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Getting Into the mainstream: The virtual strategies of the feminist movement in Puerto Rico

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GETTING INTO THE MAINSTREAM: THE VIRTUAL STRATEGIES OF THE FEMINIST
MOVEMENT IN PUERTO RICO

A thesis presented

by

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to

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Firuzeh Shokooh Valle

ABSTRACT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Journalism in the Graduate School of Arts and
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The purpose of this study was to investigate how the feminist movement in Puerto Rico has employed the Internet to advance a feminist agenda in the mainstream media. The results reveal that the listserv—which is the coalition’s main virtual platform—provides a safe space for discussions, deliberation, networking, strategizing, consensus building, decision-making, task distribution, and as a source of information. In addition, its content can produce public messages that will circulate in the mainstream media. Another important finding is that the feminist movement’s almost complete access to the mainstream media has not necessarily led to an adequate coverage of gender issues. The research demonstrates that offline communications are still vital for the feminist movement in Puerto Rico. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were sent out via email to representatives of the 18 member organizations of the feminist coalition known as the Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico.

Acknowledgments

I have always believed that my creative work is the result of a collective process. I say collective because my journalistic and academic work thrives on the constant input of ideas and feedback of many wonderful people. Collective because I could not have done any work without the support of my social network and the solidarity of others.

As a reporter, my work was constantly enriched by passionate conversations and debates with my mother, my aunts, my grandmother, my boyfriend, friends, colleagues, editors, neighbors, and even acquaintances. To say that every single one of the articles, reportages, or investigative series I wrote during almost a decade were totally, and absolutely, the product of my mind, would be false. I am fortunate to be able to count with an inspiring group of brilliant, sensitive, passionate, savvy, and generous people who challenge me, and intellectually stimulate me, every day of my life.

As a graduate student and an academic I have been surrounded by these same people, and have met many more. I am deeply indebted to my advisors, mentors and professors Laurel Leff, Debra Kaufman, and Kumarini Silva for their unflinching support in my academic endeavors at Northeastern University. They have been an example of academic rigor, intellectual honesty, and unending generosity. Thank you.

I am indebted to the members of the MAMPR who graciously accepted to participate in this investigation. Thank you for your time, support and invaluable insights. Thank you for your commitment to making Puerto Rico a more just society for everyone.

I also want to thank my aunt, the journalist Norma Valle Ferrer, for her unconditional support throughout the years and her brilliant ideas on media, journalism, feminism, and activism. She has also contributed immensely to this research through her academic work. Her groundbreaking work on feminism in Puerto Rico is a fundamental part of this thesis.

I am eternally indebted to my mother, Diana Valle Ferrer. Truly, and without a doubt, I could not have done this without her. Thank you, *Mami*, for your love, solidarity, support, critiques, and intellectual passion. Thank you for all the intense and challenging conversations that have made me analyze, and rethink, my opinions. Thank you for teaching me that feminism is also a daily practice. Thank you for being such a wonderful mother, grandmother, and friend.

My *compañero*, partner, boyfriend, and significant other, Deepak Lamba Nieves, has been my family and support in Boston. His brilliance, intellectual depth, sensitivity, and generosity have inspired me throughout the years. Thank you, Deepak, for being my love, my accomplice, and my refuge. Thank you for being my home away from home.

Marina, my daughter, is my inspiration. Her generosity, honesty, wisdom, kindness, sense of humor, and unbridled love do not cease to amaze me. Her capacity to change and evolve has

taught me great lessons. Marina has taught me what true love is all about. Being her mother has been the most creative work I have ever done. Thank you, Marina, for illuminating my days with your brilliant light.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My experiences as a reporter who covered human rights issues for five years for one of Puerto Rico's principal mainstream newspapers inform my current research on alternative media. On many occasions, after interviewing mostly female survivors of atrocious acts of violence, I asked myself if I had accurately represented their experiences, feelings, and thoughts. How would they have narrated their own stories? How much did I interpret their experiences through my journalistic reporting? Was I depicting them solely as victims? As a feminist reporter at a commercial and sensationalist newspaper I also asked myself: How could I be loyal to my interviewees' and my audience when, at the same time, I have to please my editors and, ultimately, contribute to newspaper sales and advertising? Similar questions also came up when I interviewed feminist advocates and activists. In what ways was I a feminist journalist? Was I interviewing women when I covered economic and political issues? Was a mainstream newspaper an adequate vehicle for my feminist journalistic goals and ethics?

I believe scholarly research should be an honest and transparent endeavor. As a feminist student and researcher I have learned that theory and method are inextricably linked. I will not attempt to expound in a few lines my ethical dilemmas or the power imbalances intrinsic in this research. I believe this is a complex, profound, and life-long task that requires much more space and time than a paragraph or two. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to address certain ethical issues I confronted during this research. I was formed as a journalist in the mainstream media in Puerto

Rico. I worked during eight years at *Primera Hora*, first as an editor in the Arts and Entertainment section, and then as a reporter in the News section. As a reporter I initiated a human rights beat at my newspaper, mainly covering issues of domestic and sexual violence against women. I was awarded three national prizes for articles and investigative series on gender issues. Many of my articles transformed public policies and law making concerning women and children. I always viewed my accomplishments as the accomplishments of women and the women's movement in Puerto Rico.

I may not be wrong. But I also have to admit that at the end of each day, it was my byline in the paper. I received the glory of everything published under my name, but did not experience the hell that those I wrote about went through. I also selected the information, negotiated with my editors, and, at times, complied with editorial demands such as highlighting the pain, the suffering, and the victimization of women in order to garner interest. I worked, lived, and breathed inside that machine called "the mainstream media," which should not be considered a monolithic institution either. Although there are corporate demands, hierarchical and vertical structures of organization, and the daily urge of "selling", there are also spaces for negotiation, resistance, and contestation. I believe reporters must sometimes make compromises to have access to, and transform, these spaces. This was my objective, although the results may not have been always favorable for the many women who let me into their lives.¹

¹ What I mean by this statement is that it is impossible for me to know exactly what consequences my articles had in the lives of the many women I interviewed. I would like to think they felt empowered by the stories, but this is difficult to know with certainty.

This is the background that ignited my interest in the use of the Internet as a form of alternative media used by the feminist movement in Puerto Rico, specifically the 18 organizations and groups united under the feminist coalition *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico* (MAMPR or MAM). The MAMPR has a group on Facebook with 996 members,² a blog since April 10, 2008 that has received 9,071 visits since April 14, 2008³, an email group registered under Google since 2009 with approximately 200 participants. Also, a handful of MAMPR members have their own blogs. My research goals are exploratory and descriptive. This thesis' primary research question is: How has the feminist movement in Puerto Rico employed the Internet to advance a feminist agenda in the mainstream media? In order to answer this larger question, I also discuss the Internet as a medium of communication, the Internet and exclusion, and access and participation in the public sphere. Feminist scholarship on alternative and mainstream media has produced literature concerned with the use of the Internet and other media as forms of alternative communication and information, but few have explored the relationships between the feminist movement, the Internet and mainstream media.

Media scholars (Atton 2004, Couldry and Curran 2003, Downing et al. 2001, Rodríguez 2001) have used an array of concepts to describe media and journalistic practices outside the mainstream media. Some of the concepts used are: alternative, citizen, autonomous, participatory, community, grassroots, alternative, independent, minority, popular, indigenous, emancipatory, and radical. For the purpose of my research I will use alternative media as a

² This data was retrieved from the MAMPR's public Facebook profile <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=14768494402/> on June 20, 2010.

³ This information was retrieved on May 30, 2010 from Modigo Webstats <http://webstats.modigo.com/s?tab=1&link=1&id=4505262/>.

heuristic device to explore the virtual communication practices of the members of the MAMPR. As for “media” I will adopt Downing’s (2001) broader definition that includes radio, TV, print, theater, dance, songs, graffiti, video, and the Internet. Mainstream media are described as large-scale and homogenous, state-owned or commercially driven, vertically and hierarchically organized, and “carriers of dominant discourses and representations” (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier 2008:18). Alternative media is defined as being counter-hegemonic, non-commercial, small-scale, independent from the state and the market, and community oriented. I have found that Olga Bailey, Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier’s (2008) definitions and theorizations are much more useful and provocative because they conceptualize “alternative media” as a hybrid, multidimensional, and changing form of expression that should not be encased in rigid, static or binary categories. For instance, there are alternative projects that in many ways emulate mainstream media structures and practices –in terms of how they generate capital, internal organization, or editorial decisions. Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier’s (2008) argue: “the definition of ‘alternative’ media should be amplified to include a wider spectrum of media generally working to democratize information/communication” (xi) and “articulated as relational and contingent on the particularities of the contexts of production, distribution and consumption” (xii). The authors approach their study of alternative media from four theoretical frameworks: in relation to mainstream media, as community media, as civil society media and as rhizomatic media (xii). My research attempts, precisely, to cross borders, blur boundaries, and reveal alternative media practices that defy traditional definitions.

In my research I explore how leaders of the organizations that comprise the MAMPR, and who participate in their electronic group (also called listserv or mailing list) and maintain blogs and websites, define their uses of the Internet and their relationship with the mainstream media in Puerto Rico. Most of the feminist scholarly literature on alternative and mainstream media has found that women are misrepresented and have no access to the mainstream media in their specific contexts. This is why women, and other underrepresented groups, have created their own alternative media across the globe (Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004.). In Puerto Rico, there is a rich history that dates back to union leaders, reformists, and suffragists, of feminists creating alternative media –such as specialized magazines, newspapers, and leaflets- in order to have a space to represent themselves in their own terms and to voice their concerns (Bauzá 1987, Valle Ferrer 1990, Dueñas Guzmán 1993, Crespo Kebler and Rivera Lassén 2001, Valle Ferrer 2006).

In my research I initially expected to find that the MAMPR's members are using the Internet as a hybrid form of alternative media, but not necessarily as a space of contestation, because they have access to, and are mostly well represented by, the mainstream media which spans newspapers, television and radio (See Appendix B). Only the first premise of this initial hypothesis proved to be true. I have found -through the responses of representatives of 14 of the 18 organizations that comprise the MAMPR to the questionnaire sent via email- that although almost all of the organizations have access to the mainstream media, they have mixed feelings about the coverage of gender issues. They opined that the mainstream media's coverage of gender issues in Puerto Rico –such as violence against women, reproductive rights, public policies, and sexual, racial and class discrimination- is contradictory and definitely not a priority.

But this misrepresentation has not strengthened their online voice or fomented a significant alternative online narrative. Only three of the participants of this research have personal blogs, which they mainly use to provide in-depth perspectives on gender issues in Puerto Rico.

I believe one of the possible reasons behind this is that their access to mainstream media has been guaranteed, which in itself is an important accomplishment. There can be other explanations, such as lack of time, inadequate media literacy and computer skills of the MAMPR's members, or that in Puerto Rico the Internet has not taken off as an important communicative space. Many of the participants are also concerned with exclusion, in terms of how many women have access and the necessary media literacy skills to actually use the Internet and engage in this relatively new virtual space. This is one of the reasons they still continue to have face-to-face meetings. These explanations could be analyzed in further investigations.

According to the findings of this research, the MAMPR's Internet practices are mainly focused on internal networking and communications, building consensus, decision-making, formulating media strategies, distributing tasks, and voicing their opinions. Yet its Internet practices are also hybrid and multidimensional because through them they also aim to participate in public discourse through the mainstream media. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Little written has been about the connections between the feminist movement in Puerto Rico and its media practices (Rivera Lassén 2001, Valle Ferrer 2004), although there is some literature produced by Puerto Rican feminists and scholars that I have reviewed. The focus of my research intersects with the literature on women's diverse uses of the media, specifically of the Internet (Byerly and Ross 2006, Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004, Mitra 2004). Alternative media

research is another branch of literature that I use in this study, mainly because alternative media scholars are working and reworking concepts of voice, participation, exclusion, the public sphere, and empowerment (Atton 2004, Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier 2008, Couldry and Curran 2003, Downing et al. 2001, Rodríguez 2001, Riaño 1994). I have also focused on feminist analysis of the intersection between gender and the public sphere based on theories formulated by Jurgen Habermas (Byerly and Ross 2006, Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004, Fraser 1992). Manuel Castells (2001, 2007, 2009) is a key theorist in the areas of the Internet as a communicative space, the intersections of global corporate media and local grassroots networks, the rise of online “mass self-communication” (2007), the Internet as a potential space of public participation, and communication power. As such, my research draws greatly from Castell’s theories.

There is a vast literature on communications for social change and development, especially from researchers and theorists from the developing world (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008, Melkote and Steeves 2001). There has also been an upsurge of research on the relationships between new social movements and organizations that are linking transnationally through their Internet media practices (Juris 2008, Marx Ferree and Mari Tripp 2006, van de Wonk et al. 2004).

Cyberfeminism and the intersections of gender and technology –mostly in terms of identity- has also been thoroughly researched (Haraway 1990, Plant 2000, Turkle 1995). But these are not the foci of my research at this moment, although there may be intersections.

This thesis makes important contributions on two levels: it will fill, albeit partially, the absence of research on the linkages between the contemporary feminist movement in Puerto Rico and its media practices, specifically concerning the Internet, and it will also bring to the forefront the strategies the MAMPR has used to have access to the mainstream media in Puerto Rico. In my conclusion I offer specific recommendations as to how the MAMPR might explore the Internet's potential as an alternative form of media to express itself on topics that are invisible, or superficially covered, in the mainstream media.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Five fundamental themes run through the literature on alternative media, women and media, women's media and the Internet, and the Internet as a space that enables new forms of public communication and networking: (1) alternative media provides a space where groups can represent themselves when misrepresented and excluded by the mainstream media; (2) the production of alternative media is a way of participating in the public sphere when groups have been excluded by the mainstream media; (3) groups that create alternative media are generally horizontally and non-hierarchically organized, (4) the celebration and problematization of the Internet as a space that permits diverse and multiple voices to express themselves, and (5) the Internet holds the potential of transforming and redistributing unequal power relations.

The following literature review is thematically structured around the theoretical issues, debates, and arguments mentioned above. Although there may be some clear and transparent boundaries within themes, mostly they overlap, intersect, and meet at some point. This is an intrinsic part of the research approach: to maintain fluid and changeable borders between concepts of media, communication, public and counter-public, and alternative and mainstream.

1. Alternative Media and Self-representation

A vast body of literature theorizes and analyzes women's diverse relationships with the media. Feminist scholarly attention has been focused on studying how women are represented in the mainstream media, and the roles women play as the audience for mainstream media (Byerly and

Ross 2006, Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004, Gallagher 2001, Ross and Byerly 2004).

The fairly wide consensus derived from feminist empirical research is that women are still underrepresented and excluded from the fact-based mainstream media.⁴ The most recent Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 2010, though, presents some advances in comparison to past surveys (1995, 2000, and 2005). The preliminary findings of the fourth GMMP (2010), which analyzes how women are represented in the news, are presented as sources of the news, and work as reporters and presenters in newsrooms, show that 24% of news subjects (people who are interviewed, or whom the news is about) are women (this is a 3% increase from 2005), and 16% of the stories focus on women (a 6% increase from 2005). Although there have been slight increases, the numbers for women as sources and as the focus of the stories are still pretty low. According to the 2010 GMMP report, women (47%) have achieved parity with men (53%) as sources of popular opinion, but sources described as “experts” are overwhelmingly men (81%). In terms of women working as reporters and presenters, women presented 44% of the stories on television (a 2% increase from 2005), and women reporters wrote 35% of the newspaper articles (a 6% increase from 2005). This equality in terms of numbers of female and male reporters in the newsrooms does not mean gender issues have become central in the fact-based mainstream media: only 12% of stories highlight issues of gender equality or inequality. Although these preliminary findings signal some advances for women as reporters and sources, women reporters in radio dropped drastically from 45% in 2005 to 27% in 2010. Of women in the news, 19% are

⁴ The International Women’s Media Foundation website offers an extensive summary of research conducted across the globe. The information was retrieved on July 25, 2010 from <http://www.iwmf.org/article.aspx?id=456&c=global/>.

identified by their family status compared to 4% of men.⁵ Although there have been advances, there are still many obstacles to overcome. The final report of the fourth GMMP report, which has not been released by the time of the writing of this thesis, might shed light on the findings and offer recommendations to improve the future of women in news.

The 2005 GMMP study included Puerto Rico (2010 results are not available). On February 16, 2005, 84 codifiers monitored 16 media outlets (three newspapers, five radio stations and eight television stations). They analyzed 432 news stories that contained a total of 1,343 subjects. Some of the key findings are that subjects of the news are overwhelmingly men (74%) as the focus of the story, the spokesperson, and the “expert” quoted and consulted. Only 19% of the subjects in stories on politics and the government are women, 27% in celebrity news, and 34% of the subjects in sports news are women. More women are reporters in radio (53%) and newspapers (59%), but not in television (34%). Male reporters tend to cover legal and social issues (73%) and economic issues (61%) while female reporters tend to cover science and health (75%) and crime and violence (57%). Finally, 32% of the stories by female reporters include women as subjects compared to 23% of stories by men.

Although the Global Media Monitoring Project –organized by World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)- only presents the journalistic coverage of one day out of 365, it provides an illuminating “slice” of the picture. A limitation of this research, which uses

⁵ The 2010 GMMP was conducted on November 10, 2009 by monitors in 130 countries. The preliminary findings for 2010 are based on a sample of 42 countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific Islands and Europe. The sample analyzes 6,902 news items and 14,044 news subjects. Please see GMMP’s website for more information: <http://www.whomakesthenews.org/>.

quantitative content analysis and qualitative narrative analysis, is that it does not take into account the race, class, sexuality, or nationality of the women represented in the media. Nor does it provide in-depth analysis of the issues. Nonetheless, the findings are still rather unsettling even though they point to some advances across the globe. Much improvement in terms of representation and access to the mainstream media is needed.

Alternative media has had a crucial role in attempting to repair these distortions and exclusions. Feminist media scholars Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross (2006) recognize that “women have not stood idly by, but, rather, have acted in a number of ways to improve coverage or to produce alternative news and other media structures” (38). Most of the literature reviewed for my thesis affirms that alternative media provide a space for people to express themselves on their own terms. In the groundbreaking anthology “Women and Grassroots Communication,” editor and author Pilar Riaño (1994) asserts, “women’s participation in communication initiatives constitutes a tool of struggle and a meaningful space in which to develop women’s own discourses” (4). Riaño links women’s production of grassroots media to empowerment and collective struggle. Although the texts in this anthology study grassroots media in mostly disadvantaged communities in Latin America, it remains to date one of the few academic texts solely dedicated to women as producers of grassroots media.

Many scholars are using the term “citizen’s media” to refer to alternative media produced by non-professional journalists. Clemencia Rodríguez (2001) coined the term “citizens’ media” drawing on theories on the construction of democratic citizenship formulated by Chantal Mouffe

and Ernesto Laclau (1985). She explains that citizens' media "implies first, that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where those transformations and changes are possible" (20). By using the term "citizen" instead of "alternative," Rodríguez (2001) seeks to disrupt the binary alternative/mainstream. The author's analysis of citizen media offers nuance and depth, but describes mainstream media in monolithic terms. Chris Atton (2002) is another theorist who sees alternative media as a space where marginalized communities can have a voice. Building on theories of Michel Foucault (1980), Atton (2002) has described the production of alternative media as the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" where the "Other" can represent itself (9). A crucial aspect is missing from alternative media research: the study of its audiences (Downing 2003). How do audiences react to alternative media? How are they transformed? Who are the audiences? On the other hand, there is a burgeoning literature on how the Internet has provided new possibilities for marginalized groups across the globe.

This theme is tied to my research because I studied how the MAMPR uses the Internet as an alternative space for self-representation. The MAMPR's listserv is a virtual platform in which members express themselves on diverse issues. MAMPR members have found a "safe-space" in which to voice their opinions. It has become an important center of conversation, information and networking.

2. Participation in the Public Sphere

Most of the contemporary debates and conceptualizations of the public sphere build on Jürgen Habermas's (1962/1991) theories about the public sphere as a "space" where citizens discuss common affairs. Of particular importance to communications research is Habermas's description of the media as a "coordinating mechanism for reaching understanding" in the public sphere (Cited in Byerly and Ross 2006: 117). In their research, Downing et al. (2001), Atton (2002) and Rodríguez (2001) discuss how people use radical/alternative/citizen media to transform and counter mainstream public discourse. Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have criticized the absence of gender, race and class in Habermas's analysis. The debate has led to Habermas's own revision of his theories (1992), and feminist theorization about the existence of multiple public spheres and counter-public spheres that converge and collide (Byerly and Ross 2006). Nancy Fraser (1992) and Rita Felski (1989) have developed concepts of "counter-public spheres" and "counter-discourses" to describe the participation of women (considering intersections between race, class, and sexuality) in the formation of multiple and oppositional public spheres.

Feminist scholar Nancy Fraser's (1992) theories regarding the intersections of gender and the public sphere are fundamental here. Fraser (1992) describes Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere as a "body of 'private persons' assembled to discuss matters of 'public concern' or 'common interest' in the context of absolutist regimes in early modern Europe (112). Through the public sphere, society would hold the state accountable. But this idea of an open and accessible public sphere is based on exclusions, rather than inclusions: "Women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation on the basis of gender status,

while plebeian men were formally excluded by property qualifications. Moreover, in many cases women and men of racialized ethnicities of all classes were excluded on racial grounds” (118). Using revisionist historiographies that have recorded how marginal groups such as women, workers, people of color, and gay and lesbians have created alternative publics, Fraser (1992) proposes the concept of “*subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (123). As an example she mentions the multiple alternative media outlets feminists in the United States have constructed and the alternative activities they have conducted, such as the creation of bookstores, journals, video networks, academic programs, and festivals. Through these counterpublics, feminists in the United States have been able to insert issues such as “domestic violence,” “sexual harassment,” and “the double shift” into the official public sphere. Some of the questions this research poses are: Does the Internet provide an ideal space for the creation of these subaltern counterpublics? Does the Internet permit traditionally marginalized groups an opportunity to also participate in the official public sphere?

Increasingly, the Internet is playing a crucial role in the analysis of public discourses, and the creation of a global public sphere. Castells (2008) explains that there has been a “shift from a public sphere anchored around the national institutions of territorially bound societies to a public sphere constituted around the media system” (90). This media system includes the ever-growing horizontal forms of communication on the Internet, such as mass self-communication. Regarding the participation of women in this public sphere sustained by virtual communications, Chambers,

Fleming and Steiner (2004) state that “the rich and ever-growing opportunities for women to come together on-line to produce and globally disseminate alternative news suggest that traditional forums of public debate are being reformulated by the rise of interest-group websites and that the Internet offers a potential for the reinvention of the ‘public’” (237). They caution that, even though the Internet presents new opportunities for women’s participation in democracy building, “further research is needed to confirm whether this activity supports formation of a genuinely public sphere or instead is merely something closer to Todd Gitlin’s (1998) critical notion of tiny, multiple sphericules, emphasizing the narrow and fragmented nature of such in-group communication” (239). On the other hand, these sphericules can also serve distinct purposes for individuals, groups, and social movements (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier 2008). These analyses necessarily bring to the forefront issues of participation, access, voice, and exclusion --themes that have been explored in the alternative media literature and, most of all, in feminist scholarship.

Social movements are among the groups that are using the Internet for networking, communicating with each other, creating transnational alliances, and for acquiring visibility and participation in the mainstream public realm. Castells (2007) states that the appearance of mass self-communication, such as SMS, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis, and social networking sites and tools such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, and Twitter, “offer an extraordinary medium for social movements and rebellious individuals to build their autonomy and confront the institutions of society in their own terms and around their own projects” (249). There is a long and rich history of citizens’ media around the world, especially in Latin America, that has mainly

taken the form of community radio, guerilla TV, and video production (Allan and Thorsen 2009, Martín-Barbero 1987, Riaño 1994, Rodríguez 2001). Although social movements around the world have been using the media for a long time to participate in public debate, Castells (2007) believes that for new social movements “the Internet provides the essential platform for debate, their means of acting on people’s minds, and ultimately serves as their most potent political weapon” (250). The Internet is a fairly new medium that provides a potential space for participation, and the emergence of diverse forms of counter-power (Castells 2007).

Interestingly, Castells (2009) also envisions the possibility of social grassroots movements using the Internet horizontally while they simultaneously insert their messages in the mainstream media. In other words, one strategy does not exclude the other:

Precisely because they are multimodal, diversified, and pervasive, communication networks are able to include and enclose cultural diversity and a multiplicity of messages to a much greater extent than any other public space in history. Thus, the public mind is captured in programmed communication networks, limiting the impact of autonomous expressions outside the networks. But in a world marked by the rise of mass self-communication, social movements and insurgent politics have the chance to enter the public space from multiple sources. By using both horizontal communication networks and mainstream media to convey their images and messages, they increase their chances of enacting social and political change –even if they start from a subordinate position in institutional power, financial resources, or symbolic legitimacy. (302)

The Internet provides a platform for multiple intersections between alternative and mainstream, and vertical and horizontal, among other combinations.

Listservs and email groups have also been valuable platforms for social movements’ participation in the public sphere. Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) state: “For civil society organizations, activists and social movements, e-mail, mailing lists, and forums increasingly represent a (cost-)efficient means to distribute alternative-counter-hegemonic-

information, to mobilize online as well as offline direct action, to debate issues, and even at times to become a tool for internal decision-making. Because of this, it is often claimed that the Internet is increasingly important for strengthening the public sphere or public spaces” (97). The authors studied two cases: the use of a mailing list by the Internet Governance (IG) civil society caucus of the World Summit on the Information Society, and the spontaneous public forum posted on Indymedia-Netherlands after the assassination of the right-wing populist leader Pim Fortuyn. Here, I focus on the analysis of the IG email list, because of its relevance to this research. The authors use quantitative methods to study the approximately 3,000 messages circulated in the IG listserv from 2003 to 2005. The email list had 100 “active participants” and other subscribers defined as “passive participants.” Many respondents said that the email list enlisted global participation that would have otherwise been impossible, allowed the discussion of complex issues, and complemented offline meetings. The listserv members were mostly from the Global North (the developed countries) and men. The authors conclude that the IG email list “confirms the increasing importance of the Internet relating to intra-movement networking, to disseminating (alternative) information and to debating with a view to reaching a consensus within the network” (2008:105). They also conclude that online and offline communications carry their own sets of exclusions that must be addressed (based on gender, class, race). Online (and offline) access, participation, representation, and exclusion have been thoroughly theorized and discussed by feminist scholars.

Feminist scholars have argued that the Internet has the potential to provide a democratic, open, public, and participative space for women and the distribution of gender issues (Harcourt 1999,

Youngs 2004). Analyzing certain women groups' Internet use, Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming (2004) state that "independent information distribution media projects on the Internet are quickly growing in both number and sophistication, spurred on both dissatisfaction with the mainstream news media and increasingly easier access to new media technology...Importantly, several of these Internet news and information networks challenge mainstream definitions of news by overtly advancing feminist initiatives..." (190). It is precisely the networking aspect of the Internet that has made it an ideal "voice" for social movements around the world. The emancipatory possibilities of the Internet have also become central to women's movements. Sally Burch (1999) writes: "Networking, as a horizontal and decentralized form of social articulation that facilitates joint action and exchange while respecting the autonomy of the respective components, has been widely adopted for this kind of action (movement building). The women's movement in particular has been built around networks. This form of organization has received a great boost in the last decade with the advent of the Internet" (197). The use of alternative media as a means to participate in the dominant public discourse –which is mainly sustained by the mainstream media- or to create counter-public spheres is one of the themes that runs through the feminist media literature, and for that matter, in much of media and communication literature in general.

In considering the Internet's potential to provide a space of public participation and expression, some feminist scholars have studied the benefits and problems the Internet has presented for sexual minorities (Bryson 2004, Friedman 2007). Friedman (2007) focused on how lesbian organizations in Latin America were using the Internet. She interviewed members of six lesbian

organizations in Argentina and Mexico, and analyzed a representative sample of lesbian feminist websites from Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Peru and Brazil. Friedman found that in this Latin American context, in which lesbianism is highly stigmatized, “the Internet addresses the central problems impeding the effectiveness of lesbian organizing: isolation, repression, resource restriction, and lack of community cohesion (791).” Some of the challenges the Internet presented for lesbian organizations were the creation of new responsibilities, the erection of social and linguistic barriers, and the erosion of political accountability (international networking and funding facilitated by the Internet complicated local politics). Bryson (2004) conducted open-ended in-depth interviews with 14 Australian women who identified themselves as gay, lesbians, bisexual, queer, dyke, or transgendered, and as frequent Internet users. She recruited the participants through publishing ads in a Queer, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (QLBT) women’s newspaper distributed in urban/suburban and rural areas. Bryson (2004) found that the Internet provides a safe space for these women, serves as a platform for interaction with other queer women, lets them experiment with their sexual identity, and offers them access to information and knowledge. The methods sections of these studies are too brief to be able to determine the scope of the findings, although they are not meant to be generalizable. Nonetheless, the authors shed light on certain groups of lesbians’ use of the Internet.

Feminist research on the Internet provides some of the most nuanced and complex analysis of the relationships among gender, the Internet, and the public sphere. Although I have found that a general sense of cyboptimism runs through the literature, I have also encountered nuanced evaluations that mostly focus on issues of power, participation, voice, audience, and

methodology. In her research, Ananda Mitra (2004) uses theories of voice to question trust, authenticity and power in the use of SAUNET, the web portal for the discussion of issues concerning South Asian women. Mitra (2004) used discourse analysis in her study of the busiest pages of the website (selected by the number of links and amount of clicks to get from one page to another). The author argues that the Internet provides an ideal participative space for South Asian women who have been marginalized. Their participation in this virtual space compensates for their absence in real-life spaces: “Silencing of voices is one of the primary consequences of forced and oppressive invisibility in the real-life public sphere. However, new digital technologies are transforming the sense of ‘silence’ by offering opportunities for traditionally invisible groups such as the women of South Asia, to find a new discursive space where they can voice themselves and thus become visible and make their presence felt” (Mitra 2004:492). Mitra (2004) recommends more research on the consequences of women’s digital voice in the public sphere.

Discussion of women’s participation in the public sphere permeate the feminist literature on alternative media. Yisook Choi, Linda Steiner, and Sooah Kim (2006) studied two Korean feminist webzines, Dalara and Unninet, employing qualitative and quantitative methods. The authors focused their research on answering the question of how feminist online media can express alternative and feminist voices and build a feminist community. The study found that in the cases studied the Internet has proved to be “an increasingly important medium for creating and supporting a feminist public sphere, or, more properly, multiple public counter-spheres” (Choi et al. 2006:66), although money, time, and energy are also major constraints in developing

alternative online media. Despite the Internet's networking potential, low-cost production, blurring of traditional consumer/producer boundaries, and challenging to the authority of the mainstream media, it also presents issues of access, fragmentation, cacophony of voices, and the problem of male dominance in cyberspace: "So, cyberspace does not automatically liberate the dispossessed" (69). Women's participation in the public sphere, or rather the mobilization of gender and feminist issues and voices in the public sphere and the possible overlapping of counter-public spheres, is a crucial theoretical consideration when studying feminist online alternative media and communications.

The MAMPR also uses its listserv a bridge that connects the private to the public because many decisions made through conversations in the listserv are translated into actions covered and published in mainstream media outlets on the Island. The Internet is one of the tools the MAMPR uses to participate in the public sphere in Puerto Rico. I believe one of the most important reasons why feminists are important actors in the public sphere is because journalism and feminism share a long history in Puerto Rico (See Chapter 4).

3. Internal Organization

The internal organization of the groups that produce alternative media is a vital issue in the literature I have consulted. For decades, Third World communication theorists, such as Paulo Freire (1972), have emphasized the importance of analyzing communication as a process, not only as a product. Many contemporary theorists of alternative media stress that generally there is correlation between the group's organization and the media they produce (Atton 2002, Downing

et al. 2001, Rodríguez 2001). In other words, groups or movements that produce progressive media (regressive alternative media also exist) are generally horizontally and democratically organized. But these analyses should also be problematized. Many of these authors disregard core feminist methodological questions such as “who defines who can participate?” “who defines what is marginal?” “what are the subsumed power relationships?” and “who is excluded?” In this same line, Rodríguez (2001) warns that citizens’ media must not be idealized because it may also reproduce many of the hierarchies and power dynamics of society. Speaking specifically about the Internet, Castells (2001) asserts: “Neither utopia or dystopia, the Internet is the expression of ourselves –through a specific code of communication, which we must understand if we want to change our reality” (6). The Internet is as diverse, problematic and contradictory as the real world. There is inequality, exclusion, violence, crime and exploitation.

OhmyNews (OMN) is one of the most cited examples of a successful alternative/citizen online media project in terms of reach, audience, and influence. Journalist Yeon-Ho Oh founded OMN in South Korea in 2002 as an alternative publication sustained by a large network of non-professional reporters (Kim and Hamilton 2006). OMN, whose slogan is “Every Citizen is a Reporter”, started with a staff of four and a network of 700 citizen reporters; in 2006 it had a staff of 60, of which 35 were staff reporters (Kim and Hamilton 2006). OMN is an interesting case of a hybrid alternative. On one hand, it relies on mostly citizen/non-professional reporters, but it’s also a large-scale commercial publication funded primarily by Internet advertising. OMN also has a rigorous editorial structure that resembles mainstream media’s: contributors must register with the website, and every article is examined, edited, and filtered by staff editors

(Kim and Hamilton 2006), and the project adheres to traditional journalistic and ethical codes.

OMN has proved to be a highly influential publication that has intervened directly in the mainstream public sphere –specifically during the 2002 South Korean presidential election campaign. Its English edition also plays the game of the mainstream media by featuring stories on celebrities, for example. Kim and Hamilton (2006) conclude in their article –which employed mostly discourse analysis- that OMN is a “hybrid progressive-commercial” model that defies traditional definitions of alternative and mainstream media. They also emphasize that every project must be studied and examined within its context. An important point is that, in their study, Kim and Hamilton (2006) exclude an intersectional analysis (gender, race, class, sexuality) and the description of OMN’s internal organization. For instance, when OMN says “Every Citizen is a Reporter”, who exactly are these citizens? The “about us” section of the English website of OMN suggests a less-than-democratic internal structure, with the founder, Yeon-Ho Oh, listed as the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a title mostly used in the corporate world. The rest of the staff is grouped under “volunteer editors,” “system design,” and “finance administration.”⁶ Then, is OMN an alternative publication? What constitutes an alternative media project? Democratic participation, multiple voices, internal organization, size, representation, non-commercial goals? If all boundaries and borders are transgressed and blurred, then what do we have left? Complete hybridity? How does the Internet –based on ideas of collaboration, networking, participation, and multiplicity- sustain this hybridity?

Among a sector of alternative media scholars –from whom I have cited - there is a great degree of skepticism towards the Internet as a truly democratic medium. Rodríguez and Kidd (2010)

⁶ This data was retrieved on May 14, 2010 from <http://english.ohmynews.com/>.

remain critical of web 2.0 projects because of the possibility of government and corporate surveillance and data mining of participants by corporations. Media activists, for example, debate whether corporations such as Microsoft, Google, and Yahoo, just to name a few, should provide and sustain the services and platforms used by grassroots and radical activists. Rodríguez and Kidd (2010), therefore, argue that community radio is the “world’s most significant medium, especially for marginalized groups, in both rural and metropolitan areas” (6). Radio transmission does not depend on electricity or literacy. The authors take a Freirian approach: “...the meaning and practice of participation presented here (in the anthology) is more extensive, based in collective design, decision making, creative interchange and governance, at all stages of the production and circulation of meaning, up to and including the ownership and self-government of the media outlet” (6). But, in terms of internal organization, radio projects can be as problematic as any other medium in terms of power distribution. As a recent example, the Asia Pacific Women’s sector of AMARC (the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters) studied the situation of women working in community radio outlets. The study was prompted by the concerns of women community radio broadcasters from all over the world regarding unequal power relationships within their media’s internal structures.⁷ The result was the publication of a “Gender Policy for Community Radio” (2008) to ensure women’s full participation in these grassroots organizations.

The MAMPR is horizontally and non-hierarchically organized. Generally, spokespeople are selected on a case-by-case basis and by consensus reached through the listserv. The MAMPR is not a media organization. Still, as the case study for this research, its internal organization is

⁷ This data was retrieved on May 14, 2010 from <http://www.isiswomen.org/>.

relevant. The MAMPR's guiding principles (See Chapter 4) are built upon ideas of participation and inclusion, and this is precisely the foundation of its internal organization.

4. Internet, Voice, and Participation

This leads us to the following questions that are debated incessantly in the literature: How democratic is the Internet? How plural is it? The Internet is not a panacea for marginalized people and communities (Atton 2004). There are issues of power relationships, access, and literacy that must be taken into account. Leslie Regan Shade (2002) describes the exclusion of Zapatista women's voices in the widely celebrated Internet strategies used by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* after its insurrection in Chiapas, México, in 1994. And in their case study of the Independent Media Centers (IMC's), Lisa Brooten and Gabriele Hadl (2010) reveal the subtle network media practices that reinforce hierarchies that exclude women. In "Women@Internet" (1999), Laura Agustín problematizes the question of voice: "For, with all the rhetoric about the need to liberate 'unheard voices', we miss an essential point: those voices have been talking all along. The question is who is listening" (155). These are some of the issues concerning the possibilities of the Internet as a new terrain for transcending traditional communicative and participative barriers. Besides the social divide that has just been described, primarily based on gender and race, the so-called "digital divide", based mainly on an economic analysis, must also be taken into account.

For the purpose of this literature review, I have decided to offer global statistics on Internet use because concentrating only on the United States would be misleading. Few statistics are

available on Internet use in Puerto Rico and what is available tends to be general. The only comprehensive and authoritative statistic I have found is from the United Nations specialized agency for telecommunications, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which collects statistics on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) penetration, accessibility and use across the globe. According to the latest ITU statistics (2008), 25% of the almost 4 million people who live in Puerto Rico are Internet users.⁸ The University of Puerto Rico's statistical project, *Tendencias Puerto Rico*, indicates that there are 237 Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants. This places Puerto Rico as the Latin American country with the third highest rate of Internet use, behind Costa Rica (276) and Chile (252).⁹ The Puerto Rican Blog Directory *Puertoblogs* had 1,462 blogs registered as of June 2, 2010.¹⁰ These are the most recent statistics on Internet use in Puerto Rico.

In "Communication Power" (2009), Castells asserts that the number of Internet users in the world grew from under 40 million in 1995 to 1.4 billion in 2008. Precisely, ITU estimated that in 2008 there were 1.5 billion Internet users in the world.¹¹ Basing his analysis on statistics from various studies conducted by the University of Southern California's Center for the Digital Future, Castells (2009) says that in most developed countries Internet penetration is more than 60%, and was increasing rapidly in developing countries. Nevertheless, "global Internet penetration in 2008 was still at around one-fifth of the world's population, and fewer than 10%

⁸ This data was retrieved on May 2, 2010 from ITU's website <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx/>.

⁹ This data was retrieved on June 8, 2010 from <http://www.tendenciaspr.com/>. The sources of the statistics are ITU and the 2005 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

¹⁰ This data was retrieved on June 2, 2010 from <http://www.puertoblogs.com/>.

¹¹ This data was retrieved on May 2, 2010 from ITU's website http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/at_glance/KeyTelecom99.html/.

of Internet users had access to broadband” (62). In their latest global Internet study, the World Internet Project (WIP), the Center for the Digital Future found that in only half of the 10 countries studied more than a majority of the respondents were Internet users. According to the study, “both developed and less-developed countries reported relatively low percentages of Internet users, including Mexico (32 percent), Portugal (37 percent), Cyprus and Colombia (45 percent), Czech Republic (51 percent), and Chile (55 percent). Only three countries report more than 60 percent of respondents as Internet users: Macao (61 percent), the United States (78 percent), and Sweden (80 percent)” (Center for the Digital Future 2010)¹².

There still is a profound digital divide, but the statistics show that the gap is narrowing. This is why some scholars are focusing on the dramatic and rapid increase of Internet penetration across the globe, rather than on the existing divide. The 2006 Pew Global Attitudes poll, “Truly a World Wide Web,” also sheds some light on this issue: “In each of the 13 countries for which historical comparisons can be made, more people now use computers at home, school or work than in 2002. The rise is dramatic in Turkey, Russia, India and Poland, where the number of those who say they use a computer at least occasionally has risen by 13 percent to 16 percent in the three years between surveys”.¹³ The countries surveyed were Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, Spain, Turkey, and the United States. According to the study: “Internet use is...on the rise in both industrialized societies and developing countries... However, there is a stark divide between those countries with high rates of internet use and those with less access to

¹² This data was retrieved on April 7, 2010 from The Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communication, www.digitalcenter.org/.

¹³ This data was retrieved on May 2, 2010 from <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=251/>.

this technology.” Education and income level “continue to be predominant determinants of those who use technology, with those who have higher education levels and larger incomes more likely both to use computers and to access the Internet.” Regarding gender, the study found that in 14 of the 16 countries surveyed men use computers more than women (it is important to note that this study includes gender in the computer usage category, which does not necessarily mean Internet usage). Interestingly, only in Canada and Lebanon do women and men exhibit the same amount of computer activity. Other interesting findings regarding gender and computer usage are: “...despite India's thriving computer-related industries, only 28% of men and 14% of women employ computers either at home or at work. The largest disparity found in this study is between men and women computer users in Morocco where over half (58%) of men use them, but only 36% of women share in this activity.” Evidently, gender disparities continue to be a significant issue when studying the Internet.

Feminist literature on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) usage emphasizes that any study of the “digital divide” should integrate an intersectional analysis that includes gender, race and age, among other indicators. Nancy Hafkin (2003) explains that it is very difficult to measure the global gender digital divide due mainly to the lack of national sex-disaggregated data and inconsistent gathering techniques of private firms. In her work for ITU (2003), she found very little available data from developing countries, and a closing gender gap in developed countries. Although there is no consistent data, Hafkin (2003) asserts that worldwide gender inequalities also “impact women's ability to benefit equally from the opportunities offered by information technology” (2). The author alerts that there are many

gendered dimensions that affect the relationship of women and ICT's, such as access and infrastructure (more women live in remote rural areas), participation, education and skills, literacy, social and cultural issues, and financial resources, among others. Hafkin (2003) also cautions that women are not a homogenous group, therefore, multiple intersections of ethnicity and class, for instance, must be taken into account.

There are also pessimist perspectives on the potential of the Internet for marginalized communities. Laura Agustín (1999) is one of the most radical voices in the literature on women and the Internet. In "They Speak, but Who Listens?" (1999), she focuses on migrant sex workers who live under extremely hostile conditions, generally in hiding, and moving from place to place. Does cyberspace have margins for people who live in the margins in real life? (155) The author envisions a "postmodern scribe" who would travel through neighborhoods, plazas, bars, and coffee shops, with a laptop, cellular phones, printers, dictionaries, recorders, envelopes, paper:

Some women might want to know the weather in a city they are considering going to, others to send e-mail to alert other workers about trends in police harassment, dangerous clients or new wrinkles in immigration law. The scribe can look for and print from the Internet AIDS information in the women's own language; if they do not read she can tell them what is most important to know. The technology, the education, the services are mobile, like the workers. A fleet of such van in different parts of Europe would form a true network, which women could enter and leave at different points. (Agustín 1999:154-155)

But can this technological traveler resolve the issue of exclusion? Does mobile technology solve the problem of lack of access and literacy? Theoretically, Agustín's postmodern scribe is provocative. The idea is at the heart of debates on access, participation, voices, audience, impact, representation, and marginality.

Exclusion is one of the issues that most worried the participants in this research. Respondents lamented that some members do not have the time or the computer skills to participate in the conversations held through the listserv. Other participants pointed out that since the Internet is not a massive communication medium in Puerto Rico, many groups are excluded. The members of the MAMPR use face-to-face meetings and public events to include more people.

5. The Internet and Power

Power is one of the core issues in the literature I have reviewed, even when not mentioned by name. Power lies at the heart of theoretical debates on media –whether mainstream or alternative- and on communication, participation, voice, access, audience, representation, and their intersections with race, gender, sexuality, and class. Power is also embedded in statistical and quantitative data, in its gathering and in its delivery: numbers are not just numbers.

Therefore, issues of power are inherently present in my research. This investigation relies on Michel Foucault's (1980) theorizations on power as shifting, changeable, and heterogeneous.

The MAMPR's media practices are part of this unsettled and flowing network of power relationships within the Puerto Rican mediascape. Foucault (1980) argues:

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (98)

Foucault's theories on power lead us to the concept of "subjugated knowledges."

As power is unveiled in this seamless network, other knowledges appear. Foucault's (1980) analyses of power include the concept of "subjugated knowledges". These are "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault 1980: 82). The MAMPR is a feminist coalition that works toward legitimizing "subjugated knowledges" of women, gays, immigrants, and blacks, among other marginalized people. The literature on alternative media and on feminist theory share the notion of unearthing "subjugated knowledges" as formulated by Foucault in 1980 (Atton 2002, Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004). In the media literature, alternative media is described as a space where the "Other" can represent itself in its own terms (Atton 2002, Riaño 1994, Rodríguez 2001). In feminist theories that challenge positivism, theory and methods are linked in an attempt to uncover those subjugated knowledges, unveil the subsumed webs of power entrenched in relationships of subjugation and domination, and problematize the construction of knowledge and the role of the researcher, in an attempt to, ultimately, transform the world:

Feminist assessment of knowledge is directed not merely at what is said on what grounds, but also who gets to speak, who is heard as authoritative, whose concerns and possible responses must be taken into account in constructing knowledge claims, who has access to the material and social materials needed for research, what sustains or compromises these various forms of credibility, and how the resulting authorization of knowers and knowledge changes people's life situation, and constrains or enables their lives. The normative aspirations of feminist science studies are addressed not only to the content of knowledge and justification, but also and inseparably to questions of who knows, with what effects. Yet these aspirations are intertwined without being subordinated to one another. The aim is better knowledge and a better world, together. (Rouse 2004:369)

What is the role of the Internet as a network in which power is exerted and resisted? How can subjugated knowledges find a space in the Internet?

The Internet is a fairly new medium that facilitates the emergence of diverse forms of power and counter-power: global and local, corporate and grassroots, and vertical and horizontal, cohabit, converge, and collide through the Internet fabrics. Castells (2007) explains that in the network society, different kinds of media media, spread every day more by the Internet, is the new communicational space where “power is decided” (238), decisions are made, policies are formulated, and where powers and counter-powers are constantly negotiating. The proliferation of “mass self-communication”¹⁴ has facilitated the emergence of diverse forms of counter-power, defined as “the capacity by social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society” (Castells 2007: 248). Emails, blogs, micro-blogging, and videos are some of the most common Internet tools people use to voice their opinions and, in cases, counter mainstream discourses. A recent example is the massive protest in Iran in 2009 after the election, when followers of the defeated Iranian presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi used the Internet to connect to sympathizers and advocates from all over the world to denounce what they believed was a fraudulent election. Some have described this event as the “Twitter revolution.” Although this term is controversial, mostly among activists and scholars, it is undeniable that the case of Iran highlights the potential of digital technologies for aiding social movements. These communication networks allow for the inclusion of new actors, but the majority of people around

¹⁴ Castells (2007) defines “mass self-communication” as “a form of socialized communication that is massive because it potentially reaches a global audience through p2p (peer-to-peer) networks and Internet connection, multimodal because it can be downloaded, reformatted and distributed, and “self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many” (248).

the world are still excluded. Nevertheless, “everybody is affected by the processes that take place in the global networks...” such as the financial markets, transnational NGO’s, social movements, and criminal economies (Castells 2009:25). But is this new at all? Hasn’t it always been this way?

The debate should not be limited to whether the Internet facilitates new forms of power and counter-power, but rather what role does the Internet play in contemporary networks and communicative spaces. Atton (2004) states that what may be considered “new” about the Internet is that it permits the combination of characteristics that are not new, such as digital convergence, many-to-many communication, interactivity, globalization, virtuality. Other innovative aspects of online publishing are hypertextuality, interactivity and multimediality (Deuze 2004), and the constant reworking of authorship and authority (Poster 1999). Such a diverse use of the medium clearly indicates that the Internet’s potential goes beyond it being—at least within much of the world—a cheaper technology.

My research question is located in this literature in multiple ways. Through their virtual practices, specifically their internal listserv, the MAMPR engages in a hybrid form of media that blurs traditional boundaries between alternative and mainstream. It has established a safe space in which they can represent itself in its own terms, build consensus, dissent, consult, design strategies on how to participate in the mainstream public sphere (sustained by the mainstream media), and redistribute and rework power relationships within the mainstream mediascape. The listserv also supports a *subaltern counterpublic*, which at times intersects and overlaps with the

official mainstream public sphere in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, there are also problems involving access, media literacy, exclusion, participation, mainstream media content, and ability to truly transform the mainstream mediascape. This research touches upon every single one of the theoretical threads I have analyzed.

Overwhelmingly, the literature presents a troubling picture of the relationship of women and media. Cross-culturally women are generally misrepresented, underrepresented, and excluded from the mainstream media. Women around the world, and other marginalized groups, have used alternative media to represent themselves on their terms, to create counter-public spheres, and participate in the “dominant” public sphere sustained by the mainstream media industry. I believe the feminist movement in Puerto Rico has been fairly successful in advancing a feminist agenda by using alternative venues, and, at the same time, by intervening in the mainstream media structures through effective media strategies. This is a story that differs from the usual unsettling panorama, and will therefore make an important contribution to the literature on, and the practice of, women and media.

Chapter 3: Methods

1. Why Qualitative Methods?

In this research for a single case study I employ qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of the 18 organizations that comprise the MAMPR. I also analyzed the MAMPR's documents and multimedia presentations for context: to date there is no scholarly research on the MAMPR. Of a total of 18 questionnaires sent by email, 14 were returned. In other words, there was a 78% response rate, which is more than acceptable (Schutt 2009). Qualitative methods are best suited given the exploratory and descriptive nature of this investigation. In this research, I sought the opinions, perspectives, and thoughts of feminist activists about their participation in the mainstream media and their uses of online alternative media. The MAMPR, founded in 2007, is comprised of 18 member organizations, 30 individual members, and nine affiliated organizations. I have selected the 18 organizations as my sample for various reasons: they belong to a feasible unit to research; their representatives can all participate (which does not mean that they do) in the email group of the coalition; and they are all feminist organizations based in Puerto Rico. Although there is another feminist coalition in Puerto Rico, the *Coordinadora Paz para la Mujer* (founded in 1989), I chose the MAMPR for two reasons: it has an active listserv, and its members and events have had a significant presence in the mainstream media in Puerto Rico. I cannot affirm that the participants I interviewed are representative of the MAMPR as a whole, although the 18 organizations present a good sample, neither can I affirm that the MAMPR is representative of the feminist movement in Puerto Rico

in general. The results of this research are not meant to be generalizable, although they offer unique insights of the feminist movement's media practices in Puerto Rico.

The members of the MAMPR have also consistently appeared in the mainstream media as sources in, and subjects of, news on a range of issues. Many of the strategies that have led to their prominence, inclusion, and representation in the mainstream media have been designed, discussed and analyzed in their email listserv. The interviews with open and close-ended questions of these 14 representatives offer accounts and valuable information on how they have achieved inclusion in the mainstream media in Puerto Rico, how they describe the representation of gender issues in the media, and how they use the Internet as an alternative form of communication. On the other hand, using this sample in my research has its limitations: it will only provide one side of a multidimensional process that also includes journalists and editors with the mainstream media, and feminist journalism professors who have been the mentors of many journalists and editors in the mainstream media newsrooms in Puerto Rico. The perspectives of these important actors could be included in further research on this topic.

The principle strength of the method I have chosen -qualitative semi-structured interviews- is the richness of the information the participants have provided. For the purpose of this research, their narratives offer a comprehensive and contextualized description of their participation in the listserv or why they do not participate; their uses of the Internet as an alternative form of communication; their strategic uses of the Internet to participate in the mainstream public discourse sustained by the mass media; their creation of a safe virtual space in which they build

consensus, and discuss their differences; their perspectives on how the mainstream media covers gender issues in Puerto Rico; the reasons behind their apparent success in achieving access to the mainstream media; the hurdles they have encountered; the goals and expectations of their use of the Internet; and their relationships with mainstream journalists and editors.

There are also various limitations in using semi-structured interviews. The first one is that semi-structured interviews may not yield the profound and intense narratives and descriptions unstructured in-depth interviews generally provide (Mann and Stewart 2000). Another limitation is that the researcher may have more control over the content of the interview, while unstructured interviews let the respondents dictate content in a greater degree (Mann and Stewart 2000). The third limitation is that in only conducting interviews, I did not directly observe how the members of the MAMPR use the listserv. I decided to exclude participant-observation of the listserv because it would have diluted the main methodological approach of this investigation: qualitative semi-structured interviews. Participant-observation of the listserv, unstructured interviews with the participants, quantitative content analysis of the listserv, and qualitative discourse analysis are four methods that could certainly be used in further research on this topic.

2. Virtual Methods: Advantages and Limitations

For this investigation, I conducted 14 interviews mostly through email. In cases where the email responses were unclear or were worth examining in more depth, I asked supplementary questions (probes) through email or the phone. In March 2010 I sent a questionnaire with 31 items via email to the representatives of the 18 organizations that comprise the MAMPR (See Appendix

C). Fourteen of them responded in a period of two months. The questionnaire includes demographic questions, such as age, income, and educational level, and questions about their organizations, their relationship with the MAMPR, their multiple uses of the Internet, and their opinions on the mainstream media.

In conducting qualitative research, using virtual methods greatly minimizes problems of time (the transcription of audio is unnecessary because the text is already written), distance (I live in Boston and they live in Puerto Rico), and costs for the researcher. Mann and Stewart (2000) provide an extensive list of some of the advantages of using virtual methods in research. Virtual methods facilitate communication in terms of schedules and locations that would likely be more difficult in face-to-face meetings. Online interviewing also eliminates “transcription bias” (22) which happens when researchers preselect excerpts of their interviews in an attempt to save time and money. Virtual interviewing also may create a safe environment for traditionally marginalized groups such as senior citizens, members of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community, and women. I also chose this virtual method because I believe the form should be coherent with the content. In other words, conducting interviews through email is consistent with this thesis’ research question: a study on the virtual practices of the 18 member organizations that constitute the MAMPR. Communicating through email with the participants gave me a better sense of how they interact and express themselves virtually.

Virtual methods also present many challenges and limitations for research: it can be more difficult to establish rapport and trust with participants; issues of authenticity arise; face-to-face

interactions provide important visual information that I do not have; email and chat communications demand the use of a proper “netiquette” to avoid awkwardness and misunderstandings; privacy issues may be at stake, because online information can be more easily hacked; participants must have access to the adequate technology and the necessary computer literacy skills; and the spontaneous use of language in face-to-face interactions may provide interesting insights that are absent in written texts (Mann and Stewart 2000). Hine (2005) analyzes some of the limitations of this method for qualitative research, and more specifically for feminist research:

The mechanic of methods have been made visible by turning a feminist epistemological commitment not just onto the substance of the research project, but onto the processes by which it generates its knowledge as well...Virtual methods could act as interrogators of traditional method in a similar fashion: in pondering on whether a virtual interview qualifies as real interview, we also can think more deeply about what is it that we valued about interviews as a methodological stance (10).

Hine (2005) further explains that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is generally perceived as antithetical to the goals of qualitative research: to develop profound and intimate relationships with participants who will, after building trust with the researcher, provide in-depth, contextualized, and rich narratives about the topic being investigated. Online communication, however, does not have to be static, cold, and distant --a common stereotype. Online communication can take any form and meaning that off-line (face-to-face) communication does. Hine (2005) recommends that the “researcher become skilled at making and sustaining relationships online” (17). The author offers the following conclusions to guide researchers who use virtual methods:

- Solid and effective qualitative research can be created online

- Technology does not provide automatic benefits: researchers must be sensitive and reflective
- Some research questions can be answered solely through online communication, but others may require offline communication, or both
- Self-presentation taking cultural context into account is fundamental in building researcher/participant relationships

How did I handle some of these limitations and challenges? One of the major limitations of online interviewing mentioned in the literature (Hine 2005, Mann and Stewart 2000) is the difficulty of building intimate and trusting relationships. This was not a problem in this specific research. I already knew most of the participants from my work as a reporter covering the women's movement in Puerto Rico for at least five years. I had established professional relationships with many of the participants; relationships built on trust, respect, and mutual esteem. Because my mother and aunt are well-known feminist activists and scholars in Puerto Rico, I have also known some of the participants since I was a child. I also knew that all of the participants had access to the Internet and to computers. They do differ in their computer skills and literacy, however, which might have influenced their ability to fully engage in online communication, and offer more in-depth and longer responses. I guaranteed privacy of the communications as part of the informed consent process approved by Northeastern University's Human Subjects Protocol (this shall be further discussed in the ethical issues of this chapter). Regarding the awkwardness that email communications might entail, I used the telephone to call some participants when I perceived there had been a misunderstanding or miscommunication. I

admit I could not entirely compensate for the absence of the richness of social interactions inherent in face-to-face communication, although I believe that online communication served the purposes and the research question of this exploratory research.

3. Data Analysis

Analyzing and coding the data is one of the challenges and rewards of the research process. Schutt (2009) divides qualitative data analysis into five major categories: documentation; conceptualization, coding and categorizing; examining relationships and displaying data; authenticating conclusions; and reflexivity. I began documenting the data as soon as the participants returned the email questionnaires. The documentation process consisted mostly of jotting down ideas, notes, summaries, and making organizational charts. I coded, conceptualized and categorized the data myself without using a software program because the quantity of the information was manageable. I coded the participants' responses under the following categories that stem from my theoretical framework: the Internet as an medium of communication; exclusion of voices from the Internet; access to mainstream media and participation in the public sphere and formation of counter public-spheres; coverage of gender issues in the mainstream media in Puerto Rico; and power and counter-power in the use of the Internet. I grouped and regrouped, thought and rethought, worked and reworked, the theoretical concepts and the categorization of the participant's responses on numerous occasions. In this process of coding and categorization, I examined the relationships between the participant's responses and the theoretical issues. I also used organizational charts and lists to display these relationships clearly.

There is not a prefixed or predetermined set of standards for verifying validity in qualitative data (Schutt 2009). This is one of the central theoretical and philosophical issues at the heart of qualitative research methodology. Schutt (2009) recommends the use of three criteria to assess the validity of the conclusions in qualitative research: credibility of the respondents; spontaneity of the respondent's answers; and the impact of the absence or presence of the researcher. I will address every one of these three points. As I have explained, I know many of the participants of this research (either by having met them in person or by having conversed with them on the phone). The respondents of this research are credible and mostly well-known figures in Puerto Rico. The use of email to conduct the interviews could have limited spontaneous statements, but they could have also provided different kinds of accounts than face-to-face interactions. My absence could also have had an impact in the interviews. I could not eliminate this limitation, because I was in Boston while all of the participants live in Puerto Rico. But my absence could have resulted in participants actually offering more open and honest responses because they did not feel observed or scrutinized.

Reflexivity is the last, but not least important, item on Schutt's list (2009). Reflexivity in research is also a fundamental part of feminist methodology. But reflexivity is much more profound than just writing about the problems and encounters with participants. I believe it is a process that is inextricably linked to the process of research since its very inception. Reflexivity starts at the very moment you start thinking about the research project, choose the literature to be reviewed, the theoretical framework, develop your research problem and questions, select your methods, conduct the study in the field, gather the data, analyze and categorize the data, write up

the research, and publicly present the findings. I have attempted to integrate this process of reflexivity in my research. The process by which I gathered the data was not complicated. Some participants responded very fast, and I had to send between four and five email reminders to most of them. I also had to call some of them. One of the participants argued that although her organization is listed as a member organization of the MAMPR, it's really not a "formal organization." Therefore, she decided not to participate in this study. Another of the participants, whom I know personally, never responded to my emails or phone calls. Eventually, 14 out of 18 women answered the questionnaire. Many wrote me encouraging emails saying they were excited about the effect this research could have on the feminist movement in Puerto Rico. This research makes a contribution to the feminist movement by analyzing their Internet practices, offering historical references, offering perspectives on offline and online activism and media strategies, and helping develop a stronger and more effective online presence.

4. Ethical issues

As a researcher there are ethical issues I must address and disclose. In my years as a reporter at *Primera Hora* I covered human rights issues, mainly violence against women and children. Therefore, many of the leaders of these organizations, and of the feminist movement in general, were the sources and the subjects of my articles. I developed close professional ties with some of them. During the process of this research, I solicited some of the participants who are bloggers to write about feminist issues. I later republished their writings on the website Global Voices Online (www.globalvoicesonline.org). Since the summer of 2009, I have covered the Puerto Rican blogosphere for Global Voices, a virtual project with approximately 300 collaborators,

journalists, bloggers, technologists, and activists, from more than 60 countries.¹⁵ My work at Global Voices is entirely voluntary. I am certain that these professional and affective relationships had a positive effect on this research.

As a feminist journalist, my articles and investigative reports reflect my commitment to advancing social justice. In this research, I did not attempt to be “objective”, but rather honest, thorough, and critical in a constructive way. I involved members of the MAMPR in the process of developing my research by consulting them about appropriate questions and useful angles. Time constraints did not let me include the participant’s perspectives on the research methodology and results in the final draft of this thesis. I will share my findings with the members of the MAMPR at a round table we have already agreed to convene. I will also give them a copy of my thesis so they can consult it whenever they like. The objective of my investigation is to make a contribution to the feminist movement in Puerto Rico by highlighting their achievements and offering recommendations to improve their alternative virtual media practices.

Research must also take into account the ethical implications of power relationships and imbalances. As a feminist researcher who has employed a feminist methodological perspective, the discussion of power issues between researchers and participants is invaluable. The participants in this research are all middle-class educated women like myself. In other words, there were no imbalances in socio-economic terms. All of the participants work and live in Puerto Rico, as I did before pursuing graduate studies in 2008. They were not members of a

¹⁵ For more information please see www.globalvoicesonline.org/.

vulnerable population, although some might argue that the mere fact that they are all women puts them in some kind of “marginal position.” For this research I did not ask participants to specify their race or sexual orientation. These intersections could be explored in further research. One of the participants works in an organization whose principle mission is to advocate against racism (*Ilé*), and another organization advocates for the rights of immigrant women (*Centro de la Mujer Dominicana*). Two participants work in organizations (*Fundación de Derechos Humanos* and *Puerto Rico para Tod@s*) dedicated to eradicating homophobia in Puerto Rico. In other words, sexuality and race issues are represented by organizations (my unit of analysis), not individuals. I did ask the participants about their income and education, to have a general sense of the class and educational level of the MAMPR member organizations. As a researcher, though, with control of the gathering, production, analysis, and writing of this thesis, there are power unbalances impossible to bridge (Stacey 1991). Finally, at the end of the day, I am the one who has made most of the decisions.

In the first days of March 2010, I sent 18 emails with the official recruitment petition, the consent forms and the questionnaires approved by Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Research Protection. These documents were originally written in English (See Appendix C). I translated all of these documents to Spanish, and sent the translations to the Human Subjects Research Protection for their approval (See Appendix D for Spanish version). Regarding confidentiality, in the recruitment email I clearly stated –with IRB approval- that I preferred to disclose the participants’ names because they are already well-known figures in the feminist movement in Puerto Rico. All of the participants in this study

accepted that their names be revealed. Nevertheless, I assured them that I would not disclose the demographic data individually, but rather as general information.

Chapter 4: Historical Context

1. The Feminist Movement in Puerto Rico

In this section I offer a brief overview of the history of the feminist movement in Puerto Rico.¹⁶

I use the term “movement” in singular, although there have been multiple movements and feminisms in Puerto Rico not only in terms of time periods, but also in objectives, priorities, beliefs, and principles. This social, political, and economic context is fundamental to contextualizing the MAMPR’s work since its creation in 2007. The historical context will be intertwined with examples of how the feminist movement used alternative and mainstream media to communicate its messages and participate in, and shape, public discourse.

According to the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS)¹⁷, Puerto Rico has a population of 3.9 million, of which 48% are men and 52% women. Of the approximately 900,000 families surveyed (in the 12 month period the ACS measures), 25% (the largest percentage) earned less than \$10,000 per year in income and benefits. The per capita income in Puerto Rico is \$10,022 per year. The percentage of families and people whose income is below the poverty line is 41%, and 50% when including related children under the age of 18. Almost 60% of families with a female householder (no husband present) live under the poverty line, a statistic that increases when these families have related children under 5 years or under 18 years (68% in each category). The United States Census Bureau uses the following guidelines to define poverty:

¹⁶ The sources consulted for this section are Alice Colón Warren 2003, Ana Irma Rivera Lassén and Elizabeth Crespo Kebler 2001, and Norma Valle Ferrer 1990 and 2006. I am greatly indebted to their research on the women’s movements in Puerto Rico. I have translated excerpts of their texts from Spanish into English, except Colón Warren’s article which was originally published in English.

¹⁷ This data was retrieved on May 23, 2010 from the official US Census Bureau website: <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

...A set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to detect who is poor. If a family's total income is less than that family's threshold, then that family, and every individual in it, is considered poor. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated annually for inflation with the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and excludes capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps).¹⁸

Racial composition is one of the most complicated categories to measure quantitatively in Puerto Rico. During the first half of the twentieth century, the official Census statistics show an increase in the number of white people on the Island: 61.8% in 1899, 73% in 1920, and 80% in 1950.

Loveman (2007) explains that this "whitening process" reflects changes in social definitions of race and race classifications within the US Census Bureau. In 1950, the question about race was eliminated from the Census in Puerto Rico. It was reintroduced in the 2000 Census, in which approximately 80% of Puerto Ricans self-identified as white (Loveman 2007) and only 11% of the respondents identified themselves as Black or African American (Colón Warren 2003).

Puerto Rico was under Spanish colonial rule for 400 years. Spain transferred the Island to the United States after losing the Hispanic American War of 1898. Today, Puerto Rico remains part of the United States and Puerto Ricans are United States citizens. Depending on the ideological perspective, the political relationship is considered either a commonwealth or a colony. Puerto Rico has three branches of government: Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. Puerto Rico's diverse feminist movements formed during this second period. Throughout Puerto Rican history indigenous, African, Spanish and *mestiza* women contributed in many ways to their communities and to the formation of the country. Poverty and inequality continued to ravage the Island after

¹⁸ This data was retrieved on May 23, 2010 from <http://www.census.gov/>.

1898, when Puerto Rico was immersed in capitalist and globalizing economic policies. Colón Warren (2003) explains that Puerto Rico became “a model for the emerging new international division of labor and a ‘showcase of democracy’ after the Second World War... These political and economic transformations were accompanied by changes in women’s status, reproduction, and the family that challenged the most traditional definitions of femininity on the Island” (665). After 1898, U.S. federal legislation was extended to the Island, such as the legalization of divorce. The national Legislature would adapt federal law to the Island and create new laws for Puerto Rico that did not conflict with federal law or the U.S. Constitution. In 1952 Puerto Rico created its own Constitution.

The feminist and the labor movements share a long history in Puerto Rico. Trade unions provided one of the first platforms for women to start organizing. Valle Ferrer (2006) explains that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, workers started organizing themselves in trade unions such as the Free Federation of Workers of Puerto Rico. Women rapidly embraced the social libertarian and anarchist ideals of the worker’s movement, and organized unions for domestic workers, seamstresses, and tobacco strippers. Genara Pagán, Franca de Armiño and Luisa Capetillo were some of the most important women leaders of the time. These women struggled to achieve equal rights for women, especially in education and as workers. Capetillo wrote the first “feminist manifesto” in Puerto Rico in 1911 titled *Mi opinión, sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer como compañera, madre y ser independiente* (Valle Ferrer 1990). Capetillo also published in important alternative publications that disseminated information on and analysis of women’s and workers rights, such as *Unión*

Obrera. Valle Ferrer (1990) explains that during the first decade of the twentieth century feminists engaged in two struggles: middle and high-class women (*reformistas*) focused almost exclusively on women's right to vote and to receive an education, while union leaders concentrated on organizing women workers. Establishing the right of women to an education was a crucial struggle of the first wave of the women's movement in Puerto Rico: "education is the first cause that brought Puerto Rican feminists together, as it was for most of the feminist pioneers in history" (Valle Ferrer 2006:18). Many men, such as Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, Eugenio María de Hostos, Manuel Fernández Juncos, Gabriel Ferrer Hernández, José Ferrer y Ferrer, Venancio Cruz and Ramón Romero Rosa, also supported women's right to gain access to education. The struggle for equal rights in education went hand in hand with the suffragist movement in Puerto Rico.

The movement in favor of the universal right to vote in elections united women across classes, from reformers (educated women) to workers. Reformers "also impelled expanded schooling, housing, health, birth control, and other social services, pushing the state to create policies focusing on the status of women and the domestic sphere beyond those imposed by US programs" (Colón Warren 2003). Dozens of organizations and associations conducted a campaign that included media strategies, legislative lobbying, and raising awareness (Valle Ferrer 2006). Finally, in 1929 the Legislature approved the first law that gave only literate women the right to vote. Literate women voted for the first time in the 1932 elections. Universal suffrage (including illiterate women) was achieved in 1936, making Puerto Rico one of the first countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in which all women gained the right to vote. In

1932, María Luisa Arcelay became the first woman legislator in Puerto Rico and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The teacher, writer and journalist Ana Roqué de Duprey (1853-1933) was one of the most important leaders of the suffragist movement in Puerto Rico. Her commitment to equal educational rights for women and girls led her to believe that voting would permit women to participate in society fully as citizens (Valle Ferrer 2006). Roqué de Duprey founded various alternative newspapers, such as *La Mujer* (1893), *La Evolución* (1902), *La Mujer del Siglo XX* (1917), *Album Puertorriqueño* (1918) and *Heraldo de Mujer* (1920). It is important to note that as early as the 19th century, women were already creating their own alternative communication spaces while simultaneously inserting their messages in the mainstream media.

During the decades of the 1940s and 1950s women became very active in partisan politics (Valle Ferrer 2006). The proliferation of political parties with different ideologies characterized these decades. Women participated in the formation of and assumed leadership positions in the nationalist, liberal, pro-independence, pro-commonwealth, and pro-statehood parties. The industrial revolution which started in the 1950s with the program “Operation Bootstrap” program under the government of the pro-commonwealth *Partido Popular Democrático*, offered women in Puerto Rico certain benefits in terms of gaining access to jobs outside the domestic sphere and more educational opportunities, as Valle Ferrer (2006) explains. But ideas of modernity and progress also brought many problems for women, such as the movement from rural areas to the cities that prompted the formation of urban ghettos, migration to the United States, and the use

of Puerto Rican women as guinea pigs in the birth control pill experiments and massive sterilization programs as methods of population control.

The social uprisings and movements that characterized the 1960s in many parts of the world also had significant repercussions in Puerto Rico. But it wasn't until the 1970s that social movements in Puerto Rico reached their boiling point, the second wave of the feminist movement in Puerto Rico formed, and a multiplicity of feminist organizations emerged. Women's sexual and reproductive rights, sexism in the media and in the educational system, violence against women, discrimination in the workplace, and women's legal rights as mothers and spouses, were some of the second wave's struggles during the 1970s. Activism was at a high point and many feminist non-governmental organizations flourished during this decade. Some of the organizations founded in the 1970s were *Mujer Intégrate Ahora* in 1971 (Women Integrate Now-MIA), la *Federación de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas* in 1975 (The Federation of Puerto Rican Women-FMP- whose president Norma Valle Ferrer was a reporter at the influential mainstream newspaper, *El Mundo*), the *Alianza Feminista por la Liberación Humana* (The Feminist Alliance for Human Liberation-AFLH), the *Alianza de las Mujeres de la Comunidad de Orgullo Gay* (The Women's Alliance of the Gay Pride Community-this was a section within an organization), and *Taller Salud* (Health Workshop) in 1979. The first shelter for victims and survivors of domestic violence, *Casa Julia de Burgos*, was founded in 1979. The first state-run entity dedicated to offering services to survivors of sexual violence, *Centro de Ayuda a Víctimas de Violación* (Center for Assistance for Rape Victims-CAVV), was created in 1977.

The year 1972 marks a crucial moment in the second wave of the women's movement. A Civil Rights Commission study revealed the vast legal, educational, political, economic, and social inequalities between women and men in Puerto Rico. Many journalists and feminist activists testified during the public hearings that laid the groundwork for this pathbreaking study. The findings and recommendations resulted in the creation in 1973 of the first governmental agency in Puerto Rico and in Latin America and the Caribbean dedicated solely to women's issues, the *Comisión para el Mejoramiento para los Asuntos de la Mujer* (Valle Ferrer 2006). The 1976 approval of a major legal reform, called the "Family Reform," is another milestone in the advancement of women's rights. Then congresswoman Olga Cruz Jiménez had first introduced legislation in 1969 to transform the laws that governed marriage and divorce, such as community property and custody of the children. But the findings of the Civil Rights Commission study, along with the growing intensity of women's activism during the decade, catalyzed the movement. Women's governmental and non-governmental organizations supported the "Family Reform," which granted women the right to receive half of the community property produced during a marriage and custodial rights of her children, among other legal rights.

In the 1970s, women's issues were also internationalized. The United Nations designated 1975 the International Year of Women. Puerto Rican non-governmental feminist organizations participated in the first United Nations World Conference of Women in Mexico that same year. Valle Ferrer (2006) explains that Puerto Rican feminists put the Island on the global map, and gave international visibility to its social, political, and economic situation. This was an important achievement because Puerto Rico, due to its colonial status, had been neglected in the

international arena. This World Conference also facilitated ties among feminist organizations from all over the world; relationships that still exist today.

The consensus in the literature is that one of the most significant moments in the second wave of the women's movement was the 1971 visit of U.S. feminist Gloria Steinem, who was invited by the Women's Press Club of Puerto Rico. Crespo Kebler (2001) describes the effect Steinem's visit had in Puerto Rico:

Her visit intensified and added new dimensions to the discussion on women's situation. Her physical appearance represented the stereotype of the white North American woman: she was blond, had straight hair, long legs, and only spoke English. In the political sphere, she was openly identified with organizations described as being communist, and made expressions in favor of Puerto Rico's independence. This combination of personal traits and political opinions provoked a combination of acceptance and rejection. But, what caused most controversy were her expressions on women's liberation. These expressions exacerbated nationalist, anti-communist, religious, and, of course, sexist discourses that were circulating at the time. (42)

Steinem's visit to Puerto Rico introduced issues that would be discussed intensely within the feminist movement: the autonomy of feminist organizations versus an affiliation with political parties and groups; United States colonial rule of Puerto Rico and its multiple repercussions on the situation of women; and the intersections of gender, race, and class.

Feminist journalists' involvement in the women's movement in Puerto Rico did not begin in the 1970s. Journalism and feminism have shared a long history. Journalists in Puerto Rico openly identified with feminist causes and have participated in the mainstream public discourse through

their journalistic work and political activism.¹⁹ They contributed significantly to the 1970s brewing activism. The reactivated Women's Press Club of Puerto Rico (*Sociedad de Mujeres Periodistas de Puerto Rico*) was the organization that invited Steinem to Puerto Rico. Although the Women's Press Club had been founded decades earlier, the election in 1970 of feminist journalists to the board of directors gave the organization a renewed mission and perspective. Most of these board members were women who worked for mainstream newspapers: Margarita Babb, Maggie Bobb, Isabel Cintrón, Ada Nívea Guerrero, Ruth Merino, Helga Serrano and Norma Valle (the founder in 1975 of the *Federación de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas*). In the prologue of *Documentos del feminismo en Puerto Rico: Facsímiles de la historia* (Rivera Lassén and Crespo Kebler 2001), Magaly Pineda notes that the second wave feminists were very media savvy, although she believes the geographical size of Puerto Rico is a variable:

In Puerto Rico, feminists immediately realized that the media was everything. By multiplying an image, they multiply power. This also has to do with being a small country. Being a small country generally implies that only one language is spoken, and that there is not much cultural or ethnic diversity. This makes it easier for discourses to rapidly impact a community. This was one of the best ideas of the 1960s, as we see in this book. Since then, mass media in Puerto Rico has converted the feminist movement into a powerful sector, no matter how many women may actually integrate it. The amount of press articles in the bibliography of this book is impressive, and it reveals how the press covered the feminist agenda, even when we do not have information on radio or television coverage. (xxii)

Similarly, Rivera Lassén (2007) explains that the feminist movement in Puerto Rico appears to be so powerful because of the mainstream media's substantial coverage: "It is important to note that in Puerto Rico, since independent and autonomous organizations started emerging, the press

¹⁹ For an excellent investigation on how women journalists made their entrance to the news sections of the mainstream newspapers in Puerto Rico please see Maricelis Rivera Santos's Masters thesis *Las periodistas al control del cuarto poder en Puerto Rico: Desde la llegada de la imprenta hasta su incursión en las páginas frontales de los diarios* (2008).

and the mass media magnified the image of the groups. The impact of the content of the discourses had an incredible coverage that simultaneously created a solid public image of feminist organizations. Was this an image of true power or a hologram?" (121). Castells (2007) argues that "what does not exist in the media does not exist in the public mind, even if it could have a fragmented presence in individual minds. Therefore, a political message is necessarily a media message" (241). If Castells is right it is irrelevant whether the feminist movement has "true power" or has created a "hologram of power." It has effectively distributed political messages to the mainstream media space, and this in itself constitutes a form of power.

It is evident that the feminist movement in Puerto Rico participated significantly in the public sphere maintained by the mainstream media. It inserted its messages into the mainstream media and had the opportunity to shape public discourses. The multiple factors that contributed to this achievement in Puerto Rico should be further researched. Feminist organizations were also creating alternative publications in which they exposed, discussed, and debated a wide range of women's issues. In other words, having access to the mainstream media did not conflict with the need to create alternative spaces of expression. They used leaflets, bulletins, flyers, banners, magazines, and newspapers. During the second wave hundreds of feminist art pieces, such as paintings, murals, drawings, silkscreen posters, and caricatures were created (Fernández Zavala 2007). Although most of the publications were short-lived, mainly due to financial limitations, they were important platforms for alternative communication. The *Federación de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas* published one issue of *Palabra de Mujer* in 1977. One of the most important alternative newspapers was *El Tacón de la Chancleta*, organized and sponsored by the feminist

organization *Mujer Intégrate Ahora* (MIA). *El Tacón de la Chancleta* was first published in September 1974 as an insert in the magazine *Avance*. From January 1975 to August 1975, five independent issues of *El Tacón de la Chancleta* were published, each with an average of 10-15 pages (Bauzá 1987). Magazine editors included: Margarita Babb, Maritza Durán Alméstica, Ronnie Lovler, Alma Méndez Ríos, Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, María Genoveva Rodríguez, Ivonne Torres and Elizabeth Viverito Escobar. *El Tacón de la Chancleta* included articles and opinion columns on sexual violence, exploitation of women in film, personal defense, women trade union leaders, reproductive and sexual education, history of the women's movement, stories of forgotten women, and accountability of state agencies, such as the Commission of Women. Bauzá (1987) asserts that this newspaper was vital for the women's movement:

As a vehicle of dissemination and awareness on the problems of women, the newspaper fulfilled its mission. It served as a forum and a tribune in which the feminist movement debated, analyzed and exposed ideas and issues related to the condition of women in society. Through its texts, the newspaper provides in-depth analysis of the problems and the rights of women, which were being debated locally and internationally. (36)

Differences among women, based on class, race and sexual orientation, have marked the feminist movement in Puerto Rico during the 1980s, 1990s, and the first decade of the 2000s. Feminist organizations that advocate for the rights of working women, young women, rural women, Black Puerto Rican women, immigrant women, and the LGBT community have flourished. These decades have also witnessed the genesis of feminist coalitions once thought to be impossible due to profound internal divisions such as the *Coordinadora Paz para La Mujer* in 1988 and the *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico* in 2007. Universities throughout the Island added women and gender studies programs. The women's movement has also had groundbreaking achievements in the legal arena: the approval of the Law against Sexual Harassment in 1988, the

Law against Domestic Violence in 1989 and the Law that created the Office of the Women's Advocate in 2001. The first woman governor, Sila María Calderón, was elected in 2000. Despite these substantial advances, much is left to do. Puerto Rico has the highest rate of women killed by their partners in the world (14.10 per one million) according to a study that surveyed 35 countries (Sanmartín Esplugues et al. 2010). Sexual violence and sexual abuse are pervasive, as are homophobia, racism, and ageism, the feminization of poverty, religious fundamentalism, and unequal wages. These are just some of the many problems that disproportionately affect women and girls. In terms of theoretical discussions, the feminist movement is reflecting on their relationships with the state, the ideological autonomy of the organizations, and on the multiplicity of differences among women (Valle Ferrer 2006, Rivera Lassén 2007).

2. The Birth of the *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico* (MAMPR)

We are a group of feminists composed of individuals, nonprofit organizations, and other ally entities, whose mission is to work with a gender perspective for the wellbeing of our country. We have members from all over Puerto Rico, and we are organized horizontally, non-hierarchically, democratically, and inclusively. We are an autonomous movement that believes in solidarity with other groups who are also victims of oppression and vulnerable to human rights abuses.

MAMPR Declaration of Guiding Principles, September 29, 2009

In the last months of 2007, the then Women's Advocate of Puerto Rico, María Dolores Fernós, announced that she would be resigning her position. The law that created the Office of the Women's Advocate (Law 20 of 2001) states that the position can be held for a maximum term of 10 years²⁰ to maintain the entity's independence from the four-year cycle of partisan politics and general elections. Nonetheless, Fernós decided to resign for personal reasons three years before

²⁰ The law that created the Office of the Women's Advocate was passed on April 11, 2001. The complete text of Law 20 is available on the LexJuris Puerto Rico website <http://www.lexjuris.com/>.

her term would have expired. According to the Law 20 of 2001, the successor, if officially nominated by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature, occupies the position for the rest of the term: in this case, three years. Then, the process would begin again for the 10-year term. The law that created the Office of the Women's Advocate also states that non-governmental women's organizations could recommend candidates to the position, although the Governor ultimately made the nomination. The Legislature also has to approve the nomination. This is the context in which the *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico* (MAMPR) was born.²¹

In December 2007, non-governmental feminist organizations from across the Island convened to reach a consensus on the candidates to recommend. Twenty-two organizations representing a diversity of issues met at the headquarters of the Bar Association of Puerto Rico in San Juan on December 15, 2007. They agreed to recommend two candidates, Marta Mercado, who then held the position second to Fernós, and Sara Benítez, a feminist academic and activist. In January 2008, then governor Aníbal Acevedo Vilá nominated Marta Mercado. This was a victory for the women's movement on many levels. Feminist organizations had demonstrated the capacity to organize politically, to build consensus across differences, and to influence government officials. The phrase *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico* started heading all the press releases sent to the media in that time period, which also included the names and telephone numbers of the designated spokespeople. But as the months passed, problems arose. The Legislature, then

²¹ For this section I consulted documents provided by the MAMPR: press releases and a multimedia presentation (video on the history of the MAMPR posted on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW7EN8IfTts/>). I also obtained information through personal email communications with some of the founding members, and on the MAMPR's blog <http://movimientoampliodemujeres.blogspot.com/>. In addition, as a reporter at *Primera Hora* I covered the nomination process of the Women's Advocate.

dominated by the *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (pro-statehood), the rival party of the Governor's *Partido Popular Democrático* (pro-commonwealth), never considered the nomination. During this period, the MAMPR remained active denouncing the Legislature's inaction through press releases and press conferences. When the *Partido Nuevo Progresista* won the general elections (Executive and Legislative branches) on November 4, 2008, this left Mercado's nomination moot. On November 21, 2008, the MAMPR issued a press release recommending four candidates: Marta Mercado, Sara Benítez, Johanne Vélez, a feminist lawyer and executive director of the House Commission on the Status of Women, and Linda Laras, a feminist gynecologist and director of a health center for survivors of sexual violence. The recently elected governor Luis Fortuño nominated Johanne Vélez, but the Legislature did not confirm her. The President of the Senate, the pro-statehood Thomas Rivera Schatz, said that senators rejected Vélez because she supported abortion and the legalization of domestic unions for gay partners.²² Finally in 2009, the ex-judge Yvonne Feliciano, a candidate who wasn't involved in the feminist movement, was nominated and confirmed. The MAMPR publicly opposed this appointment. At the time of this research, Yvonne Feliciano heads the Office of the Women's Advocate of the government of Puerto Rico. This defeat signaled the difficulties the MAMPR has confronted during Luis Fortuño's government.

The MAMPR expanded its goals in 2009. It was born with a single objective: recommending the Women's Advocate. But the coalition had achieved much more than that, as mentioned earlier.

The MAMPR consolidated itself as a diverse, democratic, and inclusive movement with

²² Gómez, Antonio. 2009. "Rivera Schatz 'justifica; rechazo a procuradora de las mujeres.'" Information retrieved on July 29, 2010 from Primera Hora's website <http://www.primerahora.com/riveraschatzjustificarechazoaprocuradoradelasmujeres-294191.html/>.

political, social, and media influence. The MAMPR participated in the International Women's Day demonstration on March 8, 2009, convened by a coalition of women, gays, students, professionals, workers and artists.²³ It participated in various demonstrations against homophobia and hate crimes against members of the LGBT community, and denounced state abuses committed against residents of Villas del Sol. In the summer of 2009, the Puerto Rican government issued an order to remove 200 families from the Villas del Sol community in Toa Baja, on the premise that they illegally occupied lands that are prone to flooding. Police forces tear-gassed and assaulted members of the community, most of them immigrants from the Dominican Republic. The MAMPR also included its claims in the final document of the ample *Coalition Todo Puerto Rico por Puerto Rico*, formed in the midst of the profound economic and social crisis. It participated in the national strike on October 15, 2009, convened by the labor movement after governor Fortuño announced massive lay-offs in the public sector (approximately 20,000 workers lost their jobs). The organizers estimated that 150,000 to 200,000 people participated in the demonstration.²⁴ The MAMPR also organized a series of public artistic performances in protest against domestic violence, and the government's disregard of women's and gender issues. All of these activities were widely covered by the mainstream media. In 2009, the MAMPR also wrote its Declaration of Guiding Principles (a fragment of which is cited at the beginning of this section). As I write, the MAMPR includes 18 member organizations, 30 individual members, and nine affiliated organizations. It is non-hierarchically

²³ This information was retrieved on May 25, 2010 from the blog of the March 8 Coalition <http://8demarzopr.wordpress.com/>.

²⁴ Bauzá, Nydia. 2009. The article was retrieved on May 25, 2010 from *Primera Hora* http://www.primerahora.com/firme_no_a_los_despidos-338175.html/.

organized and the spokespeople for their public events and activities are chosen based upon consultation with its listserv.

The MAMPR has continued its fervent activism in 2010. The coalition participated in the 2010 International Women's Day demonstration. It has publicly denounced the attempted consolidation of public agencies that would significantly reduce the political capacity and influence of the Office of the Women's Advocate. It has also publicly asked the head of the Office of the Women's Advocate to resign because of her "demonstrated lack of commitment during her incumbency, and her complete ignorance of gender issues".²⁵ The MAMPR has denounced crimes against transsexuals and homosexuals committed on the Island, and has organized activities to raise awareness on domestic violence against women.²⁶ It supported the recent student strike that paralyzed the state-run University of Puerto Rico for two months. Students protested against a \$100 million budget cut and the proposed elimination of certain registration and fee waivers. The student strike received wide-ranging support from a number of civil society organizations, including women, environmentalists, members of trade unions, artists, professors, and the LGBT community, among others.

The feminist movement in Puerto Rico is at an interesting moment. Relationships across differences of race, class, and sexual orientation are being formed. There are certain unifying objectives, such as the battle against domestic violence, but the feminist movement is not focused on one sole objective. The feminist movement is speaking out against homophobia,

²⁵ This data was retrieved on May 25, 2010 from the MAMPR's blog <http://movimientoaampliodemujeres.blogspot.com/>.

²⁶ As of July 29, 2010, 15 women have been murdered by their partners or ex partners in Puerto Rico.

racism, and poverty. The MAMPR has joined national social movements and coalitions against the government's social and economic policies. It has united in protests and demonstrations across the Island with students, environmentalists, the gay community, and trade unions, to mention a few groups. This is a time for building upon differences.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

1. Demographic Data and Information on Member Organizations

The MAMPR started its listserv on Google in February 2009.²⁷ The listserv had 172 members, as of May 30, 2010. Amárilis Pagán, Sara Benítez, Maria Cristina Pacheco and Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, all members of the MAMPR either as individuals or through organizations, administrate the Google group, a task that entails admitting new participants, moderating the comments of the new members, cleaning and refining the list, and assisting with the technical aspects of the listserv (troubleshooting, etc). The listserv is only for members of the coalition. Since its creation in February 2009 thru April 2010, there have been 4,872 emails sent within the group, for an average of 325 messages sent monthly. For this research I interviewed representatives from 14 of the 18 member organizations of the MAMPR, all of whom participate in the listserv.²⁸ In the first part of this section I will offer the demographic data revealed in the questionnaires.

All of the participants are women. The youngest participant is 26 years old, and the oldest is 69. There are two participants in their 20s (26 and 29), one in her 30s (35), two in their 40s (41 and 43), five in their 50s (50, 51, 52, 55 and 59), and four in their 60s (60, 62, 62 and 69). The average age of the respondents is 50 years old. All of the participants have pursued graduate studies, either a Masters, a Juris Doctorate, or a PhD. Two of the interviewees receive an annual

²⁷ This information was provided by Sara Benítez, individual member of the MAMPR and one of the administrators of the listserv, through personal communication.

²⁸ The organizations that did not participate in this research are *Colectivo Masfaldas*, a feminist student organization in the University of Puerto Rico, *Isla Cliché*, dedicated to advance a feminist agenda through art and education, *La Juntilla*, an informal group of women that supports MAMPR's public activities, and *Taller Lésbico Creativo*, which is focused on the rights of the LGBT community.

income of \$19,999 or less; two earn between \$20,000 and \$29,999; two receive from \$30,000 to \$39,999, and the largest number of participants (8) earns \$50,000 or more a year. The representatives of MAMPR member organizations belong to the middle-class.²⁹ They are all educated professional women. Eleven of them occupy top positions in their organizations, such as president, vice-president, executive director, coordinator, board member, and co-director. One of them described her position only as a “member,” another one is a spokesperson, and one of the participants said she was from the “education group.”

The organizations work on a tremendous variety of issues. Some of them are embedded within formal academic institutions, some are informally organized, and most are established non-governmental/non-profit organizations. Some depend completely on voluntary work, and some have full-time, part-time, and freelance employees. The *Centro de la Mujer Dominicana* (Center for Dominican Women, founded 2003) works with immigrant women, particularly those from the Dominican Republic. The women’s studies program *Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigación y Estudios del Género/CIIEG* (Interdisciplinary Center for Investigation and

²⁹ For definitions of what constitutes the “middle-class”, I have used two approaches: a quantitative analysis and a theoretical discussion. In quantitative terms, Harold Toro (2009), of the Puerto Rico-based think tank Center for New Economy, locates the middle class in Puerto Rico as those with a yearly income between \$30,000 and \$80,000. Toro (2009) warns that this is a “conservative segmentation that possibly incorporates levels of income that are fairly low, especially those between \$30,000 and \$50,000” (7). According to these definitions, only two participants would not be considered middle-class, strictly due to the range of their yearly income. The rest would somehow fit within the brackets, although the questionnaire did not include an option of \$80,000 or more. This was not the focus of my analysis. But, theoretically, Diane Davis (2004) explains: “drawing boundaries around any class category is fraught with difficulties, as is theorizing their bases for action in the context of this boundary drawing” (363). Davis (2004) identifies and thinks “about middle classes through analysis of how they live, how they work, what they aspire to economically and politically, and what they expect of fellow citizens, political parties, and their respective governments, as well as the myriad social, political and economic organizations they have or they have not joined” (368). This analysis must also be context-bound. In these terms, the representatives of the MAMPR’s member organizations are middle-class class educated women.

Gender Studies-1995) at the Inter-American University in San Juan represent the higher-education sector. The Women's Commission of the Bar Association of Puerto Rico (*Comisión de la Mujer del Colegio de Abogados-1975*) focuses on women lawyers and raising legal issues that affect women in general. The *Comité de América Latina y el Caribe* of CLADEM (the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights, founded in 1993 in Puerto Rico) is a regional network dedicated to implementing international treaties and national laws regarding women. *Feministas en Marcha* (FEM, founded in 1983) is a non-governmental organization whose mission is to struggle against all types of exclusions and develop feminist political proposals. The *Fundación de Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights Foundation-1998) is an advocacy organization focused on eradicating discrimination, specifically against the LGBT community. ILAEDES (*Instituto Latinoamericano de Educación para el Desarrollo de Puerto Rico*-Latin American Institute of Education for Development) is an organization focused on the intersections of education, development and public policies. *Ilé/Organizadoras para la Conciencia en Acción* (Ilé/Organizers for Conscience in Action-1992) centers on advocacy regarding discrimination based on race, gender and class. The *Organización Puertorriqueña de la Mujer Trabajadora-OPMT* (Puerto Rican Organization of Working Women-1982) focuses on working class women, and its mission is helping to eradicate gender-based violence. *Proyecto Matria* (2004) provides services to domestic violence survivors, specifically regarding socio-economic empowerment and opportunities (housing, jobs, etc.). *Proyecto Rompe* (2009) works with young people on issues concerning violence against women. *Puerto Rico para Tod@s* (Puerto Rico for Everyone-2003) also concentrates on advocacy regarding the LGBT community. *Siempre Vivas* (1997) is a feminist organization in the Mayagüez campus of the

University of Puerto Rico that focuses on inserting a gender perspective in all the spheres of the academic community. *Taller Salud* (1979) works on sexual and reproductive issues and offers services to young women at risk in low-income communities. There is also heterogeneity in the organizations' longevity, from organizations founded in the late 1970s (*Taller Salud*) up to 2009 (*Proyecto Rompe*). Half of the organizations are based in San Juan, the capital city of Puerto Rico; two are in Caguas, which is an autonomous municipality that is part of the Greater Metropolitan Area of San Juan; one is in Cayey, in the South; one in Mayagüez, on the West coast; one is based in Loíza, a predominantly black municipality in the Northeast coast, and two have no physical offices.

The Internet (by Internet we mean the listserv, blogs, websites, social media) seems to be an important part of these organizations' work.³⁰ In some way or another, in the form of websites, blogs, or for communication and promotion purposes, the Internet plays a fundamental role in the lives of these feminists. Nine out of 14 have their own websites or professional blogs (CIEEG, CLADEM, *Fundación de Derechos Humanos*, *Ilé*, *OPMT*, *Proyecto Matria*, *Puerto Rico para Tod@s* and *Taller Salud*).³¹ *Centro de la Mujer Dominicana* and *Feministas en Marcha* are building their websites or blogs. All of the websites and blogs were founded during the 2000-2009 decade. *Fundación de Derechos Humanos* updates its website monthly, and CLADEM regularly updates its regional website. The rest of the respondents did not know the frequency with which the websites are updated, if at all. Many respondents could not provide details on the number of visits their websites receive. Only three of the participants knew the number of visits

³⁰ The participant from ILAEDES did not answer any of the close-ended questions regarding the organization's use of the Internet and social media. Follow-up attempts were unanswered.

³¹ For a complete list of the website and blogs addresses please see Appendix A.

to their organization's websites or blogs: *Fundación de Derechos Humanos* (www.fdhpr.org) receives an average of 20 visitors a month, *Puerto Rico para Tod@s* (www.prrparatodos.org) has received 240,000 visits since it opened in 2004, and *Proyecto Matria's* blog (www.proyectomatria.blogspot.com) has had 9,614 visits since 2007. Eight organizations use Facebook to disseminate their messages, and only *Puerto Rico para Tod@s* also employs other social media platforms like YouTube and Twitter. Seven organizations started using the Internet as a communication medium in the last decade (*Centro de la Mujer Dominicana, CIEG, Puerto Rico para Tod@s, Proyecto Matria, Proyecto Rompe, Siempre Vivas and Taller Salud*), four organizations started in the 1990s (*CLADEM, FEM, Fundación de Derechos Humanos, Ilé*), and the OPMT and the Women's Commission of the Bar Association did not answer the question. The participants stated that they used the Internet mostly for internal communication between members, for promoting their activities and events, for internal and external networking with other organizations, and for disseminating information.

Interestingly, and rather surprisingly, only three of the interviewees have "personal" blogs that are neither "professional" blogs, nor organs of the MAMPR or their organizations. In the literature on online media and the Internet a "personal" blog serves as some sort of diary. The blogs of these feminist activists may be considered personal, yet they also deal with public issues and are political. Castells (2009) explains that although most blogs are described as personal, there is no such thing as a personal blog on the Internet: "any post on the Internet, regardless of the intention of the author, becomes a bottle drifting in the ocean of global communication, a message susceptible to being received and reprocessed in unexpected ways" (66). In this

research, I found that three out of 14 participants have “personal blogs”: Amárilis Pagán (www.brujasyrebeldes.blogspot.com), from *Proyecto Matria*, has received 3,596 visits since 2007 and updates monthly; Nahomi Galindo (www.galindomalave.com), from *Puerto para Tod@s*, gets from 100 to 150 daily visits and updates two to three times a week, and Verónica Rivera Torres (www.mujiresenpr.blogspot.com), from the *Comisión de la Mujer del Colegio de Abogados*, receives 700 visits a week and updates once a day –these last two are the youngest participants, both are in their 20s. Evidently, these three feminist bloggers are posting on a regular basis and updating their virtual spaces.

I have divided the rest of the findings into five sections that correspond with my theoretical framework: the Internet as a medium of communication; exclusion of voices from the Internet; access to mainstream media and participation in the public sphere and formation of counter public-spheres; the quality and extent of the content of women’s and gender issues in the mainstream media in Puerto Rico; and power and counter-power in the use of the Internet. I have grouped the participants’ perspectives, thoughts, arguments, and feelings into these sections to offer clarity and in-depth analyses of their responses. Their responses in turn guided the creation of these analytical categories, many of which overlap. These intersections are also a fundamental part of the analysis.³²

2. The Internet as a Medium of Communication

³² I have translated the participants’ answers from Spanish to English. Translation is a subjective process. I hope I have been accurate in representing their words. Any errors are mine. Some of the participants use the acronym MAM instead of MAMPR.

How do the participant's organizations relate to the Internet? What do they use it for? What are their worries regarding the Internet? How has the MAMPR benefited from the listserv? How has it transformed the way they mobilize and organize? What is their level of participation? Is the Internet an alternative form of media? If so, in what ways? The majority of the participants state that the Internet, mainly through the use of the listserv, has been a crucial tool of internal communication, networking, strategizing, reaching consensus, and as a source of information. The responses suggest that the MAMPR's use of the listserv blurs traditional alternative media concepts because it provides an arena for alternative communication that is not media-centric and it intersects with mainstream media at some point. It is also a safe-space that allows self-representation, participation, inclusion, and contingency. Ada Conde, a lesbian activist and the president of the *Fundación de Derechos Humanos*, explains:

The listserv helps us to be informed of what is happening. It maintains the members of the MAM informed about what the organization is planning. Through the listserv we can participate in a collective decision-making process. It is an alternative space for expression. Through the listserv we can gain support for the projects and causes of our organizations.

Alana Feldman, the general coordinator of *Taller Salud*, that works on health issues with young women, says that her organization's participation in the MAMPR's listserv has decreased with time because of an overload of information that is difficult to follow. On the other hand, she believes the virtual group has unified efforts and brought the community closer:

The listserv has facilitated the flow of information about activities and made the coordination a more collective process. It has strengthened the division of tasks and duties. It facilitates the dissemination of the scope of the efforts beyond geographical boundaries. It has also been able to reach a new audience and supplement efforts that used to be fragmented because of distance. It has strengthened new and old ties with people and similar entities and collaborators.

Interestingly, the executive director of the *Centro de la Mujer Dominicana*, the Dominican feminist activist Romelinda Grullón, believes the listserv has enabled the plight of the highly marginalized immigrant women to be included on the feminist agenda in Puerto Rico: “It has made the voices of immigrant visible, and it has helped us gain support and solidarity from other organizations.” The executive director of *Proyecto Matria*, that provides financial orientation and opportunities to domestic violence survivors, Amárilis Pagán, also says the MAMPR’s listserv has facilitated the organization’s capacity to participate in the coalition’s decision-making and deliberation processes:

The consultation process through the Google group has sped up decision-making, more so when we take into account that the MAMPR is not an organization with any budget or formal structure. The Internet has almost completely substituted telephone calls that consumed so much time, and the sending of faxes, a task that added a burden to the work responsibilities of a *compañera*. In one single stream of communication, and with one email address, we can reach many *compañeras*, receive their answers as a group (everyone sees what others write and this nurtures the discussion), coordinate activities like sending press releases or planning protests, and convening the media. Facebook has also been useful in convening people to our events, and it has opened a space to disseminate our ideas to people who may not define themselves as feminists or activists, but who sympathize with the MAMPR.

Maribel Tamargo, of the women’s studies program at the Inter-American University, says the listserv has made her feel included in the feminist movement in Puerto Rico:

Thanks to my participation in this group and its network, I have been able to connect with the struggles of women in Puerto Rico. I went to graduate school and I worked many years in the United States. I lived away from Puerto Rico from 1971 to 1987. When I returned, I was very distant from the feminist movement...The discussions in the MAMPR’s Google group offer a learning opportunity that has let me formulate my own ideas and participate actively. I believe that women, and other groups like Amnesty International and the LGBT community, can take advantage of these spaces to further their causes.

Marcia Rivera, from ILAEDES, a non-profit think-tank focused on educational issues, believes the listserv, and the Internet in general, has given the feminist movement a chance to renew

itself, “to discover great talents, new voices, and to reach and understand the thoughts of many *compañeras* who have been participating in the electronic network. I do not think any negative situation has stemmed from the use of the listserv.”

Some of the participants opine that face-to-face meetings are still crucial to the feminist movement. The “difficult” and more confidential debates are discussed in meetings and reunions. Actually, the MAMPR has had approximately the same number of meetings before and after the creation of their listserv (Amárilis Pagán, personal communication). Nahomi Galindo, of the Coordinating Board of *Puerto Rico para Tod@s*, an organization focused on LGBT issues, says:

As a networking tool it has helped us a lot. We share a lot of information. Nevertheless, we cannot use it as our only tool. Sometimes it has helped us reached consensus, depending on the discussion at hand. Using the listserv to build consensus on something that sparks controversy, is not easy at all. Since it is such a diverse organization, a lot of decisions are made in meetings. For example, I remember when we were thinking about doing the Muses activity [a street performance of women who painted their bodies to protest against domestic violence]. A *compañera* proposed the idea through the listserv. Some of the members resisted the idea, and some of us had to explain the goals and the importance of this activity. Nevertheless, the decision was made in a meeting. But, without a doubt, the listserv has helped us reduce the constant meetings that sometimes exhaust women (because many of us participate in other social movements besides the feminist movement). When finally a decision has been made, the listserv helps us distribute tasks and mobilize.³³

The coordinator of *Siempre Vivas*, focused on raising awareness of gender issues on the Mayagüez campus of the University of Puerto Rico, Luisa Seijo, also thinks the listserv has its limits:

I see the cybernetic medium as a tool that aids long distance communication making it much faster. I believe it is a tool that helps us keep in touch and be informed. It can support communication with colleagues and feminist sisters with whom it would be impossible to communicate with otherwise (mostly those who are not in the country, who cannot come to the meetings). I always enjoy personal meetings, the hugs and the

³³ I will use brackets “[]” to clarify and explain. Parenthesis “()” were used by the participants in their original narratives.

laughter, even if it's through the telephone, but I also understand that the Internet is a medium we cannot ignore.

Verónica Rivera Torres, the vice-president of the women's commission of the Bar Association, offers an interesting opinion on the Internet's effectiveness in advancing a feminist agenda in Puerto Rico:

I cannot say that the Internet has been "more effective" than other mediums [meetings, protests, leaflets] mentioned in the question. The truth is that, according to how I see it, the Internet serves a very specific function: it disseminates information faster and it can reach any place in the globe. The activities can be more easily announced and at a cheaper cost. But the work we do cannot end with writing about and announcing our events... We cannot forget that the Internet is a tool to facilitate, encourage, and activate the work that is being done in the streets, be it the political work per se (such as protests) or voluntary work in women's organizations. Sometimes it is very frustrating to write about something that is very important and see how it just stays as words because we lack the tools to do the real work. Then, this is about diversifying and complementing our work.

3. The Internet and Exclusion

The issue of exclusion surfaced repeatedly in the interviews: exclusion from the Internet in general, and from the MAMPR's listserv. Although some participants, as discussed above, believe that the Internet has provided a much needed space to traditionally excluded and marginalized groups, such as immigrant and young women, many respondents noted that the Internet establishes boundaries along lines of access, computer literacy, and time. There is a general sense that face-to-face meetings are still necessary, and that old methods of mobilization and communication should complement and converge with virtual methods. The issue of exclusion is an important discussion within feminist scholarly literature on media and the Internet, and within the virtual feminist community on Puerto Rico. The lawyer and feminist activists Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, member of *Feministas en Marcha*,

notes that one of the shortcomings of the listserv is that members with more technical ability might be directing the conversation:

The salience of some voices over others in the virtual space might be due to differences in computer skills among members. We could say that on a small scale, this reproduces the general critique of how some decisions are excluded in the world of information and communication technology (ICT's) in terms of access, literacy, and education. In a small group that believes in horizontal forms of organization, we have to be very watchful and careful that everyone participates, taking into account technophobia, electronic illiteracy, and any other communication barriers that could be creating a distinct set of categories in the discussion.

The coordinator of the OPMT, an organization focused on working-class women, Josefina Pantoja, notes that the lack of time and computer literacy among MAMPR members may inhibit their full participation in the discussion and the process of making decisions as a collective:

...Also, many of us have paying jobs that are not in the member organizations. Usually it is difficult to have access to emails from our jobs. We can see our emails when we get home, late at night, tired, and where we have other tasks to fulfill. This is why we may join the discussion too late to influence the decision-making process, and for our opinions to be taken into account. Personally, I have felt inadequate and not very skilled with the Internet. Technology is not my strongest area. There are still a lot of things I do not know how to do. This is why I cannot take full advantage of the benefits of the Internet. Nonetheless, I realized that I had to make an effort because if not I would be behind in terms of participation. This occurred at the same time they started using the Internet at my job. I have had to dedicate a lot of energy to this. I have had many bad moments and been very angry, but there is no going back. On the other hand, I think and feel that there is nothing better than exchanging ideas while looking into each other's eyes. This dynamic gives us a chance to reach better conclusions and make better decisions.

María Reinat, an outspoken feminist against racism, and the co-director of Ilé, analyzes the situation from both perspectives: exclusion within the group, and exclusion of other women:

I have not observed that any voices have had a leading role [in the MAMPR's listserv], but there is a tendency to ignore comments of some of the members while being more receptive to others. The sole use of the Internet does not let us reach the *compañeras* who do not have access or the skills. Therefore, the decisions that we make as a movement only favor those of us who have access, who have university degrees, and a certain level of education.

Luisa Seijo, who works mostly with college students, says she sometimes feels overwhelmed by the amount of messages sent through the listserv, and she believes that only the members who have time and the necessary skills are directing the conversation:

Some of us, like myself, only react to issues that we consider of vital importance, or when we feel that we, the “women from the rest of the Island,” are not being included. I prefer face-to-face communication, or through the phone, because I can at least hear the other person’s voice. But I also recognize that the Internet facilitates certain processes...although I believe it should not substitute for our meetings...I really think this medium only reaches a certain socioeconomic class that has access, such as students and professionals. But I think that most people, who are excluded from these social, economic and cultural processes, only find out about these issues through the TV and newspapers (specifically *Primera Hora* and *El Vocero*).

Nahomi Galindo, from *Puerto Rico para Tod@s*, an NGO that fights against homophobia, brings a crucial question to the forefront: How can you use the Internet to advocate for a group of people who do not have access to this medium? Is this a contradiction?

A recent example is when I was at Villas del Sol [a community mostly of Dominican immigrants that has fought a gruesome battle against the government that ordered their removal from the lands they occupied]. Some *compañeros* who have been very committed to this community had announced activities and then had written about them. One day I was talking to one of the women leaders of the community, and we touched upon this topic. When I asked her if she had seen these publications, she said no. She told me she only had had access to the Internet when she was a student, so she did not have access anymore. This confirmed what many of us have been thinking: if we want to grow as social movements, old methods cannot be discarded, but rather combined with new methods.

4. Access and Participation in the Public Sphere

Eleven of the participants said that their organizations have had access to the mainstream media in Puerto Rico.³⁴ Only Magdaline Rodríguez said that *Proyecto Rompe* has not had exposure in the media. Maribel Tamargo responded that the women’s studies program of the Inter-American

³⁴ Marcia Rivera, from ILAEDES, did not answer the questions regarding access to the mainstream media in Puerto Rico.

University had not attempted to access the media. The mainstream media, which includes television, radio, and newspapers, has covered the rest of the member organizations of the MAMPR. María Isabel Báez, of CLADEM, a regional NGO focused on state implementation of international treaties on women's issues, said that "the media has identified the MAMPR as the most updated feminist network in Puerto Rico." This presents a unique case within the literature reviewed for this research because it has been found that women generally do not have access to the mainstream media in their countries. Another interesting finding is that these eleven participants said that journalists contact them for stories, which means that reporters are actually seeking out their perspectives. The participants also contact reporters who evidently respond. Five organizations, *Taller Salud*, *Centro de la Mujer Dominicana*, FEM, the Women's Commission of the Bar Association, and *Proyecto Matria*, have also gained access to journalists through the MAMPR. Also, the MAMPR's activities have been widely covered in the media, specifically by the four newspapers in *Puerto Rico*, *El Nuevo Día*, *Primera Hora* and *El Vocero* (Amárilis Pagán, personal communication). Many participants agree that the MAMPR's success in obtaining access is because of the presence of renowned feminists, such as Josefina Pantoja and Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, who have well-established relationships with the media. Another fascinating finding is that participants report that there are feminist reporters, such as Arys Rodríguez from *Primera Hora* and Cynthia López Cabán from *El Nuevo Día*, who regularly cover feminist events and include a gender perspective in their articles. Amárilis Pagán suggests that the MAMPR's willingness to speak out during difficult social, political and economic times in Puerto Rico is a key reason for its ample media coverage:

We have demonstrated verticality as a group, we have assumed positions and we have maintained them. I also think that the fact that we have openly criticized many things, in moments in which many groups have remained silent, has grabbed the attention of certain

people in the media. We also have allies in the media, women we have known along the road, like Arys Rodríguez and Cynthia López Cabán... Not all of the contacts are mine, but also of other *compañeras*. So I think that working as a team has given us this access.

Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, a veteran feminist leader in Puerto Rico and founder of the organization FEM in 1983 and MIA in 1971, believes that the power of the media lies in the audiences, not in the messenger: “The media depends on a logic that goes in two directions: the voices that send the messages, which are not necessarily received in the same way they were sent, and the receptors who filter the voices they want to disseminate and decide when and how to do this. In this sense, the receiver has the power. Even taking this into account, the MAM has been able to place more voices, from different generations, in the public discussion.” In other words, although in classic communication theory the MAMPR would be the receiver, it has also effectively been sending its messages through the sender (the media). This circular and multidirectional dynamic transgresses traditional boundaries between senders as active agents and receivers as passive bystanders (Valle Ferrer 2004 citing theorists Jesús Martín Barbero and Valerio Fuenzalida). The literature on the Internet has documented this phenomenon and described how traditional communication paradigms are transformed when consumers become producers (Castells 2001).

Whether the MAMPR and its organizations’ use of the Internet play a meaningful role in gaining access to the media is still being debated. Mostly, participants believe that it is still indispensable to mobilize and work offline. The listserv is used to create and discuss media strategies that will eventually lead to messages being exposed in the public realm through the mainstream media. But participants still have to call reporters, send press releases, and mobilize in different ways for those messages to get out. Of course, the MAMPR’s listserv is closed. Reporters have rarely

used the organizations' websites, the participants' blogs, or the MAMPR's blog, as sources of information for their articles. Verónica Rivera Toro, from the Women's Commission of the Bar Association, says that reporters have contacted her after reading her posts on women's issues, and Amárilis Pagán also recalls that the Associated Press in Puerto Rico quoted one of her posts in a story. Yet these examples are hardly representative. Nancy Fraser's (1992) theories on the intersections of gender and the public sphere and the formation of what she calls "subaltern counterpublics" is useful in understanding the implications of the MAMPR's communication strategies. I believe the MAMPR has created a form of subaltern or counter-public sphere through their listserv. At *prima facie* this analysis seems completely contradictory and even impossible. How can a closed email listserv be described as public? It is public in the sense that many of the internal discussions, debates, and dialogues are at some point transformed into public messages. It is subaltern because it is a space for the discussion of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and feelings that are generally excluded from the official mainstream discourse. There is also a conundrum here. Is it still subaltern when it is included in the mainstream media? At what point does this space stop being subaltern? Also, to what extent is it still subaltern when it is replete with exclusions?

I believe that the mainstream media effectively co-opts certain subaltern discourses. It appropriates ideas that at some point were considered different, underground, rebellious, anti-establishment, dangerous, and even revolutionary. For example, mainstream media in Puerto Rico has "discovered" that domestic and sexual violence against women are worth covering. Once a marginal issue, news on domestic violence now fills the main pages of the newspapers.

Journalists interview relatives, friends and neighbors of the victims. They interview activists and experts on domestic violence. They publish graphs and tables. Domestic violence has become a mainstream issue in Puerto Rico thanks to the feminist movement. Violence against women is part of the mainstream public discourse. This is a very important achievement, but at the same time I believe activists should reflect on the consequences of this “mainstreaming” process. Activists should reflect on whether mainstream media is shaping and distributing their messages and how this has improved the situation of battered women on the Island.

5. (Mis)representation of Gender Issues in the Mainstream Media

The participants’ responses regarding how the mainstream media in Puerto Rico covers gender issues –such as, but not limited to, domestic violence, unequal wages, sexual harassment, racism, and homophobia- contradicts my initial hypothesis. As a former reporter who mainly covered gender issues at the second largest mainstream newspaper in Puerto Rico, I thought the members of the MAMPR had access to the media and were also pleased with the coverage. But the findings of this research reject the second premise of my hypothesis. Participants were asked: (1) How would you characterize the mainstream media’s portrayal of women’s/gender issues in Puerto Rico? For example, if it is, or is not, fair, balanced, thorough, frequent, and/or a priority; (2) Why do you think mainstream media in Puerto Rico covers women’s/gender issues in the way you have described? Although it was not asked in the questionnaire, participants also referred to the media coverage of the MAMPR’s activities. On one hand, the general sense is that the mainstream media does a fair, balanced, and accurate job of covering the MAMPR’s events. On

the other hand, respondents criticized the media's coverage of women and gender issues in general. Coverage of women's issues was described as contradictory, superficial, sensationalist, and definitely not a priority. Many participants believe that the mainstream media disproportionately covers domestic violence, in comparison to other issues, because it sells newspapers. Many noted the good work of specific reporters, but gave no credit to the media as institutions. In other words, individual reporters have been able to make changes, yet the media institutions are still commercially driven and exclusive. Alana Feldman, from *Taller Salud*, an organization that provides services to young women regarding health issues, says the mainstream media "promotes and makes controversies, or apparent controversies, visible. Therefore, they do not deliver the whole information, which would in turn foment public education. They do this because it sells and increases their audience..." Josefina Pantoja, a veteran feminist and founder of the OPMT, suggests that the mainstream media's coverage is unbalanced, but that the MAMPR's media strategies have been effective:

The MAMPR was founded, precisely, in the midst of the controversy regarding the nomination of the Women's Advocate when we rejected partisan criteria in the selection process. In other words, we have always been immersed in issues that require militancy and exposure; issues that are news worthy. This has benefited us. Also, the MAMPR has members with a lot of experience and knowledge on how to handle the media. I believe the feminist movement has done a good job with the media, and that there are feminist journalists who understand our claims. But neither them, nor us, control what is finally published. If its news worthy, it will probably appear in the media. The issue of human interest is secondary.

María Reinat, who works on issues of racism and discrimination against women, says that mainstream media in Puerto Rico responds to corporate and commercial interests, which means that they have a different set of priorities:

Even though corporate media in our country makes an attempt of representing the women's agenda, they do it inadequately. On occasions, the coverage can even harm our

goals towards inclusion and transformation. The press does not consider women's issues a priority, they do not cover women consistently, and they are not balanced at all. In the past two or three years, they have been covering our activities, but the content is superficial. When they have covered our events adequately, it's because we have designed strategies and put a lot of effort into it. There are definitely some journalists who have demonstrated their solidarity and commitment and have tried to do the movement some justice, but institutional [media] policies limit them.

Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, a feminist lawyer and founder of FEM, an organization focused on raising awareness of the intersections at gender, race, sexual orientation, and class, says that mainstream media frequently covers domestic violence because it sells. She also emphasizes an interesting point --the feminist movement in itself is not necessarily as news worthy as it was during the second wave:

It seems that our discourse still sells. I think in recent years we have been able to place domestic violence as information that sells. But sometimes the coverage can be sensationalist. Some decades ago, the feminist movement was news, but today the feminist movement is taken for granted because it's everywhere. It's assumed that the feminist movement has a political and combative voice, but we are still struggling to open spaces for the diversity of voices within the movement.

On the other hand, Amárilis Pagán, from *Proyecto Matria*, whose mission is to economically empower domestic violence survivors, believes there is never enough coverage of domestic violence because it's an "urgent issue."

Some participants also mentioned that the growth of religious fundamentalism since the election of pro-statehood Republican governor Luis Fortuño in 2008 has increased the coverage of the women's movement, specifically of the MAMPR, and of gender issues in general. Nahomi Galindo, a graduate student, blogger and member of an organization that works with the LGBT community, asserts that the economic crisis, the increase of religious (Catholic and Protestant)

fundamentalism, and the fact that some members of the MAMPR are retired journalists who had considerable experience, has contributed to the prominence of gender issues in the mainstream press. The coverage is contradictory, however:

It [the media's coverage of gender issues] has not been a priority. Nonetheless, I could say that this varies. Usually, they continue to reproduce stereotypes, gender violence, gender roles, trivialization of gender issues through advertisements and commercials. The nefarious *Cara Mía* and *Romeo* sections of *El Nuevo Día* attempt to ridicule gender stereotypes, but they do a bad job. These columns may become double-speared swords [a popular Puerto Rican saying that means that something can have an unintended outcome]....On the other hand, I have to say that when we have had political and cultural activities they have always been covered. These are the contradictions we find, the ones we have to deal with constantly, and the ones we hope to transform someday.

But Magdaline Rodríguez, from *Proyecto Rompe*, a non-profit that raises awareness of gender issues among young people, says that fundamentalism has harmed coverage of social issues:

“We are in the media, but our issues with gender perspective are not a priority, and even less when the government is supporting fundamentalist public policies. It is important to mention that the MAMPR has won allies in the media who have been sensitive and know how to cover an issue from our perspective.” Amárilis Pagán suggests that even when the media covers women it does not necessarily integrate a feminist perspective. Pagán recognizes that there have been certain advances because of five factors: key feminist journalists who work in the mainstream media; university courses in journalism that include a gender perspective; academic researchers conducting feminist research in journalism and communications; a growing number of men who are more aware of feminist issues; and the creativity and originality of the MAMPR's public activities and protests: “The media are diverse. There have been advances in terms of language, perspectives, and depth. Nonetheless, other media are still doing a horrible job perpetuating gender stereotypes or supporting fundamentalist arguments. But we have to make an important

distinction: the media has also identified women as important consumers whom they have to attract...and this does not necessarily mean that the messages sent have to be positive.”

The feminist lawyer Verónica Rivera Torres agrees that the media’s coverage is contradictory and diverse: a newspaper publishes a series on domestic violence yet the centerfold is a woman in a bikini. This leads her to conclude that: “It is not possible to work on gender issues in a in-depth manner without realizing how discursive violence is related to sexual, physical, labor and emotional violence against women.”

6. Power and Counter-Power in the Internet

To what extent can the Internet serve to redistribute power relationships? How can the Internet be an ideal space to redistribute, rearrange, renegotiate, realign, rework, rethink, or reinvent power relationships? Is the Internet a kind of equalizer of power? Or does the Internet deepen unequal power relations? Both? Neither? I would say all of the above. My research findings demonstrate that in the women’s movement, specifically within the MAMPR, the Internet has offered a space in which women feel they can express themselves. But, at the same time, this space is crisscrossed with a range of exclusions. The Internet has yet to provide a powerful online counter-narrative within the Puerto Rican context vis-à-vis the mainstream media: offline mobilization is still a fundamental part of the feminist movement’s agenda. But, this research has also found that the listserv, although closed, is a space in which different configurations of counter-power and alternative forms of communication are emerging. Many-to-many communication through the Internet facilitates networking, consensus building and strategizing

as a collective. Also, members of the MAMPR have successfully accessed and inserted their messages into the local mainstream media, although they are critical of the coverage of women's and gender issues. The MAMPR could take more advantage of the Internet, especially blogs and social media tools, to change and influence the media's coverage of gender issues. Amárilis Pagán, a lawyer who works with survivors of domestic violence, summarizes her experiences with the Internet:

It has been a process of developing awareness on power and empowerment. Although I am aware that the use of the Internet can be an element that deepens inequalities (there are segments of the population that are increasingly more excluded from development opportunities because they lack access to information and web technology), its also a space in which you have the opportunity to access large groups of people, and of presenting your ideas. Through the Internet you discover alliances, gather collaborators, facilitate the exchange of documents, and many other possibilities...this is wonderful because you can do so many things in less time.

Nahomi Galindo, an activist against homophobia, believes the networking power of the Internet is vital for social movements: "The MAM's use of the Internet has been focused on establishing a network, in this case of feminist organizations. In my view, this has been positive because networking is crucial within social movements in order to build strong relationships with each other. Although a lot of people may think this is irrelevant, I think it is relevant. We are fighting against *machismo*, patriarchy, to exert power over our own bodies." Verónica Rivera Torres describes her blogging experience as an important source of power and resistance:

My blog *Mujeres en Puerto Rico* has been a very successful and gratifying personal and political project. I have had a feminist consciousness since I was very young. For many years, I saw things that made me explode inside because I did not know how or where to express myself. In college I started to speak, learn, and politically mobilize. And since the beginning, I started using the Internet to advance the feminist cause, but it in a more private way. For example, I used my email lists to problematize news, articles, government decisions...I remember that in those exchanges I wrote columns that were eventually published in some newspaper. And now, with my blog, I feel I am doing something I feel passionate about, that advances my political agenda, and that also holds the potential of influencing people, no matter how many people read it. The blog has also

magnified my presence on the streets. Now I belong to CLADEM and the Board of Directors of *Proyecto Matria*. I make all of this work visible through my blog. Finally, all of these reflections on the political work I do on my blog have led me to remember a quote I read for a feminist course: 'But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know is' (Barbara Christian). My blog has become my contribution to a more equitable and just Puerto Rico, and, at the same time, in my life saver, my very own way of knowing I am not hallucinating."

The Internet is not a power equalizer. It is a platform that can facilitate the redistribution of power. This does not necessarily mean that the "powerless" will gain more power through the Internet. It could be the other way around: the powerful can gain even more power. The Internet, however, provides a space in which more and more people can distribute their messages and participate in public debate. I do not want to idealize the Internet as a perfect space for traditionally marginalized groups. What is undeniable, though, is that many of these groups are using the Internet to communicate their opinions (in text, audio, image, video). They are sharing the communicative space that mainstream media has traditionally monopolized. Mainstream media still is an important actor in this platform, and I think it's far from its demise as some have proclaimed. I do believe, however, that mainstream media has to learn to share the communicative space with many other actors. The flow of the conversation has changed from one-to-many to many-to-many. These transformations can open a world of opportunities for new social movements and marginalized communities.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Before turning to the conclusions, let's return for a moment to my research question: How has the feminist movement in Puerto Rico employed the use of the Internet to advance a feminist agenda in the mainstream media? The feminist movement in Puerto Rico, specifically the member organizations of the MAMPR, is using the Internet in diverse ways in order to advance a feminist agenda in the media. The urgency and immediacy of the Internet communications has certainly facilitated the discussion and dissemination of issues crucial to the feminist movement. As a coalition the organizations mostly use the listserv, although the MAMPR has its own blog and many individual organizations have websites. The listserv is a space for alternative communications because it provides a stage for self-representation and counter-discourses, it is horizontally structured, and it is non-commercial, small-scale, independent from the state and the market, and community oriented (the feminist community). It also serves as an important tool to participate in public debate sustained by the mainstream media. The listserv is a "private" safe-space for discussions, deliberation, networking, strategizing, consensus building, decision-making, information, task distribution among members, yet these efforts can produce public messages that will circulate in the mainstream/corporate/commercial media. It is alternative and mainstream, private and public, inclusive and exclusive, small-scale and large-scale, horizontal and vertical, and independent and dependent. The mainstream is still considered an important space, in which these alternative communications aim for visibility. The MAMPR's uses of the Internet are multidimensional, hybrid and unsettled. Its virtual practices cross, transgress, and merges across borders and boundaries. I believe this intermixing and border crossing enhances the MAMPR's media practices because it defies traditional, static, and binary assumptions and

definitions that generally only serve to enclose, suppress, and circumscribe creative, transgressive, and innovative media manifestations and relationships. This research introduces an interesting case in the literature on gender and media because the MAMPR, through diverse online and offline strategies, has been able to participate in the public discourse and gain access to mainstream media in Puerto Rico. But it is important to point out that this success did not occur out of the blue. These achievements must be situated within the context of the long and fruitful relationship journalism and feminism have shared in Puerto Rico as discussed in Chapter 4.

Another important finding of this research is that the feminist movement's access to the mainstream media does not necessarily lead to adequate representations (as defined and described by the members of the movement). Access in itself is a substantial achievement that must be recognized. Access has located the feminist movement in the public mind and in the public sphere. The access that the MAMPR's organizations have gained is unique in the literature on gender and media. This accomplishment must be situated in its context and history. The women's movement in Puerto Rico, dating from the suffragists, has had a long and rich relationship with the media (alternative and mainstream). Through the decades, prominent feminist leaders and activists have founded their own alternative publications, inserted their political messages into the mainstream media, and been journalists themselves. In Puerto Rico, feminism and journalism have walked together, although this does not mean the path has been free from conflicts and tensions. As demonstrated in this investigation, this long-standing relationship has not necessarily resulted in satisfactory representations in the media. In this

research, participants divided the issue of representation into coverage of the MAMPR's activities and of gender and women's issues in general. Participants said that the MAMPR receives adequate coverage in the mainstream media, but, on the other hand, the representation of gender issues is contradictory, superficial, sensationalist, and not a priority. Participants recognized the work of individual feminist reporters, and they faulted media institutions for the misrepresentation and poor coverage of gender issues. Although there are instances of resistance within these powerful institutions, there have not been profound transformations on a structural level. The fact that many women, including feminist women, in Puerto Rico have become hard-news reporters and editors in the mainstream media has not, according to these findings, resulted in deep-rooted changes regarding gender representations. For further research it would be interesting to conduct in-depth interviews with owners and editors of mainstream media outlets in Puerto Rico, specifically of the newspapers, which continue to be the main agenda setters and shapers of public discourse in the country.

I believe that the MAMPR's access to mainstream media, and its participation in mainstream public discourse, has inhibited their online presence. I have reached this conclusion based on my empirical findings and the literature review. Participants' responded that their organizations have access to mainstream media in Puerto Rico and that mainstream media does a good job covering the MAMPR's activities. Participants also stated that mainstream media generally either neglects or distorts gender issues. But this problem is not one of the MAMPR's priorities at this moment. Participants' were more focused on designing strategies to attract the mainstream media (to cover their activities) than to transform the mainstream media's coverage of gender issues in

Puerto Rico. This should be explored in further investigations. The literature shows that alternative narratives generally flourish when people assess that they are being excluded from and misrepresented by the mainstream media. I think members of the MAMPR would have a stronger online presence if they thought this was the only way to transmit its messages to the public. Other reasons could be the members' lack of time, limited computer skills, or that the Internet is still not an important communication space in Puerto Rico. Mainstream media, especially newspapers, still shape daily public discussions on the Island.

The members of the MAMPR could certainly strengthen their online presence in a number of ways. They could update their blog more frequently with posts from the members and convene members to write on specific issues to foment interesting public debates and discussions. They could provide hyperlinks to all of the member's websites and blogs and place hyperlinks to other national and international organizations with similar interests and objectives on the MAMPRs' blog. They could also create transnational ties with other feminist organizations by cross-posting from websites and blogs from other countries. The members of the MAMPR could take advantage of the Internet as a platform for receiving immediate feedback from the audience by opening the blog to comments (which should be moderated) and responding to them. They could make greater use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to disseminate information and attract audiences to their blogs and websites. The Internet provides an ideal space for data visualization that makes information more attractive and easier to understand. The members of the MAMPR could create visual mapping tools with statistics on, for instance, domestic violence incidents and murders in Puerto Rico, linking to articles and columns from

newspaper, radio and television, and integrating more multimedia tools to the website such as video and audio. They could also create a kind of “truth meter” to fact-check and verify politician’s statements on gender issues. It is nearly impossible to include everyone and everything. Nonetheless, the members of the MAMPR could formulate strategies to bridge some inequalities. For instance, they could invite members and non-members of the coalition to write posts, record audios, or film videos on gender issues. They could also do outreach in communities across the Island and then post interviews, images, audios or videos. These are some recommendations that would strengthen the MAMPR’s online voice in Puerto Rico and in the world. Some recommendations may seem far-fetched, but many are very simple and feasible.

The findings also show that participants are not pleased with mainstream media’s coverage of gender issues. The members of the MAMPR could give workshops to journalists and editors, who work in hard news, arts and entertainment and sports sections, to provide strategies on how to cover news with a gender perspective. These workshops should also include time for journalists and editors to explain their work. I believe these workshops could be very helpful for journalists, editors, and the members of the MAMPR. The MAMPR could also design a “fact sheet” with statistics and information that clarifies myths that are constantly repeated in the media (i.e. women who do not leave violent relationships must like being abused; batterers commit violent acts because they are mentally ill; most rapes are perpetrated by strangers, etc.). The members of the MAMPR could work hand in hand with the journalist associations in Puerto Rico the National Association of Journalists in Puerto Rico (*Asociación de Periodistas de Puerto*

*Rico-ASP*PRO) and the Overseas Press Club.

An additional interesting finding of this research is that offline communications are still vital for the feminist movement in Puerto Rico. The number of the MAMPR's meetings has not decreased since the listserv was initiated in 2009. Although the MAMPR's member organizations use the listserv for communicating frequently, many participants still believe that face-to-face interactions enrich community and movement building. Also, some participants said that the most delicate and polemic decisions were made in meetings. The Internet has not displaced offline gatherings that are still a vital part of the MAMPR's activism. Neither has the Internet limited the number of physical mobilizations and protests. The MAMPR has organized artistic and political performances to create awareness of certain gender issues, and they have also participated in national movements against a series of social, political, and economic problems that have affected Puerto Rico in the last three years. The Internet provides a meaningful place for virtual interactions that, at some point, are transported to physical spaces. In other words, the online "revolution" is yet to come.

Appendix A

List of member organizations of the Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres de Puerto Rico, their websites, and names of participants

1. Centro de la Mujer Dominicana (Center of Dominican Women)- <http://cemud.org/> (under construction)- Romelinda Grullón
2. Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigación y Estudios del Género (CIIEG) (Interdisciplinary Center for Investigation and Gender Studies at the Inter-American University)- <http://www.metro.inter.edu/facultad/esthumanisticos/ciieg.htm/>-Maribel Tamargo
3. Colectivo Masfaldas- <http://colectivomasfaldas.org/>
4. Comisión de la Mujer del Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico (Women's Commission of the Bar Association)- Verónica Rivera Torres
5. Feministas en Marcha- Ana Irma Rivera Lassén
6. Fundación de Derechos Humanos (Human Rights Foundation)- <http://fdhpr.org/>- Ada Conde
7. Ilé: Organizadoras/es para la Conciencia-en-Acción (Ilé/Organizers for Conscience in Action)- <http://www.blog.conciencia-en-accion.org/>- María Reinat
8. Instituto Latinoamericano de Educación para el Desarrollo de Puerto Rico (Latin American Education Institute for Development in Puerto Rico-ILAEDES)- Marcia Rivera
9. Isla Cliché- Frances Hernández
10. La Juntilla- Zuly García Ramos
11. Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM- Puerto Rico)- <http://www.cladem.org/>- María Isabel Báez
12. Organización Puertorriqueña de la Mujer Trabajadora (Puerto Rican Organization of Working Women- OPMT)- <http://opmt.tripod.com/>- Josefina Pantoja
13. Proyecto Matria- <http://proyectomatria.blogspot.com/>- Amárilis Pagán
14. Proyecto Rompe- <http://proyectorompe.blogspot.com/>- Magdaline Rodríguez
15. Puerto Rico para Tod@s- <http://www.prparatodos.org/>- Nahomi Galindo

16. Taller Lésbico Creativo (Creative Lesbian Workshop)- Olga Orraca

17. Taller Salud - <http://www.tallersalud.com/>-Alana Feldman

18. Siempre Vivas/Mayagüez campus of the University of Puerto Rico-
<http://www.siemprevivas.org/>- Luisa Seijo Maldonado

The address of the MAMPR's website/blog is: <http://movimientoampliodemujeres.blogspot.com/>

Appendix B

List of Mainstream News Media in Puerto Rico

Newspapers:

El Nuevo Día - Ferré Rangel Family

Primera Hora- Ferré Rangel Family

El Vocero- Miguel Roca and Associates

Puerto Rico Daily Sun -Journalist Cooperative

Caribbean Business- Casiano Communications

Television:

Telemundo-NBC

Univisión-Univisión

Wapa-Intermedia Partners (Cable)

Mega TV-Mega TV

Caribevisión (CV42)-Caribevisión

Canal 13- Catholic Church

Radio:

Boricua 740 AM- Luis Penchi and Associates

NotiUno-ARSO Radio Corp.

Radio Isla- Media Power Group/Eduardo Rivero and Associates

Radio Puerto Rico- Bestov Broadcasting

Radio Reloj (WKAQ 580)-Univisión Radio

WAPA Radio--Blanco Pi Family

Appendix C

Questionnaire

- 1- What is your age?
- 2- What is your educational level?
 - a- High school
 - b- College
 - c- Graduate studies
- 3- What is your income level?
 - a- 19,999/year -
 - b- 20,000-29,999
 - c- 30,000-39,999
 - d-40,000-49,999
 - e- 50,000 +
- 4- What is the name of your organization?
- 5- What is your position in the organization?
- 6- How many people work in your organization?
- 7- Where in Puerto Rico is it located?
- 8- What is the mission of your organization?
- 9- When was your organization founded?
- 10- Does your organization have a website?
 - a) Yes

b) No

11- If you answered yes: When was it started? How frequently is it updated? How many visitors does it have? What is the address?

12- Do you have a blog?

a) Yes

b) No

13-If you answered yes: Is it a personal or a professional blog? When was it started? How frequently is it updated? How many visitors does it have? What is the address?

14- Does your organization use social media tools?

a) Yes

b) No

15- If you answered yes, please indicate if your organization uses any of the following social media tools:

a) Facebook

b) Twitter

c) YouTube

d) Other (please mention which one)

16-When did your organization start using the Internet as a communication tool?

17-For what purposes? In what ways?

18- How did your organization begin its affiliation with the feminist coalition Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres (MAM)?

19- What prompted your organization to participate in the MAM's listserv?

20-How has your involvement in the listserv evolved (in terms of frequency of participation, types of information shared)?

21-How has the Internet benefitted the provided to the work of the the members of the MAM?

For example, in terms of networking, participation in collective decision-making, feminist movement building, reaching consensus, strategizing, by providing an alternative space to express yourselves, exposure in the media, access to the media.

22-What problems –if any- has the use of the Internet brought to the members of the MAM coalition? For example, protagonism of some voices over others, or misunderstandings due to the nature of virtual communication.

23-How has the MAM used the Internet to coordinate strategies to be visible in the mainstream media? In what ways has the MAM's use of the Internet helped the members become more visible in the mainstream media (commercial radio, TV, print)? For example, by designing media strategies through conversations on the listerv, and/or or building consensus through the listerv.

24- In what ways has the use of the Internet been a more effective tool than the ones used before (meetings, protests, leaflets, etc) in terms of advancing a feminist agenda in Puerto Rico? This agenda may include, but is not confined to, issues on violence, education, reproductive rights, public policies, lawmaking, the LGBT community, racial discrimination, and the creation of programs and services.

25- How has the use of the MAM's listerv influenced public opinion through the media? In what ways? For example, in terms of public support of feminist causes.

26-How have the members of the MAM been portrayed in the mainstream media in Puerto Rico? How would you characterize the mainstream media's portrayal of women's/gender issues in Puerto Rico? For example, if it is, or is not, fair, balanced, thorough, frequent, and/or a priority.

27- Why do you think mainstream media in Puerto Rico covers women's/gender issues in the way you have described?

28- Has your organization had exposure in the mainstream media?

a) Yes

b) No

29- If you answered yes, please indicate how your organization has gained this exposure:

a) By directly accessing journalists

b) Through public relations professionals

c) Through the MAM

d) Other (please explain)

30- Overall, how has your organization been able to benefit from the MAM's use of the internet?

31- Please tell me the story of how you felt and the thoughts that crossed your mind when you began working with the Internet to advance feminist issues.

Appendix D

Questionnaire (Spanish)

1- ¿Cuántos años tiene?

2- ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación académica?

a- Escuela superior

b- Bachillerato universitario

c- Estudios graduados

3- ¿Cuál es su escala de ingreso?

a- \$19,999/anuales (o menos)

b- \$20,000-\$29,999/anuales

c- \$30,000-\$39,999

d-\$40,000-\$49,999

e- \$50,000 (o más)

4- ¿Cuál es el nombre de la organización a la que pertenece (la que está afiliada al Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres-MAM)?

5- ¿Cuál es su posición en su organización base?

6- ¿Cuántas personas trabajan en su organización?

7- ¿Dónde está ubicada la sede de su organización en Puerto Rico?

8- ¿Cuál es la misión de su organización?

9- ¿Cuándo fue fundada su organización?

10- ¿Tiene su organización una página de Internet (un sitio de Internet)?

a) Sí

b) No

11- Si contestó en la afirmativa a la pregunta anterior: ¿Cuándo se inició esta página? ¿Con cuánta frecuencia es actualizada? ¿Cuál es el número de visitas? ¿Cuál es la dirección?

12- ¿Tiene un blog?

a) Sí

b) No

13- Si contestó en la afirmativa a la pregunta anterior: ¿Su blog es personal o profesional? ¿Cuándo se inició esta página? ¿Con cuánta frecuencia la actualiza? ¿Cuál es el número de visitas? ¿Cuál es la dirección?

14- ¿La organización a la que pertenece utiliza algún tipo de “medio social” (por ejemplo, Twitter o Facebook)?

a) Sí

b) No

15- Si contestó en la afirmativa a la pregunta anterior, por favor indique cuáles medios sociales utiliza su organización:

a) Facebook

b) Twitter

c) YouTube

d) Otro (por favor indique el nombre)

16- ¿Cuándo comenzó su organización a utilizar la Internet como una herramienta de comunicación?

17- ¿Con qué propósito?

18- ¿Cómo fue que su organización comenzó su afiliación a la coalición feminista MAM?

19- ¿Qué provocó que su organización participara en el grupo virtual de comunicación interna (el *listerv*) del MAM?

20- ¿Cómo ha evolucionado el nivel de participación de su organización en el grupo virtual del MAM (en términos de la frecuencia de su participación, el tipo de información compartido)?

21- ¿Cómo ha beneficiado la Internet el trabajo de las miembras del MAM? Por ejemplo, en términos de crear redes (*networking*), participar en un proceso colectivo de toma de decisiones, consolidar el movimiento feminista, facilitar consensos, formular estrategias, proveer un espacio alternativo de expresión, exposición en los medios, acceso a los medios?

22- ¿Qué tipos de problemas –si alguno- le ha causado el uso de la Internet a las miembras del MAM? Por ejemplo, protagonismo de algunas voces sobre otras, o malos entendidos provocados por la naturaleza de la comunicación virtual?

23- ¿Cómo el uso de la Internet ha ayudado a visibilizar a las miembras del MAM en los medios de comunicación masivos/comerciales en Puerto Rico (prensa escrita, radio, TV)? Por ejemplo, mediante el diseño de estrategias mediáticas a través de conversaciones en el grupo virtual, y/o haber logrado consenso a través del grupo virtual.

24- ¿Cómo el uso de la Internet ha sido una herramienta más efectiva que las utilizadas anteriormente (por ejemplo, mítines, protestas, hojas sueltas, etc.) en términos de adelantar una agenda feminista en Puerto Rico? Esta agenda incluye -pero no se limita a-, temas sobre

violencia, educación, derechos reproductivos, políticas públicas, la creación de leyes, la comunidad LGBT, el discrimen racial, la creación de programas y servicios, entre otros?

25- ¿Cómo el uso del grupo virtual de comunicación del MAM ha influenciado la opinión pública en Puerto Rico? Por ejemplo, el apoyo público a las causas feministas.

26- ¿Cómo describiría la forma en que los medios de comunicación masivos/comerciales en Puerto Rico representan los *issues* de mujeres/de género en Puerto Rico? Por ejemplo, si es, o no es, justa, balanceada, profunda, frecuente, o prioritaria.

27- ¿Por qué cree que los medios de comunicación masivos/comerciales en Puerto Rico cubren los *issues* de mujeres/de género como usted ha descrito en la pregunta anterior? Por ejemplo, si ha sido, o no ha sido, por la efectividad de las estrategias mediáticas del movimiento feminista, por la penetración de periodistas feministas en los medios, y/o por la educación universitaria de periodismo a cargo de periodistas feministas.

28- ¿La organización a la que pertenece ha logrado exposición en los medios comerciales?

a) Sí

b) No

29- Si contestó en la afirmativa a la pregunta anterior, por favor indique cómo su organización ha logrado acceder a los medios comerciales:

a) Contactando directamente a periodistas

b) Periodistas contactando a su organización

c) A través de relacionistas públicos

d) A través del MAM

e) Otra (por favor mencione cuál)

30- En general, ¿cómo su organización se ha beneficiado del uso de la Internet del MAM?

31- Por favor cuénteme la historia de cómo se sintió y lo que pensó cuando comenzó a trabajar con la Internet para adelantar las causas feministas.

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