds of the participants, as relevant as these writers in our culture; otherwise it would not be brought up. Many of the comments associated with her novels suggest that most believe her to be a bad writer; even people who are defending her work freely admit to her perceived lack of literary skills yet many have still read her work. It was stated in the second comment that the other writers referenced were all better at their craft than Rand, yet pointed out that in the opinion of this participant her work was more intellectually innovative and stimulating than theirs. The heart of Rand’s ideas were still relevant in our current political climate according to this comment. Her influence in the political arena was prominent in the data with many references made to her association with Paul Ryan, Alan Greenspan, and the comment pertaining to Rand Paul insisting that people who work for him read her novels. Her presence within society has definitely been divisive yet many decades after her death, she seemed to still be a relevant topic worthy of attention; much like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim still are today. Many commented on her longevity:

Taopraxis: Still, today, one sees people asking, "Who is John Galt?"

LaurieB: I think she's really a vampire - her stories just will not die!

It was pointed out that, “Who is John Galt?” is still a popular phrase. Although not pointed out in the comment, you can find many different types of merchandise at JohnGaltGear.com to back this claim up; from t-shirts to coffee mugs the quote is a popular mainstay in items bought and sold in current society. Protagonists and antagonists alike both seemed to agree upon one thing; Rand’s continued presence in
popular culture does not seem to be losing momentum in our current social climate. It was unclear whether the above statement referring to her as a vampire was meant as an insult or compliment, but it established her longevity in the data. The story of John Galt is still alive and well in popular culture as well as current political debate. An interesting pattern of references that people came up with seemed to emerge in the data, which I termed Randisms; “Objectiverse, Reardon Metal, Atlas Shrugged 2.0, and Randroid” were all popular sayings within the comments and I believed this to lend credibility to her cultural continued presence. In general, they did not expand on these terms yet they seemed to be present throughout the comments implying that other readers were familiar with the terms as well; thus not needing explanation.

The last theme identified in the data I refer to as the Randian crossover theme; as many of her ideas are similar to or adapted from other thinkers, they are also embedded in present perceived thought as Rand’s ideas illustrated by the comments. Rand’s opinion that gold should be used for a standard value within society is not an original idea yet it was referred to as her own:

Mark Plus: So what would happen to Rand’s notion of basing money on gold?

The implication of this comment was that basing money on gold was her idea. It is not a general statement but one linked directly to the idea being Rand’s notion. There is an entire section of comments devoted to the gold standard and what she thought would be used as a representation of value for exchange purposes; this is not an Objectivist idea but a general economic premise that some subscribe to. It was interesting to me that
throughout the discussion the distinction was never clearly made. There also seems to be some crossover in regards to laissez-faire capitalism and Objectivism:

Mark Plus: If competition in the market tends to give us better products and services, as Objectivists assert.

Mark Plus: No need to invoke a special doctrine to argue this. This is basic supply and demand.

Objectivist theory backs the idea of free market competition; however, it did not come up with it on its own. The above writer did try to make a comment referring back to the principle of supply and demand. The comment attempted to make a distinction indicating that there was no reason to create a special philosophy for this idea but that it was already an established economic theory. Although eluded to, the conversation goes on with no further distinction made. Many of the arguments have to do with basic economic principles with a Randian flavor injected into it from her followers; even the antagonists seem to go along with the intertwined ideas as if they were Objectivist theory. With this discernible pattern in the data, it was hard to distinguish between what people believed about Rand. It is possible that their problem is with capitalism in general and not Rand although the two ideologies are closely related. The distinction was never clear. There were instances where writers stated that she got her ideas from Adam Smith and Ludwig von Mises but that line of thought was quickly defended by a Randroid in this passage:

John: Rand's ideas emerged from a critique of socialism, something Smith never experienced - what she has in common with Smith is a very little portion of her project.
This comment suggested that the participant was trying to create some sort of distinction between Rand and Adam Smith’s work; however, there was nothing specific to back up the claim. It was true that Rand was writing from a critique of socialism as experience by her and her family first hand, but this did not necessarily prove that her ideas are different from Smith’s. Further, an expansion of the differences between Rand and Smith could have been specifically outlined in this comment to illustrate the differences between the two. This evidence was lacking and showed one of two things; there was not much difference or participants did not take the time to explain the details of the differentiation. References were made in regards to what Rand would think about government intervention, monetary incentives for work, and penalizing ability to reward inability with little clarification of thought on origins of the ideas. The philosophy of Objectivism as a subject is well ingrained in our culture but the data showed that there was little perceived differentiation between general capitalistic and individualistic ideas and her work.
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

This research investigated how people perceive Ayn Rand and the Objectivist theory in regards to linking these ideas to SMO’s on the internet. With the explosion of the internet, many new avenues have opened up pertaining to spreading ideology within our culture. The possibilities are more numerous than ever on how people could use this technology to reach society with their ideas. More specifically, this study examined two message boards relating to Ayn Rand articles in an effort to find out how people may or may not have incorporated her ideas into their actions and communities via SMO’s. Though social movement framing theory suggests that in some way people must have their ideas and values aligned with the basic principles of a movement to get involved, the data used for this study was inconclusive whether these specific people are involved in a particular SMO (Snow et al 1986). However, the data did suggest that many of the participants on the boards do have many of their ideas and values aligned with Objectivist theory; although the level of actions or participation they may have in their communities was unclear. At the same time, the examination of data provided an opportunity to explore in more depth what may or may not be going on in regards to Ayn Rand and how society thinks about an individualist who did not believe in society.

A list of seven possible research outcomes were examined during this study, in the process four themes also emerged pertaining to the data. The first research outcome analyzed the idea that Rand’s followers believe that the creation of her fictional world
created in *Atlas Shrugged* was possible in the real world. The data used for this study was inconclusive in weighing this outcome; although the lack of references to this topic provided evidence that followers may not find her theories actionable in the real world.

There were few if any specific references made by anyone about putting concrete actions and goals to any of her philosophy, either individually or as a social movement. It is possible that this is due to a relatively small sample of comments but unknown if more data would have been helpful in determining this outcome. A workable theory must be applicable to people’s lives; and it did not appear that Objectivism was implemented in this data. The first research outcome is closely related to the seventh; few people were willing to put concrete actions to her ideas due to the potential cultural and social implications they would encounter. In order to create this utopian world referred to in her work as Atlantis, one would have to actualize her principles in their lives and in turn, this could lead to ridicule or praise from others in society. According to the data, there were few recorded instances worthy of mention on this subject. The only situation mentioned in the comments was in reference to Paul Ryan, who at the time was running for Vice President, and a hypocritical back tracking of his previous association with Rand and her work. It seemed that the criticism he received from society was enough for him to attempt to disassociate himself with the Objectivist theories. The Tea Party does appear to be in line with Objectivism in many ways, but nothing specific was ever mentioned in regards to this association in the data.

The second and third research outcomes were supported by the data. As expected, there were people who rejected her ideas and there were also people who accepted her
ideas, but the data played out in an interesting way pertaining to this outcome. From examining the comments, it appeared that most Randoids spent their time in defense of her philosophy and very little time and energy promoting it; at least in the online format used in this study. Obviously, the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI) is in charge of the promotion of her ideas, interestingly enough they were not mentioned at all by protagonists or antagonists. I found that to be peculiar as this implies many of her followers do not appear to be connected with the ARI. The ARI is the closest thing to an organized promotional entity for Objectivism, yet these individuals posting comments did not appear to be connected. In recent months, the ARI website has undergone many changes. It seems as if they are attempting to become more of an agent of change. Perhaps this could lead to participants in future discussions in the comments sections of various online media outlets to be more prepared. Only time will tell. Many comments pertaining to this outcome were personal insults at Rand and her life choices and vague references to why her philosophy did not work. It was fine to have a personal opinion, but arguments that were more specific on the theories of Rand and why they were thought to not be of merit would have served these participants better. The counter arguments from the protagonists seemed to be of the same type. Many were personal insults directed back to the original participant and even more vague notions of why her theories were solid. In order to project values and beliefs, arguments and ideas must be outlined and explained in detail; the protagonists did not do a thorough job to the extent that I may have expected. Though both sides were represented, the discussions were not as intellectually stimulating and in-depth as I thought they might have been.
In regards to the Christian faith and how it engaged with Objectivist thought, the data was supportive of this fourth predicted research outcome in that there was little discussion of actual theory as it pertains to the two philosophies. Primarily, religion surfaced in the discussions in reference to the hypocritical nature of Rand’s atheism and current day self proclaimed Christians believing in her ideas. The data suggested that, if you like Rand and the theory of Objectivism, you have to be a hypocrite because she was an atheist. In my opinion, that suggested a misunderstanding of her work. As the comments only spoke of religion in this fashion, it appeared that there was little thought on the subject of actual values and beliefs and how the two are compared. It could be a question of finding the data pertaining more specifically to the subject of religion and Rand; this could lead to more conclusive findings on the subject but would be a research project by itself for future consideration.

The fifth outcome was not supported by the data in any fashion. The subject of individualism being a topic of heated debate leading to polarizing theories from both sides never materialized in the data I examined for this study. Obviously, the general themes of individualism and collectivism were present within the data, yet the discussions never took up the task to pursue these topics specifically. It was possible that her individualistic theories are much like that of the general economic and political ideas in that, they are embedded in general individualistic ideas and it was difficult to make a distinction between her ideas and those already established. The data used in this research more specifically discussed economic and political thought than individualism. However, there are many individualistic ideas embedded within the idea of capitalism, which
inferred that individualism was touched upon in that regard. That being said, the specific topic of individualism never materialized in the data. I had anticipated more debate on these subjects but according to the comments, this was not proven to be true. As the fourth outcome lead to opportunities for further research, I believed the fifth to be of the same category. Perhaps a larger sample of data or a more narrow examination in regards to the topic at hand could reveal more knowledge in a future study.

The sixth and final research outcome predicted in this study was supported by the data. The data suggested that her thoughts and philosophies have been embedded into political and economic theory, although not specifically as a type of social movement. It appeared to be very difficult for the participants to separate her ideas from general capitalistic ideas. There were references made to her supporting the laissez-faire form of social system yet in the actual discussion, the idea of supply and demand and rational thought became Rand’s ideas in the minds of the participants. I believe that they realize the distinctions but the data did not support this premise as, in general, many ideas were referred to as Rand’s. Could it be that she is thought of as the face of modern day capitalistic thought much like Marx is the face of collectivist thought? This was what the examination of my data suggests. It is obvious that this is an assumption made by the researcher from a very small sample of material; further research would be needed to gain full knowledge of how this interconnection works with the perception of her ideas and other theories.

Additionally, my content analysis revealed four separate themes within the data. The first theme that was present was the ongoing debate between the followers of Rand
and the opposition. As expected, this theme was present and common within the comments. Although the back and forth banter of the participants was centered on Rand and the perception of her ideas, it never seemed to escalate in the way that I had anticipated. For the most part, the discussion was not incredibly in-depth in content and centered more on personal insults and one-liners. However, they did remain on topic and established some good arguments with one another throughout the debate. The second theme to emerge from the analysis was the presence of linking the individual posts to SMO’s and political parties. Specific links were not established to any specific SMO, yet both sides seemed to agree upon the linkages to certain political parties. The perceptions of the theories of Objectivism seemed to have a high correlation to the Libertarian as well as the Conservative parties in the minds of the participants. It cannot be determined from the data to what extent the participants are associated with said parties, but the association was most certainly there. I had anticipated finding more of a connection with specific SMO’s but never materialized within the discussions.

Cultural influence, the third theme, was most definitely observed throughout discussions. Rand’s major work, *Atlas Shrugged*, was published 1957; as it began with the letters to the editor of The New York times when first released, it continues today in a different media outlet. I believe her influence to be evident in the political arena as well as popular culture. References to the link between Paul Ryan and Rand Paul surfaced and cannot help but provide the evidence needed to show that her presence is still having an impact in our culture. The fourth and final theme in my research emerged in the patterns observed between people confusing Rand’s ideas with more common economic and
capitalistic ideas in general. As she was a supporter of the system of capitalism, it was not surprising to find this result. She attempted to provide the philosophical base for capitalism; in the process, many of her ideas appear to have become one with this economic and political system. According to the data, there were little distinguishing comments to suggest that Rand was very original in her theories.

Limitations and Advantages

Like all studies, this study had many limitations as well as advantages. When undertaking a qualitative methodology approach to a research project, this can be a common theme. One major limitation to the qualitative approach was the low external validity but on the other hand, the advantage was high internal validity. Not being generalizable in its findings, it was designed to answer or explore the questions of the researcher.

The primary limitation of this study was the validity of the findings. It was very difficult to analyze arguments and counter arguments on the internet, as there was really no way of knowing who is behind the comments. Were these people serious about making changes within society based on their beliefs and values or just killing time while arguing with someone online? There was no way to find this out with the data used in this study. In addition, it is much easier to post something online where you are protected from many social implications that are not possible in the virtual world. This could result in people making assertions that they would never actualize in their everyday lives. The reverse of that argument could also be that comments are more genuine as there can be a
perception of being invincible when online; again, there was no way to make this
distinction so the data has to be accepted as it stands.

Other limitations of this study included possible researcher bias and some of the
underlying assumptions made in order to investigate the possible research outcomes put
forth in the methods section. Every effort was made to examine the data without bias yet
the master frames (Oliver and Johnston 2000) of the researcher undoubtedly affected the
manner in which the data was analyzed and interpreted and even what to focus on in the
comments. More data could have been used in order to get a larger view of what is going
on; specific message boards could have been targeted pertaining to individual issues such
as religion, politics, and popular culture in relation to Ayn Rand.

This study also had some advantages. I believe the major advantage of this
research was the exploratory nature of the study. Although the findings are not
generalizable to many other specific situations, it has opened up many new
considerations about how people perceive a specific theory or set of beliefs and how they
associate it (or not) to SMO’s and other political ideas. Using data from the internet is a
relatively new endeavor and what we can learn from it will become more and more
important as we center our lives on its use. Although this research did not find specific
answers to specific questions, the qualitative nature may have shed some light on ideas
for future research for people and organizations wanting to further their cause within
society. The area of religion in regards to where Rand fits in seems interesting as well as
how her ideas are intertwined with other general ideas and what implications this could
have for her theories as an ongoing debate within popular culture. There are many new avenues to be explored on this topic.

Conclusion

The original intent of this research was to explore the perception of Ayn Rand in our culture in regards to her ideas being linked to social change and specific social movement organizations. This was a difficult result to measure; which is to say it was almost impossible to establish measurable results in regards to people’s opinions and arguments. The exploratory nature of the analysis led to some interesting findings in the sense that, Rand was embedded in the economic and political thought of today, yet the distinction between her ideas and capitalistic ideas has become unclear to the extent that they may have merged. It appeared that Rand is associated with the ideas of capitalism as Marx is with communism; both of which embody polarizing characteristics when it comes to interaction in society as displayed in this study. As an idea within pop culture Rand was still present; however, her influence may not lead to people being committed enough to actualize her theories in the real world. With the internet a staple in our culture, the ideological debate continues in this format as it did in the newspapers of the 1950’s. It could be that Rand is more of a pop culture icon that fuels the fire for capitalism, but not a movement of thought that was considered seriously in and of itself. Libertarians, Conservatives, and the Tea Party have all taken pages from her novels into account yet remain distant in their associations when the situation calls for it. Further study on the Ayn Rand Institute as an SMO could enlighten us on the topic and may be critical in
understanding the subject further. Unfortunately for Rand, it did not appear as if society sees her as the philosophical giant that she hoped to be.

Social movements and social movement organizations are complex entities that involve a great deal of work and effort to accomplish their goals. As this study attempted to establish a link between the Objectivist theories of Ayn Rand and SMO’s, it was clear that the internet introduces a new avenue with which to achieve these goals. The lack of SMO linkage found in the data establishes the conclusion that there was much room for improvement when it comes to forging a presence on the web for these organizations. Individual SMO’s may have their own websites; however, to what extent this may or may not have an impact on the individuals involved with these movements was unclear. Specific ideologies, such as Objectivism, were certainly discussed; the impact and link to actual social changes did not appear to be of particular significance at the present time. Referring back to one of the elements contained in the definition of a social movement by McAdam and Snow (2010); the internet provides an arena for this loose collectivity of individuals to express their opinions and beliefs about what is currently taking place in the world. It seems that now, it may be a little too loose and could benefit from more specific linkage to the SMO’s themselves. An organization may consist of individuals, but they must be willing to have a voice that can be connected to the organization. At least in the online world, Objectivism as a movement appears to be in its infancy.
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